

Exploring Factors Influencing Student Study Abroad Choice of Destination in the Contemporary Globalized Era

Menerokai faktor-faktor yang Mempengaruhi Pemilihan Destinasi Pelajar Luar Negara dalam Era Kontemporari Globalisasi

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ABSTRACT

The advent of global and international dimensions in higher education has lifted the trends of students' and researcher's mobility around the globe. Identification and assessment of international students' drivers influencing their decision-making process of study destination are imperative to appeal to a larger number of international students. The present study aimed to examine the international students' motives in the selection of Malaysia as a study destination and the factors influencing their will to recommend Malaysia to their friends and relatives. A qualitative approach was employed and a total of 18 respondents were interviewed. Quality of education and cultural adoption were found as the key concerned fascination for international students in choosing Malaysia as a study destination. Besides, the low cost of living and tuition fees, cultural adoption, environmental beauty, credibility, and international ranking of institutions also appeal to students in the selection of Malaysia. The findings revealed that most of the respondents are willing to recommend Malaysia to their friends and relatives, and the factors prompting their intention are educational cost and quality, available research facilities at institutions, the credibility of Malaysian universities, and low tuition fee for higher education. The results would offer the current trends to the government and higher education institutions in offering an exclusive experience to the existing and potential students and in achieving Malaysia's Vision-2025 of attracting 250,000 international students. The limitations and directions for future research have been provided.

Keywords: international students; study destination; quality of education; cost of education; global mobility

ABSTRAK

Dalam era globalisasi kini dan konsep pengantarabangsa dalam pengajian tinggi yang menyeluruh telah meningkatkan kecenderungan pergerakan pelajar dan penyelidik di seluruh dunia. Pengalaman para pelajar yang telah menjalani program pengajian di luar negara sebagai pelajar pertukaran dan sebagainya menjadi faktor kepada rakan mereka dalam membuat keputusan memilih Malaysia sebagai destinasi bagi melanjutkan pengajian mereka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mendapatkan motif pelajar antarabangsa dalam pemilihan Malaysia sebagai destinasi bagi mereka untuk melanjutkan pengajian atau hadir sebagai pelajar pertukaran untuk tempoh masa yang tertentu. Pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan dan seramai 18 orang responden telah ditemuramah. Kualiti pendidikan dan penerimaan budaya didapati sebagai daya tarikan utama bagi pelajar antarabangsa dalam memilih Malaysia sebagai destinasi kajian. Di samping itu, kos sara hidup dan yuran tuisyen yang kompetitif, penerimaan budaya, kecantikan alam sekitar, kredibiliti dan kedudukan institusi pengajian di peringkat antarabangsa juga menjadi faktor kepada pelajar memilih Malaysia sebagai destinasi. Selain itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa faktor lain yang mendorong niat para pelajar memilih Malaysia adalah kerana kos pendidikan dan kualiti, kemudahan penyelidikan yang ada di institusi, kredibiliti universiti di Malaysia, dan yuran pengajian rendah untuk pendidikan tinggi. Hasilnya akan menawarkan trend semasa kepada kerajaan dan institusi pengajian tinggi dalam menawarkan pengalaman eksklusif kepada pelajar yang sedia ada dan berpotensi dan dalam mencapai Wawasan-2025 Malaysia untuk menarik 250,000 pelajar antarabangsa. Batasan dan arahan untuk penyelidikan masa depan telah disediakan.

Kata kunci: Pelajar antarabangsa; destinasi; mobiliti global; kualiti pendidikan; kos pendidikan

INTRODUCTION

International students' enrolment in higher education institutions (HEIs) has become a major attribute of global education from the past two

decades (De Wit 2015; Verbik & Lasanowski 2007). Malaysia has fast-becoming the focus for tertiary education center for international students. The government set a target by the year 2020 to attract 200,000 international students from all over the

world. In addition, Malaysia's Vision-2025 has a purpose to appeal to 250,000 international students by the year 2025. Hence, it becomes imperative to examine the factors that may contribute to making Malaysia an 'educational hub' for international students. This has been, in further, embedded in the draft of the strategic planning of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE). The literature search highlighted some key factors that motivating international students in choosing study destination. To name a few are; low tuition fee, adaptable culture and environment, global rankings of institutions, and recommendations from friends and relatives (Olutokunbo, Ismail, & Suandi 2013; Bodycott 2009; Özoğlu, Gür & Coşkun 2015; Wen & Hu 2019).

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2000, the number of students studying overseas was 2 million and an increase of 2.26 million in 2011, with a number of 4.26 million. Students are vital stakeholder groups in international mobility (OECD 2013). However, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) and Wen and Hu (2019) suggested that more research is needed to develop multiple approaches, particularly from international students' perspective, in order to comprehend the global mobility trends.

Besides focusing on delivering the best quality of education, an institution should also ensure an effective culture exposure to international students. A positive word of mouth is a cheap but effective promotion strategy. Only a few studies focused on the investigation of appealing factors for the prospective students in selecting Malaysia as a study destination (Pyvis & Chapman 2007; Ziguras & Law 2006; Padlee, Kamaruddin & Baharun 2010). However, to date, no research has been found that investigates the factors influencing Malaysia as a study choice destination to their friends and relatives. Consequently, the present study aims to explore the magnetism of Malaysia as a study destination as well as the factors stirring international students to recommend Malaysia to their friends and relatives.

There is an increasing trend that can be seen in Asian countries to avail social, cultural, and economic benefits of international students (Terry 2011; Mazzarol & Soutar 2008). UNESCO has ranked Malaysia as the 11th country in the world by holding 2.5 percent of global international students (MOHE 2011). Moreover, the education sector in Malaysia contributed 4 percent to the Malaysian Gross National Income (GNI) which is expected to be doubled by 2020 (Cheng, Mahmood & Yeap

2013; Lee et al. 2018).

Though Asian countries need to chart modern ways of life that can strike a deep resonance with their own cherished values and it is not an easy task. Many Asian societies are confronted with corruption, environmental degradation, ethnic or communal tension, crimes, economic-social disparities, and drug abuse (Heng 2007). As for Malaysia, this is not a pull-down factor for a student's choice of destination.

According to MOHE (2013), there are currently 20 public universities in Malaysia; 5 of which are designated research universities, 4 comprehensive universities while 11 are focused universities. The research and focused universities aim for a ratio of 50 percent postgraduate and undergraduate students; the comprehensive universities aim for 70 percent undergraduate and 30 percent postgraduate students.

In the Institute of International Education (IIE) report (2017), there are 60,244 international students enrolled in higher education in Malaysia in the year 2017 which shows a 40.9% increment from the 2016 statistics. In top-ten sending nations, Bangladesh is at the top followed by Indonesia and China respectively. India is in the 10th position while other countries comprised 38.75 of the total enrollments in the higher education sector. Table 1, it provides the details of the contribution of the top ten and other countries by numbers of international students and their percentage as well.

A focal point that may need the attention of national and institutional administration is the recent research report from the British Council (2018) which predicts a reduction of outbound student mobility over the next decade. The report titled '*International student mobility to 2027: Local investment, global outcomes*' draws on data from UNESCO and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/ Population Division, along with analysis from Oxford Economics, to forecast mobility trends worldwide.

The report shows that mobility growth began to slow with an average of 5% per year from 2012 to 2015. Furthermore, the report forecasts for the next ten years that annual growth rates will drop additionally to an average of 1.7% per year through 2027. As the report concludes, "We have found that local education provision has been potentially the weightiest driver in shaping the current global higher education landscape. In a tumultuous global context, visas and student safety are often cited as factors that influence the sector but the impact of

TABLE 1. International Students' Enrollment in Higher Education in Malaysia – 2017

Country of origin	No. of International students	% of the total
Bangladesh	6,534	10.8
Indonesia	5,700	9.4
China	4,956	8.2
Nigeria	4,943	8.2
Iran	3,293	5.4
Yemen	2,731	4.5
Iraq	2,567	4.2
Pakistan	2,361	3.9
Libya	1,975	3.2
India	1,856	3.0
Others	23,328	38.7
Total	60,244	100%

Source: Institute of International Education – 2017

domestic investment on global student mobility has been profound (Mowjee2013; Bamberger 2019). Currently, many students going abroad because there is neither capacity nor high-quality education at home but as this change outbound mobility will suffer.”

This would be an alarming situation for the international as well as for the regional educational hubs to observe the facets that may assist them to retain a sizeable portion of international students' mobility to attain academics, economics, research and/or global competitive privileges. The evaluation of the facilitation provided by national or institutional policies can be a significant element in this regard. However, for a deep and clear understanding, institutions should evaluate the international students' expectations and real-life experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several attributes in choosing a study destination. Previous literature observed the following factors; student's experience, educational quality, country image, and governmental visa/immigration policies towards the selection of study destination (Hashim, Abdullateef & Sarkindaji 2015; Sheu 2011; Hanaysha, Dileep & Hilman 2012). Mazzarol and Savery (1996) explored six key factors influencing the choice of study destination by students. Among those, personal recommendations receive from parents, relatives, friends considered significant factors in making the final decision. Another study conducted by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) in four countries i.e. Indonesia, Taiwan,

China, and India reported that recommendations from friends and relatives are a motivating factor directing students towards the selection of study destination.

In order to develop promotional tools, it is imperative to understand the reasons behind students' decisions in selecting study destinations. In the business environment, it is believing that consumer positive word of mouth has a substantial influence on the choices made by a consumer when making the decision and at the same time retain old as well (Lam, Lee & Mizerski 2009; Beech 2019). In terms of academics, as the global competition is increasing a positive students' word-of-mouth about university's culture or performance placing a significant impact on overall goodwill and public image of the institutions (Kutniauskienė & Valiulienė 2015).

FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN LITERATURE FOR STUDY DESTINATION

There is extensive literature that aims to analyze and define key factors for international students while selection study destination for higher education (Chen 2007; Ahmad & Hussain 2017; Agarwal & Winkler 1985; Beine et al. 2014; Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Cubillo, Sánchez & Cerviño 2006; Wadhwa 2016). The research review of previous studies entails that authors focused on different categories of students such as undergraduates, postgraduate students, local and international students. In this study, the major influencing factors have been recognized from prior literature which can affect the students' choice of study digestion.

For example, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) studied 2,485 students in Australia from four different Asian countries. The findings of their study indicated that a belief that studies abroad are better than local ones, as well as an aspiration for a better understanding of western culture was the most important motivation for students to study abroad. The study brought the host country's awareness and knowledge as one of the key driving factors for international students. María Cubillo et al. (2006) tried to study from an integrated perspective and investigated the decision-making process of prospective international students. Personal reasons, country image effects, city image impact, institutional images, and the program evaluation were the key five factors identified by their findings.

The Chen study (2007) focussed on the decision-making process and factors influencing

East Asian student enrolment in Canadian graduate schools. The findings of the study revealed that most important factors included institutional academic pulling factors, for instance, instructors, program credibility, efficiency and ranking factors, administrative and economic pulling-point factors, e.g. tuition, net costs, and academic awards, the Canadian climate (i.e. diversity and multiculturalism). Jiani (2017) directed a study in China and found that China's future development prospects distinctively attract students to choose China as their study abroad destination. In a recent study, Wen and Hu (2019) revealed in their findings that the reputation of higher education institutions is one of the major pulling factors of international students. Table 1 demonstrated the comprehensive division of the factors motivating students to choose study destinations found in the previous literature.

TABLE 2. Factors Influencing International Students' Choice of Study Destination

Factors	Researchers
Culture and Environment	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Price, Matzdorf, Smith & Agahi (2003); Cubillo et al. (2006); Chen (2007); Bodycott (2009); Eder, Smith & Pitts (2010); Lee & Morrish (2011); Counsell (2011); Nilsson (2015); Ahmad & Hussain, 2017; Jiani (2017).
University Facilities	Price, Matzdorf, Smith & Agahi (2003); Bodycott (2009); Nilsson (2015).
Tuition Fee and Funding Issues	Pimpa (2003); Price, Matzdorf, Smith & Agahi (2003); Maringe (2006); Soo & Elliott (2008); Bodycott (2009); Eder, Smith & Pitts (2010); Petruzzellis & Romanazzi (2010); Wilkins, Shams & Huisman (2013); Beine, Noël & Ragot (2014); Wadhwa (2016); Ahmad & Hussain (2017).
Quality of Education	Kemp et al. (1998); Mazzarol & Soutar (2002); Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003); María Cubillo et al. (2006); Hazen & Alberts (2006); L. H. Chen (2007); Yang (2007); Wilkins et al. (2012); Wilkins & Huisman (2011); Wilkins et al. (2013); Wadhwa (2016); Bodycott and Lai (2012); Lee (2017); Wen & Hu (2019).
Migration and Visa System	Mzzarol & Soutar (2002); Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003); María Cubillo et al. (2006); Yang (2007); Chen (2007); Bodycott (2009); Eder et al. (2010); Chien (2013); Wadhwa (2016).

Through previous literature, this study seeks to explore the factors that influence international students' decisions when studying abroad. The following research questions were constructed based on the study objectives:

1. What are the motives for selecting Malaysia as a study destination for international students?
2. What are the factors influencing international students to recommend Malaysia to their friends and relatives to further their studies?
3. What are the key contributors to the shift in the global landscape of students' study abroad trends?

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods and an interview approach are employed to gather data. As Tong, Sainsbury and Craig (2007) stated, qualitative approaches are exploratory in nature and enable researchers to sightsee the strains of phenomena. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the sake of data collection. A random sampling method was applied to recruit 18 international students studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) located in Penang, Malaysia to participate in this study. Students with minimum experience of minimum two-semester and

their willingness to participate were considered the criteria in selecting appropriate respondents. The interviews were conducted at a convenient time and place for the students on or close to the campus. The data collection process was constant until the data saturation was achieved. The interview sessions continued for 20–40 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a digital sound recorder. Instantly after each interview, the contents of the interview were transcribed verbatim.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has a few limitations. First, the data gathered from international students belong to 7 countries. Another limitation is the respondents of this study were from one public university named Universiti Sains Malaysia. Hence, there are chances of variation in the results when such research may conduct in other public or private universities. There are several areas where further study can be directed to get more comprehensive results regarding motivational Malaysia's attractiveness for international students. A quantitative study with an increased sample size can provide empirical results to develop more understanding of the following topic. Future studies may also be conducted by targeting participants from private universities to get more in-depth and comparative reviews.

ANALYSIS

In this study, a total number of 18 respondents participated including males 12 (66.7%) and females 6 (33.3%). Of the total respondents, 77.8% were single while the rest 22.2% were married. In terms of age distribution, half of the respondents were in the age group of 21-30. The next major percentage (22.2%) of respondents belonged to age group 31-40, followed by 16.7 percent and 11.1 percent for age groups less than 20 and above 41, respectively. The current study targeted international students containing a major proportion of the respondents from Nigeria (33.4%) and remaining (16.7%, 16.7%, 11.1%, 11.1%, 5.5%, and 5.5%) belong to Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Indonesia, Jordan, and Thailand, respectively. International students investigated in this study belong to three distinct levels of education i.e. Ph.D. (43.8%) followed by Master (43.8%) and undergraduate (53%).

TABLE 3. Demographics of Participants

Characteristics	Respondent n=18	%
Sex		
Male	12	66.7
Female	6	33.3
Marital status		
Married	4	22.2
Single	14	77.8
Age (range)		
<20	2	11.1
21-30	9	50
31-40	4	22.2
>41	3	16.7
Country		
Nigeria	6	33.4
Iran	3	16.7
Pakistan	3	16.7
Syria	2	11.1
Indonesia	2	11.1
Jordan	1	5.5
Thailand	1	5.5
Educational level		
Ph.D.	8	44.4
Master	7	38.9
Undergraduate	3	16.7

There are six categories of respondents' views and experiences about motives to select Malaysia as a study destination. The given examples of responses (as shown in Table 2.) illustrate the attributes considered by international students to further their studies in Malaysia.

The majority of the respondents reported quality of education and low cost of tuition fee as significant motives to choose Malaysia. Besides this, cultural adoption, economical living, the beauty of the Malaysian environment, and the ranking and credibility of universities are also considered as motivating factors. The findings of the present study contradict the results of Alves and Raposo (2010) where an institutions' current image and reputation have seen more imperative than quality.

Table 3 comprised of the participants' responses to the questions about inspiring factors in the recommendation of Malaysia to their friends and relatives. A high portion of the respondents

considered the cost and quality of education as the motivation to recommend Malaysia. Other factors such as the research-based educational facilities, tuition living cost, and Malaysian university’s global ranking are also perceived as influencing factors behind their intention to recommend Malaysia.

TABLE 4. Motives in the Selection of Malaysia as a Study Destination

Categories	Examples
Quality of education	“I was inspired by the quality of education that Malaysian universities offered. I am happy with my decision to choose Malaysia for my post-graduation”
Cultural adoption	“It is easy to adapt with Malaysia because of a multicultural environment and there are a number of foreign students studying here. Malaysian people are friendly”
Low cost of tuition fee	“...because both tuition fees and living cost are considered low compared to my country. So, it motivates me to go for Malaysia”
Affordability of living	“I heard from my friends that Malaysia is very economical in living and less expenditures needed by students...”
Environmental beauty	“I found during searching to select a country for my higher education that Malaysia’s weather is good, and it is also beautiful because of the tropical country”
Ranking and credibility of Institutions	“...Universities have good ranking in QS especially Malaysian Public universities. I selected Malaysia because of good ranking of my current university”

TABLE 5. Recommendations of Malaysia as a study destination

Categories	Examples
Education quality	“Yes, I like to recommend Malaysia because the education system is okay and good support from academic staff”
Cost of education	“I recommend Malaysia, and the reason is the low tuition fee charging by universities.”
Educational facilities (research-based facilities)	“Yes, I recommend. Because quality, facilities, and research-based instruments are commendable compared to others around the world”

bersambung ...

sambungan ...

Cost of living	“Here, it’s not difficult to adjust. The rents are cheaper and food expenses are also affordable for international students”
Institutions’ credibility	“Malaysian universities are good in research and the degree is acceptable in all countries. Some universities are very good in ranking, so I recommend Malaysia to others”

DISCUSSION

In this study, the key motivational factors influencing international student’s selection and recommendation of Malaysia as a study destination by international students. According to the results of this qualitative study, the major concerning issues for international students are the quality of education and the cost of living and tuition fees. The findings of the present study validate the results of Alfattal (2017) where he founds the quality and affordability as the key motivational factors for international students’ enrollment in a comprehensive college in southern California. Nearly parallel factors reported by the respondents in the investigation of the factors of the recommendation of Malaysia as a study destination to their friends and relatives. These issues have been discussed in the following section with more details.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ MOTIVATION IN CHOOSING MALAYSIA AS A STUDY DESTINATION

There are several motives behind the international students’ decision while selecting the overseas country to further their education. In the current study, the researchers found that the quality of education is the most influential motivational factor for international students in choosing Malaysia as their study destination. The Malaysian government is decidedly ambitious to provide a quality of education that attracts international students and researchers from the globe.

As the former Minister of Education Malaysia – Tan Sri Dato’ Haji Muhyiddin bin Haji Mohd Yassin said,

The Government has set ambitious – but achievable – aspirations to transform the higher education system. These aspirations constitute two aspects: those for the education system as a

whole, focusing on access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency; and those for individual students, covering the six primary attributes – ethics and spirituality, leadership skills, national identity, language proficiency, thinking skills, and knowledge” (QS 2017).

Moreover, Dato’ Seri Idris Jusoh, the former Minister of Education also indicates that

We aspire to create a higher education system that ranks among the world’s leading higher education systems and enables Malaysia to compete globally.

Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), established in 2007, considering a credible and internationally recognized higher education quality assurance body that has a mission to inspire the trust and confidence of its stakeholders through best quality practices for higher education promotion in Malaysia. Thus, these truly represent the firm’s will of Malaysia to become an educational regional hub by providing excellent quality.

Another attracting factor is the affordable cost of living and tuition fee which inspire international students to further their studies in Malaysia. Some other motivational factors are cultural adoption, suitable environment, and credibility of institutions in Malaysia. The findings of this study are contradicted with the results of a study conducting by Lee (2014) where he found that international scholarships, multilingual websites, language training programs are the key persuasive factors in students’ determination of study destination. According to the top 10 most affordable places to study abroad, Malaysia ranked number 9 behind Norway, Taiwan, Germany, France, Mexico, India, Argentina, Poland and ranked number 10 in South Africa. (Collier & Sabrina 2018).

The government of Malaysia is dedicated to the vision of developing the country as an educational destination by providing extraordinary education along with the dynamic research facilities. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) is the quality assurance and accrediting body that assuring the quality of education in public and private HEIs in Malaysia. Besides this, a wide range of study programs and courses are offered in Malaysian universities for overseas students. In the context of international students’ adjustment in Malaysia, awareness and similarity of culture, language ability, and facilitating services at the university are some of the influential factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF MALAYSIA AS A STUDY DESTINATION

The current study discovered the traits which motivate the international students to recommend Malaysia to their friends and relatives as a study destination. The personal recommendations or referrals from friends or relatives are considering inducing factors that can affect the students’ selection process of the target country (Ahmad & Hussain 2017). This is not surprising, as with the previous knowledge, awareness, and experiences, the people recommend or reject some countries. Word-Of-Mouth referral is, certainly, a most powerful promotional tool for a higher education institution to fascinate prospective students.

The most significant recommending factors found in this study are the quality of education, affordable cost of study, and flexible cultural adoption. Alongside, few respondents stated that Malaysia is a sight-seeing country, so they would like to recommend Malaysia as a choice of study. Certainly, international students are considered as ambassadors for the university. Their pleasing experiences at university can lead them to suggest this to their friends and relatives. Though nowadays, there are some complaints regarding visa and immigration process, low interaction with Malaysian students, and increasing tuition fees, the present study found that international students are most satisfied with Malaysia and the institutions providing higher education.

As most international students come out with their own sponsorship with no scholarships, the tuition fees, and living costs are the key elements influencing students’ motivation in selecting and recommending a study destination. Therefore, a country with the affordability of study and living cost would be an attention-grabbing option for students who lack substantial financial support (Leong 2015). Several factors around the world at present, including a stimulating global economy and fluctuations in the United States and Europe’s geographical trends, bring a movement in international students’ mobility. International students and researchers are now looking to pursue higher education beyond the traditional destinations, such as the UK and the United States (Paulino & Castaño 2019). This is a prodigious opportune time for the Malaysian government and HEIs to further promote and get the most out of its strengths in higher education to fascinate more international students. Malaysia can provide value-added facilitation to international

students regarding their educational, social, and cultural concerns to market itself worldwide.

THE CHANGING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE OF STUDENTS' MOBILITY

Globalization has to change the international trends with a profound influence on academics, economics, and social aspects of nations. Some of the key factors in changing the global landscape of international students' mobility are the diversification of educational destinations, growing middle class, losing ground by leading destinations, and competition of regional educational hubs.

DIVERSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL DESTINATIONS

Nearly five million students are studying abroad today which is an increase of nearly 67% since the year 2005 (Tran 2016). A major driver behind student mobility is unmet demand for HE in developing countries. For instance, when students are not able to access quality education at home, they inspired to go abroad. This trend has urged astonishing growth in the numbers of international students, for instance, Chinese and Indian students that travel overseas for the sake of education over the past decade. However, the relative magnetism of destinations is changing constantly. Asian HE systems are increasingly strengthening, such as several universities in China, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia now rank among the world's best universities (Warwick 2016). An amplified number of students in these countries are choosing to stay within the region to study, and students from other developing countries, particularly from the African region, are targeting Asian destinations as their attractive options for higher education. By way of Asia surges its capacity to absorbing regional students and expanding its recruitment of foreign students, the developed countries such as the US, Australia, the UK, and Canada may be experiencing slow demand for places in their institutions, particularly from the major sending markets like India and China (Geddie 2015).

A VISIBLE GROWING MIDDLE-CLASS

Countries with growing middle-classes are seeing more of their students considering going abroad to further their studies. In Asia, the middle class is predictable to raise from 600 million in 2010 to

more than 3 billion in 2030 to represent 66% of the total global middle-class population (Kharas 2017). *World Education News and Reviews (WENR)* (2015) observes that "Upper-middle-income economies are the ones driving growth in outbound student mobility. The total number of outbound international students from upper-middle-income economies jumped 161% between 2000 and 2012, as compared to only 29% from high-income OECD countries." Some of the most momentous emerging markets for international education are characterized by large and increasing middle-class populations such as India, Nigeria, and Indonesia.

LOSING GROUND BY LEADING DESTINATIONS

Simultaneously as developing markets have been growing educational quality and capacity, the big players of international education such as the US and the UK have been losing international educational market share. For instance, the US share of internationally mobile students throws down from 23% in 2000 to 16% in 2012, even as the total number of foreign students in America continues to climb (Bok 2015). The UK has lost ground for international students as well.

This shift is basically a function of expanding competition among study destinations. Both Australia and Canada have attracted a larger share of international students in the past decade; some other countries have also expanded ground. The OECD reports (2013) express that "significant numbers of foreign students were enrolled in the Russian Federation (4% market share in 2012), Japan (3%), Austria (2%), Italy (2%), New Zealand (2%), and Spain (2%)." As mentioned earlier, Asian regional hubs such as Malaysia are also starting to capture the deliberation of forthcoming international students.

This is a vibrant scene of a new level of competition between leading study destinations and emerging educational hubs over the next decade. Key facilitation such as national visa and immigration policies, synchronized destination marketing campaigns, international scholarship programs, and intellectual strategies for the packaging of programs will make able the countries to maintain or upsurge their market share.

REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL HUBS – A NEW FORM OF COMPETITION

An increasing trend of regional mobility is also another aspect of changing the landscape of global

mobility. For instance, the growing role of intra-regional mobility is visible in UNESCO statistics demonstrating that the percentage of Latin American students not leaving their region increased from 11% in 1999 to 23% in 2007. Likewise, over the same period, the East Asian mobile students continuing their studies within their region rose from 36% to 42% (ICEF 2015). Regional mobility has been encouraged by several programs such as ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS), ASEAN University Network (AUN), University Mobility for Asia and Pacific (UMAP) and the landmark ERASMUS in Europe (Neubauer 2012).

The increased economic prosperity and the competitiveness of higher education have formed more equal conditions for student mobility in East Asia. The fast pace of institutional ties in all directions and fostering of mobility gives new impetus to East Asia's strengthened position in the world of global higher education. While promoting inbound and outbound mobility, the East Asian governments and institutions concentrate on the regional movement of intellectual capital (Batalova, Shymonyak & Sugiyarto 2017; Bamberger 2019). This has led in recent years to substantially increase intraregional educational collaboration and exchange programs.

According to Knight (2012), the issue of regional identity upsurges further questions when it is not considered parallelly to the concept of global citizenship. The concept of regional identity, which does not emphasize competencies but shared perspectives and values, need to understand in a way to upsurge global harmony. To remains compelling, governments and academic institutions around the world must reflect carefully on their thoughts of competitive divergence and position themselves on other than price and proximity prosperity. In sum, as the globalization and internationalization of education are expected to grow and diversify, regional hubs, in accordance, will continue to swell. Nevertheless, the extent to which these regional educational hubs would concentrate on the region over the globe is still yet to see.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that quality of education, low tuition fees, affordable cost of living, easy cultural adoption, and university credibility and ranking are the major motives in the selection and recommendation of Malaysia by international

students. The increasing trend in international students' enrollment has proclaimed Malaysia as one of the prevailing emergent contenders in the global educational market. Within the last decade, the mobility of international students in Malaysia has grown by more than 200%. The recent government efforts and HEIs persuading the research environment have the potential to make Malaysia an even more attractive destination for international students, particularly from Asia and Africa region. However, this growth does not come without challenges and apparently requires more deliberation regarding international students' facilitation and their flexible adjustments in Malaysia to achieve the target of attracting 250,000 international students by 2025. It is factual that Malaysia has to scuffle hard to be in the global competition as still the United States, UK, Australia, and Japan are the major hosts of international students. While it's vibrant to celebrate the Malaysian educational achievements, yet it's not the time to be complacent yet. To achieve its vision of "Global Prominence" as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015-2025), Malaysia has to comprehend, assess, and deliver the requisites of international students' contentment.

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Received: 12 January 2019

Accepted: 12 June 2020