



ASPECTS OF CHINESE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Given the problems of studying abroad and cross-border of higher education, a large number of studies have been found in Malaysia. Thus, the idea of this study is to verify the aspects of Chinese undergraduate students in Malaysia. The target population of this study is all the third-year high school students, who are in the urban area of four third-tier cities in the Jiangxi province of China. In this study, the unlimited probability sampling design or simple random sampling is utilized finally. This research has contributed to theoretical implications. Notably, this study improves the current written literature on influential factors towards the intention of student enrolment in higher education institutions. The factors being examined are student belief, social influence and brand equity. Moreover, the finding indicates that all the independent variables have a significant relationship with foreign student enrolment. Therefore, the finding from this study can help researchers to have a clear insight and greater understanding of international students' enrolment of HEI in Malaysia in future by referring to this research.

Keywords: Chinese, undergraduate, students, Malaysia, empirical

1. Introduction

There are many scholars revealed either on general student's enrolment and examines more on other countries international student's enrolment. For instance, they showed that their crucial finding is comparative analysis toward Private versus Public Higher Education Institution for general students (Wilkinson & Yussof, 2005). This study aims

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to provide valuable insight into the aspect of general students' enrolment in HEI. Whereas another study "Internationalisation of Tertiary Education Services in Singapore" by Toh (2012) which study the foreign student enrol in Singapore; "The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations" establish by Ruiz (2014) that study about the foreign student enrolled in the United Kingdom; Understanding India: "The future of higher education and opportunities for international cooperation" by Everitt (2014) that regards to foreign student in India; Immigration Facts on Foreign Students by Ruiz (2010) study of foreign students in several countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, United State, Italy, etc. The choices available for students to study abroad have become a popular research field in higher education since student mobility has become a movement in recent decades. The number of students studying abroad is estimated at 8 million (Altbach, 2016), mainly comprises of undergraduate students and with overall expenses for undergraduate education are estimated at approximately 71,000 U.S. dollars (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation [HSBC], 2017), the total market value of international higher education can be calculated to be around 568 billion dollars by 2025. In this regard, students studying abroad can be regarded as an essential part of student mobility in the international higher education market (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016). Therefore, an examination of factors associated with how international students choose colleges is crucial. This study aims to investigate factors leading China students to choose higher education in Malaysia. In this regard, this research is a case study focusing on the factors affecting the factors of China students choosing to study in Malaysia. This study contributes to understanding international students' choices of colleges in developing countries. However, this study will focus on China students choosing Malaysia as their preferred higher learning destination due to the similar culture, recognition and affordability. The purpose of these studies was to investigate the characteristics of international students to pursue their studies in private universities or public universities overseas. This study examines factors influencing Malaysian students' intention to study at a higher educational institution (Wagner & Fard, 2009). However, the uniqueness of this study is to focus on the international students' enrolment in Malaysian Higher Learning Institution.

2. Literature Review

1,260,000 China students are studying abroad in 2015, accounting for about 25% of the total number of international students in the world, which one-fourth of total international students are Chinese overseas students (Wang & Miao, 2016). As stated, in 2000-2016, the number of overseas students from China increased from 39,000 in 2000 to 544,500 in 2016, and the number of students studying abroad increased rapidly by an annual average of 15% (National Statistics Bureau of China, 2016). In 2018, the number of Chinese students studying abroad was 662,100, up 8.83% year-on-year (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). In 1978-2016, the number of students

studying abroad had reached 4,586,600 people, and China is still the largest source of international students in the world (Wang & Miao, 2017). According to Andrade (2006), international students have contributed to intercultural learning and have improved the understanding of diversity and global issues with the local countries. Hence, Malaysian students get more exposure to foreign culture as well as building understanding between each other. Furthermore, international students create international business opportunities and world trade connections, become diplomatic allies as well as promote foreign policy interests (Schneider, 2000 as cited in Andrade, 2006). In some cases, international students may consider staying in the country after graduation to fill up positions for which few nationals are qualified (Gray, 2003 as cited in Andrade, 2006). Other than that, based on the diagram above indicates the flow of foreign enrolment in Malaysian HEI is fluctuate over the past five years, and it might become one of the main obstacles for Malaysian HEI to accomplish the mission of achieving 200,000 international students in the year 2020.

The family environment forms great influence in the decision making, but the educational background of the family members and the economic conditions of the family are undoubtedly one of the most basic and most important factors. This will not only affect an individual's decision to study abroad at their own expense but also affects the intention of studying abroad (Liu, 2016; Kuang & Qi, 2016). Family income has a significant impact on the decision-making behaviour of high school students studying abroad at their own expense (Wang, 2014). The cost of studying abroad is an important aspect for many families to choose to study abroad. The number of household income will affect the country and school to a certain extent, and the children of low-income families are less likely to go abroad at their own expense (Liu, 2015). There is a positive correlation between students' intention to study abroad and the income of their families, that is, the higher the income of the students' families, the more likely the students to study abroad, the higher the income level of the family and the better conditions for the students to study abroad (Sun, 2017). The education level of father and mother has a significant impact on the decision-making behaviour of high school students studying abroad at their own expense (Wang, 2014). With the increasing education level of parents, the possibility of their children going abroad to study is greater (Liu, 2015). It is the most significant difference when parents' education level is above college or below. If parents' education level is above college, students are more inclined to study abroad (Sun, 2017). Children from the family background of intellectuals and professionals are the most intention to study abroad, followed by civil servants' family and business families, ordinary workers and families, and the farmers' family origin students' desire is the weakest (Wang, 2014). The type of parents' occupation has a positive impact on students' intention to go abroad for cross-border HE (Sun, 2017). Besides, Zhan (2017) found that annual family income means the ability to pay to some extent. A family's annual income which is above RMB200,000 has a higher impact on the decision-making on studying abroad. Among families with annual incomes of more than RMB300,000, nearly half of them have made decisions to study abroad. For families whose annual income is less than

RMB100,000, only 6.8% of them make decisions to study abroad. Families with an annual income of less than RMB200,000 have also become an important part of self-funded overseas payers, accounting for 52.7% of the total number of students who have made overseas study decisions. This shows that, on the one hand, although relatively low-income families make a small proportion of decision-making to study abroad, because of the large population base, students from lower-income families account for about half of all those who decide to study abroad. On the other hand, it also shows that although annual income seems difficult to support their children to study abroad, it does not prevent them from making decisions to support their children to study abroad. It means that they either acquire new ability to pay in addition to their annual income or choose relatively low-cost overseas education products.

The sustained development of China's economy and the substantial increase in per capita paid income constitute a strong push for self-supporting studying abroad. With the increase of household disposable income, the intensity of resistance caused by the cost of studying abroad has weakened. The number of international students enrolled in tertiary education programs worldwide has exploded over the past two decades. It rose from 2 million in 1999 to 5 million in 2016, at an average annual rate of 5.1% among OECD countries and 6.4 % among non-OECD countries (Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators). The increase in foreign enrolment has been driven by a variety of domestic and external factors, both push (encouraging outward mobility) and pull factors (encouraging inward mobility) (UNESCO, 2013). The skills' needs increased knowledge-based and innovation-driven economies to spur demand for tertiary education worldwide, while local education capacities do not evolve fast enough to meet growing domestic demand. Rising wealth in emerging economies has further promoted students intending to enrol to higher learning institution to seek educational opportunities abroad. At the same time, economic factors, technological factors and cultural factors have contributed to the international mobility substantiality for a more affordable and less irreversible than the past (Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators). The implementation of mobility programme emphasizing on student overall capabilities development in most higher learning Institutions in Malaysia has promoted the rapid expansion of the scale of higher education in Malaysia which has significantly improved the overall quality and level of higher education and promoted the cooperation and communication between Malaysia universities and foreign universities. To a certain extent, the pull and competitiveness of Malaysia institutions of higher learning in the global international student education market were enhanced, directly and indirectly, laying a solid foundation for attracting a large number of neighbouring and distant state students and promoting the development of international students' Education in Malaysia. In 2013-2017, the number of Chinese students and international students enrolled by HEIs in Malaysia. Over the past five years, the number of international students enrolled by higher education institution in Malaysia has been in an increasing trend. The number and the proportion of Chinese students are increasing year by year. The number of Chinese students is the main international students in Malaysia.

From the theoretical perspective, the “Push-Pull” theory has been widely applied in the field of education, including the phenomenon of studying abroad. The push-pull factor theory has become a widely accepted analytical framework to explain the reasons for international students’ mobility (Sun, 2017). For the first time, Mc & Mary (1992) applied the “Push and Pull” theory to the field of education. Lawrence & Associates (1997) focused on the factors affecting the choice of destinations for Asian students. Given the national political policy level, Philip (1998) used “Push-Pull” theory to study the impact of international student mobility. The international student mobility in developing countries can be attributed to the eight push forces of home countries and the seven pull forces of the host countries.

The development of “Push-Pull” theory in the field of education for decades, can be seen that it has emerged from simple to complex, recessive to dominant, generalisation to concrete. The initial focus on the political level to the economic, cultural and social level; from the one-way “push” and “pull” of the home country and the host country to the two-way “push” and “pull”; from the national macro-level to the individual micro-level; from the external factors to the internal factors, comprehensive and systematic development, the theory developed systematically. At the same time, based on the research of critical “Push-Pull” theory scholars, the application in the education field is improved day by day. The current push and pull models of international students’ mobility mainly include: push and pull model of external factors, push and pull model of combining internal and external factors and push and pull model of interaction between internal and external factors (Li, 2015). The new “Push-Pull” theory is put forward to combine the national macroscopic level with the individual microscopic level, which overcomes the problem of the separation of internal and external factors. At the same time, the two-way push and pull factors of the country are also applied to the individual. Also, the process factors of personal choice will also be reflected in the individual push-pull process. The new model also separates all the pull factors and all the push factors to clearly distinguish the internal relations between the two factors for horizontal and vertical comparison (Liu, 2013).

Many studies have shown that students’ factors influence their choice to study abroad. Students’ factors are usually summarized as objective conditions and subjective motivation (Liu, 2013; Li, 2015; Zhan, 2017; Quang & Ooi, 2017). Many studies (Liu, 2013; Li, 2015; Zhan, 2017, Quang & Ooi, 2017) have also pointed out that students’ objective conditions have an essential impact on studying abroad, such as economy income, parents’ education level, parents’ occupation and so on. Sun (2017) conducted on the intention and influencing factors of high school students to study abroad in Suzhou, Jiangsu province of China. Using SPSS 18.0 to analyze the valid sample data of 504 students, it was found that nearly 50% of the students have the intention to go abroad for higher education. In terms of personal objective conditions, such factors as students’ academic performance, English achievement, parents’ education level, parents’ occupation, family income level, students’ expectations of studying abroad by their

relatives and friends, and whether there are expatriates around them, have a significant impact on students' intention to choose cross-border higher education.

3. Materials and Methods

According to the theory of "Push-Pull" and its application in the field of education, the pressure of Gaokao and employment, the current situation of higher education are the external factors of China, which push Chinese high school students to study in Malaysia. Access and opportunities, characteristics of higher education are the external factors of Malaysia, which pull Chinese high school students to study in Malaysia. Family resources endowment and academic performance are the internal factors of Chinese students' objective conditions, which influence Chinese high school students to choose to study in Malaysia. Ability improvement, effect and expectation are the internal factors of Chinese students' subjective motivations, which influence Chinese high school students to choose to study in Malaysia. According to the Theory of Reason Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior and its application in the field of education, the intention refers to the tendency of Chinese high school students to make a decision and choose to study in Malaysia. Their perceptions and attitudes towards the influence of Chinese factors, Malaysian factors and their conditions and motivations, will affect their intention and choice to study in Malaysia.

The target population of this study is all the third-year high school students, who are in the urban area of four third-tier cities (Ganzhou, Jiujiang, Shangrao and Yichun) in Jiangxi province of China. As stated, in 2018, the total number of students taking Gaokao in the urban areas of four third-tier cities is 20,389. The objective of this study is to examine factors that influence Chinese high school students' intention to choose to study abroad in Malaysia. Therefore, the unit of analysis is every third-year high school student, who is in the urban area of four third-tier cities (Ganzhou, Jiujiang, Shangrao and Yichun) in Jiangxi province of China. In this study, three probabilistic sampling designs are used to select sampling samples, namely, area sampling, proportional stratified sampling and simple random sampling. In this study, the unlimited probability sampling design or simple random sampling is utilized finally. This sampling design ensures that each element in the population has a known and equivalent possibility of being chosen as a subject.

Simple random sampling is a fundamental sort of sampling since it can be a part of other more complex sampling strategies. The standard of simple random sampling is that each object has the same probability of being picked. In this study, after the sample size of each city is determined, a simple random sampling can be used to select the research objects. Conceptually, simple random sampling is the simplest of the probability sampling techniques. It requires a complete sampling frame, which may not be accessible or practical to develop for the substantial population. Even if a complete frame is available, more efficient approaches may be possible if other useful information is available about the units in the population. Points of interest are of this sampling designs

incorporate free of classification error and least advance learning of the population other than the frame. Its simplicity also makes it relatively simple to interpret data collected in this way. Therefore, simple random sampling best suits circumstances where very little data is accessible about the population and data gathering can be adequately led on randomly distributed items, or where the cost of sampling is sufficiently little to make proficiency less important than simplicity. In this study, the sampling frame of the population is all the third-year high school students, who are in the urban area of four third-tier cities in Jiangxi province. The sampling frame of each city is the third-year high school students, who are in the urban area of each city. The sampling frames of four cities (Ganzhou, Jiujiang, Shangrao and Yichun) constitute the sampling frame of the population in this study.

4. Research Findings

The demographic study shows that the respondents, 235(54.9%) were males, 193(45.1%) were females in this study. The result of this study is that there are more males than females. This result of statistics is supported by Liu (2015) and sun (2017), that is, there are more males than females among Chinese overseas students. This study indicated that the number of students whose father has a degree or diploma is the largest, reaching 184 (43.0%). 66 (15.4%) students stated their fathers either had a Master or PhD. The number of students whose father graduated from a high school or specialized secondary school was 130 (30.4%). Only 48 (11.2%) students whose fathers graduated from middle school or below. As can be seen from the above data, among the high school students who are willing to study abroad, the majority of their fathers have received higher education, accounting for 58.4%. The number of students whose mother has a degree or diploma is the largest, reaching 199 (46.5%). 19 (4.4%) students stated their mothers either had a Master or PhD. The number of students whose mother graduated from a high school or specialized secondary school was 139 (32.5%). 71 (16.6%) students whose mothers graduated from middle school or below. As can be seen from the above data, among the high school students who are willing to study abroad, the majority of their mothers have received higher education, accounting for 50.9%. In this study, 0.7 was adopted as an acceptable critical value.

The modified structural equation model is used to test the relationships between the constructs based on the proposed hypotheses. Critical t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.96 (significance level = 5 percent), 2.58 (significance level = 1 percent) and 3.24 (significance level = 0.1 percent). For this study, a 5 per cent significance level (t-value 1.96) was used as a statistical decision criterion.

According to the first line of path parameters (Beta = 0.363, $P < 0.001$), the push of Chinese factors (PC) has a significant positive impact on the students' intention to study abroad (IM), which means that the push of Chinese factors (PC) will promote the students' intention to study abroad (IM).

According to the second line of path parameters ($\beta = 0.057, P > 0.05$), the Chinese students' objective conditions (OC) has not a significant positive impact on the students' intention to study abroad (IM), which means that the Chinese students' objective conditions (OC) will not promote the students' intention to study abroad (IM). In line with the third line of path parameters ($\beta = 0.313, P < 0.001$), the Chinese students' subjective motivations (SM) has a significant positive impact on the students' intention to study abroad (IM), which means that the Chinese students' subjective motivations (SM) will promote the students' intention to study abroad (IM). Consistent with the fourth line of path parameters ($\beta = 0.443, P < 0.001$), the pull of Malaysia's factors (PM) has a significant positive impact on the students' intention to study abroad (IM), which means that the pull of Malaysia's factors (PM) will promote the students' intention to study abroad (IM). According to the fifth line of path parameters in ($\beta = 0.557, P < 0.001$), the students' intention (IM) has a significant positive impact on the choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM), which means that the Chinese students' intention (IM) will promote the choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM). In proportion to the first line of bootstrap mediation effect, the standard estimate of the mediation path (PC---IM---CM) is 0.209, and the corresponding 95% confidence interval is [0.144, 0.277], which does not contain 0. It reaches significant level, and the mediation effect exists. That is, the students' intention to study abroad (IM) plays a mediating role in the influence of the push of China's factors (PC) on the Chinese students' choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM).

According to the second line of bootstrap mediation effect, the standard estimate of the mediation path (OC---IM---CM) is 0.033, and the corresponding 95% confidence interval is [-0.031, 0.105], which contains 0. It does not reach significant level, and the mediation effect does not exist. That is, the students' intention to study abroad (IM) does not play a mediating role in the influence of the Chinese students' objective conditions (OC) on the Chinese students' choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM).

In keeping with the third line of bootstrap mediation effect, the standard estimate of the mediation path (SM---IM---CM) is 0.180, and the corresponding 95% confidence interval is [0.115, 0.246], which does not contain 0. It reaches significant level, and the mediation effect exists. That is, the students' intention to study abroad (IM) plays a mediating role in the influence of the Chinese students' subjective motivations (SM) on the Chinese students' choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM).

In proportion to the fourth line of bootstrap mediation effect, the standard estimate of the mediation path (PM---IM---CM) is 0.255, and the corresponding 95% confidence interval is [0.191, 0.319], which does not contain 0. It reaches significant level, and the mediation effect exists. That is, the students' intention to study abroad (IM) plays a mediating role in the influence of the pull of Malaysia's factors (PM) on the Chinese students' choice to study at Malaysian HEIs (CM).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research has contributed to theoretical implications. Notably, this study improves the current written literature on influential factors towards the intention of student enrolment in HEI. The factors being examined are student belief, social influence and brand equity. According to Shaw (2005) stated that previous studies have offered some examples, recommendations and considerations for institutions in structuring and carrying out their research studies on the educational benefits of diversity. Therefore, the finding from this study can help researchers to have a clear insight and greater understanding of international students' enrolment of HEI in Malaysia in future by referring to this research study. Next, the findings of this study provide a reference for students, academician or researchers who plan to study and research in this field as there is less established research done towards international students' enrolment of HEI in Malaysia. Last but not least, Universities build a recognizable brand by creating a memorable logo. It should represent the universities have positive image and able to convey a message to people, and it should be easy for people to make a connection between the brand and the education that attempts to be offered. Besides, it can be used as a guideline for those students looking for further study after finished secondary school life.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, international students were the only specific age of the group (the majority in the age group of 19-25) that centralized in this study. Hence, the result of this research will not be accurate if the target respondent is altered to other age groups like the age from 17 to 18. Thus, future researchers are advisable to ensure target respondents of the questionnaire survey are distributed relatively based on the region and age group ratio to produce a result with higher generalizability and representative for all international students. Some respondents might also give imprecise respond during the survey as they think and believe that some of the information acquired may infringe their privacy or language barrier among the respondent. These circumstances will influence the researchers from receiving actual and accurate information related to this research.

Researchers are recommended to expand the study to a broader geographical area or different age groups for better generalisation in the future research. Instead of just a single university, future research can be done by including other universities in Malaysia as there are different regions and age group international students so they might have different thoughts towards enrolment of HEI in Malaysia. Besides that, researchers are also recommended to ensure that target respondents for the questionnaire survey are distributed relatively based on the region and age group ratio to acquire result with greater generalizability and representative for all international students.

Nevertheless, there are some recommendations to overcome the problem of accuracy, and trustable of the data obtain through the questionnaire that leads by the inappropriate answer provided by the respondents due to their language barrier or other factors. Firstly, before distributing the questionnaire to the respondents, the researcher

has to give a precise description about the purpose of conducting this questionnaire to let the respondent to feel this questionnaire is safe, and the privacy is protected when they are answering the questionnaire. Moreover, the researchers can assist the respondents to answer the questionnaire if they meet any problem when the times, they submit their questionnaire back to the researcher.

In conclusion, this study had achieved the research objective in determining the determinants of foreign student enrolment in Malaysia HEI. Scale measurement with internal scale and inferential analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. Last but not least, this finding indicates that all the independent variables have a significant relationship towards foreign student enrolment.

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