

Factors Influencing International Students’ Decision to Study at Taiwanese Universities

Chen Yu Ching¹, Anchalee Chayanuvat²

Email: ¹chenjanet@livemail.tw, Email: ²anchalee.c@rsu.ac.th

¹Master of Education Program, Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

²Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

Abstract

Mixed methods approach was employed for this study to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. In the process of data collection, a specially designed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The questionnaire data indicated three top factors influencing international students’ decision. First was “Scholarships”, followed by the factors of “Society and Culture”, and “Language Skills”. On the other hand, the semi-structured interviews found different three top factors influencing international students' decision. First was “Personal Factors” followed by “Language Skills” and “Recommendation and Support”. As the “Language Skills” Factor emerged in both quantitative and qualitative data, it was assumed the prime mover for students wanting to study in Taiwan. “Language Skills” Factor as international students see Taiwan as the place where they can acquire both top global languages as English and Chinese for their better future.

Keywords: Factors, International students, Decision to study abroad

Introduction

In connection with the dynamic period of globalization, student mobility has emerged. The phenomenon of ‘study abroad’ becomes a common activity. Students have more freedom to choose where to study; therefore, it is interesting to know what makes some students decide to study in another country instead of one’s own. International students represent the primary source of university internationalization in many countries. In the 21st century, studying abroad has become an international trend; we can see a steady flow of student mobility to countries such as United States, Canada, China and so on (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). International education by itself can attract more international students but it is better to understand what factors influence international students' decision to study abroad.

According to Ministry of Education in Taiwan (MOE, 2018), statistics show that more and more international students are coming to study in Taiwan. In 2014, the Taiwanese government established a 2020 goal of 150,000 international higher education enrollments with a large number of scholarships offered. This is a reason why there are more

international students than before in Taiwan. This study was, therefore, conducted with an aim to identify other major factors that attracted international students to Taiwan.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were-

1. To investigate the factors influencing the decision by international students who choose to study at Taiwanese Universities
2. To prioritize the factors that can draw international students to study in Taiwan.

Research Scope

1. The sample size for international students was calculated based on Yamane's formula (Yamane 1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where, n=The sample

N=The size of the population

e=The error of 5 percentage point (0.05)

Public university sample was 200 international students and the private university sample was 278 international students. Totally, 478 international students participated in this research.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods approach with the use of questionnaire and interviewed data.

Results and Discussion of the Study

The two instruments showed similar ideas on factors influencing international students' decision to study in Taiwan.

Analysis of the questionnaire (Quantitative)

The mean and S.D. were computed for all the items and the researcher used them to find out the most attractive factors for international students. The following table shows the data.

Table 1: Mean and S.D of Influencing Factors Questionnaire Data

No	Item	Mean(\bar{x})	S.D	Level
X. Scholarships				
29	I prefer to get a scholarship.	4.44	.730	Very high
30	Scholarships are really good support for me	4.45		
Total		4.44		
VII. Society and Culture (learn other country culture/make new friends)				
19	I can learn about another culture.	4.33	.710	Very high
20	I can make friends from other country.	4.29		
21	I can understand people from other countries.	4.21		
Total		4.27		
VIII. Language Skills				
22	Both Chinese and English are interesting to me.	4.21	.809	High
23	I can improve my English and Chinese.	3.97		
24	I have more opportunities to use English and Chinese.	3.99		
Total		4.06		

The results points to the three strong factors influencing international students' decision, the strongest factors were “Scholarships” (\bar{x} =4.44), followed by “ Society and Culture”(\bar{x} =4.27) and “Language Skills” (\bar{x} =4.06).

Analysis of the Qualitative Data (Semi-structured interviews)

Qualitative data were collected from 20 volunteers (international students) in separate face-to-face interviews. They came from 12 countries (Japanese, Korea, Malaysian and so on). The responses were analyzed based on the meaning conveyed into themes showing the factors influencing their decision making.

Table 2: Themes and Frequency of Semi-Structured Interviews

Themes	Frequency
Personal factors	17
Language Skills	15
Recommendation by others	15
University Image	13
Society and Culture	12
Careers	8
Scholarships	8
Desired Programs (Courses)	7
Cost (tuition fee/living)	3

Conclusion

It is possible that in the questionnaire, “Scholarships” was on the list of 11 factors, so most respondents ticked this item as the most important factor but the interviewees did not talk about it in the same intensity. The interviewees were all scholarship holders. It is worth noting that one common factor emerged from both instruments: the “Language Skills” Factor. This finding reveals that international students came here to improve their abilities in both English and Chinese.

Suggestion

Taiwan should try to take advantage of this factor. Their universities must make sure that students who come to study in Taiwan have many opportunities to acquire both languages both in class and outside class.

References

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