AshEse Journal of Economics
Vol. 7(2), pp. 312-324, July, 2021
ISSN: 2396-8966

http://www.ashese.co.uk/economics1/blog

Full Length Research

Factors Influencing International Students' Selection of Universities in China: A Case Study of Selected Universities in Chengdu

Raphael Nimako[1*], Derrick Acheampong[2], and Prince Annor[3]

[1*]University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, [2] koforidua Technical University, [3]Internal Anditor-Ghana Education Service

*Corresponding author. E-mail: excoderaph@yahoo.com

Received July, 2021; Accepted July, 2021

The Chinese government attached great importance to education by offering international exchange programs for international students. This research determined the factors influencing international students' selection of universities in China (Higher Education Institutions). Both qualitative and quantitative data were used. The results were discussed based on the Partial Least Square Estimation (PL-SE) and the Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) outcome. From the four independent variables, Cost Related (CR) Issues was found to have the highest coefficient path, followed by Government Initiatives (GI), Institutional Reputation (IR), and Cultural Adaptability (CA) respectively. Cost related issue (74.4). Likewise, cultural adaptability (72.7) being the second highest had the lowest under importance value (0.151). The lowest performing construct was government initiatives (60.3). Thus, managerial actions targeted at improving international students' intake must focus on developing systems and policies that will help alleviate the cost or financial responsibilities of their students. This can be done by instituting scholarship programs and providing opportunities that will enable students to engage in part-time jobs to support their financial obligations. These factors should be considered by Higher Education Institute managers to improve their marketing strategies in attracting foreign students to enroll at their institutions.

Keywords: Higher Education Institution, International students, Selection factors, China

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

One way of accessing higher education by all is through countries offering international exchange programs for which China is no exception. As an essential component of international exchanges and cooperation, international students' education has been given great importance by the Chinese government. Students in pursuit of higher education are becoming one of the main priorities of universities not only in Europe but also worldwide. Most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) include internationalization as a part of their strategies, thus, contributing to the development of study programs in English, guest lecturer involvement, and participation in other activities aimed at attracting foreign staffs and students. Brochado (2009) suggests that all services provided by HEI should be managed or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market. Although there have been some works done in elucidating higher education and its advancement, there is still less work done to explore in the context of international students

interested in studying abroad (Davey, 2005)[2]. This study therefore focuses on the most significant stakeholder related to higher education that is the student because a student is mainly responsible for the choice of a higher education institution in which he/she gains his/her study experience.

Statement of the problem

Despite the growing research interest in international students' higher education destination choice (Ahmad, 2015; Forsey 2012; Naidoo 2012), and ignoring the subtle growth in other geopolitically important regions (Wilkins et al., 2012), very little is known about the factors influencing the migration of students from other parts of the world to China. Most of the research in this field tends to concentrate on the choice criteria of students to study in English-speaking countries (Maringe and Carter, 2007). There is a large number of international students choosing to study in newly emerging educational hubs, for example, students opting to study in China, has created a new trend, and as such, there is the need to know what reasons make these students decide to come to China for higher education. However, the finding of this research would be useful for educational institutions in China to have some knowledge as to how international students select China as an educational destination for their study and motivated the researcher.

Objective of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the factors that explains foreign students' choice of Chinese universities.

Research question

This study addresses "what explains foreign students' choice of Chinese universities?" based on the objectives.

Review of Literature

First and foremost, for the Cost Related Issues (CRI), Karl and Yousefi (2009) have identified based on a research several factors which influence the students' intention of choosing a certain higher education institution and these were: the cost of education, the content and structure of the study programs, the facilities offered by the university, the value of education and the influence exerted by family and friends. However, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) "further identified six factors influencing the selection of a host country: 1) knowledge and awareness of the host country, 2) personal recommendations, 3) cost issues, 4) environment, 5) geographic proximity and 6) social links".

In terms of Institutional Reputation (IR) as a factor influencing international students' selection of universities, Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) pointed out that the quality of program of study, campus safety, cost, and academic reputation are the top key criteria used by students and parents to choose institutions. Shah and Brown (2009) reported that the only quantitative study undertaken in Australia with 750 students on factors influencing student choice to study with a private higher education institution in top three reasons in rank order are: quality of teaching staff; quality of courses; and reputation of the college.

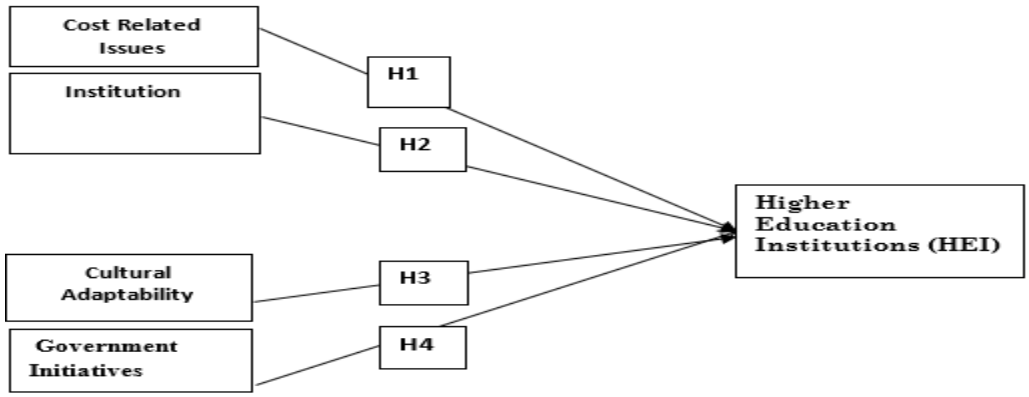
Moreover, another factor by other researchers' was Government Initiative (GI). The introduction of tuition fees for non-EU students in Sweden from the autumn term 2011 caused an instant decrease of international student applications. The Local Newspaper reported that there were fewer than 1300 international students registered for the 2011 autumn term compared to the previous academic year where over 16,000 applicants were registered (Guibourg, 2011). Further, the Swedish Agency for Higher Education Services' (Verket för Högskoleservice, VHS) analysis showed that China accounted for the largest drop in numbers of students enrolling while in terms of percentages, the enrolment from some countries almost disappeared completely. The drop of applicants from Pakistan and Bangladesh were more than 90 percent while applicants from Iran, India, and Thailand dropped by more than 80 percent (Clark, 2012). This has led to a shift in the student population in Swedish HE in terms of an increase of European student groups.

Notwithstanding, Cultural Adaptability is another factor by some researchers'. In China and India, the two driving factors for international education are the desire to understand western culture and to obtain an education better than that offered locally (Mazzarol et al., 2001). The recognition of cultures has increased due to globalization (Würtz, 2006).

Theoretical Framework (Push-Pull Factor Theory of international student decision making process)

The aforementioned key factors together with others stem from a model used by most authors which are known as the "push-pull" models. The "push-pull" models have been used to understand international student flows (Cummings, 1984)., students' motivation to study abroad and international students' choice of university (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The push factors are factors associated with the home country environment considered by students as being unsatisfactory, thus influencing them to leave their country to look elsewhere to undertake tertiary education (Ahmad and Hussain, 2017). Examples of such push factors includes: the lack of capacity and opportunities provided by the local educational institutions in the home countries, lower quality of education, lack of availability of specialization programs, limited access to funding and employer preference for overseas qualifications (Ahmad, 2015; Altbach, 2004; Chen, 2007; Lee, 2014).

The pull factors, on the other hand, includes what potential students may consider being attractive features in the host country, and those most often mentioned in the literature include the reputation of the institution and/or country, exchange rate, lower cost/fees and cost of living, opportunity to experience a new and different culture, English-speaking environment, the policies of the host county's government



Picture 1: Research model
Source: own

concerning the recruitment of international students and the quality of the program and course (Maringe and Carter 2007; Pimpa 2005; Singh 2014; Wilkins et al., 2012). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) suggested international students use a three-step selection process in which a student first decides to study internationally, then selects a host country (influenced by a country's "pull factors"), and finally, selects an institution within that host country (influenced by the institutions' "pull factors").

Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that all international students use this process to select a study destination as some International students may by-pass a host country and choose a host institution directly (for example, choosing a highly ranked university regardless of its country) (Chen, 2007). The findings of the research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) suggested that in order for host governments and their institutions of higher education to attract a greater number of international students, they need to consider the importance of these 'push–pull' factors that influence students' study destination choice.

DATA AND METHODS

Measure and variables

The survey research design was employed in this study. This design provided the opportunity for the research to be carried out within its real-life context. Since theoretical concepts cannot be measured directly, they therefore, have to be operationalized into measurable items (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Research design and method

The study adopted an exploratory research design. The research design was used to specify the relationship existing among the variables of the research. It defined the structure of any scientific work, giving a systematic approach to the study. The study made use of a survey research design, which was aimed at highlighting current issues through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation more. This study made use of quantitative research design as it was based on assessing numerical data which is quantifiable. Below is a research model the researchers' used to ascertain the factors that influence the selection of international students into universities in China (See Picture 1).

Hypothesis of the study

1. **H_1:** Cost Related Issues (CRI) significantly affect the decision of international students' selection of higher education institutions in China.
2. **H_2:** Institutions' International Reputation (IR) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institution in China.
3. **H_3:** Cultural Adaptability (CA) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institutions in China.
4. **H_4:** Government Initiatives (GI) significantly affect international students' selection of higher education institutions in China.

Population

A population of a research study refers to all people or items (unit of analysis) with the characteristics one wishes to study. The unit of analysis may be a person, group, organization, country, object or any other entity that one wishes to draw inferences (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The targeted population for this research was all international students currently studying in China in some selected universities (HEI) in Sichuan provincial capital, Chengdu. Researchers choose a sample rather than using the whole population because the sampling process saves time and money. If researchers choose the right sample, they will get results that reflect the whole population on a large scale

Table: 1 Systematic Evaluation of PLS-SEM Results

Evaluation of the overall model	• **No global goodness-of-fit criterion**
Evaluation of the measurement Models	Reflective measurement models: • Internal consistency (Composite Reliability) • Indicator Reliability • Convergent Validity (Average variance extracted) • Discriminant Validity
Evaluation of the structural model	• The coefficient of determination (R^2) • Size and significance of path coefficients • Partial least square estimation results
Additional analyses	• Importance-performance map analysis

(Patton, 1990).

Sample Selection

A stratified sampling technique was applied in selecting two (2) universities in Chengdu the capital of Sichuan province in China. These two universities were University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC) and Sichuan University (SCU). The selection of these universities was based on a variety of factors such as the number of international students and the number of international programs being offered by these universities.

Sampling Procedure

As advocated by Campbell (1995) one critical stage in collecting data is the selection process if any meaning findings can be arrived at. Key informants play a critical role in eliminating biases in field survey since actor possess worth of information relevant to the subject matter understudy. For this study, the researchers' employed a random sampling approach to collect data from a key informant. Random sampling was adopted because it enables the researcher to eliminate the biases associated with purposive sampling approaches (Yin, 2017)[26]. These individual's view was collected through field survey over a given period.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data was utilized for the purpose of this study. In collecting the appropriate primary data for this research, questionnaires were administered to identify and gain an understanding of the key factors influencing international students' selection of higher education institutions in China through a proposed research questions.

Data Analysis

After the fieldwork, the responses to the questionnaires were analyzed. The questionnaires were analyzed using the Partial Least Square Equation Model. The quantitative process of analyzing data was employed using Smart PLS student version 3.0. figures and tables were also used to bring out salient points. After the validation of the survey data, t-test or t-statistics were conducted to test the relationship between independent and its impact on international students' selection of universities and further used to test the hypothesis formulated. Therefore, the hypothesized model of this study was tested, and the analysis of relationship defined by the theoretical model with the use of Smart PLS 3.0 software (Hair Jr, and Hult, 2016).

RESULTS

Evaluation of the Measurement Models

A common approach in PLS-SEM technique is the presentation of results in two phases. The first is to focus on the reliability and the validity of measures used. The logic behind this was to ensure that measures are representing the constructs of interest and that there is a good reason for them to be used to test the theoretical model of the study. Table 1 highlights a systematic approach to evaluating of PLS-SEM results as proposed by Hair et al. (2014).

Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Instruments

In this study, the assessment of the reflective measurement models included; composite reliability to evaluate internal consistency, average variance extracted (AVE) to evaluate the convergent validity, and discriminant validity to ascertain the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability is the extent to which the measure of a construct is consistent or dependable. Using a scale to measure the same construct multiple times, we get the same result every time, assuming the underlying phenomenon is not changing (Bhattacherjee 2012).

Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency reliability is a measure of consistency

Table: 2 Construct, Standardized Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability Values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

CONSTRUCT	Items	Standardized Loadings	Cronbach's. Alpha	AVE.	Composite. Reliability
	CRI1	0.555	**0.763**	**0.530**	**0.844**
COST RELATED ISSUES	CRI2	0.850			
	CRI3	0.514			
	CRI4	0.814			
	CRI5	0.833			
INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION	IR1	0.645	**0.761**	**0.504**	**0.832**
	IR2	0.499			
	IR3	0.816			
	IR4	0.752			
	IR5	0.791			
CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY	CA1	0.682	**0.813**	**0.647**	**0.878**
	CA2	0.905			
	CA3	0.897			
	CA4	0.706			
GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES	GI1	0.660	**0.796**	**0.624**	**0.868**
	GI2	0.806			
	GI3	0.814			
	GI4	0.865			
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	HEI1	0.912	**0.826**	**0.745**	**0.897**
	HEI2	0.916			
	HEI3	0.751			

between different items of the same construct. Bryman and Cramer (2005) asserts that internal reliability is particularly important when there are multiple measurement items for each construct. In this research, all the constructs consisted of multiple items. Cost related issue and Institutional reputation were each measured with five items, Cultural adaptability, and Institutional reputation were each measured with four items while Higher education institution was measured using three items. The conventional criterion for internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha, which provides an estimate of the reliability based on the inter-correlation of the observed indicator variable. Alternatively, there is another measure known as composite reliability which takes into account the different outer loadings of the indicator variables. Hair (2014) states that, specifically, composite reliability values of 0.60 to 0.70 are considered as acceptable in exploratory studies, even though, Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) argues that in situations of advanced stages of research, values that range between 0.70 and 0.90 can be considered satisfactory. This study applied both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability criteria to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the measurement items of this study.

The results mentioned in Table 2 and Figure 1 shows that the highest composite reliability coefficient is the construct, higher education institution (HEI) (0.897), while the other constructs had their composite reliability coefficient values above the criteria strictly recommended 0.7, and above. Also, Cronbach's alpha values shown in Table 2, and Figure 2 demonstrates that all values fall within the acceptable threshold of > 0.5. Consequently, the results revealed that both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of the entire constructs were above their respective recommended cut-off points, that is, > 0.5 for Cronbach's alpha, and > 0.7 for composite reliability. This is an indication that internal consistency and adequate reliability of the constructs measures all the items. Besides, all other estimation values were above the recommended cut off point indicating strong reliability and high internal consistency in measuring relationship in the model.

Validity Analysis

Construct validity examines how well a given measurement scale is measuring the theoretical construct that it is expected to measure.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity analyzes the closeness with which a measure relates to the construct which is purported to measure. It can be proven by comparing the observed values of an indicator of one construct with that of other indicators of the same construct whiles demonstrating the similarity between values of these indicators. In establishing the convergent validity of this study, the researcher considered the Fornell and Larcker (1981) proposed criterion of convergent validity, in this case, average variance extracted (AVE). Ideal standardized loading estimates should be 0.7 or higher and AVE estimation should be higher than 0.5. Therefore, in this study, the

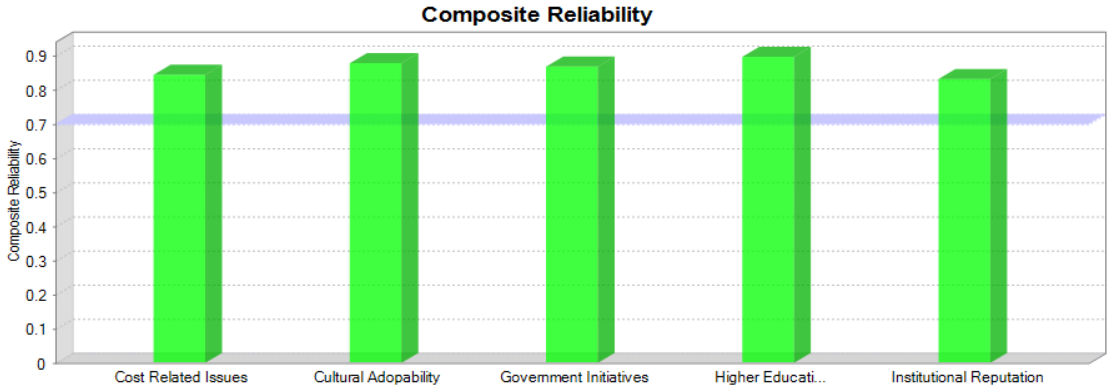


Figure 1 Graphical presentation of Composite Reliability Values for Internal Consistency Reliability Assessment

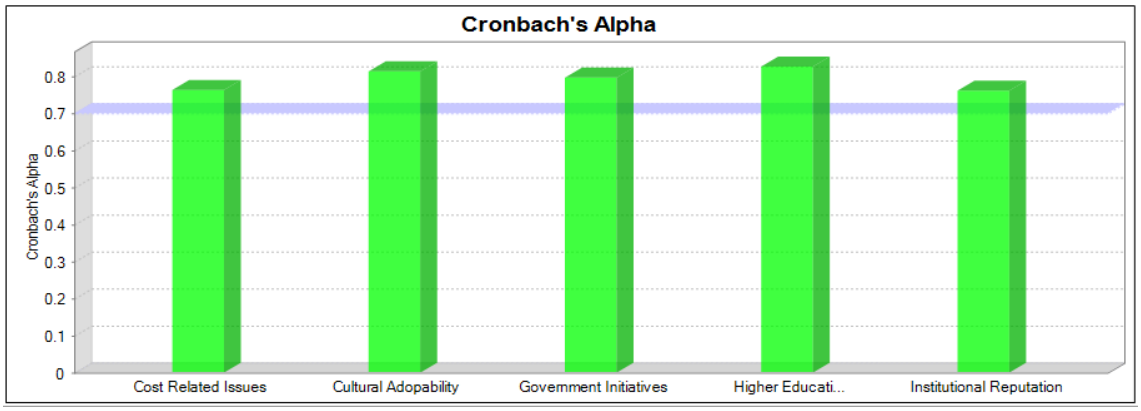


Figure 2: Graphical representation of Cronbach's Alpha Values for Internal Consistency Reliability Assessment

minimum cut off criteria of AVE required to be higher than 0.5 was used for assessing the convergent validity (Chin, 1998; Höck and Ringle, 2006). Results presented in Table 3 and Figure 3 demonstrate that the average variance extracted for all constructs were above the 0.50 threshold thus, establishing an acceptable convergent validity of the latent constructs used in the model.

Discriminant Validity

The validity of the data was examined in conformity with the method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). They suggested that in order to have a significant validating value for data set, the square root of the average of each latent variable should be larger than the correlation among the variables tested. In this study, the discriminant validity algorithm found in smart PLS. Table 3 presents the results of discriminant validity tested on Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Significance of Path Coefficients

The next step of the structural model evaluation process was the assessment of the path coefficients between the structural model's latent variables. The magnitude of path coefficient shows the degree or level of relationship that exists between two latent variables. From the four independent variables, CRI was found to have the highest coefficient path, followed by GI, IR, and CA respectively as shown in the diagram in Figure 4.

Partial Least Square Estimation Results

From the results of the partial least square structural equation model by the researcher, it was revealed that all the latent variables examined to some extent have impact or influence on HEI. The analysis of data resulted in an R^2 of 0.779 (Figure 5) which gives a strong significance that explains the extent to which the latent variables influences HEI. The R^2 gives an indication that 77.9% of the variation in HEI has been explained by the latent variables.

Out of the four independent variables, CRI was found to have the highest significant influence on HEI. CRI2, CRI4 and CRI5 were high enablers of CRI with standardized loadings of 0.850, 0.814 and 0.833 respectively. CRI2 talked about affordable living standards in China, CRI4 talked about anticipated higher returns on educational investment and CRI5 talked about the availability of scholarship schemes for potential students. Availability of scholarships schemes for potential students, affordable living standards and higher return

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

Construct	CRI	CA	GI	HEI	IR
Cost Related Issues (CRI)	0.728				
Cultural Adaptability (CA)	0.513	0.804			
Government Initiative (GI)	0.766	0.430	0.790		
Higher Education Institution (HEI)	0.809	0.575	0.815	0.863	
Institutional Reputation (IR)	0.814	0.575	0.913	0.844	0.710

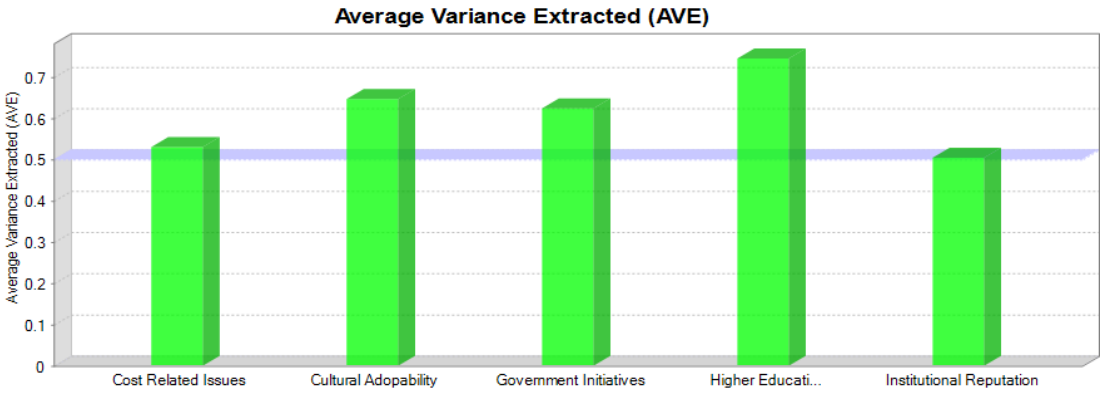


Figure 3: Graphical presentation of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for Convergent Validity Assessment

Figure 4: Graphical presentation of path coefficient for assessing the strength of the relationship of the latent variables

on educational investment for studying in China had an influence on international students' selection of universities in China (HEI). This result therefore, support hypothesis one which states that CRI has an influence on HEI.

Despite GI and IR also having an impact on HEI, their impact is not as high as that of CRI. GI and IR had a correlation coefficient of 0.310 and 0.213 respectively. This supports hypothesis 2 and 4. IR3, IR5, and IR4 are high enablers of HEI with standardized loadings of 0.816, 0.791 and 0.752 respectively. IR3 is about quality learning facilities such as library and classrooms. Also, IR4 is about national and provincial ranking status of the institution. The paths of GI, GI4, GI3, and GI2 are high enablers of HEI with standardized loadings of 0.865, 0.814 and 0.806 respectively. GI2 is about favorable government policies towards international students, GI4 is about the provision of opportunities for students to gain international career experience whereas GI3 is about flexible immigration laws especially relating to students work and study permit. These findings support hypothesis two and hypothesis four. Also, according to the results of the analysis of this study,

Table 4 T- Statistics and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Mean	Standard Deviation	T. Statistics	P. Value	Remarks
CRI→HEI	0.320	0.115	2.753	0.006	Accepted
IR→HEI	0.164	0.063	2.486	0.013	Accepted
GI→HEI	0.277	0.143	2.211	0.027	Accepted
CA→HEI	0.241	0.170	1.254	0.210	Not Accepted

T-Stats: ≥1.96→ Accepted. T-Stats: <1.96→ Not Accepted

Table 5 Total Effect and Index Values for the IMPA of Higher Education Institution

Construct	Importance (Total Effects)	Performance (Index Values)
Cost Related Issues	0.336	74.386
Cultural Adaptability	0.151	72.692
Government Initiatives	0.248	60.229
Institutional Reputation	0.197	63.477

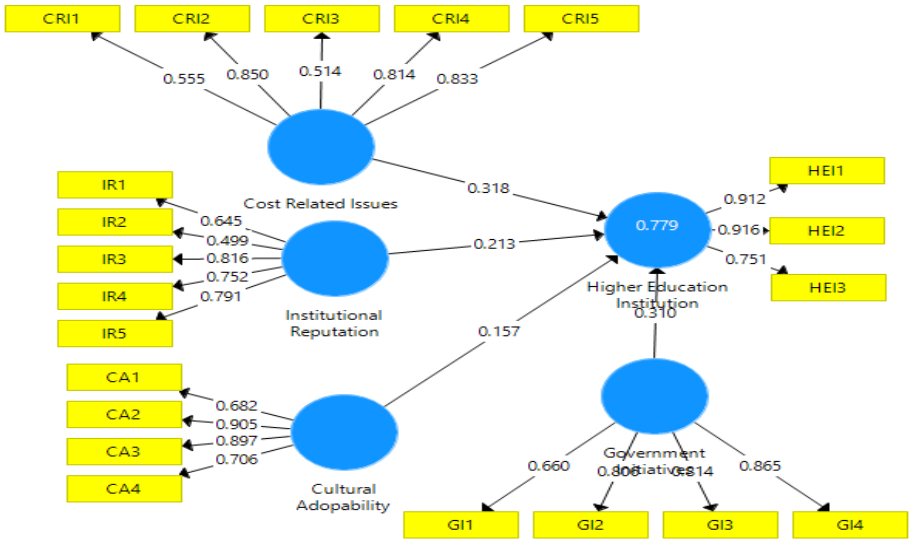


Figure 5: Path Estimation Results

CA is positively related to HEI. However, relative to other independent variables, CA has a lower positive value to HEI (0.157).

Testing of Hypothesis

The strength of the structural model and the testing of the hypothesis were examined using bootstrapping resampling method to generate empirical t-statistics for significance testing in evaluating the hypothesized relationships. The testing of the hypothesis enabled the researcher to substantiate and confirm the proposed path relationships as proposed in the conceptual model. In addition to the path estimation, the t-statistics was conducted to test the formulated hypothesis for the study. Hypothesis testing is essential if the researcher can identify which set of variables had a significant influence on international students' selection of universities in China. In order to accept or reject the stated hypothesis, the t-statistics was used as the unit of measurement. The threshold of 1.96 was adopted. Table 4 showed the mean, standard deviation, t-statistics and the P. values of the dependent and independent variables. According to the results of the t-statistics, three of the stated hypothesis suggested that these independent variables influenced students' selection of universities in China.

Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) and Results

Table 5 presented the data utilized for the IPMA on International Students' selection of universities in China, as illustrated in Figure 7. The x-axis represented the total effects (Importance) of the exogenous constructs (Cost related issues, Government initiatives, Institutional reputation, and Cultural adaptability) on the target construct (Higher education

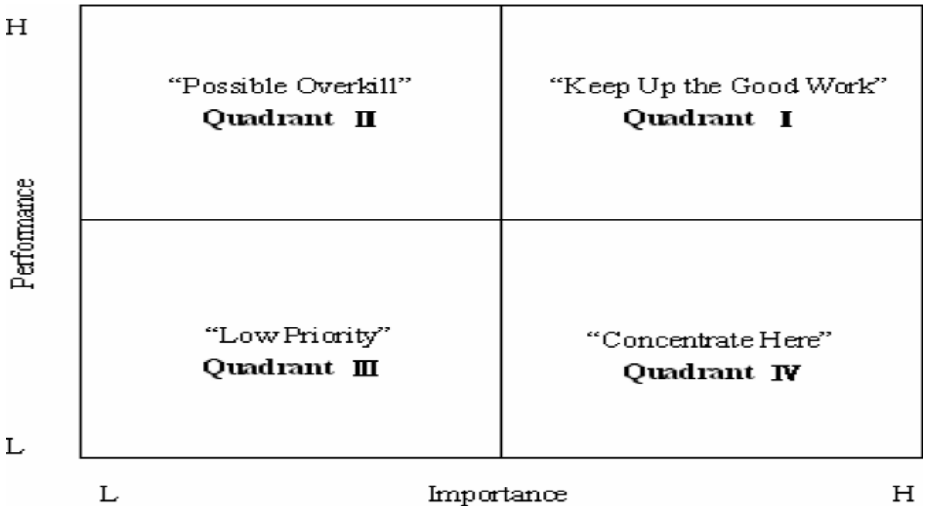


Figure 6: Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)
Source: Martilla & James (1977)

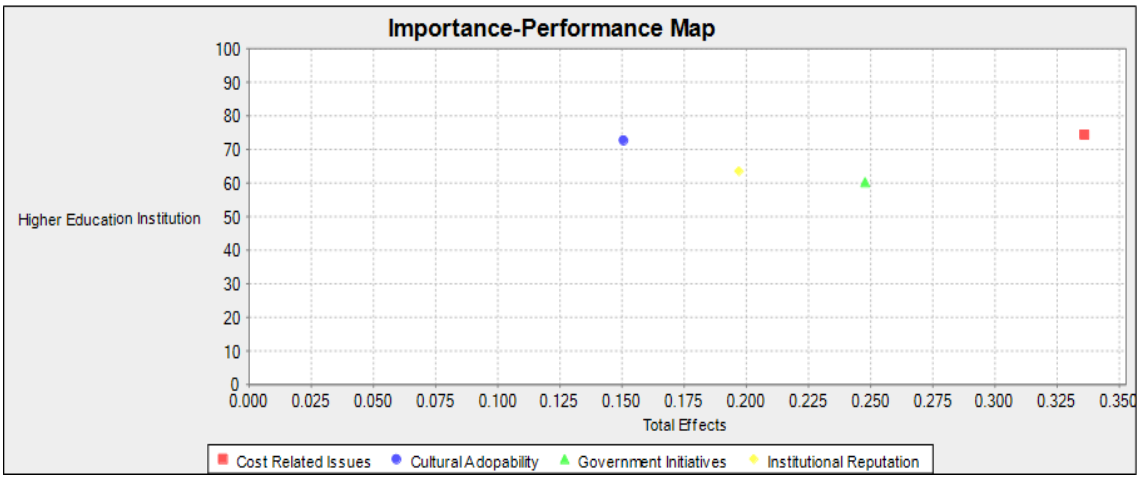


Figure 7: IPMA Results of Exogenous Constructs Higher Education Institution as Target Construct

institution). Whiles, the y-axis depicted the average constructs scores (Performance) of the four exogenous variables. A cut through the arithmetic mean of the available data was performed as depicted in Figure 6 and the following portions were obtained: Quadrant I (Keep up the good work), Quadrant II (Possible overkill), Quadrant III (Low priority), and Quadrant IV (Concentrate here). The IPMA as presented in figure 11 showed that cost related issues, government initiatives and institutional reputation are located in Quadrant I (Keep Up the Good Work) which was characterized by both importance and effectiveness on the selection of universities. Cultural adaptability falled under Quadrant II (Possible Overkill).

The results revealed that cost related issues (with a total effect value of 0.336) was particularly essential in explaining the utilization of the selection of universities in China. Another direct predecessor of selection of universities; government initiative (0.248) and institutional reputation (0.197) had relatively low importance in explaining international students´ selection of universities in China. However, it is also important to note that, cultural adaptability was the least important variable in explaining the selection of higher education institution in China as demonstrated in Table 5. On the other hand, it is evident from the important performance map analysis that the exogenous construct with the highest performance is a cost related issue (74.4). Likewise, cultural adaptability (72.7) being the second highest had the lowest under importance value (0.151). The lowest performing construct as far as selection of higher education is concerned was government initiatives (60.3).

Table 6: Linkage of corresponding; research objectives, research questions, variables and hypotheses

Research Objective	Research Question	Variables and Hypotheses	Linkage with Analyzed Results and Hypothesized Relationships
1. To ascertain the effect of cost related issues on the selection of universities in China. 2. To evaluate the impact of the institution's international reputation on the selection of universities in China.	1. How do cost related issues affect the selection of universities in China? 2. What is the impact of the institution's international reputation on the selection of universities in China?	**HI:** Cost Related Issues (CRI) significantly affect the decision of international students' selection of higher education institutions in China. **H2:** Institutions' International Reputation (IIR) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institution in China. **H3:** Cultural Adaptability (CA) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institutions in China. **H4:** Government Initiatives (GI) significantly affect international students' selection of higher education institutions in China.	1. Effect of Cost Related Issues on Higher Education Institution. (CRI→HEI) 1. Impact of Institutional Reputation on Higher Education (IR→HEI)
3. To explore the impact of government initiatives on students' choice of universities in China.	3. How does government initiative influence students' choice of universities in China?		1. Effect of Government Initiative on Higher Education Institution. (GI→HEI)
4. To investigate the students' cultural adaptability on the selection of universities in China.	4. What is the impact of cultural adaptability on students' selection of universities in China?		
			Important Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) and Results on the selection of Universities in China (HEI)

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the researcher to ensure coherency and uniformity in the discussion of the analyzed results, the researcher demonstrated in Table 6, a linkage of corresponding; research objectives, research questions, variables and hypotheses, and hypothesized relationships among latent variables in the proposed conceptual model.

Effect of Cost Related Issues (CRI) on Higher Education Institution

The researchers' sought to evaluate the first objective of the research by answering the research question: how do cost related issues affect the selection of universities in China (Higher Education Institution)? The hypothesized relationship in the conceptual model that was used to evaluate this research question was H1. In the proposed conceptual model, these researchers hypothesized that cost related issues would have a positive effect on the selection of universities in (H1). The parameter estimates results are as shown in Table 4 and Figure 7 (That is. H1: CRI →HEI; $\beta = 0.318$, t-test value = 2.753, $p = 0.006$). The above hypothesis was identified to be both positive and statistically significant. Thus, suggesting the existence of a positive effect of cost related issues on the selection of higher education institution. This result is consistent with existing literature of Karl and Yousefi (2009). They identified several factors which influence the students' intention of choosing a certain higher education institution and these were the following: the cost of education, the content and structure of the study programs, the facilities offered by the university, the value of education, and the influence exerted by family and friends. Though the writer mentioned a variety of influential factors in the selection of an institution, the cost was also part of the list. This shows that cost is critical when it comes to issues of selecting international higher education.

Also, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) "further identified six factors influencing the selection of a host country: 1) knowledge and awareness of the host country, 2) personal recommendations, 3) cost issues, 4) environment, 5) geographic proximity and 6) social links". With the result of this study and the supporting literature, it can be confirmed that Cost related issues significantly has an influence on

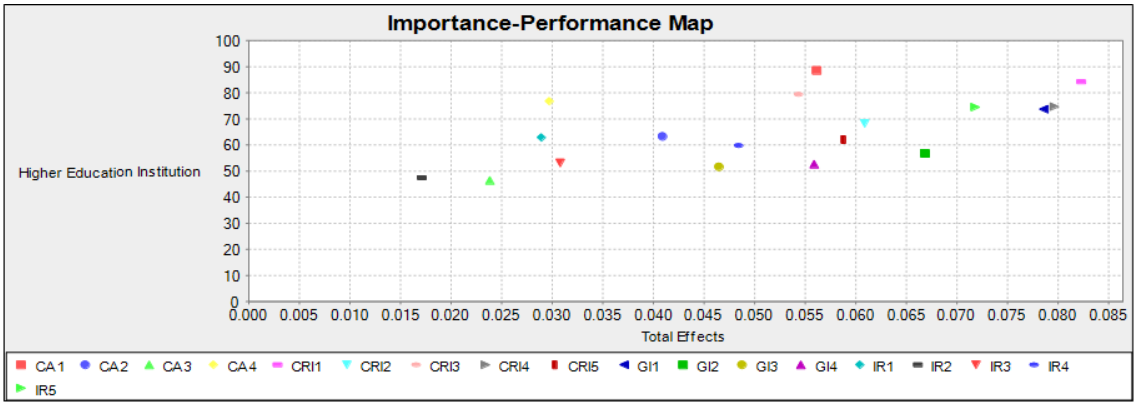


Figure 8: IPMA Results of Construct Indicators Higher Education Institution as Target Construct

international students' selection of universities in China (Higher Education Institution).

Impact of Institutional Reputation (IR) on Higher Education Institution

In this study, the proposed conceptual model hypothesized that institutions' international reputation (IR) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institution in China as stated in H2. The parameter estimates results were shown in Table 4 and Figure 7 above (That is. H2: IR →HEI; β = 0.213, t-test value = 1.254, p = 0.210). The result was also supported by studies undertaken with both students and parents by Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) who showed that the quality of program of study, campus safety, cost, and academic reputation are the top key criteria used by students and parents to choose institutions. Shah and Brown (2009) report that the only quantitative study undertaken in Australia with 750 students on factors influencing student choice to study with a private higher education institution in top three reasons in rank order are: quality of teaching staff; quality of courses; and reputation of the college.

On the other hand, pull factors such as institutional reputation, international recognition of qualification, teaching quality, and locational factors appear to exert greater influence on specific institutional choice. What is interesting is that overseas students differ in their motivations for studying abroad.

Impact of Government Initiatives (GI) on Higher Education Institution

Government initiatives (GI) was hypothesized to have a positive effect on higher education institution that is, H4. The parameter estimates results as shown in Table 4 and Figure 7 above (That is, H4: GI →HEI; β = 0.310, t-test value = 2.211, p = 0.027) indicated that GI was an influential factor affecting the selection of higher education institution in China. These findings were consistent with the proposed hypothesis (H4) in the model which suggested that Chinese government is doing its best to attract more international students into universities in China. On the contrary, for example, the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU students in Sweden from the autumn term 2011 caused an instant decrease of international student applications. The newspaper, The Local, reported that there were fewer than 1300 international students registered for the 2011 autumn term compared to the previous academic year where over 16,000 applicants were registered (Guibourg, 2011)[12]. Further, the Swedish Agency for Higher Education Services' (Verket för Högskoleservice, VHS) analysis showed that China accounted for the largest drop in numbers of students enrolling while in terms of percentages, the enrolment from some countries almost disappeared completely. The drop of applicants from Pakistan and Bangladesh were more than 90 percent while applicants from Iran, India, and Thailand dropped by more than 80 percent (Clark, 2012). This has led to a shift in the student population in Swedish HE in terms of an increase of European student groups.

Effect of Cultural Adaptability (CA) on Higher Education Institution

After the researcher's results, Cultural Adaptability (CA) significantly affects international students' selection of higher education institutions in China (H3). It also had a positive relation on the selection of higher education institution but it was relatively low as compared to the other hypotheses which had a higher influence on higher education institution. The parameter estimates results were shown in Table 4 and Figure 7 (That is, H3: CA →HEI; β = 0.157, t-test value = 2.486, p = 0.013). This result was consistent with existing literature which suggests that, the major factors attracting students to undertake international higher education studies in various host countries have been identified. In China and India, the two driving factors for international education are the desire to understand western culture and to obtain an education better than that

offered locally (Mazzarol et al., 2001).

In a low-context (LC) culture, communications are direct, detailed and explicit, normally in the form of written texts. It is just the opposite in a high-context (HC) culture, where implicit information is often shared via indirect communication like symbols, picture and personal relationships. The recognition of cultures has increased due to globalization (Würtz, 2006).

Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) on Higher Education Institution (HEI) and Policy Implementation

The IPMA enabled the researcher to find a solution to policies and managerial implementations that managers of higher education institutions need and find the competitive priorities of international students towards the selection of higher education institution. These policies will help institution mangers to attract more international students to their universities. Consequently, this study undertook IPMA to determine the actual performance of the influential factors to the selection of higher education institutions. This will provide the opportunity for the prioritization of managerial actions toward students' selection of higher education institutions.

By applying the IPMA, this study also contributes significantly in determining the most relevant drivers of international students' selection of higher education institutions in China by comparing their perceived importance and performance. Managerially and policy wise, this study has provided useful information and valuable insights to higher education institutions running international programs in China to better understand international students' migration (ISM) or prospective international students' needs.

Therefore, the study signifies potential students' perception of cost related issues is a primary, influential, and important factor influencing the selection of higher education institutions in China. Thus, managerial actions targeted at improving international students' intake must focus on developing systems and policies that will help alleviate the cost or financial responsibilities of their students. This can be done by instituting scholarship programs and providing opportunities that will enable students to engage in part-time jobs to support their financial obligations to the institutions they are affiliated to. Again, the institutions should make available internship programs with companies so that students can practice on the jobs they will do after completion of their programs.

However, Government initiative; although is relatively lower compared to cost related issues in terms of its importance for establishing potential international students' selection of higher education institutions in China, efforts must be done to develop and improve the bilateral cooperation and relationship between China and other countries to motivate their students to study in Chinese universities. The Chinese government should create more scholarship schemes to support international students thereby making China an attractive destination for international students. Also, the government can subside the tuition fees to attract more international students to the universities in China.

The IPMA demonstrates that Cultural Adaptability has little relevance in individual's selection of higher education institutions to study in China but still need attention. Therefore, managerial and policy activities must be directed at the creation of cultural clubs which involves the Chinese and the international students, hosting of cultural activities or programs together, forming students' clubs thereby creating learning environment for all students.

On institution reputation, school managers should publish names and pictures of international students who excel in their various fields on their website, make flyers with images of international students' activities and showing the rank of the universities. By so doing it make the institution attractive and marketable. Exchange programs should also be introduced to engage many countries.

Conclusion

The research revealed that the decision to study abroad is a complex process that is influenced by personal and situational factors as well as the institutional and programs characteristics.

These factors indicated that the personal preferences of international students are aligned with the unique features and social philosophy that China has to offer. The findings contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the higher education market in China. The outcomes of this research will therefore be of much interest to all, especially the universities. This will serve as a guide in their policy making decisions to enable them to attract more international students who would in return sell the name of the university abroad. More so, these outcomes will help the universities in China to adopt new concepts of educational market and organizational structures.

Recommendations

Although the current study was designed to be as thorough as possible, it comes with its limitations. Firstly, the current data were collected from the international students in two universities in China. Increasing the span of the respondents (number of international students and universities) from other different universities that have a significant number of international students will provide concrete evidence to buttress this study.

Further research could also be conducted on other factors that will add up to the aforementioned factors to help international students, higher education institutions, and all other stakeholders to have more or a better understanding of the educational market in China.

In addition, in some of the influential factors identified, due to doubts about the final results, further research is needed. Again, more variables may be added to explore more factors influencing international students' selection of universities in China.

REFERENCES

A. Brochado. Comparing Alternative Instruments to Measure Service Quality in Higher Education[J]. Quality Assurance in Education, 2009, 17(2):174-190.

G. Davey. Chinese Students' Motivations for Studying Abroad[J]. International Journal of Private Education, 2005, 2: 16-21.
S. Ahmad. Evaluating Student Satisfaction of Quality at International branch Campuses[J]. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 2015, 40 (4):488-507.
J. D. Forsey, M. S. Broomhall. Broadening the Mind? Australian Student Reflections on the Experience of Overseas Study[J]. Journal of Studies in International Education, 2012, 16(2):128-139.
V. Naidoo. Research on the Flow of International Students to UK Universities[J]. Journal of Research in International Education, 2012, 6(3):287-307.
J. H. S. Wilkins, M. Balakrishnan. Student choice in higher education: motivations for choosing to study at international branch campus[J].Journal of Studies in International Education, 2012, 16 (5):413–33.
S. C. F. Maringe. International Students' Motivations for Studying in UKHE: insights into the choice and decision-making of African students[J]. International Journal of Educational Management, 2007, 21 (6):459-75.
W. K. F. P. Yousefi. Factors Influencing Malaysian Students Intention to Study at a Higher Educational Institution [M]. 2009, 1-12.
G. N. Mazzarol, T. Soutar. Push-Pull Factors Influencing International Student Destination choice[J]. International Journal of Educational Management, 2002, 16(2):82-90.
S. Broekemier, G. Seshadri. Differences in College Choice Criteria Between Deciding Students and Their Parents[J]. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 1999, 9(3):1-13.
B. G. Shah M. The Rise of Private Higher Education in Australia: Maintaining quality outcomes and future challenges[C]. In Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF), 2009, 143-150.
C. Guibourg. New Fees Prompt Fears of Cuts at Swedish Universities[OL].The Local - Sweden's news in English., 2011.
S. S. Cobb-Clark D. A. Sinning. Migrant Youths' Educational Achievement: The role of institutions. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science[J]. 2012, 43(1):18-45.
S. Mazzarol, T. Soutar, G. Smart, D. Choo. Perception, Information and Choice: Understanding how Chinese Students Select a Country for Overseas Study [M]. Canberra: Australian Education International, 2001.
E. Würtz. Intercultural Communication on Web sites: A Cross-cultural analysis of Web sites from High-context cultures and Low-context cultures[J]. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 2006, 274-299.
W. K. Cummings. Going Overseas for Higher Education: the Asian Experience[J]. Comparative Education Review, 1984, 28(2):241-257.
M. Ahmad, S. Z. Hussain. An Investigation of the Factors Determining Student Destination Choice for Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates[J]. 2017, 42(7):1324-1343.
P. Altbach. Higher Education Crosses Borders: Can the United States Remain the Top Destination for Foreign Students?[J]. 2004, 36(2):18-25.
L. H. Chen. East-Asian Students' Choice of Canadian Graduate Schools[J]. International Journal of Educational Advancement, 2007, 7(4):271-306.
C. Lee. An Investigation of Factors Determining the Study Abroad Destination Choice: A Case Study of Taiwan.[J]. Journal of Studies in International Education, 2014, 18(4):362-81.
N. Pimpa. Marketing Australian Universities to Thai Students[J]. Journal of Studies in International Education, 2005, 9(2):137-46.
G. J. Singh, N., J. Schapper. The Importance of Place for International Students' Choice of University: A Case Study at a Malaysian University[J]. Journal of Studies in International Education, 2014, 18(5):463-74.
A. Bhattacherjee. Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices. Textbooks Collection. Book 3[M]. Florida-USA: 2012.
M. Patton. Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods[J]. sage, 1990.
S. P. Campbell. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1995, 85-106.
R.K.Yin. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and methods[M]. Sage: 2017.
G. T. M. Hair Jr, J. F., & Hult. A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)[J]. sage, 2016.
M. Hair Jr, J. F. Hult, G. T. M. Ringle, C. Sarstedt. A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)[M]. Sage: 2014.
D. Bryman, A., Cramer. Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 12 and 13: A guide for social scientists[M]. Psychology Press, 2005.
I. Nunnally, J. C., Bernstein. Psychometric Theory[J]. Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 1994, 17:275-80.
L. D. F. Fornell. Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error: Algebra and statistics[J]. Journal of marketing research., 1981, 382-8.
W. W. Chin. The Partial Least Squares Approach for Structural Equation Modeling[J]. Modern methods for business research, 1998, 295-236.
C. M. Höck, M., Ringle. Strategic Networks in the Software Industry: An empirical analysis of the value continuum[J]. In IFSAM VIIIth World Congress, 2006, 28:2010.