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PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL STUDENTS IN SURABAYA AND SIDOARJO ON INTENTION IN CONTINUING STUDIES IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract *- Higher education is an important stage in a person's educational journey which aims to improve one's quality and prepare for a future career. In Indonesia, private universities have a significant role in offering a variety of study programs and providing alternatives for students who wish to continue their education after completing secondary education. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of private universities and the factors that influence their interest in continuing their studies at these institutions is important. This research aims to investigate the perceptions of high school and vocational school students in Surabaya and Sidoarjo regarding their interest in continuing their studies at private universities. The survey was conducted on 200 respondents who were high school and vocational school students in the two regions. Respondents were obtained during promotional visits to each school by the promotional team from Sunan Giri University Surabaya (UNSURI). They were asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to explore their perceptions and interests in private universities. The research results showed that the majority of respondents showed a positive interest in continuing their studies at private universities. This research can provide valuable insight for private higher education institutions in developing marketing strategies and programs that suit the needs and expectations of prospective students.*

Keywords: higher education, private universities, student perceptions, interest in studying, Surabaya, Sidoarjo, survey, questionnaire, Sunan Giri University Surabaya, marketing strategy, educational programs.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in building quality Human Resources (HR). The educational process includes changes in the attitudes and behavior of individuals or groups, aiming to mature humans through teaching and training. Effective education equips individuals with investment capital for the future. Investing in education not only provides short-term benefits, but also long-term benefits. In the long term, education has a positive impact on individual career progress in the world of work which pays attention to the value of the education obtained (Donald et al., 2018). On the other hand, in the short term, education is considered an investment because the knowledge gained does not decline, but can be applied in various aspects of life. Therefore, universities have a vital role in creating quality human resources, so that they are able to respond effectively to global changes (Sušanj et al., 2020; Alfawaire & Atan, 2021). Now, many universities, both public and private, offer a variety of study programs to meet the interests and needs of high school/vocational school graduates who wish to continue their education, in line with awareness of the importance of education and the demands of the world of work.

Sunan Giri University Surabaya (UNSURI) plays an important role in offering higher education in the East Java Province region. Strategically located on the border between Surabaya and Sidoarjo, UNSURI offers good accessibility for prospective students in both cities. However, even though UNSURI provides a variety of interesting study programs, the decision to choose a study program remains a challenge for prospective students (Akindele et al., 2012). This decision is influenced by various factors, such as environmental conditions around the campus, personal preferences, and also their perception of the educational institution (Le, 2020). According to Teelken and Lomas (2009); Cavallone et al. (2020), perceptions are beliefs formed within individuals, which can shape their views on the quality and reputation of higher education. Various aspects such as academic reputation, facilities, curriculum, location, and tuition policy at UNSURI will influence how students assess the institution. Therefore, it is important for UNSURI to understand and accommodate the preferences and expectations of prospective students through improving marketing strategies, evaluating academic reputation, improving facilities and quality educational services (Darmawan et al., 2015; Krause & Davidson, 2018). In this way, UNSURI can increase its attractiveness as a higher education option for prospective students, and ultimately, contribute to the development of quality Human Resources (HR) in the region (Abell & Becker, 2021; Masnawati & Darmawan, 2022).

Thus, the aim of this research is to understand how students' perceptions influence their interest in continuing their studies at Sunan Giri University Surabaya. With a deep understanding of the factors that influence student interest, UNSURI can improve marketing and recruitment strategies to attract the interest of prospective students. It is also necessary to evaluate UNSURI's academic reputation, facilities, curriculum, location and education fee policies to make it more competitive. Factors such as easily accessible campus locations and the availability of scholarships must also be considered so that UNSURI becomes an attractive choice for prospective students. In this way, UNSURI can increase the attractiveness of their institution and make a greater contribution to the development of quality human resources.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a quantitative approach to answer the problem formulation and achieve the research objectives that have been set. With a focus on quantitative analysis, this research collected data from a number of high schools and vocational schools in Surabaya and Sidoarjo. The population in focus is class XII students, which is considered a relevant group for exploring their perceptions and interests towards private universities. In taking samples, the accidental sampling method was chosen, where respondents were selected by chance during promotional visits to these schools. A total of 200 respondents were involved in this research, which is expected to provide sufficient representation of the target population. The data collection techniques used include observation and distributing questionnaires via the Google Form platform. Observations helped researchers understand the context and interactions between students and the promotion team during school visits. Meanwhile, distributing questionnaires via Google Form makes it easier to collect data from respondents who are diverse geographically and over time, as well as facilitating more efficient data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this research, a survey was conducted on 200 respondents consisting of high school and vocational school students in the Surabaya and Sidoarjo areas. These respondents were obtained during visits to each school in order to promote UNSURI and they provided responses through the distribution of questionnaires aimed at exploring topics related to their interest in continuing their studies at university. Through the questionnaire method, the researchers sought to understand students' perceptions and preferences for higher education as a further option after completing upper secondary education. The survey was carefully conducted to cover various aspects that might influence a student's decision, including but not limited to factors such as college reputation, availability of courses of interest, campus location, tuition costs, and scholarship options. Through student participation in this survey, it is hoped that a better understanding of the dynamics of student interest in choosing college as the next step in their educational journey can be gained. Thus, this research is important in providing a comprehensive view of student preferences and needs in the context of higher education in the Surabaya and Sidoarjo areas. The results of distributing the questionnaire are described as follows along with their managerial implications.

1. Of the total students who were research respondents, 22.5% of them were not interested in continuing their studies at a private university, while the remaining 77.5% or 155 respondents were interested in continuing their studies at a university. The managerial implication of these findings is the need for private universities to strengthen recruitment and marketing strategies to increase the interest of prospective students. Management needs to understand the reasons behind students' disinterest in private colleges and identify ways to increase the attractiveness of their institutions. Students' disinterest in private universities is a major concern, because it can affect the attractiveness of the institution and ultimately its impact on student acceptance.

   First, management needs to conduct an in-depth analysis to understand the reasons behind students' disinterest in private universities. This may include a review of students' perceptions of the academic quality, facilities, reputation, and cost of a private college education compared to public universities (Sulaksono et al., 2021). With a better understanding of the factors that influence student interest, management can design more appropriate strategies to attract their attention.

   Second, management needs to identify ways to increase the attractiveness of their institutions. This can include various efforts, such as improving the quality of academic and non-academic services, adapting curricula to job market needs, improving campus facilities, and providing attractive scholarship or financial aid programs for prospective students. In addition, developing an effective marketing strategy is also key in reaching and influencing prospective students (Munir et al., 2022).

   Thus, the managerial implications of these findings require private universities to take proactive steps in strengthening recruitment and marketing strategies, as well as improving aspects that can increase the attractiveness of their institutions. By doing this, it is hoped that private universities can overcome the challenge of student disinterest and gain greater trust and interest from prospective students.

2. Of the 155 respondents who were interested in continuing their studies at university, 28.39% or 44 respondents chose not to consider UNSURI as a place of study because they preferred state universities. Of the 155 respondents who were interested in continuing their studies at tertiary institutions, the reasons they chose private tertiary institutions could be explained, such as academic reputation, facilities provided, curriculum offered, location and educational costs.

   The managerial implication of these findings is that UNSURI must evaluate and improve their academic reputation, facilities, curriculum, location and education fee policies to be more competitive in the eyes of prospective students. This can be done by developing effective marketing strategies and improving the quality of educational services offered.

The managerial implications of these findings emphasize the importance of evaluating and improving various aspects that can increase UNSURI's attractiveness in the eyes of prospective students. The following are several aspects that need to be considered by UNSURI management:

a. Academic Reputation: UNSURI needs to evaluate and improve their academic reputation. This includes the quality of teaching, excellence in research, academic achievements of alumni, and recognition from related institutions. Improving academic reputation will increase prospective students' confidence in the quality of education offered by UNSURI.
b. Facilities: Evaluation and improvement of campus facilities is an important step in increasing the attractiveness of an institution. This includes improvements and additions to learning facilities, laboratories, libraries, sports facilities and other supporting facilities. Good facilities will create a comfortable and supportive learning environment for students.
c. Curriculum: UNSURI needs to review their curriculum to ensure that the study programs offered are in line with the needs of the job market and the latest developments in the relevant field of science. Refining the curriculum can increase the relevance of the education offered by UNSURI and better prepare students for the challenges of the world of work.
d. Location: Evaluating campus location is also important, because strategic location can be a determining factor in choosing a university. UNSURI needs to ensure that their campus location is easily accessible, safe and comfortable for students. Apart from that, UNSURI can also take advantage of its unique location as an advantage in attracting prospective students.
e. Tuition Fee Policy: Competitive tuition policy can also be a deciding factor in choosing a college. UNSURI needs to evaluate their education fee policy to ensure that the fees set are in line with the added value provided by the institution. In addition, UNSURI can offer scholarship programs or other financial assistance to support students who excel academically but have financial limitations.

To increase UNSURI's attractiveness in the eyes of prospective students, effective marketing steps and improving the quality of educational services are very important. Through the right marketing strategy, UNSURI can expand its promotional reach, increase awareness of its programs, and attract the interest of potential students. In addition, by improving the quality of educational services, such as improvements in curriculum, facilities and teaching quality, UNSURI can attract the interest of prospective students who are looking for a quality educational experience.

By taking these steps, it is hoped that UNSURI can compete more effectively in attracting prospective students and maintaining its reputation as a quality private university. Effective marketing will help UNSURI to stand out among its competitors and attract the attention of the right prospective students. In addition, improving the quality of educational services will also increase the satisfaction of existing students, help retain them as part of the university community, and provide positive recommendations to potential prospective students.

As a sustainable step, UNSURI needs to continue to evaluate and adjust its marketing strategy and the quality of its educational services. By monitoring education industry trends, paying attention to feedback from students and prospective students, and continuing to increase innovation in education, UNSURI can ensure that it remains relevant and attractive to future students. In this way, UNSURI will remain an attractive choice for prospective students and continue to strengthen its position as a quality private university.

3. As many as 71.61% or 111 respondents from the total respondents who continued their studies at tertiary institutions considered UNSURI as one of the private universities they were considering. Of the 28.39% who did not choose UNSURI as their university of choice, due to factors that influenced their decision, such as long distance, preference for certain study programs not offered at UNSURI, and reputation as an Islamic university.

The managerial implication of these findings is that UNSURI needs to pay attention to factors that influence students' decisions in choosing a university, such as location, study programs offered, and reputation as an Islamic university. Management must take strategic steps to improve or overcome things that become obstacles for students in choosing UNSURI as the university of choice.

Several main factors that need to be considered are campus location, study programs offered, and UNSURI's reputation as an Islamic higher education institution. The following is a more detailed explanation of the managerial implications:

a. Campus Location: Campus location is one of the main factors influencing a student's decision in choosing a college. UNSURI management needs to ensure that their campus location is easily accessible, safe and comfortable for students. Apart from that, the unique location of the campus can also be an advantage that can be used to attract the interest of prospective students.
b. Study Programs: Offering study programs that suit the needs and interests of prospective students is very important. UNSURI management needs to ensure that the study programs offered are relevant to job market developments and meet high educational quality standards. Apart from that, UNSURI can also consider adding or expanding the offering of study programs that are of interest to prospective students.

c. Reputation as an Islamic Higher Education: In the context of UNSURI, reputation as an Islamic tertiary institution can be an important factor for prospective students who consider religious aspects in choosing a tertiary institution. Management needs to ensure that UNSURI strengthens its identity as an Islamic higher education institution that provides quality education and is in accordance with Islamic religious values. This can be done through developing academic and religious programs, as well as strengthening collaboration with related religious institutions.

By paying attention to these factors, UNSURI management must take strategic steps to improve or overcome things that become obstacles for students in choosing UNSURI as the university of choice. This could include preparing a concrete action plan to improve facilities, increase promotion and marketing, develop new study programs, and strengthen its identity as a quality Islamic higher education institution. In this way, UNSURI can increase its attractiveness in the eyes of prospective students and gain trust as a desirable educational choice.

4. Of the 111 respondents who considered UNSURI, 86.49% of them chose it because of location. Apart from that, there is also the availability of scholarships at UNSURI. The managerial implication of this finding is that location and availability of scholarships are important factors in attracting student interest in UNSURI. Therefore, management should consider further investment in improving campus accessibility and providing more scholarships or financial assistance to prospective students. The managerial implications of these findings indicate that the location and availability of scholarships have an important role in attracting students' interest in UNSURI. The following is a more detailed explanation of the managerial implications:
   a. Campus Location: A strategic and easily accessible campus location is an important factor in attracting prospective students. UNSURI management needs to ensure that their campus location meets the needs and preferences of prospective students, such as accessibility to public transportation, a safe surrounding environment, and the existence of important facilities such as places of worship, places to eat, and shopping centers. Further investment in improving campus accessibility can be made through developing transportation infrastructure, improving environmental security around the campus, and collaborating with the local government to improve public facilities around the campus.
   b. Availability of Scholarships and Financial Aid: Scholarships and financial aid are important factors that influence prospective students' financial ability to access higher education. UNSURI management needs to consider increasing the availability of scholarships and financial assistance for prospective students who excel but have financial limitations. This can be done through increasing the budget allocation for scholarships, collaborating with donor institutions or companies to provide scholarship funds, as well as developing financial assistance programs that suit student needs.

By paying attention to these factors, UNSURI management can increase the attractiveness of their institution in the eyes of prospective students (Akmal et al., 2015). This agrees with Chan (2004); Ness and Tucker (2008); Kirk and Day (2011); Hurtado et al. (2012), further investment in increasing campus accessibility and the availability of scholarships or financial aid will help UNSURI to expand their reach and gain credibility as an inclusive and sustainable education option. By investing in improving campus accessibility and increasing the availability of scholarships or financial aid, UNSURI can demonstrate its commitment to providing inclusive and sustainable education options, thereby enhancing its appeal to a wider range of prospective students.

Addressing these factors not only aligns with the expectations and preferences of prospective students but also contributes to UNSURI's reputation as a quality private university. By prioritizing accessibility and affordability, UNSURI can differentiate itself from competitors and establish itself as an institution that values diversity and supports students from various backgrounds. Moreover, investing in scholarships and financial aid programs can help alleviate financial barriers to education, making UNSURI a more viable option for students who may otherwise be deterred by tuition costs.

Based on the information provided, we can infer that there is a considerable interest among students in continuing their studies at private universities. However, the exact number of students interested in private universities, as well as those considering UNSURI specifically, would require more detailed market research and analysis. Conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews with prospective students could help UNSURI gain insights into these factors and tailor its marketing strategies and educational services accordingly to attract and retain students effectively. Additionally, monitoring enrollment trends and competition within the private university sector would provide valuable data for strategic decision-making (Masnawati & Darmawan, 2023).

In facing increasingly fierce competition in the world of higher education, it is important for every university, including Sunan Giri University Surabaya, to pay intensive attention to the market dynamics of prospective students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012; Newman et al., 2020). This is necessary so that universities can respond to changes in the preferences and needs of prospective students more effectively. By monitoring the market dynamics of prospective students, UNSURI can better understand developing trends and preferences, so that it can adjust marketing strategies and educational programs to attract the interest of more prospective students (Darmawan, 2007). In addition, by understanding the market dynamics of prospective students, UNSURI can also better optimize the new student admissions process, including improving promotions, adjusting admissions policies, and providing better services for prospective students (Epple et al., 2006; Vander Schee, 2009; De Freitaset al., 2015). Thus, monitoring the market dynamics of prospective students is not just a strategy to increase the number of applicants, but is also an important step in strengthening UNSURI's position as one of the leading universities in the region, as well as to continue to contribute to providing quality and relevant higher education to needs public.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of research regarding the influence of high school and vocational school students' perceptions in Surabaya and Sidoarjo on their interest in continuing their studies at private universities, especially at UNSURI, several findings were found that provide an important picture of the dynamics of student interests in the context of higher education. The managerial implications of these findings provide valuable direction for higher education management in increasing the attractiveness of their institutions as well as understanding the factors that influence students' decisions in choosing a higher education institution.

There are groups of students who are not interested in continuing their studies at private universities. It is recommended that every private university strengthen its recruitment and marketing strategies to increase the interest of prospective students. Management needs to understand the reasons behind students' disinterest in private colleges and identify ways to increase the attractiveness of their institutions.

Some students prefer state universities to UNSURI. This means UNSURI must evaluate and improve their academic reputation, facilities, curriculum, location and education fee policies to be more competitive in the eyes of prospective students. This can be done by developing effective marketing strategies and improving the quality of educational services offered.

The findings show that the majority of respondents consider UNSURI as a private university option. This means that UNSURI needs to pay attention to factors that influence students' decisions in choosing a university, such as location, study programs offered, and reputation as an Islamic university. Management must take strategic steps to improve or overcome things that become obstacles for students in choosing UNSURI as the university of choice.

Location factors and scholarship availability are the main considerations for students who choose UNSURI. This means that location and availability of scholarships are important factors in attracting student interest in UNSURI. Therefore, management should consider further investment in improving campus accessibility and providing more scholarships or financial assistance to prospective students.

In conclusion, these findings provide valuable insight for the management of UNSURI and other private universities to understand the preferences and needs of prospective students in choosing a higher education institution. By strengthening marketing strategies, improving service quality, and paying attention to factors that influence student decisions, it is hoped that universities can increase their attractiveness and achieve student admissions goals effectively.

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