



ONE BELT, ONE ROAD: ENHANCING MALAYSIAN STUDENTS' MOBILITY

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Abstract:

This paper aims to develop a framework on the determinants of international student mobility from Malaysia. China's One Belt, One Road initiative is an important milestone for Malaysia as the two countries seek closer economic and political ties. The education sector also benefitted from this closer relationship. The significance of this paper is that it formulates a logistic regression model which encompasses various parameters in students' choice of country to study abroad. With an understanding of the various determinants of student mobility, the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia will be able to fine-tune its macro policies to attract more international students to study in Malaysia.

Keywords: Malaysia, student mobility, tuition costs, job opportunities

Introduction

Student mobility is a driving force for changes as globalization of education necessitates countries to review their policies to either stem brain drain or attract international talents. Malaysia is no exception as it strives to increase its investments in higher education to attract foreign students.

Many factors have contributed to increased student mobility. These include decreasing cost of air-travel, wider educational opportunities for foreign students, and greater competition to attract top students. Students studying overseas will gain the experience of a different culture, study environment and academic values which may give them an edge over their peers in the job market.

Changes in the job market also mean that new skills are in demand. Constant learning, training and development need to take place as a country competes in the

international arena. Governments and private sectors are increasing their investments to build institutions of learning to attract both local and overseas students. Learning could be in both traditional face-to-face mode or through distance and e-learning.

Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education in its Blueprint 2015-2025 has set out three distinct phases to review the National Higher Education Strategic Plan. These are:

- 1) Phase 1: Review of current performance and progress
- 2) Phase 2: Align 10 strategic "Shifts" with existing national plans that would take the higher education system to the next level
- 3) Phase 3: Finalisation of the Blueprint

Market statistics

Malaysia's higher education enrolment has breached the 1.2 million student mark in 2012. It currently ranks 3rd in ASEAN for enrolment in Masters and Doctorate programs. At the same time, its universities have moved up in global rankings, recording niche areas of research excellence. In 2014, it has four universities in the top 400 QS Global Ranking of universities (Table 1).

Table 1: Ranking of Malaysian universities

Malaysian Universities	QS Global Ranking (2014)
University of Malaya	151
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	259
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	294
Universiti Sains Malaysia	309
University Putra Malaysia	376

Source: Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has identified five key drivers to realize its goals of becoming a world leading education centre. These are:

- 1) Instilling an entrepreneurial mindset
- 2) Placing equal value on technical and vocational training as formal traditional academic education
- 3) Focusing on outcomes over inputs
- 4) Developing a model of earned autonomy for institutions
- 5) Promoting shared responsibility for higher education resources

In the 2015-2025 Blueprint, Malaysia aims to achieve a 2.5 million tertiary enrolment target, which is among the highest in ASEAN. With this transformation journey, students will be able to enjoy a higher quality education programme as well as

having more opportunities through informal pathways and ongoing professional development.

Malaysia also hopes to be the country of choice for foreign students. With investments from both local and overseas universities, Malaysia aims to promote inbound student exchanges while strengthening its international position. The establishment of foreign branch campuses of Reading University, University of Southampton, Newcastle University, Monash University and Netherlands Maritime Institute of Technology are just some of the initiatives taken to accomplish its ambitious goal to attract up to 200,000 foreign students by 2020.

Initiatives of other countries

As Malaysia transforms and innovates its higher education sectors, other countries are also introducing measures to attract international students. For example, Taiwan has encouraged foreign universities to establish branch campuses on the island. China universities are also offering generous scholarships to attract top students and recruiting talented faculties to raise their profiles. Like Taiwan, it has also managed to persuade a number of foreign universities to establish operations in China.

One Belt One Road Initiative

The revival of the ancient Silk Road as One Road One Road by President Xi Jinping in 2013 signals China's ambitious plan to link China with Europe through Central and Western Asia and Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe through the Maritime Silk Road. This initiative is a powerful illustration of China's growing economic and political cloud. It will bring about closer economic and political collaborations between countries along the Belt and Road. The announcement by China Construction Bank to list RMB 1 billion worth of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Bond on Bursa Malaysia and the establishment of a second renminbi clearing centre in Malaysia (after Singapore) demonstrated the increasing influence of China in Asean.

The education sector also benefitted from the One Belt, One Road initiative as China seeks closer student and faculty exchanges with countries along the proposed route. Another strategy which China has adopted is establishing educational institutions overseas to promote its programme abroad. The establishments of Xiamen University's overseas campus in Malaysia and Soochow University campus in Laos are examples of China's universities rising presence overseas.



Statistics from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education showed that Australia was the most popular destination for Malaysian students, followed by United Kingdom, Taiwan, Egypt, United States and Indonesia (Table 2).

Table 2: Malaysian students studying abroad

	Total number of students	
	2014	2013
Australia	20,535	13,397
United Kingdom & Northern Ireland	15,780	15,020
Taiwan	12,137	8,530
Egypt	8,720	11,145
United States	6,914	6,600
Indonesia	4,527	4,685
Jordan	3,168	2,879

Source: Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education

The popularity of Australia as a study destination could be due to its proximity to Malaysia. In addition, as English language is the main medium of instruction, there is no communication barrier to most Malaysian students.

United Kingdom has always been a traditional favourite for Malaysian students. Because of the familiarity with the British education system, many students feel comfortable studying in British universities.

Taiwan remains a favourite for many Malaysian Chinese students who are educated in Chinese high schools. In addition, the affordability of a Taiwanese education as compared to a Western education is an important factor in the decision-making process of many parents.

Egypt follows next as a popular destination for many Malaysian Muslim students who felt that there are many benefits of studying in a Muslim country. However, the student numbers have declined by almost 22% in 2014 from 2013, most likely due to the concerns of political tensions and security in the country.

The United States remains a popular destination for Malaysian students. In 2014-2015, there were a total of 7,231 Malaysian students studying in the country, an increase of 6% from the year before. While the United States is geographically further compared to other countries listed above, many Malaysian students see having an American education as offering them an experience which is different from other countries. The international recognition of an American degree is a major consideration for most students,

Family ties also play an important role in determining the country of choice for students. Students normally would choose a country if they have family members or friends in a particular country. Statistics from the World Bank showed that Australia remains the most popular country for Malaysian seeking employment overseas, following by the United Kingdom and United States. The statistics, however, exclude Singapore which remains the top country for Malaysian workers who commute between the two countries on a daily basis (Table 3).

Table 3: Malaysians by Country and Occupations

Country	Number of Malaysian	Key Occupation
Australia	116,193	Professional - 30,010 Managers - 7,886 Technicians & trade workers - 5,353 Community & Personal Service Workers - 4,940
United Kingdom	69,939	Not Available
United States	61,765	Managerial and Professional Specialty Occupations - 23,926
Canada	25,530	Business & finance professionals - 3,315 Management - 2,010 Natural and applied sciences - 1,955 Education, law, social and community - 1,425

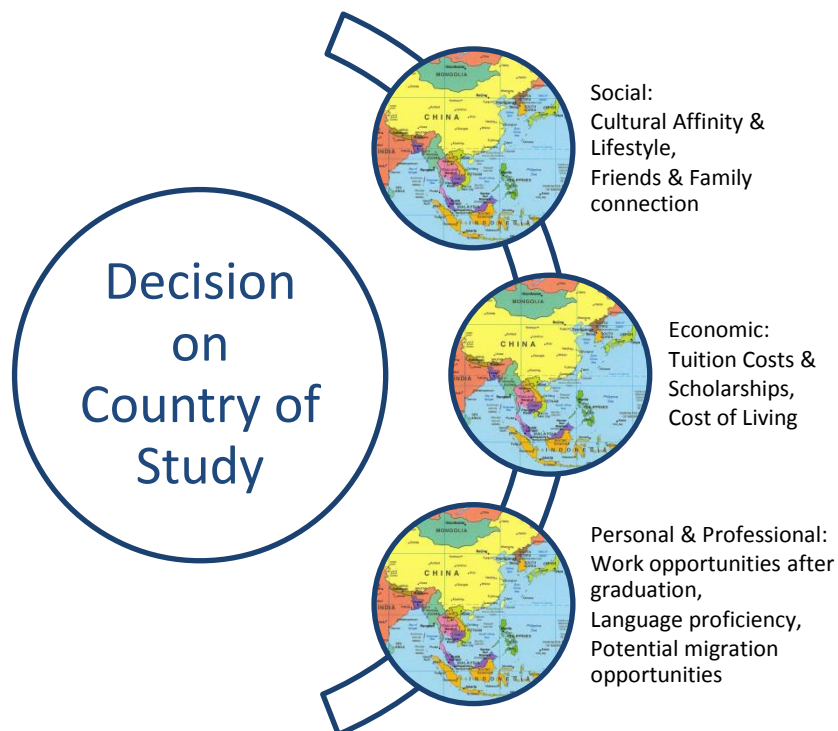
Source: World Bank

Development of a framework of student mobility

The drivers of student mobility are manifold. The list below contains some important considerations for students when making the choice to study abroad (Figure 1).

- 1) International recognition of qualification
- 2) Tuition Costs & Scholarships
- 3) Cost of Living
- 4) Proximity
- 5) Cultural affinity & lifestyle
- 6) Work opportunities after graduation
- 7) Language proficiency requirements
- 8) Ease of student visa application
- 9) Family & friends connection
- 10) Potential migration opportunities

Figure 1: Framework for student mobility



Obstacles to student mobility

One of the major considerations to student mobility is the recognition of the qualification earned. Full recognition is important for securing future job opportunities or implementing credit transfers.

Financing is another obstacle as tuition fees in Western countries such as the United States or United Kingdom may be unaffordable to many Malaysian without the offer of scholarships.

Language proficiency is another discouraging factor as students may either have to pass a language proficiency test before they are accepted by the university or they may be required to enroll in a language course as a pre-requisite. The latter will result in a longer duration of study which adds to the financial burden of students.

Formulation of a Logistics Regression Model

A logistic regression model is formulated to predict the probability of a student choosing a particular country as a choice of study. Logistics regression model is a non-linear transformation of linear regression. Logistics regression is used to model dichotomous outcome variables. The distribution is a S-shaped distribution with probabilities between 0 and 1.

$$\text{Logit}(p) = a + b_1 (\text{qualification}) + b_2 (\text{tuition}) + b_3 (\text{cost of living}) + b_4 (\text{distance}) + b_5 (\text{culture}) + b_6 (\text{work}) + b_7 (\text{language}) + b_8 (\text{visa}) + b_9 (\text{family}) + b_{10} (\text{migration})$$

Where:

- 1) Qualification = University ranking
- 2) Tuition = Costs of tuition / year
- 3) Cost of living = Mainly food and accommodation / year
- 4) Distance = km from Malaysia
- 5) Culture = Binary variable if the two countries have similar cultures
- 6) Work = Immigration statistics on work visa granted
- 7) Language = Binary variable if two countries have similar main languages
- 8) Visa = Number of days to apply for study visa
- 9) Family = Binary variables if there are family members in the country of choice
- 10) Migration = Immigration statistics on permanent residency granted

Areas for further research

This study has provided a model to determine Malaysian student mobility. Further empirical research could be carried out to enhance the model. The plethora of statistics required for such a study warrants closer private-public collaboration with the relevant ministries.

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