



ISSN 2827-8151 (Online)

**SRAWUNG: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities**

<https://journal.ifpublisher.com/index.php/issn>

Vol. 4, Issue 3, (2025)

[doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v4i3.776](https://doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v4i3.776)

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## **Perspectives of BELTEI International School Students Toward Pursuing Higher Education at BELTEI International University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*All K12 graduates in Cambodia must choose the suitable university for furthering their study. Therefore, this study analyzes why the majority of BELTEI International School (BELTEI IS) alumni chose other universities over BELTEI International University (BELTEI IU), despite the institutional relationship. BELTEI IS is one of Cambodia's largest private school networks, while BELTEI IU, its higher education equivalent, provides degrees in 13 faculties and 45 specialties. However, only a tiny fraction of BELTEI IS graduates (11% at Campus 1 and 5% at Campus 2) enrolled at BELTEI IU for the 2024-2025 academic year. This phenomenological research, which used purposive sampling and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 80 BELTEI IS graduates, investigates the factors that influence their university decisions. According to the findings, students chose other schools mostly because of perceived better employment prospects (14.8%), family/friend recommendations (12.7%), and a higher reputation/ranking (11.3%). BELTEI IS staff had little impact over these decisions (82.5% indicated no influence). Participants stressed the importance of BELTEI IU offering a distinctive campus atmosphere, advanced academic programs, greater research and innovation possibilities, and improved teaching quality. They also stressed the need for a student-centered approach, greater career assistance, and budgetary transparency. These elements, together with university culture and value offer, are critical in decision-making for future professional success.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Quality, Career Prospects, Institutional Linkage, Student-Centric Approach, University Choice*

## INTRODUCTION

BELTEI International School (BIS) is one of Cambodia's major private school networks, providing general education in accordance with the national curriculum as well as supplemental English, Chinese, and IMA (Intelligent Mental Arithmetic) programs. BELTEI International University (BIU), a private college with two campuses, offers bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees in 13 faculties and 45 majors (*BELTEI Gr.*, 2025). This pattern is consistent with larger studies on student mobility, which reveals that secondary school graduates frequently choose institutions that match with their professional objectives, financial conditions, and perceived status (Cook, 2022).

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education is a critical point in students' academic and professional careers. This decision is impacted by a myriad of factors, including institutional reputation, program offers, career possibilities, financial concerns, and personal goals (Brewis, 2019). For example, in the 2024-2025 academic year, BELTEI IU's Campus 1 enrolled 1,746 students, with only 194 (11%) from BELTEI IS. Similarly, Campus 2 had 1,585 students, with just 80 (5%) being BELTEI IS grads. This situation raises important issues regarding the reasons that influence students' decisions to attend other schools rather than remaining in the BELTEI educational network. Understanding these viewpoints is critical for BELTEI IU to increase its appeal to its own secondary school graduates by BELTEI IU Report (*BELTEI Gr.*, 2025).

The primary question raised by this study is why, despite the institutional relationship, the majority of BELTEI IS graduates choose other institutions over BELTEI IU. Existing literature suggests that students' university choices are shaped by academic and career considerations such as institutional reputation, program diversity, and graduate employability (Harahap et al., 2023); financial factors including tuition costs, scholarships, and perceived return on investment (Haron et al., 2017); and institutional branding and peer influence, where social perceptions, alumni success stories, and peer recommendations heavily impact decisions.

This study has practical consequences for BELTEI IU's strategic planning, marketing, and academic growth efforts. Understanding why students choose competitors may help the institution improve its curriculum, broaden its appeal, and expand its partnership with BELTEI IS. Furthermore, the findings may add to wider conversations about student retention and institutional loyalty in Cambodia's quickly changing higher education scene (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). This study seeks to describe stakeholder opinions of major quality management components and overall education quality improvement in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, it aims to investigate the link between these quality management components and education quality enhancement, finally assessing their impact on quality improvement in HEIs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The transition from secondary to higher education is a significant decision-making process for students, impacted by a variety of variables including institutional reputation, program availability, financial concerns, and personal goals (Lombard, 2020). Despite the enormous student population at BELTEI International Schools (BELTEI IS), only a tiny number of graduates opt to continue their study at BELTEI International University. This literature review examines current studies on student decision-making in higher education, institutional loyalty, and variables influencing university choice, with a particular emphasis on understanding why BELTEI IS students choose other schools over BELTEI IU.

### **Factors Influencing University Choice**

According to research, students choose a university based on a variety of variables, including academic reputation, program diversity, employment chances, and campus facilities. According to research conducted by İlğan et al. (2018), students choose universities with strong industry linkages and excellent employability rates. This suggests that BELTEI IU can improve its perceived academic and career advantages to recruit more BELTEI IS graduates.

The availability of specialist programs is also important. BELTEI IU offers 45 majors across 13 faculties, although students may prefer alternative institutions if they believe their professional aspirations are not aligned with BELTEI IU's offerings. Comparative studies on university choice in Southeast Asia indicate that students frequently prefer institutions with worldwide prestige or collaborations, which may explain why BELTEI IS graduates go for other colleges (İlğan et al., 2018).

### **Institutional Loyalty and Transition from Secondary to Higher Education**

Institutional loyalty, in which students continue their education within the same educational network, is prevalent in private universities with integrated K-12 and university systems. However, BELTEI IS students have a poor transfer rate to BELTEI IU, indicating a gap between secondary and higher education branding. According to Tahir & Fatima (2023), students who regard their secondary school as academically demanding may seek bigger challenges elsewhere, whereas others may link university reputation with freedom from their old institution. Financial concerns also influence loyalty. While BELTEI IS and BELTEI IU are part of the same private foundation, tuition and scholarship availability may affect decisions. Research in Cambodia discovered that affordability and financial assistance had a major impact on university enrollment meaning that BELTEI IU may need to increase scholarship incentives for BELTEI IS graduates.

### **Student Perceptions and Alternative Choices**

According to phenomenological research on student decision-making, social influence, family expectations, and institutional marketing all impact university preferences (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). If BELTEI IS students believe other institutions are more prominent or inventive, they may dismiss BELTEI IU despite past connection. Research on Cambodian higher education conducted by discovered that students frequently depend on alumni comments and social reputation when selecting institutions, implying that BELTEI IU's marketing techniques may need to be reconsidered. Furthermore, the lack of alignment between BELTEI IS's general education curriculum and BELTEI IU's degree programs may put students off. According to research, smooth academic routes boost transition rates, hence BELTEI IU should benefit from improved curricular alignment and early university exposure programs for BELTEI IS students.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study will use a phenomenological research technique to fully analyze and comprehend the lived experiences of BELTEI IS graduates when they choose a university for further education. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research tradition, is well suited to this inquiry since its fundamental purpose is to characterize the "essence" of a phenomenon as seen by individuals (Greening, 2019). This technique seeks to reveal the meanings, perceptions, and interpretations that participants have regarding their decision-making process when choosing a university, particularly when an institutional tie exists but is not the primary choice.

Purposive sampling will be used in this investigation, which is consistent with the phenomenological method. This method was chosen because it allows for the deliberate selection of participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation, specifically BELTEI IS graduates who have chosen to further their education at universities other than BELTEI IU, despite the existing institutional linkage. Purposive sampling in phenomenology aims to pick "information-rich" examples that can reveal profound insights into the substance of the phenomena, rather than statistical generalizability (Johnston et al., 2017). The data will be collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and the raw data will go through a rigorous analysis procedure based on phenomenological principles, notably using transcendental phenomenological technique. This inductive and iterative technique will begin with verbatim transcription of all audio recordings, followed by epoche (removing personal biases) and horizontalization (identifying all significant utterances).

These noteworthy statements will then be grouped into meaning units to generate textural descriptions of what each participant experienced, followed by structural descriptions that analyze how they perceived the phenomena while taking into account contextual circumstances. Finally, individual textural and structural descriptions will be combined to generate a composite textural-structural

description, exposing the key themes and invariant structures that explain why BELTEI IS alumni select other colleges. A qualitative data analysis approach may be used to help with organizing and coding, along with continual reflective journaling and peer debriefing to guarantee methodological rigor and bias minimization (Brailas et al., 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the demographic information for the 80 research participants. The bulk of participants are men (81.3%, 65 persons), with women accounting for 18.8% (15 individuals). The majority graduated lately, between 2023 and 2024 (61.3%, 49 persons). Participants came from several BELTEI IS campuses, with Campus 15 having the most representation (41.3%, 33 persons). These graduates currently attend a wide range of universities, but only 1.3% (1 individual) are enrolled at BELTEI International University 5, with the Institute of Foreign Languages (12.5%, 10 individuals) 6 and the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (8.8%, 7 individuals) 7 among other notable options. These graduates majored in a variety of fields, with Business Administration accounting for 7% (10 persons).

**Table 1.** Demographic Information

Demographic Information	Descriptions	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	65	81.3%
	Female	15	18.8%
Years of Graduation	2019-2020	22	27.5%
	2021-2022	9	11.3%
	2023-2024	49	61.3%
BELTEI IS Campus	BIS campus 9	22	27.5%
	BIS campus 12	12	15%
	BIS campus 15	33	41.3%
	BIS campus 16	5	6.3%
	BIS campus 17	4	5%
	BIS campus 18	4	5%
Current University	Institute of Technology of Cambodia	7	8.8%
	University of Health Sciences	7	8.8%
	Institute of Foreign Languages	10	12.5%
	American University of Phnom Penh	4	5%

	University of Economic and Finance	7	8.8%
	BELTEI International University	1	1.3%
	National Polytechnic Institute of Cambodia	4	5%
	Norton University	5	3.5%
	International University	4	2.8%
	ACLEDA University of Business	4	2.8%
	American University of Phnom Penh	4	2.8%
	Limkokwing University	4	2.8%
	Western University	5	3.5%
	CamEd Business School	5	3.5%
	SETEC Institution	5	3.5%
	University of Puthisastra	4	2.8%
Major	Electronic and Automatic	7	8.8%
	Doctor	7	8.8%
	Business Administration	10	7%
	BA of English	4	2.8%
	Finance and Banking	7	4.9%
	Accounting	1	0.7%
	Software Engineer	4	2.8%
	Civil Engineering	5	3.5%
	Pharmacy	4	2.8%
	Computer Science	4	2.8%
	Architecture	4	2.8%
	General Management	4	2.8%
	International Relation	5	3.5%
	Artificial Intelligence Engineering and Cybersecurity	5	3.5%
	Civil Aviation	5	3.5%

Source: Processed Data by Researcher (2025)

This section lists the elements that influenced students' university choices other than BELTEI IU. The most common reason for their selection was "better job prospects after graduation," which was given by 14.8% of respondents, followed by "family/friend recommendations" (12.7%) and "better reputation/ranking" (11.3%). Other important indicators were "more preferred academic programs" (8.5%) and "lower tuition fees/scholarships" (7%). Less commonly reported reasons were "location/convenience" (2.1%), "lack of desired major at BELTEI IU" (2.8%), and the view that "the name 'BELTEI' is boring" (2.8%).

Furthermore, the chart shows that the vast majority (82.5%) of students claimed that BELTEI IS lecturers or staff had no effect on their university selection, with only 17.5% claiming differently. The part on knowledge with BELTEI IU's curricula does not provide any specific data points.

**Table 2.** Factors Influencing University Choice

Factors Influencing University Choice	Descriptions	Frequency	Percentage
Why did you choose your current university instead of BELTEI IU?	Better reputation/ranking	9	11.3%
	More preferred academic programs	12	8.5%
	Lower tuition fees/scholarships	10	7%
	Better job prospects after graduation	21	14.8%
	Location/convenience	3	2.1%
	Family/friend recommendations	18	12.7%
	Lack of desired major at BELTEI IU	3	2.8%
	The name "BELTEI" is boring.	4	2.8%
How familiar were you with BELTEI IU's programs before making your decision?	Very familiar	24	16.9%
	Somewhat familiar	50	62.5%
	Not familiar at all	6	7.5%
Did BELTEI IS teachers or staff influence your university decision?	Yes	14	17.5%
	No	66	82.5%

Source: Processed Data by Researcher (2025)

This table, "Perceptions of BELTEI IU," shows the elements that might have influenced participants' decision to attend BELTEI IU as well as their present impressions of the school. The most important variables that would have impacted their choice were "more scholarship opportunities," which were wanted by 33.8% (27 individuals), followed by "stronger industry connections/internships" (30%, 24 persons), and a "wider range of academic programs" (21.3%, 17 individuals).

Less influential criteria were "better promotion/marketing," "improved campus facilities," and a wish to "change the name 'BELTEI' to something else," all indicated by 5% (4 respondents). When asked to compare BELTEI IU to their present university, 37.5% (30 people) said "About the same," whereas 20% said "Slightly better" and 18.8% said "Much better." In contrast, 16.3% considered it "slightly worse" and 7.5% "much worse." A significant majority of participants, 80% (64), said that they would not choose BELTEI IU for further studies (e.g., Master's/PhD), with just 20% (16 persons) receptive to the notion.

**Table 3.** Perceptions of BELTEI IU

Perceptions of BELTEI IU	Descriptions	Frequency	Percentage
What factors would have encouraged you to choose BELTEI IU?	Stronger industry connections/internships	24	30%
	More scholarship opportunities	27	33.8%
	Better promotion/marketing	4	5%
	Wider range of academic programs	17	21.3%
	Improved campus facilities	4	5%
	Change the name "BELTEI" to something else	4	5%
How do you perceive BELTEI IU compared to your current university?	Much better	15	18.8%
	Slightly better	16	20%
	About the same	30	37.5%
	Slightly worse	13	16.3%
	Much worse	6	7.5%
Would you consider BELTEI IU for future studies (e.g., Master's/PhD)?	Yes	16	20%
	No	64	80%

Source: Processed Data by Researcher (2025)

## Qualitative Findings

### **Question:** *What advice would you give BELTEI IU to attract more BELTEI IS graduates?*

The qualitative findings, derived from the perspectives of 80 participants, reveal several critical areas for BELTEI International University (BELTEI IU) to

address in order to attract more graduates from BELTEI International School (BELTEI IS).

*"Participants expressed a strong desire for a distinct and improved campus environment, citing dissatisfaction with the architectural monotony between BELTEI IS and BELTEI IU structures, and advocating for a larger, cleaner location with modern facilities and a re-evaluation of the number of events to avoid disrupting study schedules."*

*"Academically, the feedback highlighted the need for significant upgrades, such as adding more useful and advanced programs, encouraging research and innovation, investing in better staff training and lesson design to improve teaching quality, and limiting class sizes to provide a more personalized learning experience. A definite goal for internationalization was also visible, with proposals to develop international programmes, invite more international teachers, and strengthen collaborations with foreign universities."*

*"Furthermore, participants emphasized the necessity of a more student-centric approach, urging the institution to prioritize student well-being and academic success over financial gains, improve job placement services, restrict overly rigid internal rules, and foster stronger communication and mentorship between BELTEI IU seniors and BELTEI IS undergraduates, drawing inspiration from best practices."*

*"Finally, financial considerations were prominent, with recommendations to offer tuition discounts, increase transparency regarding additional fees, and provide accessible accommodation options for students from the provinces, collectively underscoring the need for BELTEI IU to offer a transformative, high-quality higher education experience distinct from its high school counterpart."*

**Question: Any additional comments about your university decision?**

The qualitative findings, derived from the perspectives of 80 participants, reveal several additional comments regarding to university decision.

*"A university selection, particularly for BELTEI IS graduates contemplating BELTEI IU, goes beyond specific suggestions and involves a larger assessment of linked aspects. Students carefully assess the congruence of their personal and career goals, as well as how a BELTEI IU degree translates into practical employment chances like as industry contacts, internship opportunities, and alumni success stories. They also evaluate program specificity vs breadth, looking for "more useful" and "advanced" programs that provide clear routes to professional objectives, as well as chances for research and innovation for people with academic backgrounds."*

*"Beyond academics, "fit" is critical. This includes the campus culture and vibe, in which students seek a unique and inspiring environment that fosters a sense of belonging, as well as meaningful student-faculty interaction made possible by smaller class sizes and approachable, high-quality faculty who can provide*

*personalized feedback and mentorship. The availability and quality of student support services, such as academic advising, mental health resources, and career counseling, are also important factors, indicating a demand for timely and comprehensive help."*

*"The value proposition and long-term investment are critical in the decision-making process." Students and their families assess the return on investment (ROI), weighing the quality of education against the cost, making tuition affordability and clarity regarding hidden costs critical considerations. The university's reputation and recognition are critical, since students desire a degree that will help them in the job market and pursue their education, with foreign alliances and instructors helping to shape this perception. A strong and engaged alumni network is also regarded for its ability to help with professional growth.*

*"Finally, the actual experience outside of marketing materials is important. Word-of-mouth from current and recent students, made possible by greater communication between BELTEI IU seniors and BELTEI IS freshmen, is extremely significant. Similarly, campus visits and exposure, including benchmarking trips to other universities, offer prospective students to get a firsthand look at BELTEI IU's academic and campus life. Essentially, students graduating from an associated high school seek a university that represents a significant step up in quality, providing a distinct and stimulating environment, strong support for their overall development, and a clear, tangible return on their investment for their future careers."*

## CONCLUSION

The research of 80 BELTEI IS graduates demonstrates a gap between the institution and its alumni, with just a tiny fraction deciding to continue their studies at BELTEI IU. Students prefer other colleges because to greater employment opportunities, family recommendations, and reputation. BELTEI IS personnel has minimal impact over students' decisions. Students want a contemporary campus with sophisticated curricula, research opportunities, and fewer class sizes. They also want globalization and a student-centered approach. Financial concerns like as tuition cost and accessibility to housing are also essential. Students see higher education as a long-term investment, with word-of-mouth and firsthand college experiences affecting their decisions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

BELTEI IU should improve its value offer to recruit more graduates. This involves investing in a contemporary campus environment, updating program options, encouraging research and innovation, increasing teaching quality, and putting student well-being first. The institution should also address financial obstacles by providing fair pricing, attractive tuition reductions, and accessible housing alternatives for provincial students.

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