

**ABSTRACT**

**Gender and Students' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Their Decision to Enrol In Higher Education In Barbados**

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The purpose of this study was to investigate university undergraduate students' perceptions of the factors that influenced their decisions to enrol in higher education in Barbados. More specifically, the study sought to determine if there were sex differences in the perceived determinants of student enrolment.

Data from two samples were analysed in this study. The first sample was a non-random sample of 200 undergraduate students, comprising 77 males and 123 females from across the Social Sciences, Pure and Applied Science and Humanities and Education faculties. A self-report questionnaire was used to collect data from this sample. The second sample of 2392 undergraduates, 740 males and 1652 females, was randomly selected from the 2007-2008 student intake. This second sample was selected to compare the similarities and differences between the two samples with a view to enhancing the level of confidence and validity in the findings of the study.

The data collected were analysed using exploratory factor analysis and the Pearson Product-moment Correlation as the primary statistical techniques. The t-test was used as one of the statistical methods to determine the statistical significance of differences observed in the study.

It was found that personal and socio-economic factors played a significant role in the decisions of participants to pursue higher education. The most important finding in this study was that participants perceived that financial benefits and personal improvement were the most significant influences in their decision to pursue higher education. However, there were sex differences in participants' perceptions of the most important factor that influenced their decision to enrol in higher education in Barbados. Males identified financial benefits whereas females identified self-improvement as the most important influence. Parents were identified as the most influential persons on participants' decision to pursue higher education. It was also found that 45% of the Barbadians sampled perceived that financial concerns stood in the way of their enrolment.

The results of this study revealed that whereas male and female participants had similar underlying motives and factors influencing their decisions to enrol in higher education, the gender disparity in enrolment had implications for policymakers at the national level and administrators in higher education in Barbados. Future research should therefore seek to replicate this study using a randomly selected representative sample of respondents who meet the matriculation requirements for entry in higher education to determine the extent to

which the results of this study reflect the views of a wider cross-section of qualified persons.

Key Words: Roderick Ricardo Rudder; Gender; Higher Education; Perceptions.

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