STUDENT DIRECT

Unlock Key Insights with

West Africa Student Voice 2025

UNDERSTAND WHAT TRULY DRIVES STUDENTS FROM WEST AFRICA TO STUDY ABROAD



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Foreword

It hasn't been an easy couple of years for our industry - watching leaders, colleagues, and friends across the country take the hit. But our sector keeps evolving. We can't sit in the gloom. We have to adapt, find the opportunities, and move.

West Africa isn't the next recruitment frontier. It's already here, it's digital, it's informed, and it's ready to engage directly. Africa will sit at the center of global student recruitment for decades, the way India and China have shaped the last ones.

The findings in West Africa Student Voice 2025 confirm what our team sees on the ground. Students aren't waiting to be found. They're reaching out, directly, confidently, and with clear intent.

This report captures that energy. More importantly, it defines the opportunity in front of institutions. Meet students with speed. Be authentic. Back every promise with data. Build the direct relationship.

At Student Direct, we believe the future of global student recruitment is direct connection. These insights are the backbone of that belief. Building direct isn't easy. It takes intent, time, and real resourcing, or the right partner who brings all three. We've all seen the cost of taking the easy route. The work now is to do what's right for students and for institutions, with clarity, accountability, and pace. The payoff is worth it, better-informed students, higher trust, higher conversions, and fewer surprises.

Saurabh Malhotra

Founder and CEO, Student Direct Edu Solutions Inc

Executive Summary

The **West Africa Student Voice 2025** study - conducted by *Student Direct* - offers one of the most comprehensive looks yet at how students in **Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon** research, apply, and communicate with international institutions.

The results reveal a digitally confident, high-intent student market that values transparency, responsiveness, and post-graduation opportunity above all else.

West Africa is one of the fastest-growing recruitment regions globally, with most students planning to begin studies within **12–24 months**, signaling a strong near-term pipeline. More than half are **bachelor's degree and HND (Higher National Diploma) holders wanting to pursue postgraduate studies**, though interest in undergraduate and diploma pathways remains strong - giving institutions wide opportunity across segments.

When choosing institutions, students focus on **affordability, academic quality, and employability**. Cost remains a gatekeeper, but perceived **return on investment** drives final choice. Most shortlist **three to four institutions** before applying, reflecting a focused yet comparative decision process.

Almost **80% prefer applying directly** to institutions rather than using paid agents - proof of rising digital confidence and a demand for control and transparency. This shift makes **direct engagement** an essential recruitment strategy.

WhatsApp and email are now the twin pillars of communication. Over **70% expect a reply within 48 hours**, making speed the new measure of credibility. Institutions that combine automation with personalized follow-up achieve better conversion.

Despite strong motivation, students still struggle with **financial planning (77%)**, **visa navigation (63%)**, and **document preparation (54%)** — all areas where better institutional guidance can reduce attrition.

The *West Africa Student Voice 2025* study confirms that students across the region are **ready, informed, and digitally connected** - they're simply waiting for institutions to meet them with **responsiveness, authenticity, and transparency**.

For education providers seeking sustainable growth, the opportunity is clear: move closer to students through **direct digital engagement** and convert intent into enrolment.

Top 10 Learnings from West Africa Student Voice 2025

Tremendous interest in Canada.

Canada is the clear destination leader (64%), though results reflect heightened exposure from Canada-focused campaigns of Student Direct.

High-Intent Market.

Most students plan to begin studies within 12–24 months, signalling a short decision window and strong near-term recruitment potential.

Postgraduate Focus, But Strong Undergraduate Base.

Nearly half of respondents hold a bachelor's degree and are targeting master's studies - yet one-third remain undergraduate prospects.

Direct Application Is the New Default.

Over 80% of students prefer applying directly rather than through agents, driven by trust, control, and cost transparency.

Trust Anchored in Official Sources.

Institutional and government websites are the most trusted - outperforming agents, social influencers, and even peers.

WhatsApp Dominates Student Communication.

WhatsApp now rivals email in reach; its immediacy and accessibility are transforming institutional engagement.

Speed Defines Credibility.

More than 70% of students expect replies within 48 hours - positioning responsiveness as a key competitive differentiator.

Video-First Digital Behaviour.

Students spend 2+ hours daily on TikTok, and Instagram - confirming that attention in Africa is visual and mobile-led.

Quality, Cost, and Outcomes Drive Destination Choice.

Students seek strong ROI - quality education linked to employability, affordability, and post-study work rights.

Financial and Visa Processes Are Major Pain Points.

Financial planning (77%) and visa navigation (63%) remain top challenges - institutions that simplify or guide these steps gain conversion advantage.

Want to translate these insights into results for your institution?

Book a Meeting →

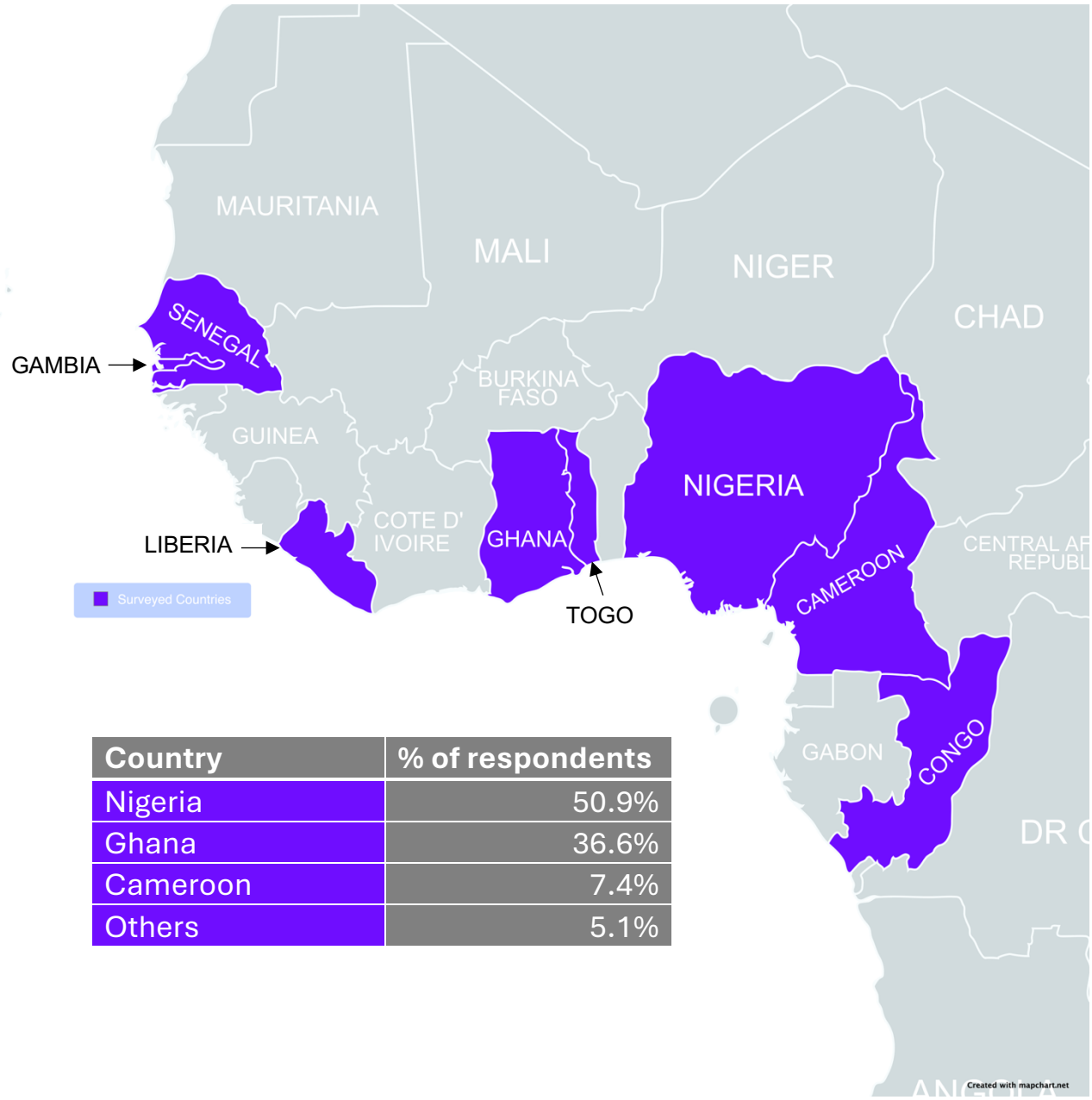
Meet the Student Direct team and explore how we help partners build direct, transparent, and measurable student engagement pipelines.

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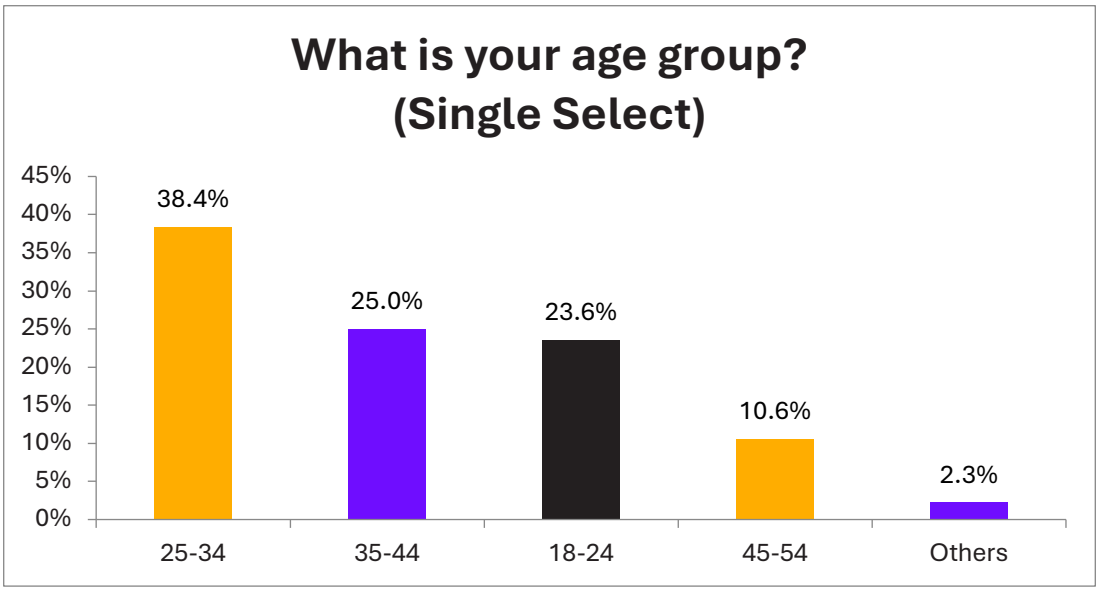
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Student Demographics

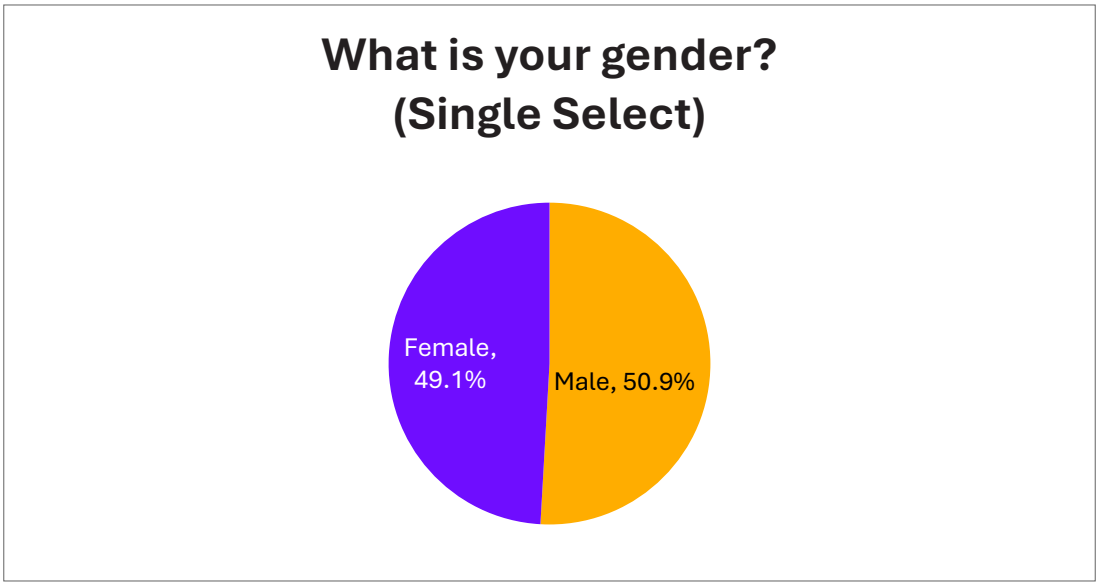
The respondent base is concentrated in **Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon**, representing diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.



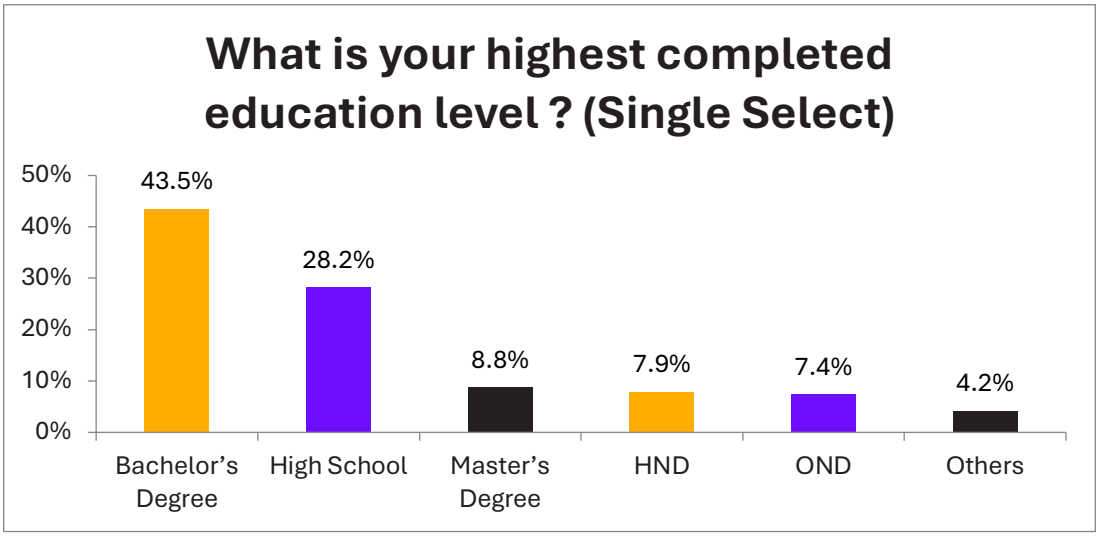
Country	% of respondents
Nigeria	50.9%
Ghana	36.6%
Cameroon	7.4%
Others	5.1%



Most respondents are within the **18–34 age range** and have completed secondary or undergraduate education.



The gender balance is near-even, showing that international study ambitions are broadly shared across demographics.

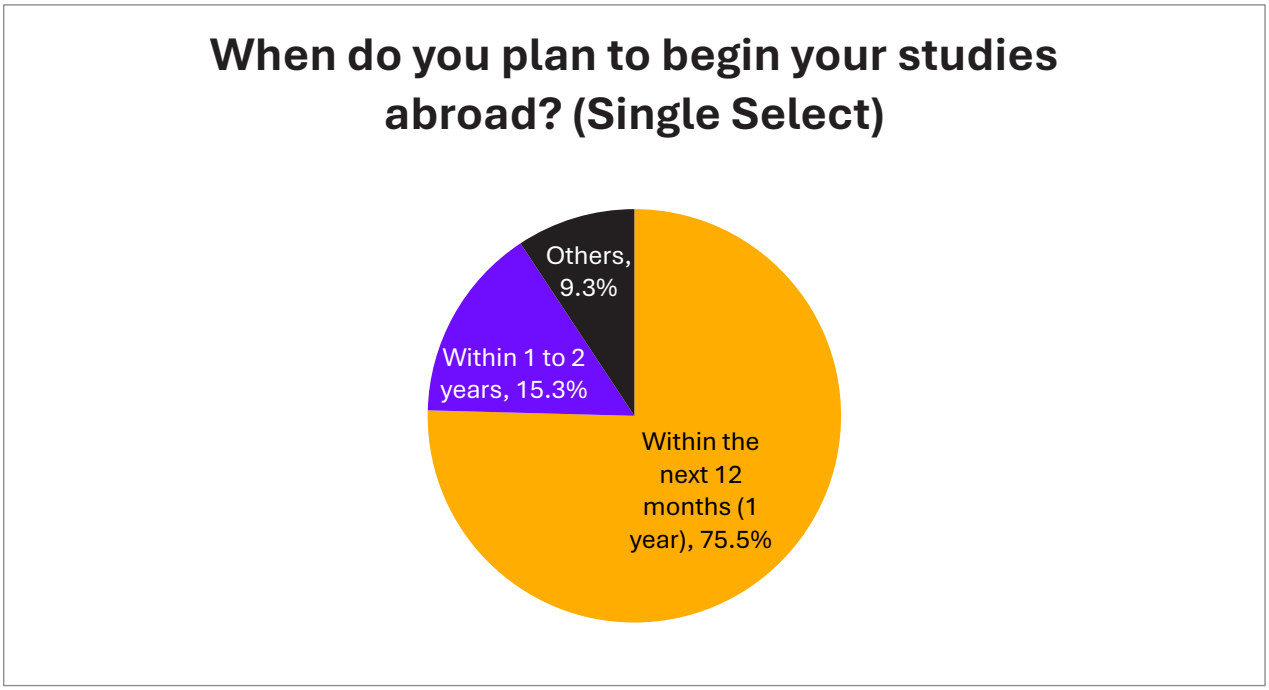


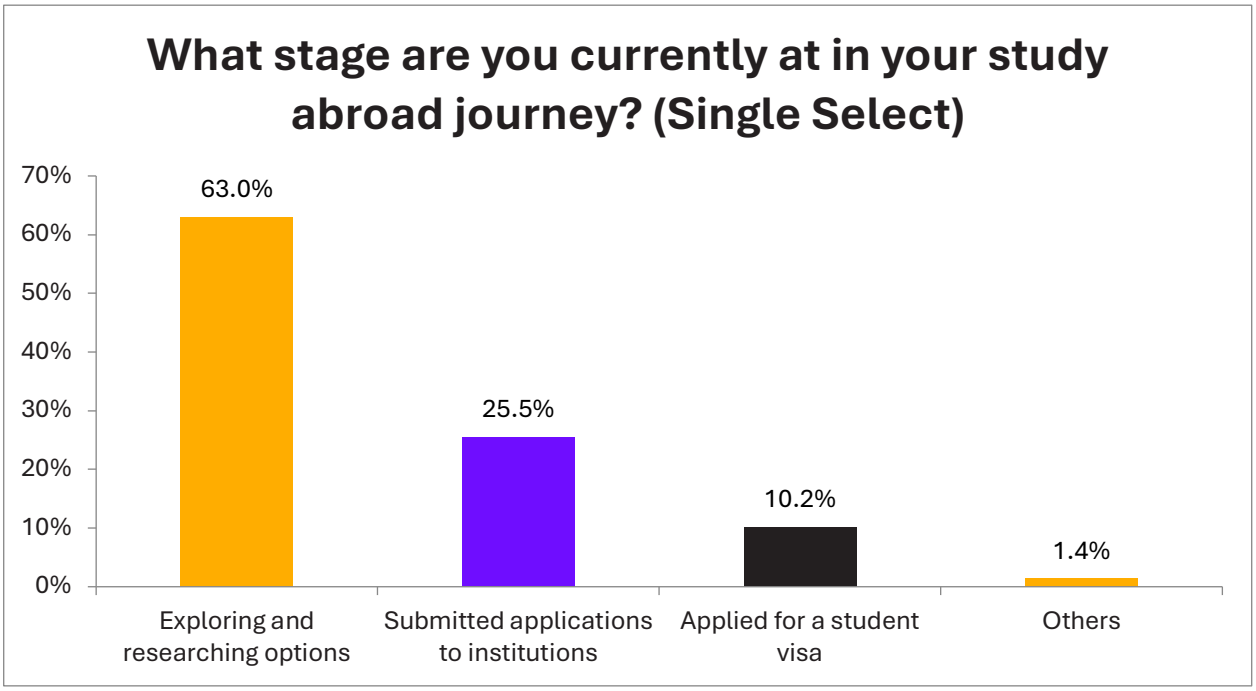
Among respondents, the largest group had completed a **Bachelor's degree (43.5%)**, followed by those with **high school education (28.2%)**. Smaller segments reported having a **Master's degree (8.8%)**, **Higher National Diploma (HND) (7.9%)**, or **Ordinary National Diploma (OND) (7.4%)**, while **4.2%** indicated other qualifications.

- The data suggests that a significant portion of potential applicants from West Africa are **degree/HND holders seeking postgraduate opportunities**, aligning with the strong interest in Master's-level programs noted later in the survey.
- The presence of more than one-third of respondents with a high school /OND qualification highlights ongoing interest in **undergraduate pathways**.

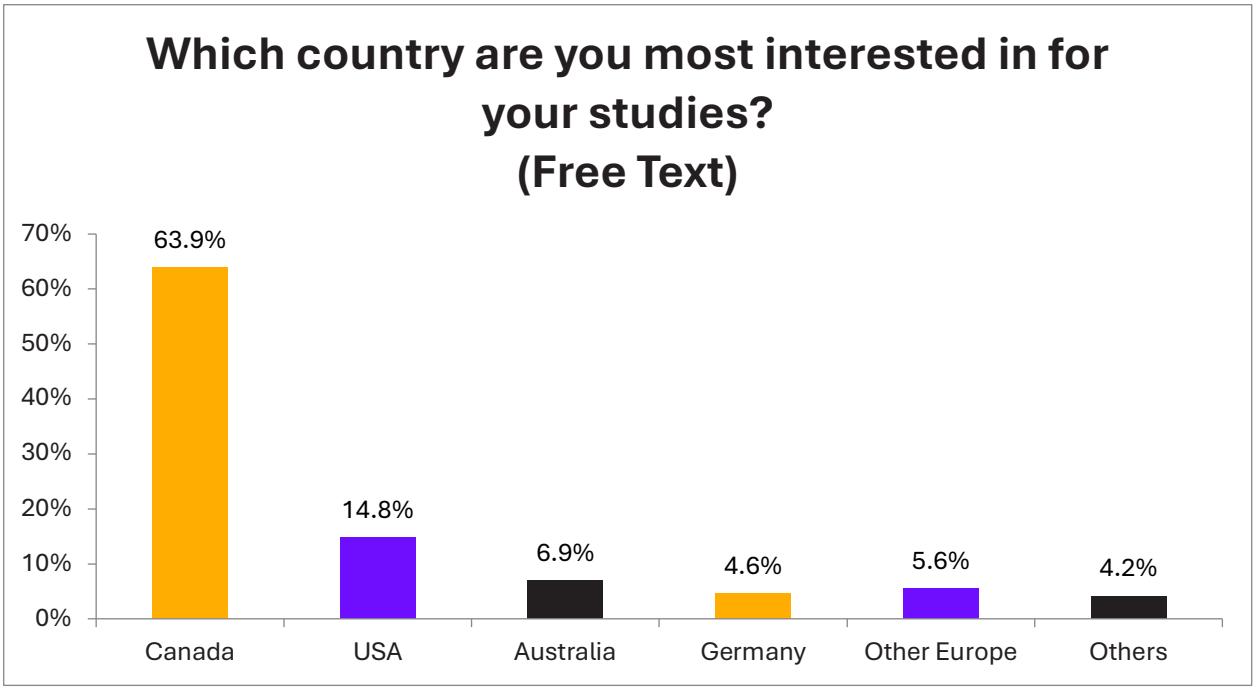
Study Intentions & Timelines

Students are overwhelmingly focused on near-term starts, with most planning to apply for **the next one or two academic intakes**.





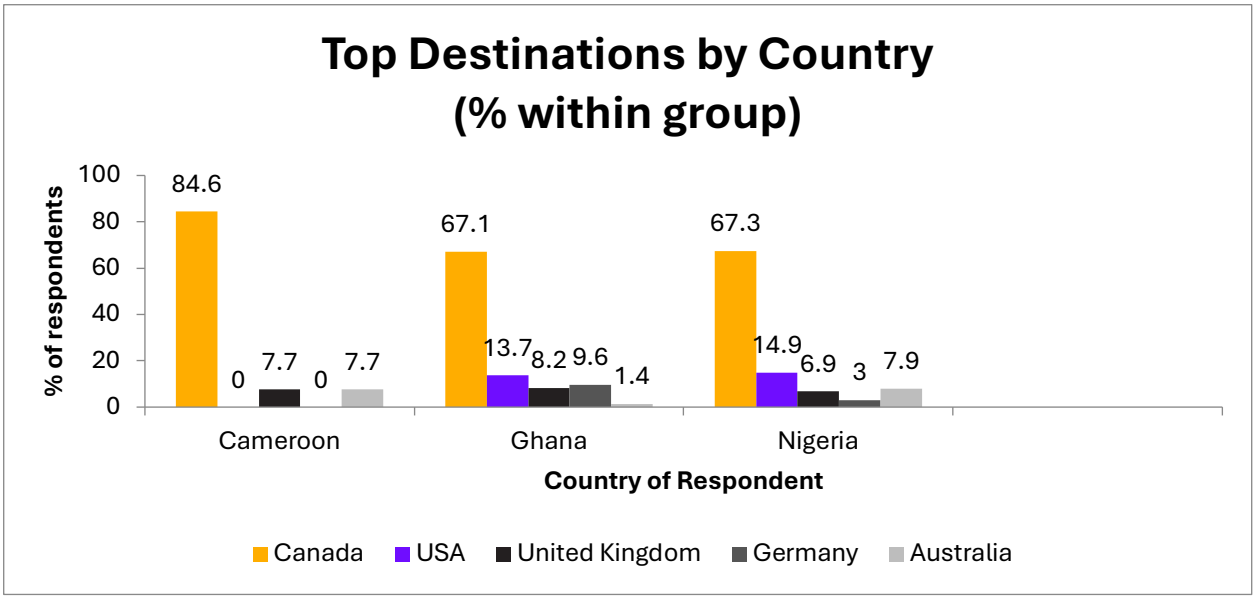
A smaller segment - about one-fifth - remain in an exploratory phase, signalling opportunity for early engagement.



Across all respondents, **Canada dominates as the destination of choice**, attracting nearly two-thirds of total responses (**63.9%**) - more than four times the share of the second-ranked country, the **United States (14.8%)**.

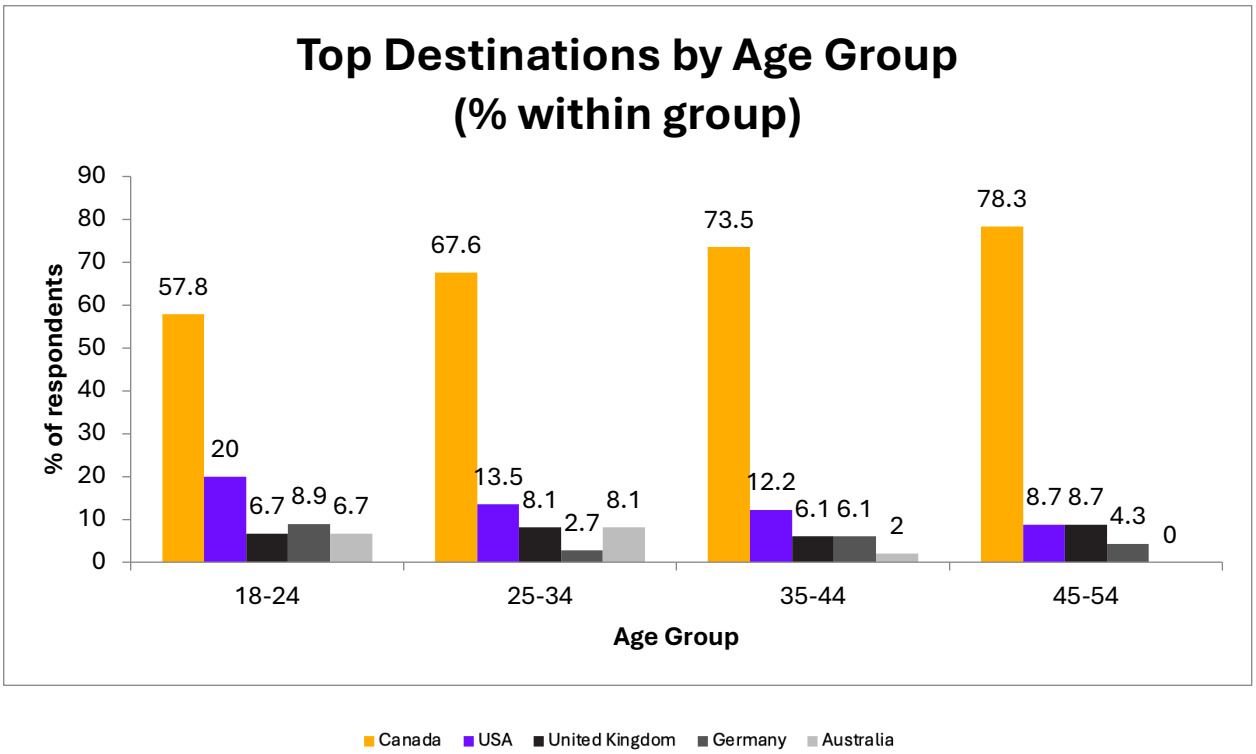
Australia (6.9%), Germany (4.6%), "Other Europe" (5.6%), and "Others" (4.2%) form a distant second tier.

Note: Canada's popularity partly reflects Student Direct's campaign reach



When segmented by the student's country of residence, **Canada remains the top destination in all three markets** - but the degree of dominance varies.

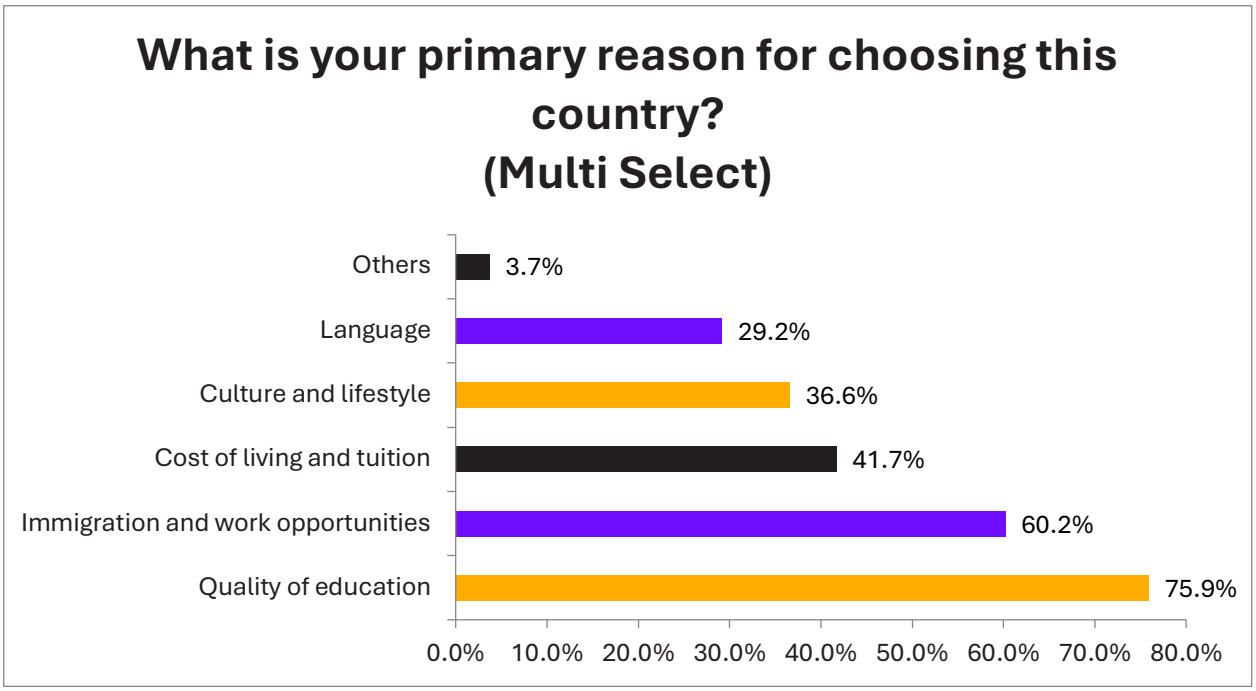
- **Cameroon:** an overwhelming **84.6%** of respondents prefer Canada, with minimal diversification to other destinations.
- **Ghana: 67.1%** select Canada, followed by the U.S. (**13.7%**) and modest interest in the U.K. (**8.2%**) and Germany (**9.6%**).
- **Nigeria: 67.3%** choose Canada, **14.9%** the U.S., and single-digit shares for the U.K., Germany, and Australia.



Across age cohorts, the **preference for Canada strengthens with age**:

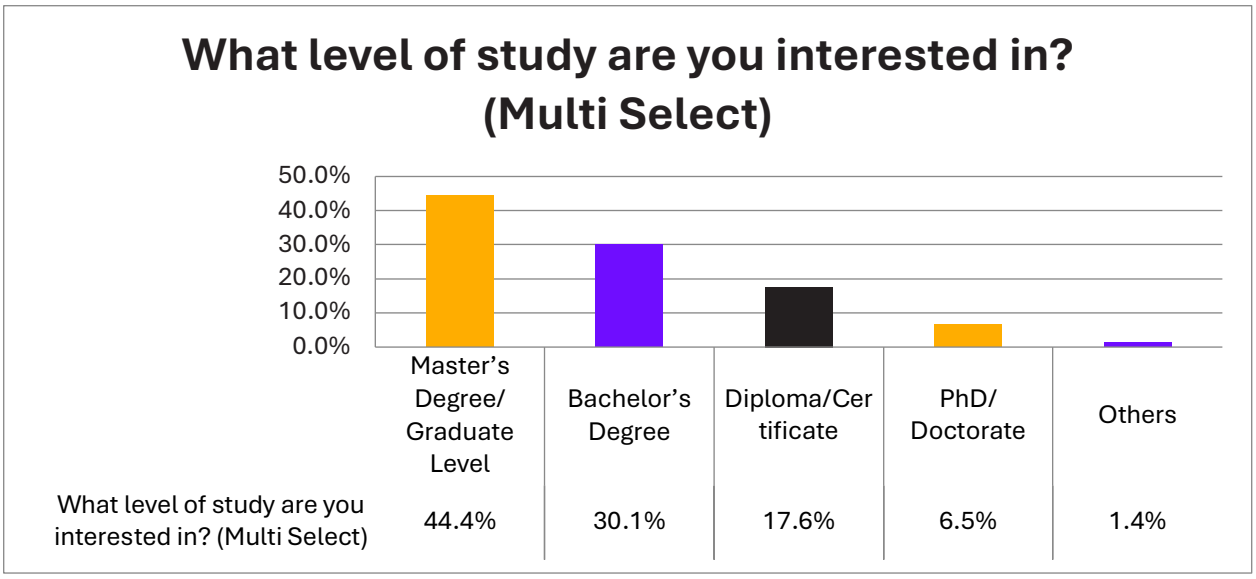
- **18–24 years:** 57.8% choose Canada; the U.S. draws 20%.
- **25–34 years:** 67.6% Canada, 13.5% U.S.
- **35–44 years:** 73.5% Canada, 12.2% U.S.
- **45–54 years:** 78.3% Canada, 8.7% U.S.

Younger respondents show more diversification and curiosity toward multiple destinations, especially the U.S. and Australia.



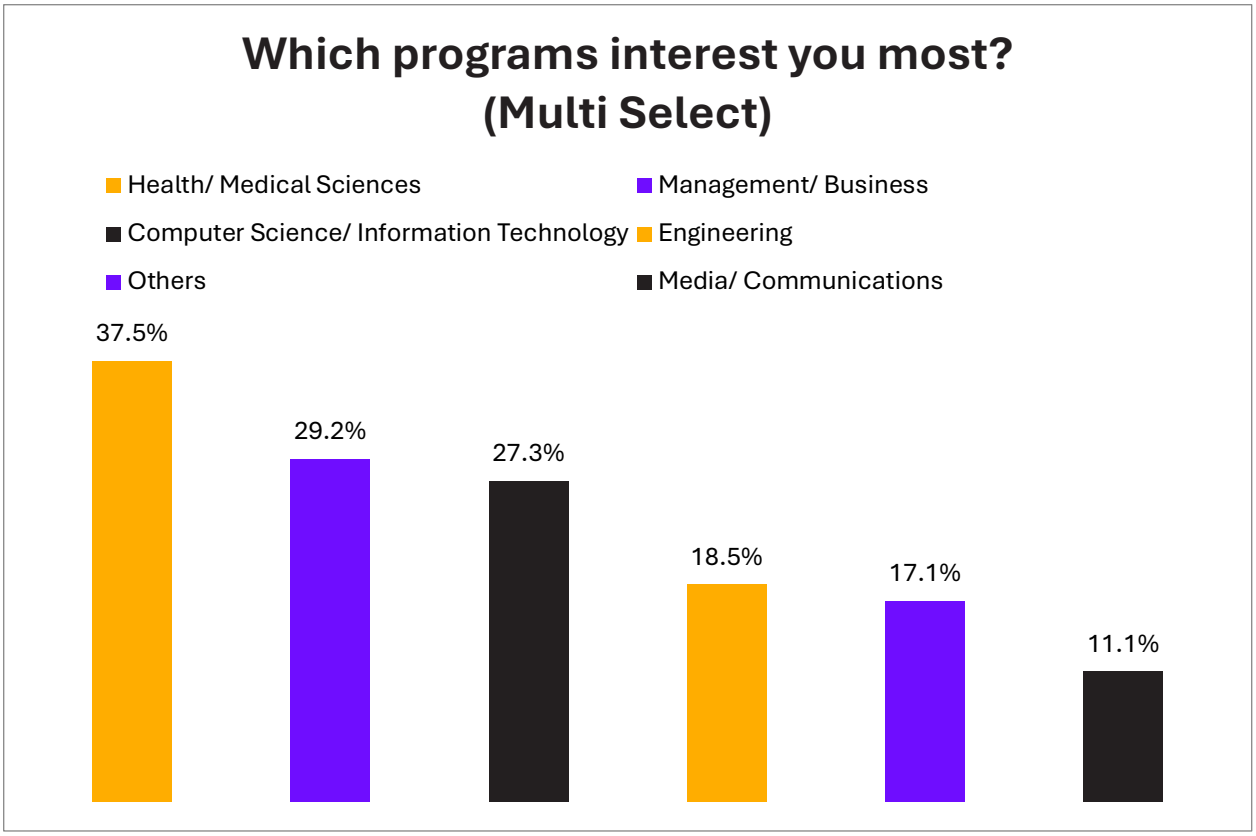
When asked why they chose their preferred study destination, respondents overwhelmingly cited **quality of education (75.9%)** as the leading reason, followed by **immigration and work opportunities (60.2%)** and **cost of living and tuition (41.7%)**. Secondary motivators included **culture and lifestyle (36.6%)** and **language (29.2%)**, while only **3.7%** selected "others."

For West African students, quality and outcomes are inseparable - the best destination isn't the cheapest, it's the one that pays off.



When asked which level of study they are most interested in pursuing, respondents most frequently selected **Master's degree or postgraduate programs (44.4%)**, followed by **Bachelor's degrees (30.1%)** and **Diploma or Certificate programs (17.6%)**. A smaller portion indicated interest in **PhD or Doctoral studies (6.5%)**, while **1.4%** selected "others."

The data highlights a strong **postgraduate orientation** among West African students, with nearly half seeking Master's-level study. The substantial Bachelor's segment signals continued demand from recent secondary and undergraduate graduates seeking accessible, affordable degree pathways abroad.



When asked which academic fields or programs interest them most, respondents most frequently selected **Health and Medical Sciences (37.5%)**, followed by **Management and Business (29.2%)** and **Computer Science / Information Technology (27.3%)**. **Engineering (18.5%)**, **Media and Communications (11.1%)**, and **Other disciplines (17.1%)** followed at lower but notable levels. The results show a strong inclination toward **career-driven and globally employable disciplines**, particularly in healthcare, business, and technology.

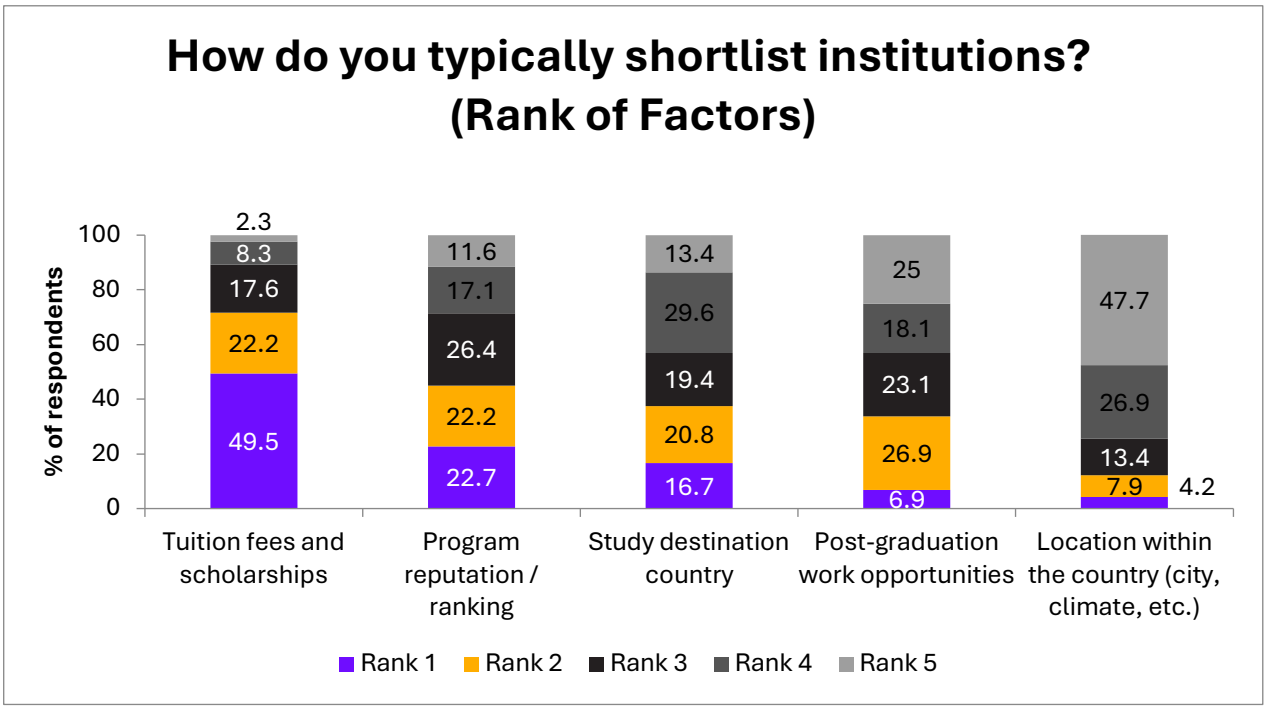
Want to understand the program preferences of students in West Africa?

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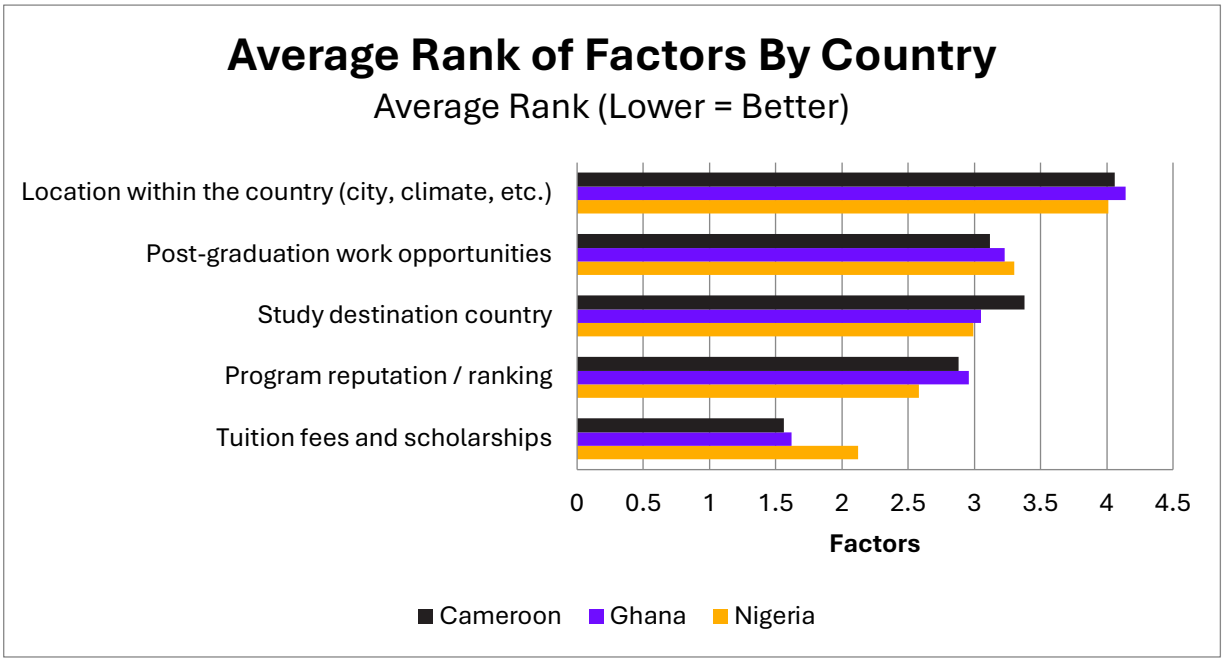
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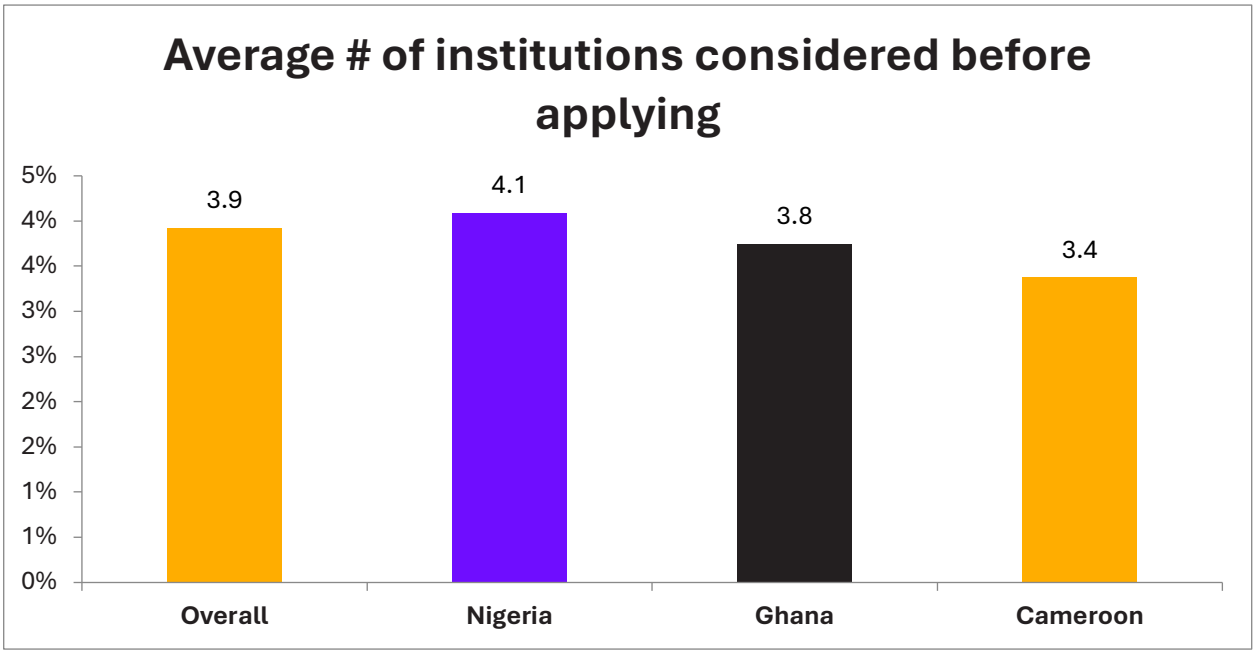
Student Research Process



Students ranked **tuition and scholarships**, **study destination**, and **post-graduation work opportunities** as their top three factors when shortlisting institutions. Program reputation and location within the country followed closely. Students are seeking transparency on fees and clear post-study work rights, indicating that cost communication and employability narratives are key levers for conversion.

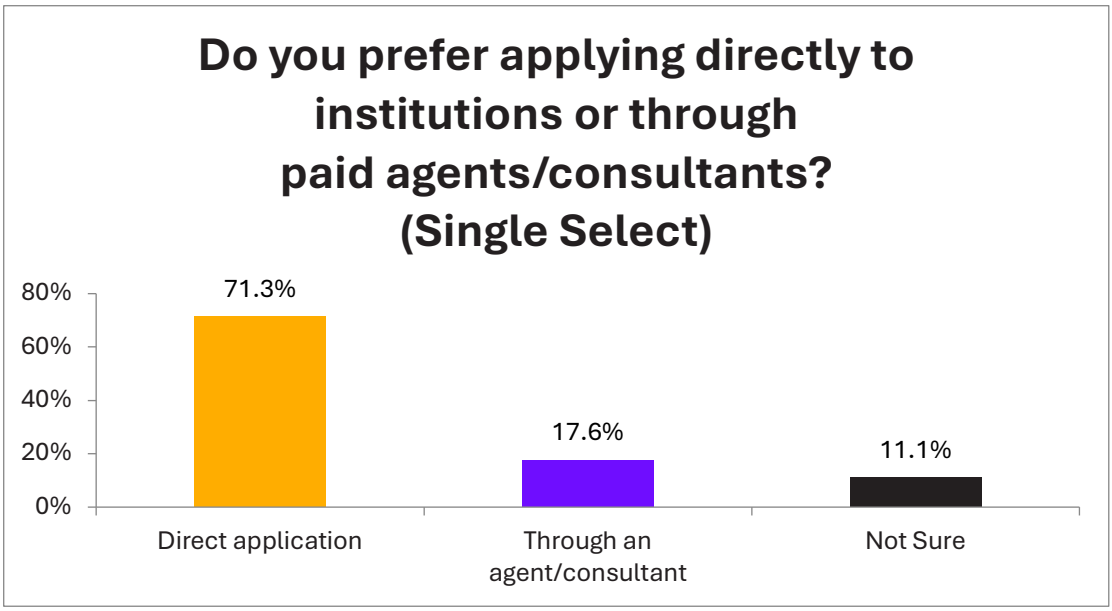


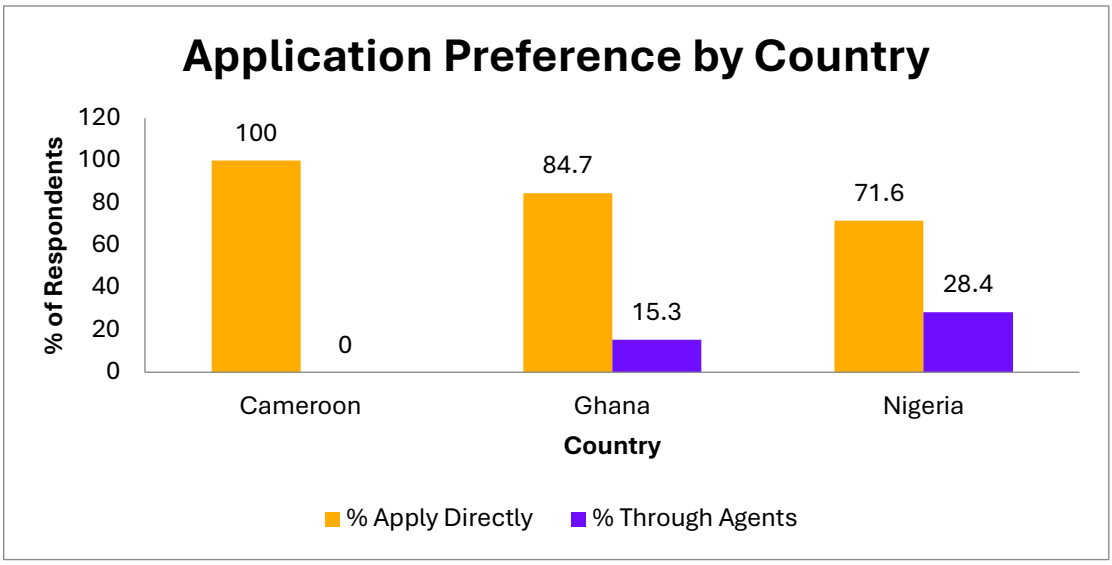
Tuition fees and scholarships while the top ranked factor, has a lower importance (higher rank) in Nigeria as compared to Ghana and Cameroon



Across all respondents, students considered an average of **3.9 institutions** before submitting an application. By country, the average was **4.1 for Nigeria**, **3.8 for Ghana**, and **3.4 for Cameroon**.

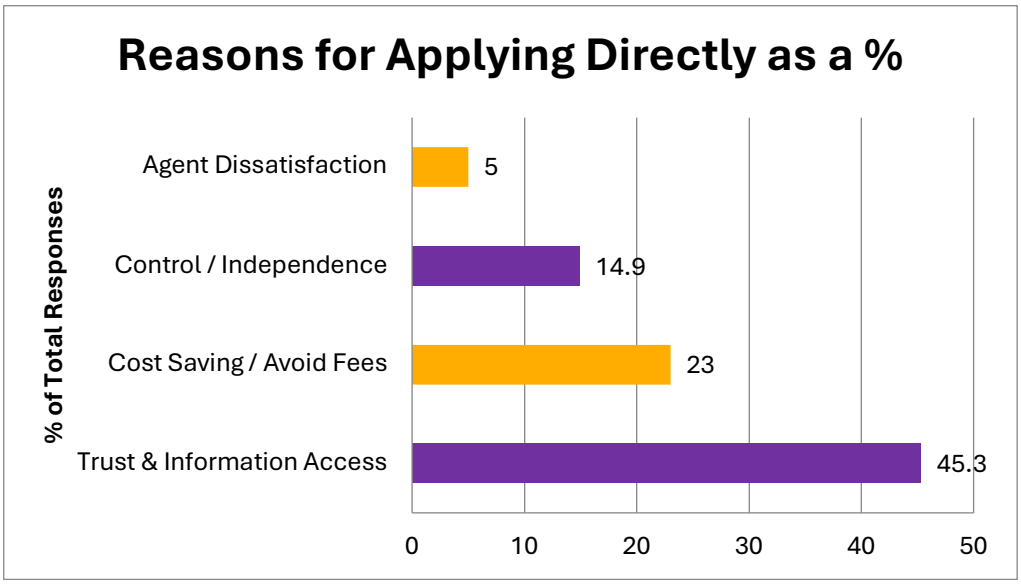
- The data suggests that West African students evaluate **three to four institutions** during their decision-making process, reflecting a **focused yet comparative** approach.
- Nigerian students demonstrate slightly broader exploration, consistent with the country's large, digitally active applicant pool and wider access to institutional marketing.
- Students from Cameroon appear more decisive, possibly due to fewer local recruitment events and a stronger reliance on direct institutional recommendations.





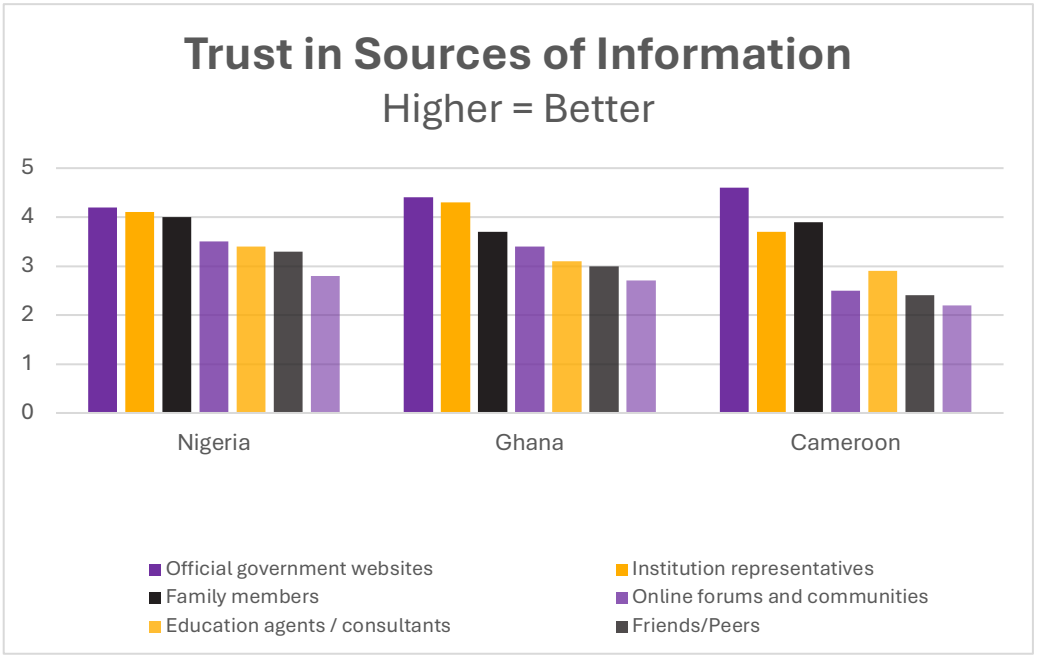
Across the full sample, **71.3%** of respondents prefer **applying directly to institutions** rather than through paid agents/consultants. This preference reflects **rising digital confidence**, better access to **self-serve tools**, and a perception that direct routes are **faster, cheaper, and more transparent**. The pattern holds across markets: in **Cameroon, 100%** report applying directly (no agent reliance); in **Ghana, 84.7%** apply directly vs **15.3%** via agents; and in **Nigeria, 71.6%** apply directly vs **28.4%** via agents 0 differences that likely mirror **agent penetration** and local ecosystem maturity. Taken together, the data indicates students increasingly expect to engage **first-hand with institutions**, using official channels for guidance and verification rather than intermediaries.

Students no longer see "applying directly" as a feature - they see it as a right. Transparency and control now drive trust more than any intermediary.

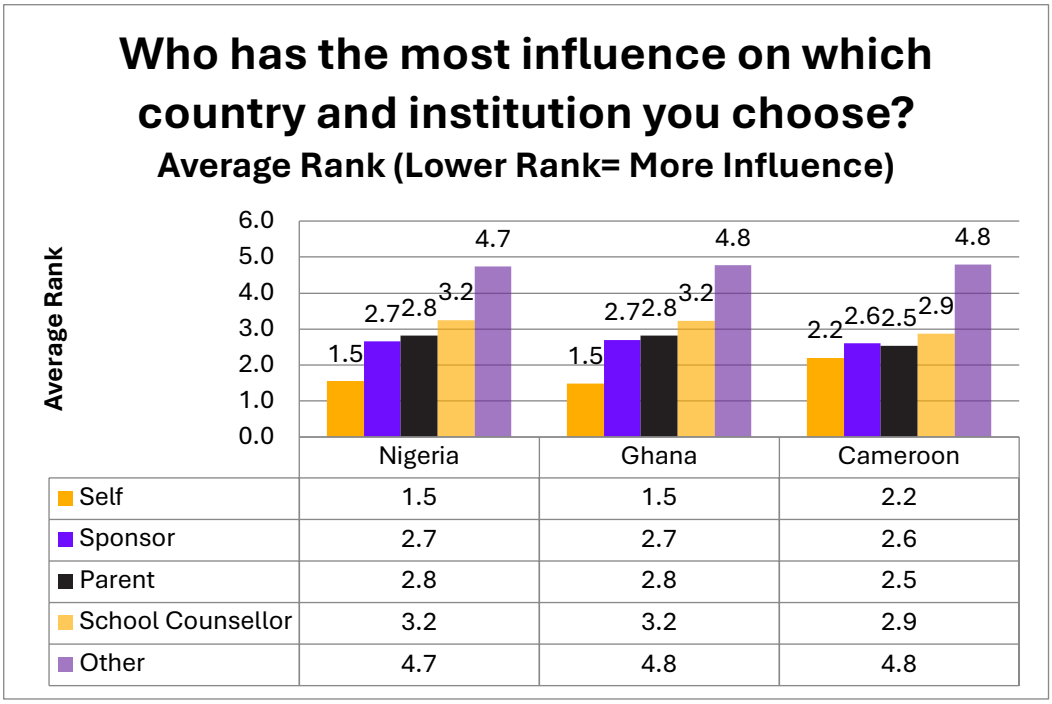


When asked *why* they prefer applying directly, responses clustered around four themes: **trust**, **cost-saving**, **control/independence**, and **accuracy**.

- "Trust" was the most dominant motivator, reflecting both confidence in official sources and skepticism toward third-party intermediaries.
- "Cost-saving" and "control" highlight a growing desire for independence and transparency in the admissions process.

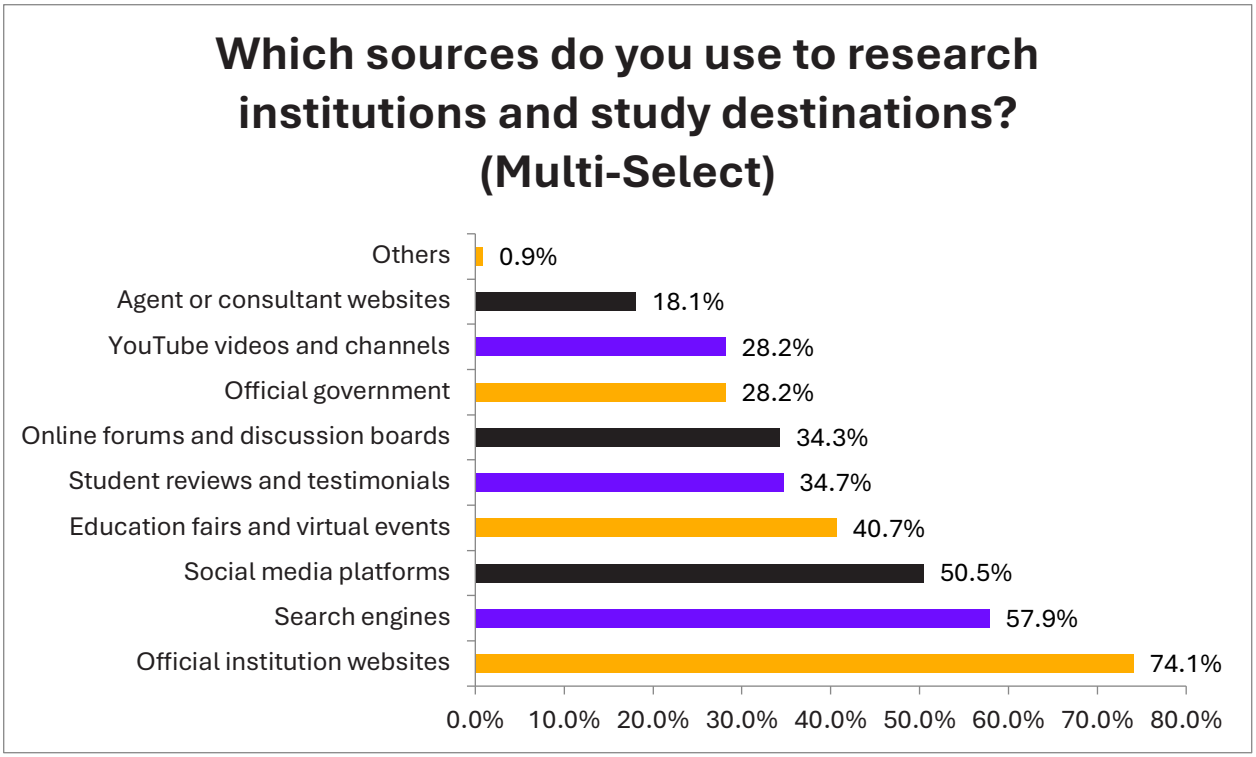


When rating information sources on a five-point scale, students gave the highest trust ratings to **official government websites** and **institutional representatives**, both averaging above 4.0. **Social media influencers** and **online communities** ranked significantly lower.



When asked to rank who most influences their study and institution choice, students placed **self-research** first, followed by **parents** and **institution representatives**. Under others - **Education agents**, **peers**, and **social media influencers** ranked lower overall.

- The data reveals a highly **self-directed decision process**, where students take ownership but still seek family validation.
- The role of institutional representatives remains crucial, bridging trust between students and official information.



When asked which sources they use to research study destinations and institutions, respondents most frequently cited **official institutional websites (74.1%)** and **search engines (57.9%)**, followed by **social media platforms (50.5%)**. Other commonly used channels include **education fairs and virtual events (40.7%)**, **student reviews/testimonials (34.7%)**, and **online forums or discussion boards (34.3%)**. **YouTube videos** and **official government websites** were used by **28.2%** of students, while **agent or consultant websites** were referenced by just **18.1%**.

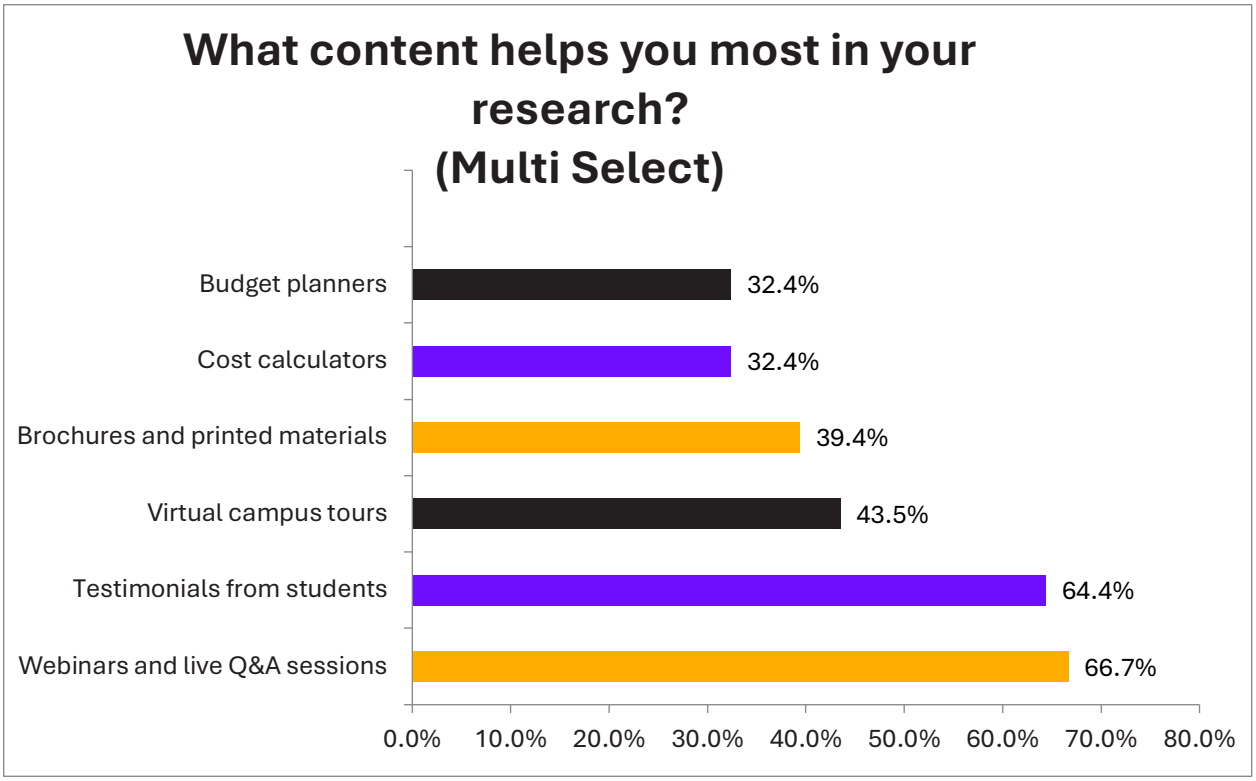
Institutional authenticity is outperforming marketing - students trust people and platforms directly connected to the source.

Did you know that Student Direct's Canada Connect webinars have attracted more than 1200 participants in the last 2 editions

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Book a Meeting

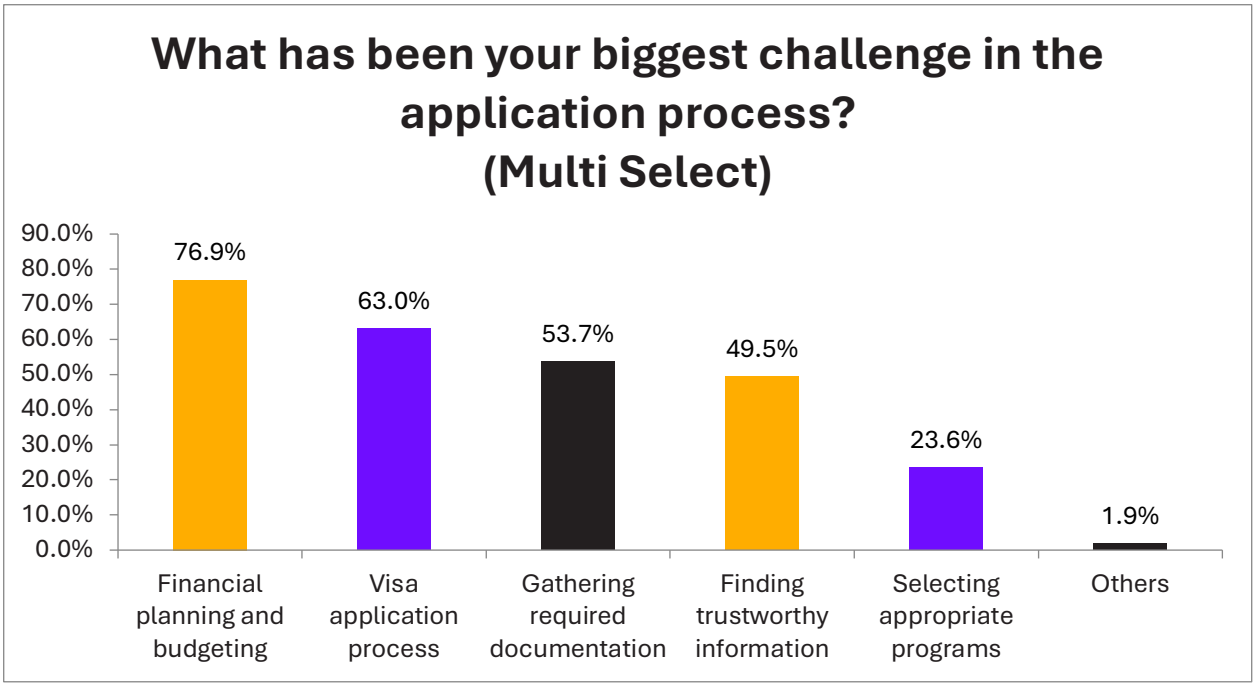
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When asked which types of content assist them most in researching study destinations and institutions, respondents most frequently selected **webinars and live Q&A sessions (66.7%)** and **testimonials from students (64.4%)**. These were followed by **virtual campus tours (43.5%)**, **brochures or printed materials (39.4%)**, and **budget planners or cost calculators (both 32.4%)**.

- The results indicate that students value **interactive and experience-based content** above static materials. Live webinars, Q&A sessions, and authentic student stories allow for direct engagement, creating trust and emotional connection.
- The prominence of virtual campus tours shows demand for **immersive, visual experiences** that bridge the gap between online research and on-campus reality.
- Traditional materials like brochures and printed guides still play a supportive role but are now secondary to digital, participatory formats.
- Students distinguish sharply between **authoritative vs promotional** voices.
- Institutions can enhance their influence by positioning themselves as **official, transparent, and data-based communicators**, referencing embassy or government sources wherever possible.
- Campaigns should feature institutional staff or alumni rather than generic influencer partnerships.

Interactivity is the new credibility - live sessions and authentic voices outclass static brochures and paid endorsements.



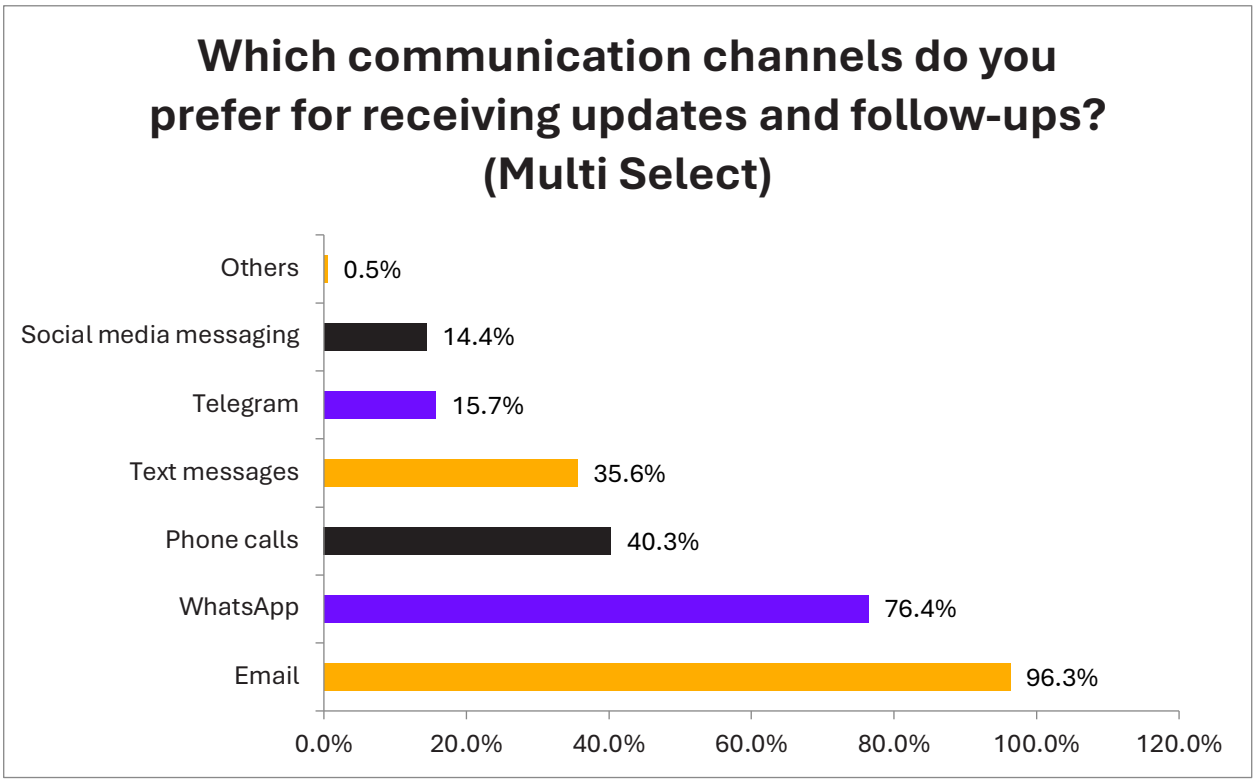
When asked about the biggest challenges encountered during the application process, the top issues cited were **financial planning and budgeting (76.9%)**, **visa application process (63.0%)**, and **gathering required documentation (53.7%)**. Nearly half of respondents (**49.5%**) also mentioned **finding trustworthy information**, while **23.6%** noted difficulty in **selecting appropriate programs**.

Want to learn how Student Direct Digital can help you run demand generation campaigns?

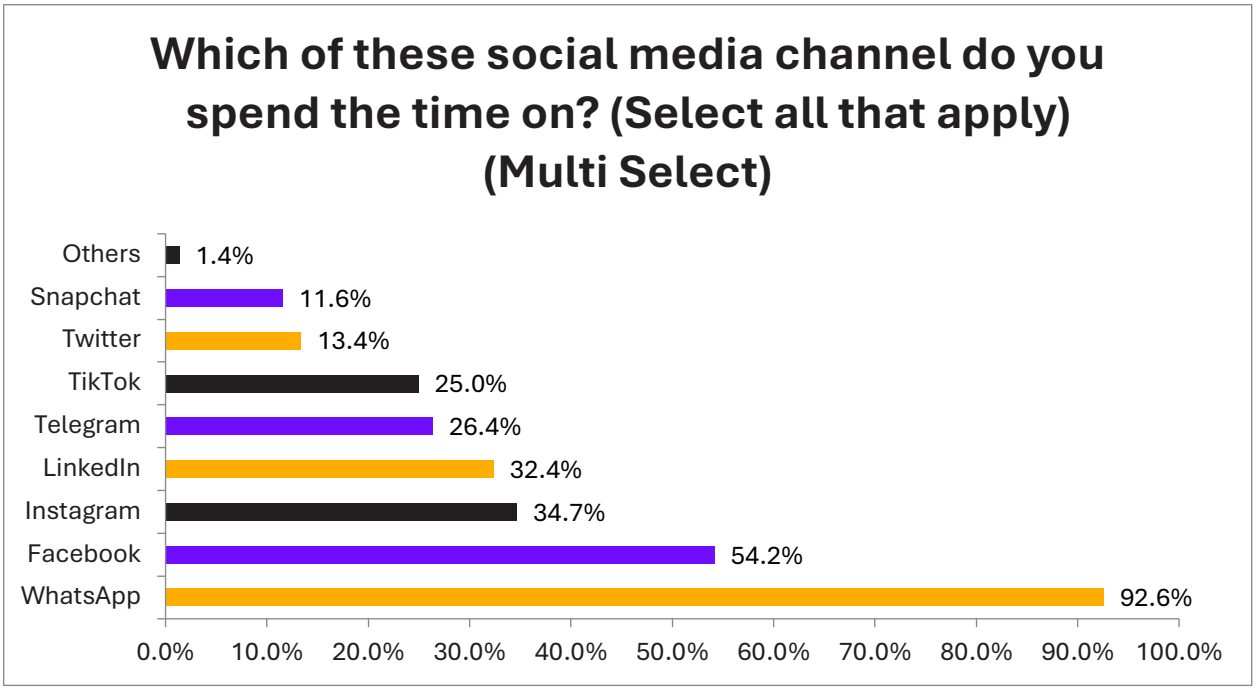
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Communication Channels



When asked which communication channels they prefer for receiving application updates and follow-ups, **email** was the overwhelming leader, chosen by **96.3%** of respondents. **WhatsApp** followed as a strong secondary channel at **76.4%**, while **phone calls (40.3%)** and **text messages (35.6%)** were moderately popular. Other digital messaging platforms such as **Telegram (15.7%)** and **social media messaging (14.4%)** were less commonly preferred.



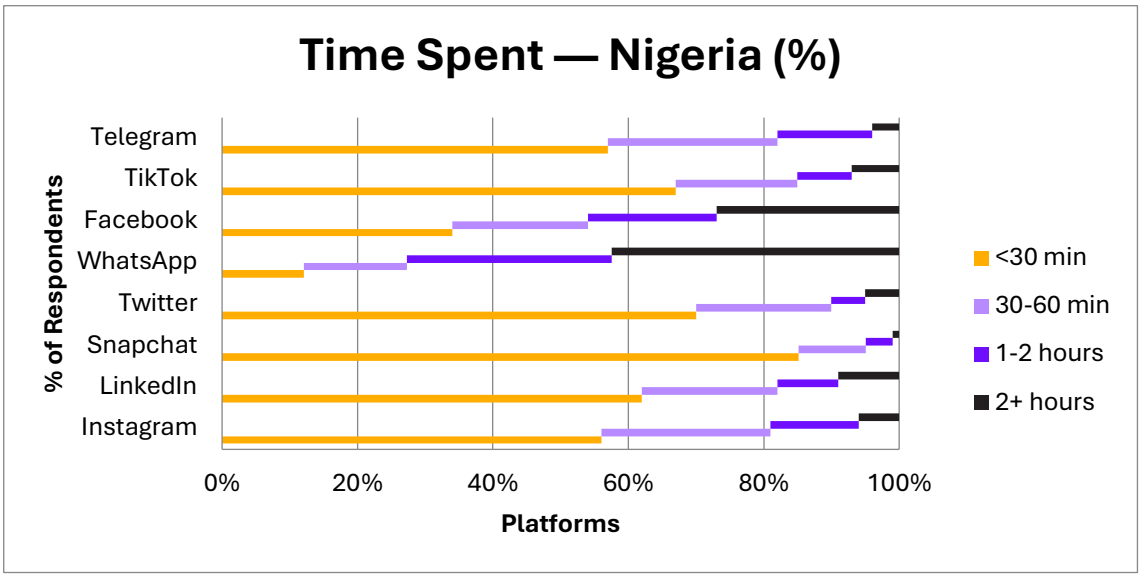
- WhatsApp's dominance confirms its role as the **primary recruitment interface** in West Africa.
- Institutions should use **WhatsApp Business** with pre-programmed templates and personalised responses.
- Email remains important for official documentation, but immediacy and convenience make WhatsApp the student default.

With penetration levels approaching those of email, WhatsApp's combination of accessibility and real-time responsiveness is transforming how institutions connect with students.

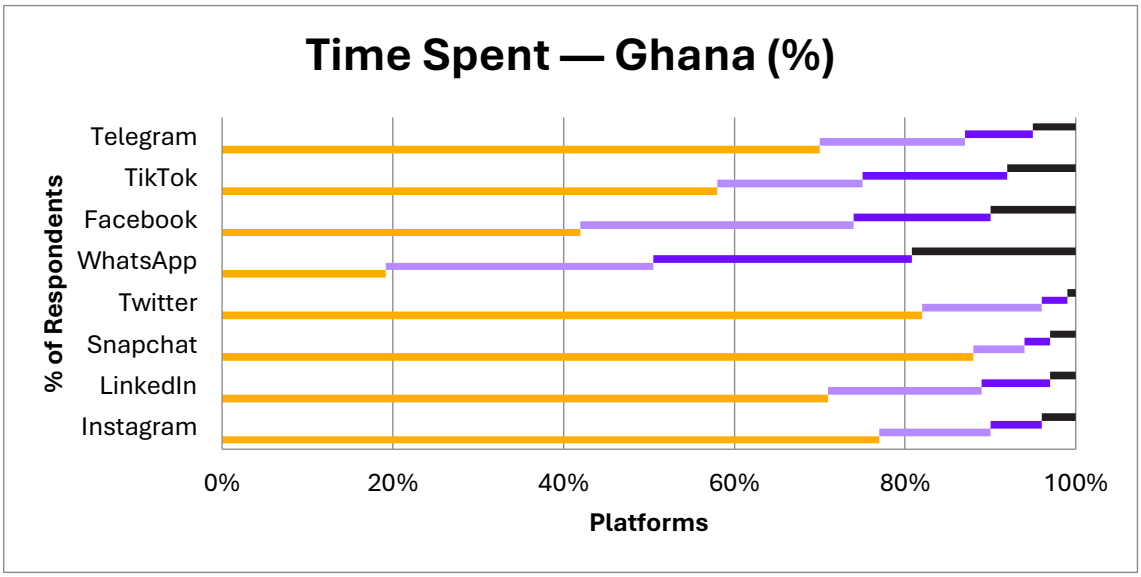
Want to learn how Student Direct uses WhatsApp integrations with partner institutions?

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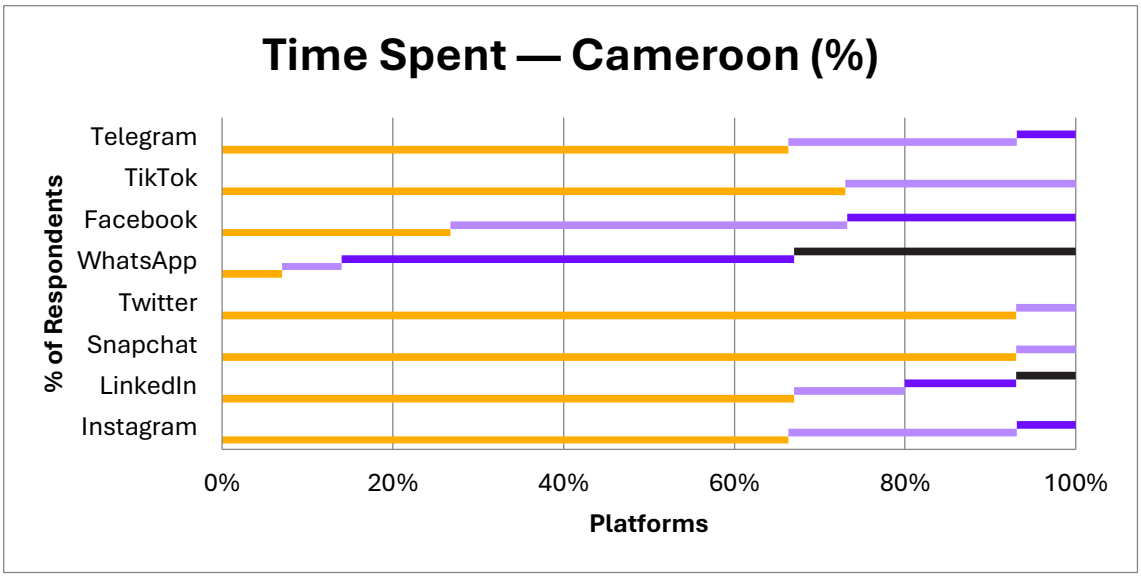
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In Nigeria, **WhatsApp, and Facebook** emerge as the most time-intensive platforms, with a high proportion of respondents spending **over two hours per day** on each. **Instagram** and **Telegram** also record strong daily engagement, while **LinkedIn** maintains moderate use, primarily among mature or postgraduate audiences.



Ghanaian respondents display a similar engagement hierarchy, though overall intensity appears slightly lower than Nigeria. **WhatsApp** again leads, followed by **Facebook**., **TikTok**, and **Instagram**. **LinkedIn** use is comparatively higher in Ghana than in other markets, suggesting a more professional orientation and appetite for employability-related content.

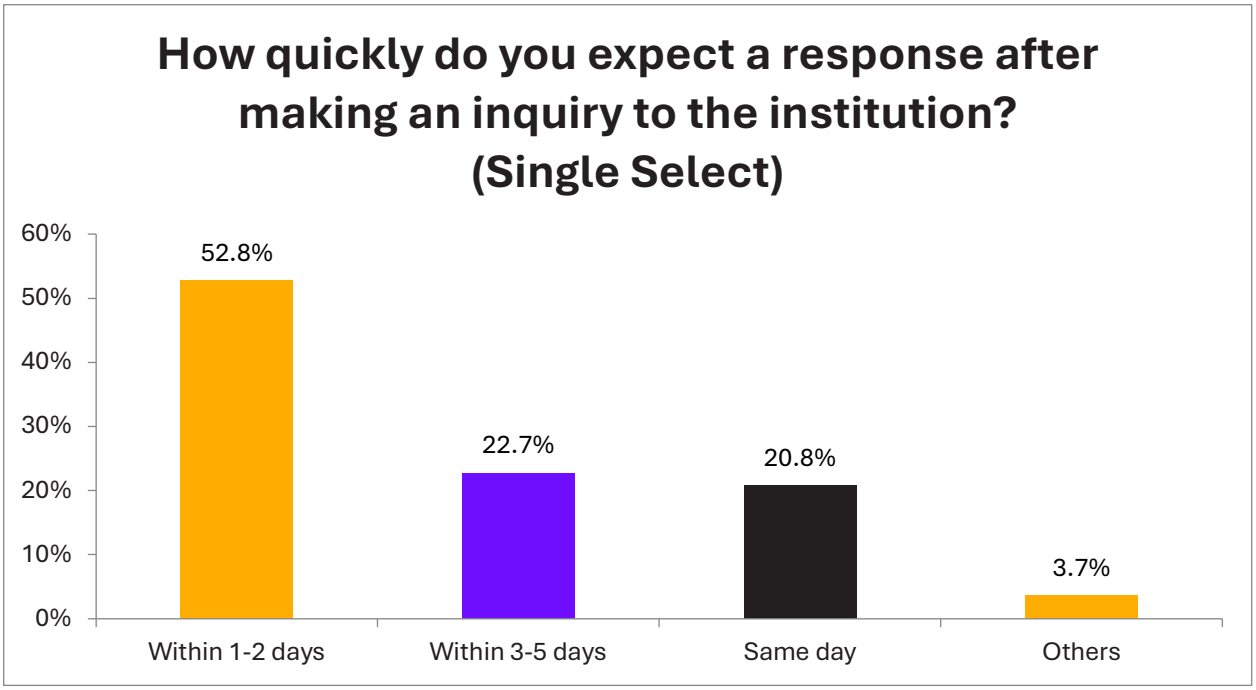


In Cameroon, **WhatsApp** dominates with near-universal daily use, while **Facebook** follows as key engagement platform. Fewer respondents report prolonged time on Instagram or LinkedIn, indicating a more **concentrated social media ecosystem**.

Across Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon, the data reveals that students are **highly active on multiple social and communication platforms**, with clear national variations in usage intensity.

Cross-Market Insights

- **WhatsApp** is consistently the **most dominant platform** across all three countries — combining penetration, immediacy, and trust.
- **Video-first platforms (TikTok, Instagram)** command the bulk of students' discretionary digital time, confirming that attention is visually led.
- **LinkedIn** has a moderate reach across the region, suggesting opportunity for postgraduate and professional segmentation.
- For institutions, the takeaway is clear: West African recruitment success hinges on a **WhatsApp-first, video-driven, and country-tailored content strategy**.



When asked how quickly they expect a response after making an inquiry to an institution, a majority of respondents (**52.8%**) indicated they expect to hear back **within one to two days**. Another **20.8%** expect a **same-day response**, while **22.7%** are willing to wait **three to five days**. Only **3.7%** selected "other" timelines.

Interpretation:

- The findings clearly show that **speed of response has become a decisive factor** in shaping students' perception of institutional professionalism and reliability.
- More than seven in ten students (73.6%) expect a response within 48 hours - underscoring the need for institutions to operate at a **real-time pace** that matches digital expectations.
- Longer response windows (three to five days) risk disengagement or loss of leads to more responsive competitors.
- This expectation aligns closely with students' heavy use of **WhatsApp and email** - platforms that facilitate instant communication and accountability.

About Student Direct

Every trend in this report reinforces the pillars of Student Direct's model: speed, transparency, and human engagement. **As students go direct, institutions must too** - and Student Direct helps them do exactly that.

Student Direct is a Canadian-founded **student conversion and engagement company** that acts as a fully integrated extension of institutional recruitment teams.
We focus exclusively on **direct applicant recruitment and conversion**, helping colleges and universities connect with students **without agents** through high-touch, personalised communication across **WhatsApp, email, and phone**.

Our **performance-based model** ensures institutions pay only for measurable results - turning marketing investment into transparent, trackable conversion outcomes.
Today, Student Direct manages **direct-applicant pipelines for leading public institutions across Canada**, achieving **offer-to-fee conversion rates above 40%** and driving more than **300 student conversions in 2025**.

With a **dedicated on-the-ground presence across Africa and South Asia**, supported by our in-house digital arm **Student Direct Digital**, we combine **human engagement with digital precision** - reaching students where they are and converting interest into enrolment.

Our model:

- **People-Plus Approach** - combining in-country expertise with digital automation.
- **Direct Recruitment, No Agents** - authentic institutional voice, end-to-end transparency.
- **Performance-Based Partnerships** - institutions pay only for results.
- **Data and Insights** - turning student engagement into actionable strategy.

In a market where **trust, speed, and accountability** define success, Student Direct stands as a strategic partner helping institutions build **direct, measurable, and lasting connections** with students worldwide.

Want to learn more?

Book a Meeting

Meet the Student Direct team and explore how we help partners build direct, transparent, and measurable

SCAN ME

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