International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulfindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

The Influence Of Lecture Flexibility, University Reputation, And Reference Groups On The Decision To Choose An Executive/Employee Class Program At Private Higher Education Institutions (A Study At Universitas Bandar Lampung)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and empirically prove the influence of lecture flexibility, university reputation, and reference groups on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung (UBL). The research approach used is quantitative with a causal-associative survey design. The study population includes all 128 active students of the Employee Class Program in the 2025/2026 Academic Year. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a proportional random sampling technique, resulting in a sample of 97 respondents. Data were collected through a 1–5 Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression assisted by IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. The multiple linear regression results yielded the equation Y = -3.410 + 0.380(X1) + 0.311(X2) + 0.549(X3) + e. Partially, lecture flexibility has a positive and significant effect on the choice decision (t = 4.922; p = 0.000), university reputation has a positive and significant effect (t = 4.877; p = 0.000), and reference groups have the most dominant positive and significant effect (t = 8.652; p = 0.000; Beta = 0.626). Simultaneously, all three independent variables have a significant effect on the choice decision (F = 34.518; p = 0.000) with a coefficient of determination of 52.7% (R^2 = 0.527; Adjusted R^2 = 0.512). These findings confirm that while academic flexibility and institutional reputation are essential prerequisites, interpersonal recommendations from colleagues, superiors, family, and alumni serve as the most powerful driving factor for working students in selecting a higher education institution.

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Keywords: Lecture Flexibility; University Reputation; Reference Groups; Choice Decision; Employee Class Program; Higher Education Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a fundamental role in producing highly competitive human resources in the era of a knowledge-based economy. Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education emphasizes that higher education is vital in developing the potential of the academic community to produce graduates who master branches of science and technology to fulfill national interests and enhance national competitiveness. Within this regulatory framework, the expansion of access to higher education is no longer restricted to young formal high school graduates, but is also widely open to active workers and working professionals seeking to upgrade their academic qualifications and career paths amidst their daily work routines.

This paradigm shift has driven the growth of Employee Class Programs across various higher education institutions in Indonesia. The Employee Class Program is specifically designed to accommodate the time constraints and busy schedules of active professionals by conducting lectures outside office working hours (particularly on weekends on Saturdays or in the evenings), integrating face-to-face learning with information technology-based online learning systems (blended learning), providing customizable credit systems, and offering flexible academic administrative services. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards provides a legal basis for higher education institutions to deliver adaptive blended learning models.

Amid increasingly fierce job market competition, possessing a higher education degree is no longer merely an added value, but has become an absolute prerequisite across various job sectors and promotions. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that workers with higher education have a significantly higher average income level compared to those with secondary education. In addition, employment regulations in both private and government sectors increasingly require bachelor's and master's degree qualifications for strategic positions, thereby sparking a surge of interest among professionals to pursue advanced higher education.
Private Higher Education Institutions (PTS) play a dominant role in administering Employee Class Programs in Indonesia, including in Lampung Province. The structural and managerial flexibility possessed by private institutions enables more adaptive curriculum design and scheduling for

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working students compared to the bureaucracy of public universities. The list of higher education institutions offering Employee Class Programs in Lampung Province is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Higher Education Institutions Offering Employee Class Programs in Lampung Province

No	Provider Institution	Institutional Status
1	Universitas Bandar Lampung (UBL)	Private (PTS)
2	Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia	Private (PTS)
3	Institut Informatika dan Bisnis (IIB) Darmajaya	Private (PTS)
4	Universitas Terbuka Lampung	Public (PTN)
5	Universitas Muhammadiyah Lampung	Private (PTS)

Based on Table 1, the majority of providers for employee class programs are private higher education institutions (PTS). The high number of private universities creates fierce competition in recruiting prospective working students. Universitas Bandar Lampung (UBL), established in 1984, is a prominent private university in Lampung Province and has proven its excellence by achieving the title of the Best Private Higher Education Institution Rank 1 within the LLDIKTI Region II environment for seven consecutive years. UBL offers Employee Class Programs at both undergraduate (S1) and postgraduate (S2) levels with concentrations across various study programs such as Law, Management, and Civil Engineering. The distribution of UBL employee class student enrollment is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Enrolled Students in UBL Employee Class Program

No	Study Program	Total Registered Students
1	Law	586 Students
2	Management	204 Students
3	Public Administration	183 Students

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4	Civil Engineering	166 Students
5	Accounting	63 Students
6	Business Administration	57 Students
7	Communication Science	37 Students
8	Mechanical Engineering	10 Students

Despite having a large student base, new student admission data for UBL's Employee Class Program during the 2021–2025 period shows sharp dynamics and fluctuations between admission targets and actual applicants, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Target vs. Actual Admission of UBL Employee Class Program (2021–2025)

Academic Year	Admission Target	Actual Applicants	Achievement (%)
2021	500	530	106.0%
2022	500	702	140.4%
2023	500	498	99.6%
2024	500	298	59.6%
2025	500	325	65.0%

Table 3 illustrates a sharp decline in the number of applicants in 2024 and 2025 below the institutional target. This phenomenon highlights the urgent need for an in-depth understanding of prospective consumer behavior regarding educational services. The decision to choose a higher education institution involves complex trade-offs between educational quality, time, effort, cost, and career/family consequences (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Engel et al., 2012). Identified key factors include lecture flexibility, university reputation, and reference groups (colleagues, superiors, family, alumni). A comprehensive empirical study testing these three variables

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simultaneously on the employee class segment at private universities in Bandar Lampung City remains limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to empirically examine the influence of lecture flexibility, university reputation, and reference groups on students' decisions to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This research is built upon two main theoretical frameworks: Consumer Decision-Making Theory (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2019) and Services Marketing Mix Theory (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2018; Lupiyoadi, 2016; Tjiptono, 2019).

Choice Decision for Educational Services (Y): Consumer decision-making is a sequential process comprising: problem/need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase/choice decision, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of employee class higher education, choice decisions are measured through cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions encompassing certainty of choice, careful consideration, alignment of choice with career needs and financial capabilities, promptness and accuracy of decision-making, and willingness to recommend the program to other parties (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Lecture Flexibility (X1): Lupiyoadi (2016) defines flexibility in educational service marketing as the institution's capacity to provide leeway for students in determining time, place, method, learning pace, and study load without compromising academic quality standards. Tjiptono dan Chandra (2016) emphasize that service flexibility generates strong perceived value (both functional and economic) for consumers. Indicators of lecture flexibility are adapted from Barua & Lockee (2024), Tucker & Morris (2012), Beatty (2019), and El Galad et al. (2024), which include: lecture schedule flexibility, blended learning method flexibility, academic service flexibility, learning material access flexibility, and tuition fee installment scheme flexibility.

University Reputation (X2): Fombrun (1996) and Tjiptono (2019) define reputation as the collective perceptual representation of stakeholders regarding an institution's past track record and future prospects compared to its competitors. Because educational services are intangible, reputation serves as an intangible asset that mitigates consumers' risk perceptions and guarantees the credibility of degrees in the professional realm (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Czajkowski et al., 2020). Reputation indicators include: BAN-PT/LAM accreditation status, faculty

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competence and experience, alumni career success track records, and positive public image (Tjiptono, 2019; Rahmat, 2021).

Reference Groups (X3): Schiffman and Kanuk (2019) and Kotler and Armstrong (2018) define reference groups as individuals or groups that serve as direct or indirect reference points in shaping an individual's attitudes, opinions, and behavior. Reference group influence operates through three forms: informational influence, normative/utilitarian influence, and value-expressive influence (Sumarwan, 2017; Peter & Olson, 2014). For working students, the most relevant reference groups comprise: workplace colleagues, immediate superiors/institutional leaders, nuclear family members, and personal testimonials from known alumni (Arif & Nofriansyah, 2022).

Table 4. Mapping of Previous Research and Research Novelty

Researcher & Year	Research Focus	Key Findings	Position & Novelty of This Study
Chain et al. (2025)	Private HEI choice in Malaysia	Institutional reputation and academic quality are most influential; social factors are also determinant.	Examines the specific segment of employee class students at a regional private university in Indonesia.
Juhaidi et al. (2024)	University Choice Factors	Academic reputation and career prospects serve as major determinants in university choice.	Integrates lecture flexibility alongside institutional reputation.
El Galad et al. (2024)	Flexible Learning Dimensions	Students favor hybrid learning and flexible grading systems.	Directly tests the effect of lecture flexibility on enrollment decisions.

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Mutiara Asyfa (2024)	Tuition Cost, Reputation, & Reference	Campus reputation and reference groups significantly influence choice decisions.	Focuses sample specifically on active employee class students across multiple study programs.
Satyanegara & Widikusyanto (2018)	Reference Groups in Higher Education	Reference groups are the most significant factor following educational services.	Examines specific influences of workplace peers and office superiors on enrollment decisions.

Based on the theoretical review and prior research matrix, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

1) H1: Lecture flexibility has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung.
2) H2: University reputation has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung.
3) H3: Reference groups have a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung.
4) H4: Lecture flexibility, university reputation, and reference groups simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative causal-associative approach with a questionnaire survey method. The study population consists of all 128 active students of the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung for the 2025/2026 Academic Year, spread across Law (72 students), Management (35 students), and Civil Engineering (21 students). The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula at a precision significance level of e = 0.05 (Sugiyono, 2018): $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2] = 128 / [1 + 128(0.05)^2] = 128 / [1 + 128(0.0025)] = 128 / 1.32 = 96.96 \approx$

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97 respondents. The sampling technique utilizes Proportional Random Sampling to ensure that each study program is proportionally represented, as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Population and Sample Distribution Across Study Programs

No	Study Program	Population (N)	Proportion Formula	Sample Size (n)
1	Law	72	(72/128) x 97	55 Respondents
2	Management	35	(35/128) x 97	26 Respondents
3	Civil Engineering	21	(21/128) x 97	16 Respondents
Total		128		97 Respondents

The research instrument uses a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The operationalization of the research variables is comprehensively presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable & Items	Dimensions / Indicators	Statement Item Measurement Focus
Lecture Flexibility (X1) (10 Statement Items)	• Lecture schedule flexibility • Learning method flexibility • Academic service flexibility • Material access & tuition installment flexibility	Suitability of weekend schedules, lectures not interfering with office working hours, ease of accessing digital materials/LMS, ease of administration, and

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		availability of tuition fee installment schemes.
University Reputation (X2) (10 Statement Items)	• Institutional & program accreditation status • Lecturer quality & competence • Graduate quality & track record • Positive public institutional image	Excellent/A accreditation status of UBL and its study programs, mastery of subject matter by lecturers, success of alumni in securing strategic positions, and prestigious image of the UBL campus in society.
Reference Groups (X3) (11 Statement Items)	• Nuclear family support • Workplace colleagues' influence • Superior/management encouragement • Positive alumni testimonials • Peer group influence	Moral and financial support from family, information and advice from work colleagues, direct recommendations from office superiors, and known successful experiences of UBL alumni.
Choice Decision (Y) (12 Statement Items)	• Certainty in choosing UBL • Confidence in the decision made • Program alignment with career • Willingness to enroll & register • Willingness to recommend	Certainty in choosing UBL after comparing alternatives, curriculum alignment with career development, commitment to complete studies, and willingness to recommend to other parties.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 through the following stages: (1) Instrument Quality Test (Pearson Product Moment Validity Test and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test); (2) Classical Assumption Tests (One-Sample Kolmogorov-

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Smirnov Normality Test, VIF/Tolerance Multicollinearity Test, and Glejser Heteroscedasticity Test); (3) Multiple Linear Regression Analysis; and (4) Hypothesis Testing via Partial Test (t-test), Simultaneous Test (F-test), and Coefficient of Determination Analysis (R^2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics: The demographic profile of the 97 student respondents from the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 97)

Respondent Characteristics	Classification / Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employment Status	Private Sector Employee	47	48.5%
	Entrepreneur	22	22.7%
	Civil Servant (ASN)	18	18.6%
	Indonesian National Police (Polri)	6	6.2%
	State-Owned Enterprise (BUMN) Employee	4	4.1%
Study Program	Law	56	57.7%
	Management	26	26.8%
	Civil Engineering	15	15.5%
Total Sample		97	100.0%

Based on Table 7, respondents are dominated by private-sector employees (48.5%) and entrepreneurs (22.7%). This reflects the typical profile of employee-class students who face tight working hours and place substantial value on time flexibility and learning methods.

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Validity and Reliability Tests: The results of the item validity tests using Pearson Product Moment correlation and the instrument reliability tests are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Research Variable	Number of Items	Range of Calculated r	Table r (5%)	Cronbach's Alpha	Evaluation Remarks
Lecture Flexibility (X1)	10 Items	0.591 – 0.771	0.200	0.950	Valid & Highly Reliable
University Reputation (X2)	10 Items	0.645 – 0.817	0.200	0.916	Valid & Highly Reliable
Reference Groups (X3)	11 Items	0.650 – 0.813	0.200	0.916	Valid & Highly Reliable
Choice Decision (Y)	12 Items	0.586 – 0.758	0.200	0.880	Valid & Highly Reliable

The results in Table 8 show that all 43 statement items meet the validity criteria (r count > 0.200 with p = 0.000) and all variables possess Cronbach's Alpha values well above the 0.70 threshold, establishing the high reliability of the research instrument.

Classical Assumption Test Results:

Normality Test: Based on the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, asymptotic significance values (Asymp. Sig.) were obtained: 0.086 for X1; 0.172 for X2; 0.200 for X3; and 0.068 for Y. Since all significance values are > 0.05, the residuals in the regression model are normally distributed. Multicollinearity Test: Tolerance values for all independent variables

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exceed 0.10 (X1 = 0.986; X2 = 0.981; X3 = 0.971) and VIF values are below 10 (X1 = 1.015; X2 = 1.020; X3 = 1.030), demonstrating the absence of multicollinearity among independent variables. Heteroscedasticity Test: Based on the Glejser test, the regression of absolute residuals yielded significance values of 0.239 for X1; 0.867 for X2; and 0.308 for X3. All values exceed 0.05, confirming that the model is free from heteroscedasticity (satisfies homoscedasticity).

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and Partial Test (t-Test): The multiple linear regression analysis results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Multiple Linear Regression and Partial Test (t-Test) Results

Model Predictor	Unstd. Coeff (B)	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t Count	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-3.410	5.052	—	-0.675	0.501	—	—
Lecture Flexibility (X1)	0.380	0.077	0.354	4.922	0.000	0.986	1.015
University Reputation (X2)	0.311	0.064	0.351	4.877	0.000	0.981	1.020
Reference Groups (X3)	0.549	0.063	0.626	8.652	0.000	0.971	1.030

Based on Table 9, the multiple linear regression equation is obtained as follows: Y = -3.410 + 0.380(X1) + 0.311(X2) + 0.549(X3) + e

Interpretation of the regression equation and partial testing (t-test): The constant value of -3.410 indicates that if Lecture Flexibility, University Reputation, and Reference Groups are equal to zero, the baseline value of the choice decision is -3.410. The Lecture Flexibility variable (X1) has a regression coefficient of 0.380 with a calculated t-value of 4.922 and a significance of 0.000 (< 0.05). This proves that H1 is accepted, meaning lecture

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flexibility has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose UBL's Employee Class Program.

The University Reputation variable (X2) has a regression coefficient of 0.311 with a calculated t-value of 4.877 and a significance of 0.000 (< 0.05). This proves that H2 is accepted, meaning university reputation has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose UBL's Employee Class Program.

The Reference Groups variable (X3) has a regression coefficient of 0.549 with a calculated t-value of 8.652 and a significance of 0.000 (< 0.05). With a Standardized Beta of 0.626 (the largest among all variables), H3 is accepted, proving that reference groups have a positive, significant, and most dominant effect on the decision to choose UBL's Employee Class Program.

Simultaneous Test (F-Test) and Coefficient of Determination (R^2): The ANOVA test and model summary results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Simultaneous Test (F-Test) and Coefficient of Determination Results

Model Test	F Count	Sig. (p)	Correlation (R)	R Square (R^2)	Adjusted R^2
Linear Regression Model	34.518	0.000	0.726	0.527	0.512

Based on Table 10, the calculated F-value is 34.518 with a significance of 0.000 (< 0.05). This confirms that H4 is accepted, meaning Lecture Flexibility, University Reputation, and Reference Groups simultaneously exert a significant effect on the Decision to Choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung. The multiple correlation value (R) of 0.726 indicates a very strong relationship. The R Square value of 0.527 (Adjusted R^2 = 0.512) demonstrates that 52.7% of the variance in students' decisions can be explained simultaneously by the three independent variables, while the remaining 47.3% is influenced by other variables outside the research model.

Comprehensive Discussion of Research Findings:

1) Effect of Lecture Flexibility on Choice Decision (H1 Accepted): Lecture flexibility is proven to be an indispensable functional prerequisite for employee-class students. Structured weekend class schedules, blended learning methods, seamless access to recorded lectures, and installment payment facilities provide essential convenience for working students to

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balance work and academic duties. This finding supports Services Marketing Mix Theory (Lupiyoadi, 2016; Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016) and aligns with empirical findings by El Galad et al. (2024).

2) Effect of University Reputation on Choice Decision (H2 Accepted): Institutional reputation significantly reinforces prospective students' choices. UBL's standing as the Rank 1 Best Private Higher Education Institution in LLDIKTI Region II for seven consecutive years, superior study program accreditations, and successful alumni career records act as quality assurance that minimizes perceived risk for prospective students. This reinforces Consumer Decision Theory (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Engel et al., 2012) and is consistent with Chain et al. (2025) and Juhaidi et al. (2024).
3) Dominant Effect of Reference Groups on Choice Decision (H3 Accepted): Reference groups are confirmed as the single most dominant determinant (Beta = 0.626). Since the majority of employee-class students are employed, recommendations from departmental coworkers, workplace leaders, nuclear family support, and testimonials from successfully established alumni serve as highly credible sources of guidance. Word-of-mouth communication within professional environments is proven to be more effective in driving enrollment decisions than conventional advertising (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2019; Sumarwan, 2017; Satyanegara & Widikusyanto, 2018).
4) Simultaneous Synergy Across Variables (H4 Accepted): The simultaneous effect of 52.7% validates that choice decision-making is a multi-dimensional process. Superior reputation creates initial institutional appeal, lecture flexibility provides the technical solution to study without disrupting work hours, and reference group endorsements deliver the decisive social push ensuring prospective students finalize their enrollment at UBL's Employee Class Program.

CONCLUSION

Based on the inferential statistical analysis and discussion, this study concludes:

1. Lecture flexibility has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung (H1 accepted).
2. University reputation has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung (H2 accepted).

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3. Reference groups have a positive and significant effect with the most dominant contribution (Standardized Beta = 0.626) on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung (H3 accepted).
4. Lecture flexibility, university reputation, and reference groups simultaneously have a significant effect on the decision to choose the Employee Class Program at Universitas Bandar Lampung (H4 accepted), with a determination power of 52.7% (R^2 = 0.527; Adjusted R^2 = 0.512).\

Managerial Implications for Universitas Bandar Lampung:

1. Strengthening Incentive-Based Referral Programs: Given the dominance of reference groups, UBL is advised to establish an official Student & Alumni Referral Program that offers institutional appreciation/incentives for students or alumni who refer new applicants.\
2. Corporate Strategic Partnerships (B2B): Intensify outreach for employee programs via company visits and collaborative human resource development partnerships with government institutions, state-owned enterprises (BUMN), and private corporations across Lampung Province.
3. Enhancing Alumni Achievement and Career Publicity: Maximize social media channels and official websites to showcase success stories of employee-class alumni who have achieved career advancement and job promotions.
4. Maintaining Academic & Financial Flexibility: Preserve convenient weekend lecture scheduling, optimize the Learning Management System (LMS), and maintain flexible tuition installment plans.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the research scope by investigating additional variables that may influence choice decisions, such as perceived actual tuition affordability, digital e-learning service quality, social media marketing effectiveness, and campus geographic location. Furthermore, broadening the population scope to cross-institutional comparisons across private universities in southern Sumatra will enrich the generalizability of empirical findings.

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