

Edutourism : International Student's Decision Making Process In Selecting A Host University In Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical model that integrates the different groups of factors which influences the decision making process of international students in selecting a university of study in Malaysia. The design / methodology that was adopted involves presentation of hypothetical model which shows the choice of Malaysian university as an independent variable dependent on four factors: institutional reputation; financial factor, degree of internalisation of university; and social / geographical link. The consideration, whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the prospective international student, will determine the final choice made by these students in selecting a university of study in Malaysia. The limitations of this study stem from the nature of the study itself. Being a preliminary study, it aims to integrate the factors identified in the existing literature. Thus, future research on the subject will examine the existing relationships among the aforementioned factors. In particular, it will give and analyse the weight of each factor on the university choice intention of the international students, and the relative importance of each element for the factor it belongs to. Therefore, determining the relative importance of each element and factor would constitute an important source of information for future work in international edutourism studies. Since, there are few studies which try to tackle the decision making process of the prospective international student on choice of university in Malaysia from an integrated point of view. This paper contributes to bridging that gap.

Keywords: Edutourism, Decision Making, Higher education, International Student, and University

Introduction

Edutourism is an economic activity that is extremely attractive to many nations. It is knowledge-intensive, high value added and offers long term socio-economic benefits (Anthony, et al, 2004). All economies, however simple, are based on knowledge. Knowledge plays an important role in the economy of any nation. A knowledge economy is one in which knowledge is the key resource (Economic Research Services Department, 2000). The emergence of the knowledge economy has significantly influenced internalisation of higher education globally. The popularity and prominence of higher education in providing quality human capital capable of contributing to the world economy is on the increase with edutourism providing the platform for knowledge transfer (Mohamed, Hasan, Dzakiria, and Kassim, 1999).

The index in this information shows that there is rising knowledge intensity in the world economy system with educational institutions producing the knowledge while edutourism is acting as agent of knowledge transfer and distribution. Thus, affirming the link between education, tourism and economy.

Cant, (2004) emphasised the need for people to develop some key global skills, knowledge and right attitude necessary to keep them prepared, productive, innovative, and competitive in the contemporary global business environment. This needs has increased international students' search for quality higher education around the world (Enders, 2004; Teichler, 2004) with scholars been more careful in their universities choice decision making process. Edutourism services providers and marketers need to be more aware of the underlying factors been considered by these scholars while making a choice of university of study. Thus, a sustainable approach for them to survive current edutourism competitive market.

Conceptual Orientation

Various studies had being conducted in Malaysia regarding factors been considered by the international students while selecting host universities. Jason, Ahmad, Azmi, and Azhar, (2011) and Foo, Russayani, and Lim (2010) examined the study focusing on factors that influenced international students to choose Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, (UKM) and Universiti Utara Malaysia, (UUM) respectively. However, due to limited population and sample size adopted in both studies, evidences obtained from these studies are not enough to generalise Malaysia situation on the subject. Therefore there is a need to reexamine the study from general perspective as factors that motivated an international student to choose a particular university differs among

different groups. The study conducted in Mohd Taibj, Nik Rahila, Sharimllah, Anisah and Mohd Shamsuri (2009) on the subject used attributes of quality of Malaysia as a country to determine international student's choice of a particular university instead of universities' attributes of quality thus, there is need to re-examine this study using Malaysian's universities indicators / attributes of quality. Fadli Fizari et al,(2011) in their study on this subject focused only on factors that influenced international scholars to select private universities in Malaysia hence, a one-sided approach. Therefore, there is need to examine this subject using both public and private universities in Malaysia. Furthermore, all previous studies on this subject in Malaysia did not propose a theoretical model that integrates the different groups of factors which influence the decision making process of international students, analysing different dimensions of this process and explaining those factors which determine students' choice of universities. Thus, the gap to be filled in this study.

Meaning and Concept of Edutourism

Many tourism scholars were of the views that the concept of edutourism is new and hence, giving it a concise definition is not near feasible! The concept of edutourism is derived from the combination of the Latin word *educātiōn* from which English gets the word *education* and the Greek word *tómos* meaning circle from which comes the word *tour* and Greek suffix *-ism* which when used with a noun denotes an action hence, *edutour-ism* is the act of travelling with intended purpose of learning (Fernández,1978). It refers to any tourism program or product offering in which participants travel to a location with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience (Jiménez, 1986). Edutourism is an activity undertaken by the tourists for whom education and learning is the primary or secondary part of the trip (Ritchie, 2003). Paul (2003) suggested that edutourism should be viewed along a continuum ranging from 'general interest while travelling' to 'purposeful learning and travelling'. This includes general tourism and adult study tours, international university studies, secondary school students' travel, and exchange programmes. Edutourism can be independently or formally organised and can be undertaken in a variety of natural or human-made settings (Ritchie, Carr, and Cooper, 2003).

Theoretical Framework: Factors Influencing International Student's Choice of University of Study.

Ford, Joseph, and Joseph (1999) pointed that students from different cultural background have different factors that motivates their choice of university of study. An overwhelming numbers of research on factors that influenced international students choice of institution of study revealed the following:

Institution Reputation: Institutional reputation described the overall impression made on the mind of the public about a university (Keling, 2006). It relates to various issues ranging from the ranking of the institution (Harari,1992), Accreditation of its programmes and faculties (Baharun,2002), Competence and expertise of the academic staff (Yusof, Ahmad, Tahudin and Ravindran,2008), Qualification of the academic staff (Van der Wende, 2007), Marketability and recognition of the degree awarded (Ismail ,2009) and Safety and security on campus (Cohen,2003). Keling (2006) concluded that reputation of the university is the most influential factor that motivate international students in selecting their preferred universities.

Cost or Fees (Financial Factor): Joseph and Joseph (2000) affirmed that financial related issues seems to have more important influence on the international students' university choice. Financial factors includes affordable tuition fees (Webb,1993) and availability of financial aids for the students at the university (Yusof, Ahmad, Tahudin and Ravindran,2008). Jackson (1986) pointed that high college cost have a negative influence on college choice while availability of financial aids to reduce costs have a positive influence. Based on the above findings, it is can be concluded that availability of financial aid has a significant influenced on college choice decision by the international students.

Level of Internationalisation of the Institution: The concept of internationalization constitutes a widespread concept in the management literature and has recently begun to be applied to higher education institutions (Deem and Brehony, 2005). The concept explains the availability and diversity of international programmes in the institution (Harari,1992; Klasek, 1992; Ayoubi and Masoud, 2007 and Mestenhauser and Ellingboe,1998), the population of international students currently studying in the institution (Lipsett, 2009; McGowan and Potter, 2008), the numbers of international staff working in the school (Van der Wende, 2007) and, international strategic alliances of the institution (Hanson and Meyerson, 1995; Harari,1992; Pickert and Turlington, 1992). Internationalisation is a sustainable process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the universities hence, a strategic approach that influences international students' choice of institution (Knight,1994).

Social and Geographical Links: This is another important factor that determine direction of flow of international students in the context of choice of university (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery,1997). ***This includes*** parental influence or suggestion (Baharun,2006), Friends / Peer opinion (Licata and Maxham,1998), Alumnus suggestions (Bourke,2000), Geographical proximity/location (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery,1997), and level of discrimination, (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery,1997).

Proposed Conceptual Framework

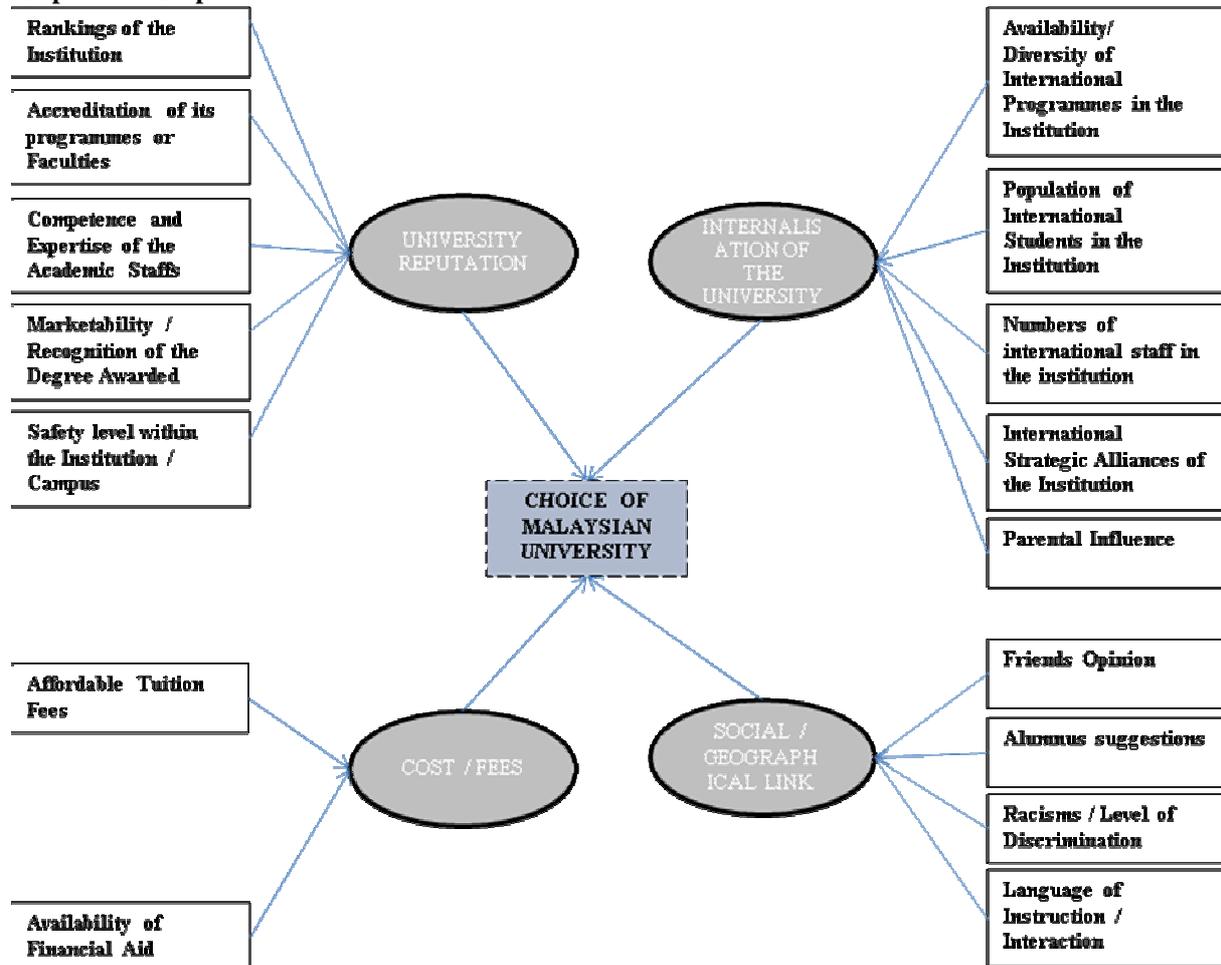


Figure 1: Showing a Model of Factors Influencing International Students' University Choice Decision.

Research propositions

The above theoretical framework allows us to set forth the following research propositions: **H1.** University reputation positively influence the decision making process of the international students to choose Malaysian universities.

H2. Cost and fees(Financial Factor) postively influences the decision of the international students to choose Malaysian Universities.

H3. Internalisation of universities has a direct and positive relationship with the choice of Malaysian universities by the international students.

H4. Social and geographical link positively influenced the choice of Malaysian universities by the international students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Until now, research on decision making process of the international students in the choice of edutourism destination has centred on partial aspects of the process. Existing literature has concentrated on identifying those elements which play a part in the decision of the prospective international student on choice of a university and establishing it's priorities. The model presented in this study shows the choice of Malaysian university as an independent variable dependent on four factors: institution reputation; the effect of cost and fees, degree of internalisation of the university;and social / geographical link. The consideration, whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the prospective student,of the different elements making up the factors included in this study will determine the final choice of the university made by students.

The limitations of this study stem from the nature of the study itself. As a theoretical model, it aims to integrate the factors identified in the existing literature. Thus, future research must try to examine the existing relationships among the aforementioned factors. In particular, it must analyse the weight of each factor on the Malaysian university choice decision among the international students, and the relative importance of each

element for the factor it belongs to. Therefore, determining the relative importance of each element and factor would constitute an important source of information for future work in international edutourism studies. On the other hand, there should be more in-depth study on the effect that country image has on the decision making process of the prospective international students.

Another interesting area suggested for further study is the experiences of the international students in their respective universities. This would establish whether there are significant differences between pre university choice decision and actual experience. Further analysis of the behaviour and determining factors in the decision making process of the international student would allow educational institutions, as well as national, regional and local governments interested in attracting international students, to strengthen their image, try to eliminate weaknesses and thus, increase their possibilities of being chosen as a destination for consumption of higher education services.

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