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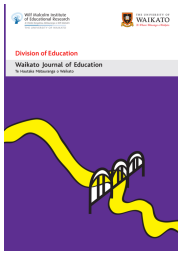

Does university choice decision matter for school engagement and student alienation?

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Abstract

This research examined the impact of students' decision of university choice on student alienation and school engagement through structural equation modelling. The sample of the study consists of 609 Turkish first-year students from a state university, who were selected by convenience sampling method designed in the correlational design. In the study, it was determined that university students make their choices in accordance with being informed about the university, financial support the university provides, acquaintance, the effect of high school education, job opportunities, cost of education, students already studying at the university and geographical position. The study has revealed that students' university choice decisions have positive effects: they will be affected by school engagement and the quality of higher education. The highly perceived emotional engagement is the key to shaping university choice decisions. However, student alienation has no effect on university choice decisions. Understanding the impact of school engagement and student alienation on university choice decision in Turkey should benefit other developing nations and the educational community at large.

Keywords

University choice decision; school engagement; student alienation; higher education

Introduction

In recent years, as in many other countries, including Turkey, higher education has been a growing demand which exceeds available places in higher education. The Student Selection and Placement Center (SSPC) reported that approximately one and a half million students have participated in the Student Selection Examination (SSE) every year for the past decade. There are many reasons for the increase in the number of students who want to enrol in higher education over the years. First, there has been a steady increase in the number of high school graduates, and this has further increased after the start of eight-year compulsory primary education in 1997. Second, there is a cumulatively increasing group of candidates, including lower scores from previous years (they did not perform satisfactorily in

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the first entrance exam). Finally, a significant number of students who succeed in entering an academic programme retake the entrance exam several times to enter the desired academic programme. These three candidate groups create an important 'snowball effect' every year. On the other hand, over the last few years, especially in private universities, there has been a particularly noticeable increase both in public and especially in private universities in Turkey; therefore, the universities are facing severe competition. As of 2019, there are 209 higher education institutions in various cities, including 129 state universities and 80 private universities. Approximately 4.5 million students are enrolled in academic units at the undergraduate level and approximately 2.9 million students at the associate level. Considering that the competition for the students in higher education institutions has become more intense, the importance of candidate students' decision to choose the university emerges.

University choice is one of the most important issues for young people when making their career plans. While appropriate decisions make an individual happy with long-term outcomes for life, decisions taken without thinking can have some negative consequences both in academic life and after graduation. Therefore, considering that university students are in an intense competition with each other today, it is essential to examine the positive and negative results that students' university choice can bring about in their academic life. In the relevant literature, although there are considerable studies on factors affecting students' university choice, there are limited numbers of studies about consequences of students' university choice. In these studies, negative consequences of students' university choice such as student alienation (Kiremitci & Boz, 2019; Lee & Cho, 2017), and positive consequences of students' university choice such as scholarship awards (Hu, 2010), school engagement, self-efficacy and students' academic achievement were expressed (Benitez, 2017; Hu, 2010).

It is believed the present study, which investigates whether students' university choice decisions predict the variables of engagement and student alienation in line with the literature, will contribute to this literature. It is vital to identify the reasons of how students' university choice decisions are made. The reason for this can be explained by the fact that students' university choice decisions may cause potential changes in their academic lives. A university student who decides to attend a university that suits their preferences may have a tendency to adopt a more positive approach and higher motivation to achieve their professional and career goals. Choosing a university is a crucial decision in one's life because most of the time getting a university degree allows a person to achieve better working conditions. As a result, if students are more careful and selective when choosing their university, their level of cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement with their university can increase and their level of alienation from their universities may decrease in the terms of weakness, anomy, isolation and meaninglessness. Higher education institutions and their administrators may be interested in knowing the consequences of students' university choice decisions.

There is an exam-centred implementation for entrance into the university education system in Turkey. High school students must take a standardised university entrance examination consisting of two stages. The scores obtained in the first stage are valid for two years (ÖSYM, 2020). If the candidates do not make any preferences to enrol at university in their first year, they can just take the second exam the next year should they wish since the first stage is still valid. After students make their academic programme preferences, they are placed in a programme based on the scores they obtain in the examination as well as their high school graduation points. When students are making their preferences for universities, they have the opportunity to make a total of 24 choices by selecting the programme they want most as primary and then the programme they want next as secondary. Although whether students can attend a university is determined through a central examination in Turkey, students are also included in the process with the university preference form given to students. The reason for this study to be examined in Turkish universities, 35 percent of the candidates who won the university are placed in one of their first three choices in Turkey (YOK, 2019. Accordingly, the rate of university students going to the university they wish to study at is quite low. It is expected that the students who cannot attend the university they prefer and want to study first are expected to have low school engagement and alienation rates. In line with all these explanations, the main purpose of this research is to find out whether university choice decisions predict the variables of school engagement and student alienation.

Literature

The concept of university choice can be defined as "the decision to prefer a particular university to others in higher education" (Filter, 2010). University choice is the combination of the current information about the university, the image of the university and the reputation of the university (Briggs & Wilson, 2007). The theoretical foundations of the concept that emerged in the early 1980s are based on the student enrolment behaviour theory (Kusumawati et al., 2010). Students' university choice decision is a complex and lengthy process, and it is affected by a number of factors. According to a model developed by Chapman (1981) to give university administrators a perspective on institutional enrolment policy and student admissions, these factors are classified as follows: i) external influences [the impact of key people, characteristics of the university; the university's efforts to communicate with potential students], ii) student characteristics [socio-economic status, ability, educational expectations, high school performance], and iii) expectations of college life. Hence, the university choice evaluation process can get quite difficult and complex. Perna (2006) examines university choice decisions in four different layers: (1) individual habitus, (2) school and community context, (3) higher education context, and (4) broader social, economic, and policy context. In addition, students' university choice decisions can be shaped by access to information about the university.

School engagement can be described as students' sense of belonging to the school, adoption of the school' goals and willingness to participate in the activities within the school (Fredricks et al., 2004). This concept, which consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions, focuses on the interaction of students, teachers and administrators, the educational expectations of students, and their close attention to the curricula and the school environment (Arastaman, 2009). School engagement in higher education is essential in terms of enabling students to shape their future, to have a good profession and to socialise. It is believed that university choice decisions have an impact on students' internalisation and adoption of the school's goals. Therefore, students are expected to feel happy and excited, take part in class activities in a more participatory manner, and have a greater learning effort at a university they have chosen willingly. It is possible to come across a limited number of studies in the literature that investigate the relationship between school choice and school engagement (Benitez, 2017; Hu, 2010; Vaughn & Witko, 2013). For instance, in a study, Hu (2010) and Vaughn and Witko (2013) reported that students' levels of academic and social engagement with their schools increased if they attended schools that met their needs and preferences. Benitez (2017) also found positive relationships between school engagement and career choices. Based on all these studies, it is agreed that there are significant relationships between school choice and school engagement, and that school choice is an important predictor of school engagement. In addition, students' school choice decisions are thought to increase their school engagement levels positively.

Students' university choice decisions are an important concept in terms of being the predictor of student alienation. Alienation in education is defined as different situations and processes in which students become alienated from knowledge and learning-related processes and these processes become less meaningful to individuals, the interest in learning and teaching decreases, and education becomes an increasingly boring, monotonous and unappealing activity (Sidorkin, 2004). Investigating the concept of student alienation in higher education is important in terms of directing the students' energy to the field in which they are talented instead of channelling it to the direction desired by the education system (Thomas & Smith, 2004). It can be put forward that university choice decisions are effective in students' alienation from knowledge and learning-related processes and in their belief that education is boring and unappealing. Therefore, a student is not expected to regard himself as lucky in a university that is not preferred willingly, and he is more likely to feel alone, to find university rules meaningless, and to deem many practices to graduate at his university absurd and meaningless. There is a limited amount of research in the literature that indirectly examines the relationship between school choice and student

alienation (Kiremitci & Boz, 2019; Lee & Cho, 2017). In a study which addressed the relationship between profession choice and student alienation, Kiremitci and Boz (2019) reported that intrinsic profession choice motivation factors decreased alienation for women while extrinsic profession choice factors increased alienation levels for men. Lee and Cho (2017) also found high positive relationships between alienation and career barriers.

Method

Research model

This study was designed in the correlational design method, which is a quantitative research methodology. University choice decision was taken as the independent variable and university alienation and university commitment were used as the dependent variables. The study has a correlational research design in which at least two factors are assumed to occur together following a pattern or act together. Several methods are used to determine correlations between variables, one of which is the correlation coefficient. In this study, the correlation coefficient method was employed to determine the variables (Tekel & Karadag, 2019).

Population and sampling

Target population of the research is 1,235 first-year college students attending different programmes within the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Communication of a public university in South of Turkey in the academic year 2019–2020. Considering the impossibility of reaching all students, the research has been carried out on a sampling from the target population. Convenience sampling method has been used in forming the sampling. After all the calculations were done, the minimum sample size representing the population was found to be 278 for five percent confidence interval and five percent margin of error (Baş, 2013). However, considering possible problems while completing the survey, it was been decided that 680 students would be asked to fill in the questionnaire. Six hundred and eighty students in the sample representing the target population were given the questionnaire, 609 of those returned were fully completed. Three hundred and two of the participants (50%) in the sampling were female, and 302 of them (50%) male. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 50 (mean age: 19.51 years, SD = 2.49).

Before making their university choices, more than half of the participants did research into the university they wished for less than two months (n=326; 55%); 25 percent of them (n = 148) sought out information about the university for 2–4 months, and 20 percent of them (n = 118) for more than four months. It can be stated that students did not make informed choices before they chose their universities. While 90.1 percent of the participants (n = 537) attended these universities willingly, 9.9 percent attended their universities unwillingly.

Data collection

The data for this study were collected using three scales using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

The University Choice Decision Scale (UCDS)

The UCDS, developed by Apaydın and Seçkin-Kapucu (2017), reveals the factors influencing students' university choice decision. This 5-point, Likert-type scale consists of eight subscale with a total of 31

items: 1) *being informed about the university* (factor loadings in the range of .62–.70), 2) *job opportunities* (factor loadings in the range of .72–.68), 3) *geographical position* (factor loadings in the range of .50–.81, 4) *financial support the university provides* (factor loadings in the range of .66–.77), 5) *acquaintances* (factor loadings in the range of .61–.85), 6) *the cost of education* (factor loadings in the range of .73–.81), 7) *students already studying at the university* (factor loadings in the range of .63–.79), and 8) *the effect of high school education* (factor loadings in the range of .71–.83). The scale explained 64.21 percent of total variance as a result of EFA, and the percentage of variance explained by each sub-scale for the eight sub-scales were 8.83, 8.09, 10.00, 8.52, 8.30, 6.82, 6.68, and 6.94, respectively. CFA was calculated in order to verify an eight-factor structure for the construct validity of the study. Goodness of fit indexes were calculated [$\chi 2$= 1145.71, df=406, $\chi 2$/df= 2.82 P<0.001], RMSEA = 0.055, GFI = 0.89, AGFI = 0.87, NFI = 0.86, NNFI= 0.89 and CFI = 0.90]. The standardised coefficients originating from CFA and showing factor relationships with the items were found to be between .41 and .86. Apaydın and Seçkin-Kapucu (2017) determined the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale as α = 0.90; and for the eight sub-scales were .77, .85, .78, .75, .71, .77, .78 and .64, respectively. In this study the Cronbach's alpha coefficients was found to be α = 0.90 for the weakness; and for the eight sub-scales were .76, .79, .81, .79, .78, .78, .76 and .79, respectively. This scale is preferred as a data collection tool in today's literature (Topoğlu &Topoğlu, 2018).

The School Engagement Scale (SES)

The SES, developed by Fredricks et al. (2004) and adapted by Çengel et al. (2017), was used to determine the school engagement levels of students. This 5-point, Likert-type scale consists of three subscales with a total of 19 items: (1) *emotional engagement*, (2) *behavioural engagement*, and (3) *cognitive engagement*. As a result of the explanatory factor analysis (EFA) performed for this study, the second, fifth, sixth and ninth items found in the scale were removed from the scale due to the fact that their factor load values were different sub-scales. Consequently, in this study, SES consisted of a total of 15 items. The sub-scales factor loadings are as follows: (1) emotional engagement with the factor loadings in the range of .47–.71, (2) behavioural engagement with the factor loadings in the range of .54–.73, and (3) cognitive engagement with the factor loadings in the range of .41–.71. The scale explained 46.89 percent of total variance as a result of EFA, and the percentage of variance explained by each sub-scale was 19.33 for emotional, 10.75 for behavioural, and 16.80 for cognitive. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was calculated in order to verify a three-factor structure for the construct validity of the study. Goodness of fit indexes were calculated [$\chi 2$= 322.04, df=85, $\chi 2$/df= 3.78 P<0.001], RMSEA = 0.068, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.85, NNFI= 0.86 and CFI = 0.89]. The standardised coefficients originating from CFA and showing factor relationships with the items were found to be between .39 and .68. Çengel, et al. (2017) determined the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale as α = .89; and for the three sub-scales were .80, .68 and .80, respectively. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .79, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three sub-scales were .74, .46 and .70, respectively. This scale is preferred as a data collection tool in today's literature (Mameli & Passini, 2017; Yusofet al., 2007).

The Student Alienation Scale (SAS)

The SAS was developed by Çağlar (2012) to determine the extent of students' perceived alienation when it came to the university they attended. This 5-point, Likert-type scale consists of four subscales with a total of 20 items: (1) *weakness*, (2) *anomy*, (3) *isolation*, and (4) *meaninglessness*. The sub-scales factor loadings are as follows: (1) weakness with the factor loadings in the range of .57–.66, (2) anomy with the factor loadings in the range of .56–.76, (3) isolation with the factor loadings in the range of .70–.86

and (4) meaninglessness with the factor loadings in the range of .43–.80. The scale explained 46.36 percent of total variance as a result of factor analysis, and the percentage of variance explained by each sub-scale was 13.07 for *weakness*, 11.98 for *anomy*, 11.22 for *anomy* and 10.08 for *meaninglessness*. CFA was calculated in order to verify a four-factor structure for the construct validity of the study. Goodness of fit indexes were calculated [$\chi 2$= 421.71, df=164, $\chi 2$/df= 2.57 P<0.001], RMSEA = 0.051, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.83, NNFI= 0.87 and CFI = 0.88]. To conclude, the variables that were related to the eight factors constituting the scale remained under the factors of the original scale. The standardised coefficients originating from CFA and showing factor relationships with the items were found to be between .42 and .72. Çağlar (2012) determined the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale as α = .86; and in this study the Cronbach's alpha coefficients was found to be α = .71 for the weakness; α = .67 for anomy, α = 0.67 for isolation, α = .80 for meaninglessness and α = .65 for the overall scale. This scale is preferred as a data collection tool in today's literature (Aydın & Özel, 2020).

Data analysis

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between university choice decision, student alienation and school engagement. It also examined the impact of students' university choice decision on student alienation and school engagement. For this purpose, first, descriptive statistics for the variables were obtained. Second, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used. Since the variables in the developed model (university choice decision, student alienation and school engagement) were formulated with theoretical concepts and structures that could not be measured and seen directly, the structural equation modelling was used to explain the variables in this theoretical model (see Figure 1, Figure 2).

Creating the theoretical models

Two theoretical models were tested in this study: (a) the effect of university choice decision on school engagement, and (b) the effect of university choice decision on student alienation. In the *first theoretical model (Model A)*, the measurement components were (i) *university choice decision*, the external variable of the model, consisting of eight observable variables (being informed about the university, job opportunities, geographical position, financial support the university provide, acquaintances, the cost of education, students already studying at the university and the effect of high school education), and (ii) *school engagement*, the internal variable of the model, consisting of three observable variables (emotional engagement, behavioural engagement and cognitive engagement) (Figure 1). In the *second theoretical model (Model B)*, the measurement components were (i) *university choice decision*, the external variable of the model, consisting of eight observable variables (the sub-scales of the UCD), and (ii) *student alienation*, the internal variable of the model, consisting of four observable variables (weakness, anomy, isolation and meaninglessness) (Figure 2). Two different structural equation components were added to the theoretical model of the study: (1) university choice decision has a direct effect on school engagement, and (2) university choice decision has a direct effect on student alienation.

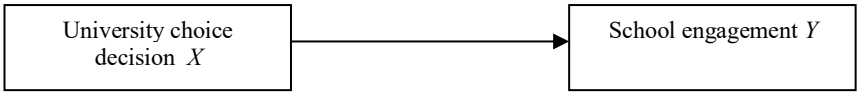

Figure 1. Model A: The relationship between university choice decision and school engagement.

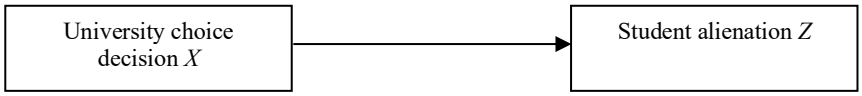

Figure 2. Model B: The relationship between university choice decision and student alienation.

Testing the models

When testing the theoretical structural equation models, attention was paid to the fact that the goodness of fit indices root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardised root mean square residual (SRMS) values were less than 0.10 and goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI) values were greater than 0.90. In addition, the criterion that the ratio of chi-square ($\chi 2$) compliance test to the degree of freedom ($\chi 2/df$) was between 1-5 was used (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Sümer, 2000). Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed on the survey data using SPSS version 24 and LISREL 8.54.

Ethics approval

Since this study is part of a larger study, ethics committee approval was obtained from Akdeniz University Social and Human Scientific Ethics Committee for the research (Date: 07.02.2020, Code: 55578142-050.01.04-E.22577, Number of Ethics Committee Decisions: 24). Before obtaining consent from the participants, information forms were distributed, giving information about the objectives and scope of the research. All participants were assured that the collected data was for research purposes only and would be kept confidential.

Findings

The relationships between students' university choice decision, university alienation and university commitment

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients between university choice decision, school engagement and student alienation.

[1. BIU: Being Informed about the University; 2. JO: Job Opportunities; 3. GP: Geographical; 4. FSUP: Financial Support the University Provides; 5.A: Acquaintances; 6.CE: The Cost of Education; 7.SSU: Students already Studying at the University; 8. EHSE: The Effect of High School Education; 9. EE:Emotional Engagement; 10. BE: Behavioural Engagement; 11. CE: Cognitive Engagement; 12. W: Weakness; 13. A: Anomy; 14. I: Isolation; 15. M: Meaninglessness; 16. UCD: University Choice Decision; 17. SE: School Engagement; 18. SA: Student Alienation]

Table 1. The Correlational Matrix Between University Choice Decision, School Engagement and Student Alienation (n=609)

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**
1.BIU	1	.44*	.12*	.42*	.39*	.29*	.36*	.35*	.18*	-.05	.15*	-.14*	-.08*	-.08-	-.01	.68*	.16*	-.12*
2. JO		1	.17*	.48*	.23*	.26*	.42*	.42*	.25*	.01	.15*	-.21*	-.12*	-.10*	-.04	.70*	.22*	-.17*
3.GP			1	.12*	.05*	.10*	.25*	.11*	.68*	.40*	.76*	-.35*	-.16*	-.14*	-.29*	.18*	.86*	-.35*
4.FSUP				1	.27*	.31*	.37*	.39*	.21*	.02	.08*	-.09*	.00	.05	.02	.66*	.14*	-.00
5.A					1	.46*	.30*	.33*	.05	.00	-.01	-.06	-.00	-.00	.07	.62*	.02	.00
6.CE						1	.32*	.33*	.08*	.00	.09*	-.08*	-.04	-.03	.05	.61*	.09*	-.04
7.SSU							1	.45*	.26*	.02	.24*	-.24*	-.03	-.03	-.04	.61*	.28*	-.13*
8.EHSE								1	.22*	.03	.11*	-.21*	-.04	.01	-.01	.65*	.19*	-.09*
9. EE									1	.22*	.44*	-.42*	-.20*	-.24*	-.30*	.27*	.83*	-.43*
10. BE										1	.25*	-.23*	-.25*	-.15*	-.24*	.01	.48*	-.32*
11. CE											1	-.29*	-.09*	-.02	-.23*	.18*	.82*	-.24*
12.W												1	.21*	.19*	.33*	-.24	-.44*	.65*
13. A													1	.24*	.47*	-.08	-.22*	.68*
14. I														1	.32*	-.04	-.18*	.65*
15. M															1	-.00	-.34*	.76*
16.UCD																1	.25*	-.14*
17.SE																	1	-.43*
18.SA																		1
M	4.14	3.61	2.60	4.05	3.77	3.46	3.30	3.73	2.87	1.81	2.59	3.70	3.08	3.16	3.22	3.60	2.54	3.16
SD	.88	1.11	.67	1.00	1.10	1.22	1.21	1.23	.76	.63	.74	.63	.81	.74	.86	.70	.56	.48

*p<.01

When the averages of students' perceptions on university choice decision were considered, the highest average related to the *being informed about the university-BIU* [M = 2.60, SD = .67] subscale, and the lowest average related to the *geographical position-GP* [M = 2.19, SD = 1.04] subscale. When the school engagement averages of the students were considered, the highest average was found in terms of *emotional engagement-EE* [M = 2.87, SD = .76] subscale, and the lowest average related to the *behavioural engagement-BE* [M = 1.81, SD = .63] subscale. When the student alienation averages of the students were considered, the highest average was found in terms of *weakness-W* [M = 3.70, SD = .63] subscale, and the lowest average related to the *anomy –A* [M = 3.08, SD = .81] subscale. And also, it was seen that the highest mean score belonged to the perception of *university choice decision* [M=3.60, SD= .70] and the lowest mean score to the perception of school engagement [X=2.54, SD= .56].

In consideration of the theoretical models created in relation to the causal relationships between university choice decision, school engagement and student alienation, the goodness of fit indices of the simultaneous contributions of each latent and observable variable of the theoretical models to the total models are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Goodness of Fit Parameters for Models (n=609)

Independent variable	Dependent variables				β	t	Full model R^2	
University choice decision (Model A)	School engagement *				.39	4.78	.15±	
	χ2	*df*	*χ2/df*	*RMSEA*	*GFI*	*AGFI*	*NNFI*	*CFI*
	210.30	43	4.89	.080	.94	.91	.86	.89
University choice decision (Model B)	Student alienation				-.09	-1.67	.008±	
	χ2	*df*	*χ2/df*	*RMSEA*	*GFI*	*AGFI*	*NNFI*	*CFI*
	224.17	53	4.22	.073	.94	.91	.86	.89

*p<.001

In model A, fit indices were calculated as χ^2= 210.30; df= 43; χ^2 /df = 4.89; GFI= .94; AGFI=.91; NNFI=. 86; CFI = .89; and RMSEA= .080. All paths were significant, and the fit indexes are acceptable (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Sümer, 2000). It can be mentioned that the direct effect of university choice decision on school engagement is significant and positive (β= .39; t= 4.78). According to path analysis, school engagement explained a combined 15% of the variance in university choice decision. University students' university choice decisions have a positive effect on school engagement. This situation can be explained by the importance of the enrolment rate in higher education. Enrolment rates in higher education provide information about the participation, access or prevalence of education in countries in terms of different education levels. It shows to what extent populations of countries in higher education age can meet their educational needs (Günay & Günay, 2017). The Turkish higher education system, 6 percent in 1981, reached a gross enrollment rate of 94 percent in volume and structure in 2017, reaching both a broad and complex structure and a universal stage (Çetinsaya, 2014; Günay & Günay, 2017). As a result, it is thought that there is an increase in schooling rates with the students who are committed to their schools.

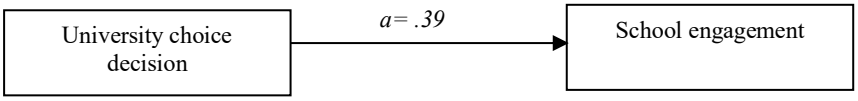

Figure 3. The structural equation model between university choice decision and school engagement.

In model B, fit indices were calculated as χ^2= 224.17; df= 53; χ^2 /df = 4.22; GFI= .94; AGFI=.91; NNFI=. 86; CFI = .89; and RMSEA= .073. According to the t-test analysis conducted to determine whether the relationships in the model were significant, it can be mentioned that the direct effect of

university choice decision on student alienation is not significant (β= -.09; t=-1.67). Students' university choice decisions are not seen as the reason for finding their educational activities meaningless, feeling inadequate and weak, isolated from school and for their alienation to their universities. The reason for this can be explained by the university environment (external variables) created by the competition among students. Therefore, the effect of individual characteristics (internal variable), such as decision making, is not considered important for alienation to school.

Discussion and conclusion

University choice decision is the external variable of the study. The findings revealed that being informed about the university by using sources like university graduates, university students, university lecturers and university visits was found more effective than the other university choice decision sub-scales. This is followed by the dimensions of financial support the university provides, acquaintance, and the effect of high school education, job opportunities, cost of education, and students already studying, respectively. In addition, the university choice decision found to be at the lowest level was geographical position. The studies of Ayvat (2018), Briggs and Wilson (2007), Söderlund and Rosengren (2007), who emphasise the importance of being informed about the university, support the findings of this research. According to Chapman (1981), students can change their university choice decisions more quickly by communicating with the students studying at the university. Söderlund and Rosengren (2007) state that word of mouth develops a positive attitude among students towards the university while giving their university choice decisions. In addition, the findings of the present research are supported by the research findings of Ayvat (2018), who maintains that information obtained from other students studying at the university, university visits, and information provided by the academicians about the department of interest are important in students' university choice decisions.

School engagement, which was the internal variable of Model A consists of three observable variables (emotional engagement, behavioural engagement and cognitive engagement). While emotional engagement, which is one of the sub-scales of school engagement, was perceived at the highest level, behavioural engagement was perceived at the lowest level by university students. This finding shows similarity with the research findings of Friedel and Anderson (2017) who have revealed that the emotional engagement dimension is perceived at the highest level. Friedel and Anderson's (2017) research findings also indicate that behavioural engagement is perceived at the lowest level and supports the findings of the present study. Freshman students' failure to adopt university rules and to complete their duties and responsibilities on time may cause behavioural engagement to be perceived at a low level.

Student alienation, the internal variable of Model B, consists of four observable variables (weakness, anomy, isolation and meaninglessness). Of these, student alienation was the most significant and reliable variable in determining school student alienation. While weakness, which is one of the sub-scales of student alienation, was perceived at the highest level, anomy was perceived at the lowest level by university students. Although different results have been obtained among the sub-scales of student alienation at the highest level, it is observed that the lowest level is mostly related to anomy (Aydın & Akar, 2014; Ayık & Ataş-Akdemir, 2015; Çağlar, 2012). The fact that the anomy is perceived lowest can be explained by the views of Ayık and Ataş-Akdemir (2015), who stated that students considered university rules necessary and had no problem in following them. The fact that the weakness is perceived highest can be explained by the fact that despite having high-level goals, freshman students have low expectations that they can achieve these goals. Therefore, administrators and lecturers in higher education may be advised to take the necessary measures to anticipate and recognise student alienation.

The SEM analysis indicated that the goodness of fit indices of only one model were at a sufficient level. This result suggests that although the university choice decision and school engagement model can be applied (Model A), the university choice decision and student alienation model cannot be applied

(Model B). In this respect, the findings in the literature suggest that university choice decision is one of the crucial determinants of school engagement, supporting the fact that the model resulting from this study can be applied (Benitez, 2017; Hu, 2010; Vaughn & Witko, 2013). Accordingly, if students' university choice decisions are determined, their school engagement levels may increase. Along with students' university choice decisions, they increase students' school engagement levels; it will enable the development of effective education and training in the classroom and will contribute to students' success in school. By predicting and recognising students' university choice decisions, higher education administrators and lecturers can help them increase their school engagement. As a result, the success of students who feel engaged with their school can increase.

In the second model established to determine the direct impact of university choice decision on student alienation, it was found that university choice decision did not have a predictive effect on student alienation. Accordingly, students' university choice decision is not an important determinant in reducing student alienation. University students' university choice decisions have no effect on student alienation. Therefore, it is not possible to explain student alienation with university choice decisions. Therefore, in future studies, it is necessary to investigate which variables the students' university election decisions have an effect on.

This study examines the effects of university choice decisions in detail with the results of school engagement and student alienation in first-year university students' perspectives in Turkey. The findings obtained in this study can be summarised as follows: (1) a positive and significant effect of university choice decision on school engagement was found, (2) university choice decision does not have an effect on student alienation. The results obtained are similar to other studies conducted in related literature. However, compared to other studies, some differences were detected in our study because of different cultural behaviours. Nevertheless, it is indicated that the behaviour of Turkish students is not significantly different from those of other counterparts. In order to increase the student engagement of the first-year students to their schools, their tendency to make informed choices can be increased while making the university preference decisions. Therefore, family support is needed along with guidance from teachers and education managers in their high schools.

The literature on consequences (based on school engagement and student alienation) for the university choice decisions is limited in both national and international literature (Benitez, 2017; Hu, 2010; Kiremitci & Boz, 2019; Lee & Cho, 2017; Vaughn & Witko, 2013). There is limited research on the consequences of university choice decisions in the literature. The analysis of all the relevant literature has revealed that while many studies have been carried out on the criteria of university choice process in many countries, there is very little research on the consequences of university choice decisions. There are no research findings in the national literature. This study also aims to contribute to filling the gap in the literature on the consequences of university choice decisions.

The findings of this study can be regarded as useful for higher education institutions while planning and developing student recruitment strategies. Implementing these strategies could help increase the number of registrations. University administrators who participate in the decision-making process regarding strategic planning may find the results of the present study potentially useful. In light of the outcomes of this study, students can use appropriate determinants while choosing their universities. By understanding these factors influenced by university choice decisions, it is possible to identify how and why students choose a university and to shape the strategies used by students during the decision making process.

This study was conducted in two faculties at one state university, which indicates that only the opinions of the students studying at these faculties were included in the study. In addition, further research can be carried out in institutions that are not only in one city, but also all around Turkey. This means that a very limited group of students were involved in this study. It is suggested that a future study can be conducted covering a wider geographical area, which includes a larger sample of both state and foundation universities. A comparative qualitative study conducted in both public and foundation

universities can help reveal details that can be ignored by quantitative research. The current study was conducted with first grade students. The absence of other university stakeholders, including higher education institution administrators, lecturers and parents, constitutes the most important limitation of the study. In addition, data was collected and analysed in only one country, so the generalizability of the findings is limited. In future studies, the impact of university choice decisions on university environment and the impact of university environment on school engagement and student alienation can also be examined through path analysis.

The study has used two consequences (school engagement and student alienation). The number of consequences of university choice decision can be increased for further research. Thus, it will provide a more comprehensive picture of the results of university choice decisions. In subsequent studies, the effects of university choice decisions on the university environment and the effects on the school engagement and student alienation in the university environment can also be examined by path analysis. This helps researchers test the model in more detail.

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