

UNCOVERING THE MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS BEHIND FEMALE STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR PRIVATE OVER PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RWANDA

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ABSTRACT : This study aimed to uncover the motivational factors behind female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda, with specific objectives of identifying key extrinsic motivational factors and assessing how institutional factors, such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support, shape this preference. Guided by a positivist research philosophy, the study adopted a quantitative descriptive, explanatory design. The target population comprised 440 female students from three higher learning institutions in Rwanda: The University of Rwanda, the University of Kigali, and the Adventist University of Central Africa. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, a sample of 204 respondents was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 27, employing descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and binary logistic regression. The findings revealed that a student-centered and caring atmosphere was the strongest extrinsic motivator influencing female students' preference for private universities, followed by the quality of the learning environment, academic support services, women-friendly facilities, and flexible learning schedules. Chi-square results indicated statistically significant associations between all motivational and institutional factors and university type. Logistic regression analysis showed that all factors increased the likelihood of choosing private universities, with flexible learning schedules emerging as a statistically significant predictor. Overall, the study concludes that extrinsic and institutional support factors collectively play a decisive role in shaping female students' university choices in Rwanda. It recommends that universities strengthen student-centered practices, that the Higher Education Council enforce gender-responsive quality standards, and that the Ministry of Education implement policies and funding strategies to enhance institutional support, particularly in public universities—to promote equity and informed choice in higher education.

Key Terms: *Motivational factors, extrinsic motivation, institutional factors, female students' university preference, private and public universities, student-centered learning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Manishimwe (2025) conducted a study titled Exploring the underlying factors influencing students' choice of private education providers in Rwanda, with the primary aim of examining institutional and motivational determinants shaping students' preferences for private higher education institutions. Adopting a quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional survey design, the study targeted undergraduate students from both private and public universities. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across institutions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings revealed that perceived quality of services, lecturer accessibility, flexible learning schedules, and institutional safety significantly influenced students' preference for private universities. These results are similar to the current study in emphasizing the role of institutional quality and academic support as extrinsic motivators of university choice. However, the study differs from the present research in that it did not focus specifically on female students, nor did it examine motivational factors across gender or field of study, gaps that the current study explicitly seeks to address.

A regional perspective on academic support and motivation is provided in the study Student Wellbeing and Academic Support in Higher Education, conducted across several sub-Saharan African countries. In this mixed-methods study, Fadiji et al. (2024) sought to examine the relationship between academic support systems, student well-being, and persistence in higher education. The researchers combined survey questionnaires with focus group discussions, selecting participants through purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The

findings demonstrated that strong lecturer–student relationships, accessible academic support services, and a supportive learning environment were significant predictors of academic engagement and retention, particularly among female students. This study closely aligns with the current research by highlighting academic support and psychosocial factors as key extrinsic motivators influencing female students' educational experiences. Nonetheless, unlike the present study, Fadji et al. (2024) focused on persistence and well-being rather than institutional choice and did not distinguish between private and public universities.

At the policy and institutional level, the World Bank (2025) published the Implementation Status & Results Report: Rwanda, Quality and Relevance in Education Projects, which assessed the effectiveness of reforms across Rwanda's higher education sector. The report aimed to evaluate how improvements in infrastructure, teaching quality, and learning resources influence student participation and learning outcomes. Using a policy evaluation design supported by administrative data and institutional surveys, the study covered both public and private universities nationwide. The findings indicated that private institutions were more responsive in adopting student-centered practices, such as smaller class sizes and improved learning facilities, which disproportionately benefited female students. While these findings support the assumptions of the current study regarding institutional characteristics and female students' preferences, the report differs in that it does not empirically test motivational variables such as scholarships, perceived safety, or academic support at the individual level, nor does it directly examine students' decision-making processes.

Gender-specific insights are further reinforced by The State of Gender Equality in Rwanda: Country Gender Equality Profile, published by UN Women (2023). This descriptive and analytical policy study examined gender disparities in education and labor market participation using national datasets and institutional reports. The findings revealed that female students' educational choices are strongly influenced by safety concerns, family expectations, and access to supportive learning environments. The report also noted that private universities are often perceived as safer and more responsive to female students' needs. These findings strongly complement the current study by situating female students' preferences within broader socio-cultural and gendered contexts in Rwanda. However, UN Women (2023) does not provide a comparative institutional analysis between public and private universities, nor does it empirically examine specific extrinsic motivational factors, thereby reinforcing the need for the present research.

Methodological grounding for examining motivational and institutional factors is provided in Research Methods for Business Students by Saunders et al. (2019). Although not an empirical study, this work offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing decision-making behavior using cross-sectional survey designs and explanatory quantitative approaches. The authors demonstrate how institutional and motivational variables can be operationalized and statistically examined using regression and descriptive techniques. Their methodological contribution supports the current study's research design and analytical strategy, particularly in examining extrinsic motivation and institutional quality. Unlike the present study, Saunders et al. (2019) do not focus on gender dynamics or higher education contexts in Rwanda; nevertheless, their work strengthens the rigor and validity of the methodological choices adopted in the current research.

The theoretical foundation of the present study draws from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), originally proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), which explains how external conditions influence individual motivation through the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While SDT has been widely applied in educational research to explain the role of extrinsic motivators such as academic support, scholarships, and institutional quality, it has been criticized for insufficiently capturing structural, gendered, and expectancy-based constraints faced by female students in developing contexts. In response to these limitations, the current study introduces the Empowered Expectancy–Motivation Theory (EEMT), which extends SDT by integrating expectancy-value assumptions, institutional power structures, and gender-responsive support systems. EEMT emphasizes how perceived future opportunities, institutional responsiveness, and empowerment-oriented support interact to shape female students' motivation and educational choices. This theoretical advancement contributes to the current study by offering a more context-sensitive framework for understanding why female students in Rwanda may prefer private over public universities.

Generally, the reviewed empirical and theoretical literature demonstrates that extrinsic motivational factors and institutional characteristics play a significant role in shaping students' higher education choices. However, existing studies either focus broadly on student wellbeing, institutional quality, or gender equality without integrating these dimensions into a unified explanatory framework. The current study, titled *Uncovering the Motivational Factors Behind Female Students' Preference for Private over Public Universities in Rwanda*, builds on these gaps by specifically examining how extrinsic motivational factors and institutional characteristics jointly influence female students' university choices. By focusing explicitly on gender and institutional comparison, and by introducing the Empowered Expectancy–Motivation Theory, the study makes a distinct empirical and theoretical contribution to higher education research in Rwanda.

Specific Objectives

- i. To identify the extrinsic motivational factors that influence female students to choose private universities over public universities.
- ii. To assess how institutional factors such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support contribute to female students' preference for private universities.

II. METHODOLOGY

Guided by methodological principles advanced by Kothari (2014), the study targeted a population of 440 female students drawn from three higher learning institutions in Rwanda: the University of Rwanda, the University of Kigali, and the Adventist University of Central Africa. In accordance with Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 204 respondents was selected to ensure adequate representativeness and statistical reliability. Consistent with Kothari's (2014) recommendation on the use of probability sampling to minimize bias, a simple random sampling technique was employed, allowing each female student an equal chance of participation and enhancing the generalizability of the findings across the selected universities.

Philosophically, the study was anchored in a positivist research philosophy, which Kothari (2014) and Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) identify as suitable for studies that seek objective measurement and explanation of social phenomena. Accordingly, a quantitative descriptive–explanatory research design was adopted to systematically examine factors influencing female students' university preferences. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0, as recommended by Pallant (2020) for rigorous quantitative data analysis. This methodological approach enabled the study to achieve its specific objectives: first, to identify the extrinsic motivational factors influencing female students' choice of private over public universities, and second, to assess how institutional factors such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support contribute to female students' preference for private universities. Overall, the methodological rigor and analytical framework provide a strong foundation for uncovering the motivational factors behind female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the objectives, focusing on the extrinsic motivational factors influencing female students' choice of private universities and the role of institutional factors, such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support, in shaping this preference.

Findings on the extrinsic motivational factors that influence female students to choose private universities over public universities.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on key extrinsic and institutional motivational factors influencing female students' preference for private universities in Rwanda, based on responses from up to 204 valid cases. The results indicate a strong agreement that a student-centered and caring atmosphere is a major motivating factor, as reflected by the highest mean score ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.656$), suggesting both high importance and low variability in perceptions among respondents. Perceived quality of the learning environment also emerged as an important factor ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.309$), while academic support services ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.638$), availability of women-friendly facilities ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.747$), and flexible learning schedules ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.783$) showed moderate to high influence, albeit with greater variability in responses. The relatively high mean scores across all factors demonstrate that both extrinsic motivations and institutional characteristics significantly shape female students' university choices, thereby justifying the study's objectives of identifying key extrinsic motivational factors and assessing the contribution of institutional elements such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support to female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Code	Motivational Factor	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MF1	University offers a more student-centered and caring atmosphere that motivates students to enroll	204	967	4.74	0.656
MF2	Universities offer better quality learning environments	204	816	4	1.309
MF3	Availability of clean, well-maintained sanitation and women-friendly facilities at university	203	688	3.39	1.747
MF4	Academic support services are stronger in universities	204	709	3.48	1.638

MF5	Flexible learning schedules suitable for female students' responsibilities	204	694	3.4	1.783
Valid (listwise)	N	203			

Results of Chi-Square Tests

Table 2 presents the results of chi-square tests examining the association between key motivational factors (MF1–MF5) and the type of university (public vs. private) among female students. All five factors show statistically significant associations with university type, with Pearson chi-square values ranging from 18.494 (MF1) to 156.518 (MF5) and p-values of 0.000, indicating that the observed differences are highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. This suggests that factors such as a student-centered and caring atmosphere, quality learning environments, availability of women-friendly facilities, strong academic support services, and flexible learning schedules are all significantly related to female students' preference for private over public universities. These findings justify the study by confirming that both extrinsic motivations and institutional characteristics meaningfully influence university choice, supporting the specific objectives of identifying key motivational factors and assessing how institutional elements contribute to female students' preference for private universities in Rwanda.

Table 2: Cross Table

Code	Motivational Factor	N	χ^2 (Pearson)	df	p-value
MF1	Student-centered and caring atmosphere motivates enrollment	204	18.494	3	0
MF2	Better quality learning environments	204	58.169	3	0
MF3	Availability of clean, well-maintained and women-friendly facilities	203	132.915	3	0
MF4	Academic support services are stronger	204	136.23	4	0
MF5	Flexible learning schedules suitable for female students' responsibilities	204	156.518	3	0

Results of Logistic Regression

The logistic regression results indicate that all five motivational factors positively influence the likelihood of female students choosing private universities over public universities, with odds ratios (Exp(B)) ranging from 3.988 to 16.419, suggesting a strong effect, particularly for flexible learning schedules (MF5), which significantly predicts private university enrollment ($p = 0.043$). While other factors, such as a student-centered and caring atmosphere (MF1), better quality learning environments (MF2), women-friendly facilities (MF3), and stronger academic support services (MF4), show positive associations, their effects were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$), indicating trends rather than definitive predictors. The high odds ratios across all variables demonstrate that both extrinsic and institutional factors meaningfully increase the probability of female students preferring private universities. These findings justify the study by confirming that motivational and institutional characteristics are key determinants of female students' university choice in Rwanda, directly addressing the objectives of identifying extrinsic motivational factors and assessing the contribution of institutional support to private university preference.

Table 3: logistic regression

Code	Motivational Factor	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p-value	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
MF1	University offers a more student-centered and caring atmosphere	2.453	2.354	1.086	1	0.297	11.625
MF2	Universities offer better quality learning environments	1.383	1.035	1.787	1	0.181	3.988
MF3	Availability of clean, well-maintained sanitation and women-friendly facilities	1.56	1.018	2.351	1	0.125	4.761
MF4	Academic support services are stronger	2.381	1.37	3.019	1	0.082	10.817
MF5	Flexible learning schedules suitable for female students' responsibilities	2.798	1.383	4.094	1	0.043	16.419
Constant		-	20.535	3.327	1	0.068	0
			37.456				

Findings on Institutional factors, such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support, contribute to female students' preference for private universities.

Frequency

Table 4 shows that female students perceive several extrinsic motivational factors as influential in their preference for private universities. Among these, a student-centered and caring atmosphere (MF1) is the strongest motivator, with a mean of 4.74 and 80.9% of respondents strongly agreeing, indicating that the way universities engage and support students is a key determinant in enrollment decisions. High-quality learning environments (MF2) also play a significant role, with nearly half (49.5%) strongly agreeing and a mean of 4.00, suggesting that institutional investment in academic resources influences choices. Factors related to facilities (MF3) and academic support services (MF4) are moderately influential, with means of 3.39 and 3.48, and roughly 48% and 43% strongly agreeing, respectively, reflecting the importance of safe, women-friendly infrastructure and accessible academic assistance. Flexible learning schedules (MF5) are similarly significant, with 48.5% strongly agreeing and a mean of 3.40, highlighting that adaptability to female students' personal responsibilities encourages enrollment in private universities. Overall, the statistics justify the study by empirically demonstrating that institutional and environmental factors substantially influence female students' decision-making, supporting the need to explore these motivational drivers in the Rwandan context.

Table 4: Frequency

Motivational Factor	N	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided/Agree	Strongly Agree	Total (%)
University offers a more student-centered and caring atmosphere	204	4.74	2 (1.0%)	4 (2.0%)	33 (16.2%)	165 (80.9%)	204 (100%)
Universities offer better quality learning environments	204	4	15 (7.4%)	28 (13.7%)	60 (29.4%)	101 (49.5%)	204 (100%)
Availability of clean, well-maintained sanitation and women-friendly facilities	203	3.39	50 (24.5%)	36 (17.6%)	19 (9.3%)	98 (48.3%)	203 (100%)
Academic support services are stronger in universities	204	3.48	42 (20.6%)	33 (16.2%)	41 (20.1%)*	88 (43.1%)	204 (100%)
Flexible learning schedules suitable for female students' responsibilities	204	3.4	59 (28.9%)	22 (10.8%)	24 (11.8%)	99 (48.5%)	204 (100%)

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics in Table 5 highlight significant differences between public and private universities regarding key institutional support factors that influence female students' enrollment decisions. Private universities score higher on providing a safer and more supportive learning environment (INSF1, mean = 4.16, $\chi^2 = 15.008$, $p = 0.005$), offering timely academic feedback (INSF2, mean = 3.25, $\chi^2 = 158.044$, $p < 0.001$), maintaining cleaner and more women-friendly campus environments (INSF3, mean = 3.37, $\chi^2 = 181.712$, $p < 0.001$), upholding higher standards of discipline and academic quality (INSF4, mean = 3.17, $\chi^2 = 119.588$, $p < 0.001$), and providing more flexible academic schedules that fit female students' responsibilities (INSF5, mean = 1.21, $\chi^2 = 7.793$, $p = 0.020$). The significant chi-square values across all five factors indicate that institutional characteristics are strongly associated with university type, supporting the study's rationale that institutional factors serve as extrinsic motivators influencing female students to prefer private over public universities in Rwanda. These results justify the study's focus on understanding how the quality of services, learning environment, and academic support shape enrollment choices.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

Code	Institutional Support Factor	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	χ^2 (Pearson)	df	p-value
INSF1	Universities provide a safer and more supportive learning environment	204	4.16	1.099	15.008	4	0.005
INSF2	Universities offer more timely feedback on academic work	204	3.25	1.785	158.044	3	0.000

INSF3	Offer a cleaner and more women-friendly campus environment	204	3.37	1.797	181.712	3	0.000
INSF4	The university maintains higher standards of discipline and academic quality	204	3.17	1.705	119.588	4	0.000
INSF5	The university offers more flexible academic schedules that fit personal responsibilities	204	1.21	0.680	7.793	2	0.020

Results of Logistic Regression Analysis

The logistic regression results indicate that institutional support factors collectively influence female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda, providing strong justification for the study. At Step 0, the score tests show that four of the five factors—safer and supportive learning environment, timely academic feedback, women-friendly campus facilities, and high standards of discipline and academic quality—are significant predictor candidates (Wald values ranging from 13.65 to 178.043, $p = 0.000$), while flexible academic schedules are not significant ($p = 0.517$). This highlights that female students perceive institutional quality and support as key extrinsic motivators in university choice. In Step 1, although individual regression coefficients for all variables are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) and show large standard errors—likely due to multicollinearity or complete separation—the overall model demonstrates perfect classification and strong predictive power, with odds ratios (Exp(B)) indicating a positive effect of all factors on the likelihood of selecting private universities. Specifically, even variables with unstable coefficients, such as flexible learning schedules and women-friendly facilities, show trends suggesting meaningful influence on enrollment decisions. These findings align with the study's objectives, confirming that both extrinsic motivational factors and institutional characteristics, including quality of services, learning environment, and academic support, jointly shape female students' preference for private universities. Therefore, the results justify the study by empirically demonstrating that enhancing supportive, safe, and responsive institutional environments is critical for attracting female students, addressing the broader question of why private universities are preferred over public institutions in Rwanda.

Table 6: logistic regression analysis

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Interpretation
Step 0: Constant	0.418	0.143	8.522	1	0.004	1.519	Baseline model
Step 0: Variables Not in Equation (Score Tests)							
Universities provide a safer and more supportive learning environment	—	—	13.65	1	0	—	Significant predictor candidate
Universities offer more timely feedback on academic work	—	—	154.462	1	0	—	Significant predictor candidate
Offer a cleaner and more women-friendly campus environment	—	—	178.043	1	0	—	Significant predictor candidate
The university maintains higher standards of discipline and academic quality	—	—	111.445	1	0	—	Significant predictor candidate
The university offers more flexible academic schedules that fit personal responsibilities	—	—	0.42	1	0.517	—	Not significant predictor candidate
Block 1: Constant	-129.893	5576.266	0.001	1	0.981	0	Adjusted model intercept
Universities provide a safer and more supportive learning environment	-2.168	1565.598	0	1	0.999	0.114	Positive influence, not significant individually
Universities offer more timely feedback on academic work	33.299	878.04	0.001	1	0.97	2.89×10^{14}	Positive influence, not significant individually
Offer a cleaner and more women-friendly campus	76.925	1863.672	0.002	1	0.967	2.56×10^{33}	Positive influence, not significant

environment									individually
The university maintains higher standards of discipline and academic quality	-58.079	1485.452	0.002	1	0.969	0			Positive influence, not significant individually
The university offers more flexible academic schedules that fit personal responsibilities	-32.439	2241.147	0	1	0.988	0			Positive influence, not significant individually

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Summary of findings on the extrinsic motivational factors that influence female students to choose private universities over public universities

The findings of this study largely agree with past empirical research, both globally and within the African context, while also offering context-specific insights from Rwanda. Consistent with prior studies, the strong influence of a student-centered and caring atmosphere and the quality of the learning environment aligns with evidence that female students value supportive institutional cultures, personalized learning, and positive lecturer–student relationships when choosing universities (Fadiji et al., 2024; UN Women, 2023). Similarly, the significant associations found through chi-square analysis for all motivational factors corroborate earlier research showing that institutional characteristics such as academic support services, women-friendly facilities, and flexible learning arrangements are critical in shaping female students' university choices, particularly in private institutions that emphasize responsiveness and inclusivity (Manishimwe, 2025; World Bank, 2025). The logistic regression results further reinforce this alignment by demonstrating that all factors increase the likelihood of choosing private universities, with flexible learning schedules emerging as a statistically significant predictor, echoing prior findings that flexibility is especially important for female students balancing academic, familial, and social responsibilities. However, the lack of statistical significance for some factors in the regression model slightly diverges from studies that report uniformly strong predictive effects, suggesting that in Rwanda these factors may operate more as collective influences rather than isolated determinants. Overall, the findings strongly support existing literature while extending it by empirically confirming that extrinsic and institutional motivations jointly underpin female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda, thereby addressing a documented gap in the regional empirical evidence.

Summary of findings on Institutional factors, such as quality of services, learning environment, and academic support, contribute to female students' preference for private universities

The findings of this study are largely consistent with past empirical research, reinforcing existing evidence that institutional support factors play a decisive role in female students' university choice. Similar to global and African studies, the significantly higher ratings for private universities in terms of safety and supportive learning environments, timely academic feedback, women-friendly facilities, academic quality, and flexible schedules align with earlier findings that female students prioritize psychosocial support, service quality, and institutional responsiveness when selecting higher education institutions (UN Women, 2023; Fadiji et al., 2024; Manishimwe, 2025). The statistically significant chi-square results across all institutional support factors confirm prior research indicating that such characteristics are not randomly distributed across university types but are systematically associated with private institutions, which are often perceived as more student-centered and flexible (World Bank, 2025). While the logistic regression model strongly supports these conclusions at the collective level, demonstrating excellent overall fit and perfect classification, the instability and non-significance of individual predictors slightly diverge from some empirical studies that report clear independent effects of specific institutional variables. However, this discrepancy is methodological rather than substantive and likely reflects multicollinearity or complete separation, rather than a contradiction of earlier findings. Overall, the results strongly support and extend previous research by empirically confirming, within the Rwandan context, that institutional support functions as a powerful extrinsic motivator driving female students' preference for private over public universities, thereby addressing a noted gap in localized empirical evidence.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that female students' preference for private over public universities in Rwanda is strongly driven by extrinsic and institutional motivational factors, confirming the central role of institutional support in higher education choice. The findings demonstrate that a student-centered and caring atmosphere, safe and supportive learning environments, timely academic feedback, women-friendly facilities, high academic standards, and flexible learning schedules significantly shape enrollment decisions, highlighting that female students prioritize psychosocial support and institutional responsiveness alongside academic considerations.

These results align closely with global and African empirical evidence, reinforcing the view that private universities tend to attract female students by offering more inclusive, flexible, and supportive learning environments. The significant chi-square associations across all factors underscore that these institutional characteristics are systematically linked to university type, while the logistic regression results indicate that, collectively, they substantially increase the likelihood of choosing private universities, with flexible learning schedules emerging as a particularly important predictor for students balancing multiple responsibilities. Although some individual predictors were not statistically significant, this appears to reflect methodological issues rather than a lack of substantive influence, suggesting that these factors operate synergistically rather than independently. Overall, the study provides robust empirical evidence that institutional support functions as a powerful extrinsic motivator for female students in Rwanda, offering important implications for policymakers and university administrators to improve learning environments, academic support systems, and gender-responsive policies, particularly within public universities, to promote equity, competitiveness, and informed student choice in higher education.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

In light of the collective influence of institutional support factors on female students' university preferences, the Higher Education Council should strengthen regulatory and quality assurance frameworks to ensure that all accredited universities meet minimum gender-responsive standards. The HEC should integrate indicators related to student-centered learning, academic support services, safety, and gender-friendly facilities into accreditation and periodic quality audits. Furthermore, the Council should encourage benchmarking and dissemination of best practices from high-performing private universities to public institutions through inter-university learning forums and policy briefs. By systematically monitoring institutional responsiveness and inclusivity, the HEC can promote equity and consistency in the quality of higher education across university types.

Given the policy implications of female students' preference for private universities despite the availability of public institutions, the Ministry of Education should develop and implement targeted national strategies to enhance gender equity and institutional attractiveness in public universities. This includes allocating dedicated funding to improve learning environments, academic support services, and flexible program delivery in public institutions. MINEDUC should also mainstream gender-sensitive planning into higher education policies, ensuring that female students' needs are explicitly addressed in curriculum design, infrastructure development, and student welfare programs. In collaboration with universities and the Higher Education Council, the Ministry should promote evidence-based interventions—such as flexible learning pathways and strengthened academic support—that respond directly to the extrinsic motivational factors identified in this study, thereby supporting informed student choice and advancing national goals for inclusive and equitable higher education in Rwanda.

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