



**FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ENROLL AT
A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

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This independent study report has been approved to be a partial fulfillment in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tanakorn'.

(Dr. Tanakorn Limsarun)

Advisor

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jomphong'.

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Abstract

Research Title : FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ENROLL AT A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

This study was aimed to find the influencing factors for international students to enroll at a private higher education institution. This study assessed the location factors and motivation factors as influencing factors and also program and courses, accreditation, tuition fees, and scholarship facilities as private higher education institutions factors that influence international students to enroll. This study is entirely based on the documentary research approach, therefore, this study found that many factors enhance and improve international students' enrollment. Location factor, Motivational factors, Programs and courses, Accreditation; High Tuition fees of private higher education institutions lead to reduction of International students' enrollment; Scholarship facilities of a private higher education institution enhance and improves international students' enrollment; I influence of close locations increases international students' enrollment; and Motivation factors of international students' influences enrollment. This study proposed recommendations for international students to emphasize on close location factor for enrollment, to emphasize on home country image for the push factor and to emphasize on ease of entry requirements, and better host country teaching methods for the pull factor. Moreover, this study proposed for international students to emphasize private higher education institution factors such as a wide variety of courses, an institution with proper accreditation, low tuition fees and living costs, and higher scholarship facilities. This study is valuable for international students to identify the most influential factors to consider a prospective place to study and for their decision-making process. Lastly, this study provided insight into private higher education institutions' service providers to constantly upgrade their factors that can attract international students' enrollment.

Keywords: International students, Enroll, Private Higher Education Institution.

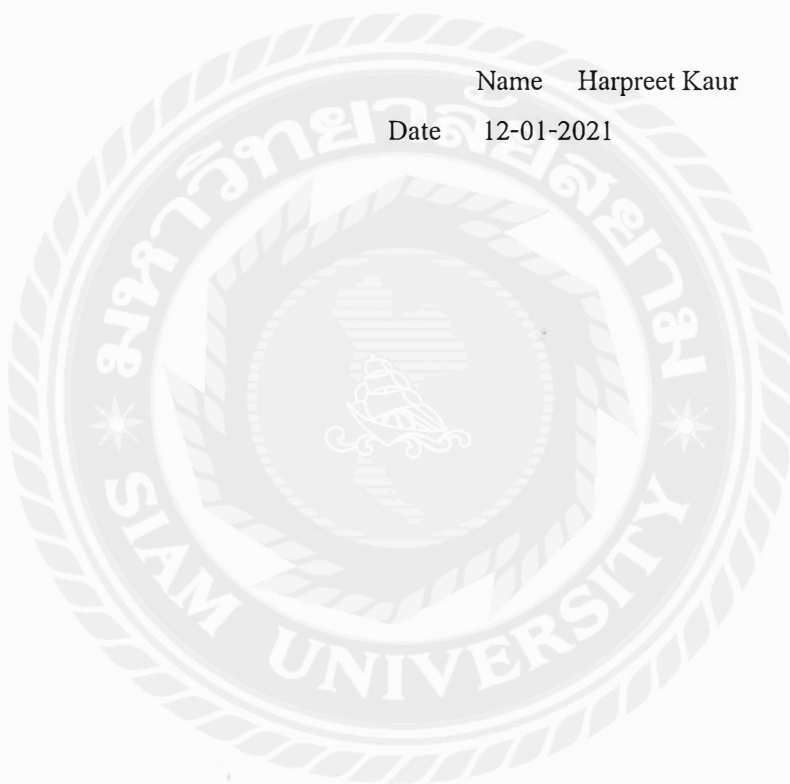


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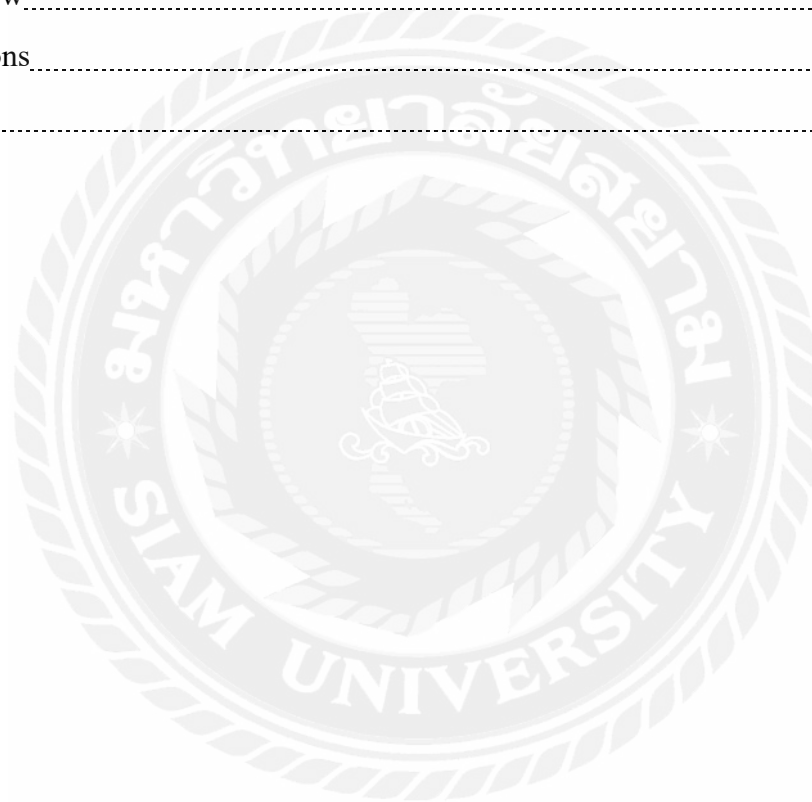
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Introduction

Research Background:

Higher Education is very important for individual growth perspectives as it provides them a sense of attainment considering the current situations as there is a lack of job security due to the fast-paced movements and volatility in the economy (Lim, 2013). Private higher education institutions are more diverse and secular, students' friendly and lack political involvement as they provide learners with ample opportunities in terms of enhancement of skills, ideas, knowledge, and innovation (Fernandez, 2010). There is a shift in preference towards private higher education institutions due to change in the economy and job-market situation, and the perspectives of education service consumers (students) and providers (institutions) (Shah and Nair, 2011). The students select a certain private higher education institution based on various factors and it varies from one student to another still there are some commonalities between them (Kaur, 2016). The commonalities include institutional factors, location factors, and the push-pull theory factors and in the context of institutional factors that include program and courses, placement services, accreditation, tuition fees, and scholarship facilities (Ming and King, 2010). The location factors determine the closeness and proximity to the home of a student to private higher education institutions. It provides useful and necessary information about the destination that influence international students to enroll at a certain place (Kioko, 2018). In motivation, the push factor is normally explained as the negative situation in the home country of international students due to the preventive success or development of the political and economic condition of the origin country (Wintre et al., 2015). The Pull factors in motivation probably distinguish one country more attractive than the other country concerning its various factors such as country image, visa processing, and migration friendly (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Kaur, 2016).

Research Problems:

There is an upward shift in the numbers of prospective international students for higher studies and higher education service providers (institutions) and this shift has created a competitive market for education service providers to collect a large number of international students' enrollment; to accumulate more revenues through tuition fees. Private higher education institutions largely depend upon student enrollment and intakes (Dezhbakhsh and Karikari, 2010). As competition gets intensifies, private higher education institutions turned out to be aggressive and creative. The international students are very much aware of private higher education institution offerings, and importance for foreign students, also how they look and interpret the influencing factors that influence them to choose one institution over the other. International students influencing factors are also short-lived when they consider factors to choose higher education institutions. It means the factors that are important today might not be important tomorrow. Therefore, from time to time, higher education institutions need to probe possible influencing factors for international students (Abrahamson, 2010).

Consequently, a large number of studies have been conducted on the influencing factors that attract international students to choose a foreign study destination, but no research work has been found concerning the econometric value of international

students in the context of institutional factors, location factors, and the push-pull theory factor. Furthermore, this study aims to bridge the research gap by providing a better understanding of influencing factors of international students to private higher education institutions in terms of financial cost against the expected quality and value of education from the institutions concerning private higher education factors, location factors, and the motivation factors.

Research Questions:

- 1) What are the factors that influence international students to enroll at a private higher education institution?
- 2) How does the influence of a private higher education institution factors impact on international students' enrollment decision making process?
- 3) How does the influence of location factors impact international students' enrollment decision making process?
- 4) How does the influence of motivational factors impact international students' enrollment decision making process?

Objectives of the study:

- 1) To examine the factors that influence international students to enroll at a private higher education institution.
- 2) To examine the influence of a private higher education institution factors impact on international students' enrollment decision-making process.
- 3) To examine the influence of location factors impact on international students' enrollment decision-making process.
- 4) To examine the influence of motivational factors impact on international students' enrollment decision-making process.

Scope of the study:

It is aimed that the study would disclose important and valuable information for private higher education staff and management team could avail the findings to alter and moderate their current policies if something better comes up to attract more prospective students and thus to increase the enrollment rate. This is the first empirical study on factors influencing international students' choice of private higher education based on international students influencing factors, location factors, motivational factors private higher education institutions and international students' enrollment. Therefore it may serve as a helpful literature reference for future research purposes in this field. The findings of this research will also be helpful for international student decision making process and private higher education institution students' enrollment.

Research Significance:

This study accords to the understanding of different factors in terms of motivating students' perceptions to select private higher education institutions. This study applies only to international students that are coming to pursue their education at private higher education institutions. Furthermore, this study will help the operation and management system of the private higher education institutions by knowing which

factor influences the international student to study at their place and will further help to improve the performance in terms of an increase in international enrollment rate to survive in the competitive field of education providers. The results of this study will also help the private higher education institution to boost and enhance its marketing strategies to attract a large pool of international students also it will make the personnel department aware at all time during the selection process from the international students' point of view and their emphasis on certain factors.



Literature Review

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ENROLLMENT:

The enrollment trends of International students regarding private higher education institutions in the United States help this study objectives and research questions. The enrollment number for post-secondary accounted for a steady increase of 40 percent from 1970 to 2010. There has been a sharp decline in enrollment trends in the USA for the first time. Furthermore, the enrollment rate for undergraduate degree programs decreased by 5 percent (NSCC, 2019). This was due to the higher cost of education, low unemployment rate, and strong economic conditions as many of them were leaving the institution for a job. This data reveals that there is a strong urgency for international students to fulfill the gap (King, 2019). There has been a change in funding structures towards education institutions as funding's got decreased over the time, in result, it has affected the tuition fees and cost got increased, reduction in faculty staff and student services on campuses got reduced as well; that caused a decrease in international students (Stauffer et al., 2019). Overall the numbers of international students studying in the United States has been on a declining side as for the three consecutive years from 2016 to 2019, the total number of new international students enrolled at post-secondary institutions in the United States decreased from 7 percent to 1 percent (Redden, 2019). Some researchers mentioned that the decline of international students due to increase in tuition costs (Cooper, 2018), or strict entry requirements for internationally mobile students (Moody, 2019).

PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS FACTORS:

To choose one private higher education institution is a very difficult task for international students. In this regard, a private higher education needs to be clear with likes of services that they offer to international students, they need to present their strength towards them so it would be easier for them to decide and their core values are also be identified by international students for their decision making (Moogan, 2011). International students need to give weightage and priorities towards certain factors when choosing one over the other. This process also requires them to analyze the risk and challenge factors if choosing that particular place to study. The final decision of the international student to select a private higher education institution is only when there is a high involvement of time and search of information (Americanos, 2011). The most influencing way to choose one place to study for further education at private higher education is to identify the future benefits that international student would get after the completion of their studies, institution based on their reputation of being known for providing more benefits than the cost for international students (Morrish & Lee, 2011).

Program and Courses:

Chia (2011) examined twenty-two studies concerning academic programs and their impact on the student decision-making process to study at a private higher education institution. In the study, it was found out that nine factors were recognized as a high level of importance given to them by students. Those nine factors were (1) academic reputation, (2) location, (3) quality of instruction, (4) availability of programs, (5) quality of faculty, (6) costs, (7) reputable program, (8) financial aid, and (9) job

outcomes. On the other hand, remaining factor was included in the studies; (10) variety of courses offered, (11) size of the institution, (12) surrounding community, (13) availability of graduate programs, (14) student employment opportunities, (15) quality of social life, (16) class size, (17) graduate school outcomes, (18) extracurricular programs, (19) friendly/personal service, (20) affiliation, (21) admission requirements, and (22) attractiveness of campus facilities. Kaur (2016) mentioned that academic programs have a positive influence on students' choice. Kharani and Razak (2013) proposed that there is a positive relationship between academic programs and student choice process as students consider academic programs the most for their overseas education.

Accreditation:

The most common and influencing factor for international students is that their choice of institutions is recognized and accredited or not under any regulatory bodies in their respective countries. It is commonly understood that accreditation increases institution reputation and rankings; it also increases the prestige of any institution nationally or internationally. An institution is known to be accredited under a government agency, gets student attention (Kusumawati, 2013). There is a strong influence of accreditation on institution brand image (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman 2012). Accreditation is an important factor for international students to study in Malaysia for their overseas study (Koe & Saring, 2012; Khairani & Razak, 2013). However, accredited institutions deliver higher quality programs (Migin et al., 2015).

Tuition fees:

Tuition fees considerably the most important factors for selection of any private higher education institution, it's regarded as a "highly influencing factor" for international students when they select to study at a private higher education institution (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016). The financial burden on international students is on a top priority list for consideration in choosing a place to study. Hence, the countries that have "low tuition fees attract more international students" and are "very popular" (Wintre, Kandasamy, Chavoshi, & Wright, 2015). Similarly, Kaur (2016) also agreed on the fact that low tuition fees and living costs were the main factors for international students to study at a private higher education institution in Malaysia.

Scholarship Facilities:

The scholarship facilities for international students to study at a private higher education institution decrease the cost burden on them and increase the chances of taking admission in that particular institution (Oliveira & Soares, 2016). The study in the United States of America used data from 1991 to 2006 from a private higher education institution to analyze the cause and concern for a reduction in enrollment rates per institution. The results achieved from this study stated that the increase in tuition fees and non-availability of scholarship and another sort of monetary benefits caused a decrease in enrollment rates by 25 percent (Helemt & Marcotte, 2011).

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INFLUENCING FACTORS

LOCATION FACTORS:

According to Kioko (2018), location factors can influence international students' decision-making process as it is an important factor apart from institutional image, quality of teaching faculty, costs, and job opportunities. It was evident from the outcome of the study that bad location has a negative influence on international students' decision-making process. The distance from home to study places influences international students for enrollment; a bad location caused a decrease in student intakes (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh, & Susuman, 2018). There is a strong motivation among international students if the travel distance between their home and study destination is shorter. Short distance allows international students to be closed and also similar cultural aspects (Oliveira & Soares, 2016).

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS (PUSH-PULL):

The political situation of any country can be a vital push factor for students as countries considered of bad interest refer to a bad reputation in terms of security and openness towards international students and there are various push factors such as unstable government, lack of freedom of speech and expression, low level of unemployment, lack of cultural and ethnic diversity, poor economic condition; poor international education standards in the host country motivate students to study outside from their places (Counsell, 2011). Lim et al. (2011) study revealed that Chinese students chose Malaysia because they perceived the country as exciting and fun to live in with a comfortable climate rather than its image as a quality education destination as pull factors. A country with easy and flexible visa processing and migration friendly is more likely to attract international students to select their country as a study destination as pull factors.

Findings

International students influencing factors

- Location Factors
- Motivation Factors

(Kioko, 2018); (Oliveira & Soares, 2016);
(Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh, & Susuman, 2018);
(Americanos, 2011); (Cheng et al., 2013);
(Wintre et al., 2015);

Private Higher Education Institution Factors

- Program and Courses:
- Accreditation:
- Tuition Fess
- Scholarship Facilities

(Koe & Saring, 2012); (Khairani &

Influencing Factors to Enrollment

(NSCC, 2019); (King, 2019); (Stauffer et al., 2019); (Redden, 2019); (Cooper, 2018); (Moody, 2019)

Razak 2013); (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman 2012); (Migin et al., 2015); Helemt & Marcotte, 2011); Kaur, (2016)

Figure 1

3.1 Explanation of Established Framework:

1. Private higher education factors enhance and improve international students' enrollment. 2. The institutional factors enhance and improve international students' enrollment. 3. The location factor enhances and improves international students' enrollment. 4. The motivational factors enhance and improve the international students' enrollment. 5. Program and course enhance and improves international students' enrollment. 6. Accreditation enhances and improves international students' enrollment. 7. High Tuition fees of private higher education institutions lead reduction of International students' enrollment. 8. Scholarship facilities of a private higher education institution enhance and improves international students' enrollment. 9. Influence of close locations increases international students' enrollment. 10. Motivation factors of international students' influences enrollment.

Recommendations:

Recommendations to Emphasize on the Possibilities of Influencing Factors among International Students:

The location factor for any private higher education service provider is highly essential; a bad location tends to cause a decrease in student enrollment; interior areas are highly unmotivated among international students. Chinese students consider the closeness of place of stay and place to study as a top priority; therefore, commute distance from their home country to a place of study is less, then it is more likely for international students to go to that particular place for study. Asian students mostly select Malaysia due to proximity to home; Cambodian and Singaporean students selected Malaysia for their further education. It is evident from the findings that close distance leads to higher student enrollment (Oliveira & Soares, 2016; (Singh; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016).

Recommendations for Motivation Factors:

Push factors: The main dominant features for international students to choose other places than their home countries is due to poor governance; bad security for locals and internationals; bad education standards, lack of infrastructure facilities, high crime rate, international conflict reflect international students intention. Hence, a bad home country image leads international students to not choose that particular place to study and opt for other places for the same. The private higher education service providers need to analyze their push factors from students' perspectives (Counsell, 2011). The

study of Fernandez (2010) supported the fact that a high crime rate, international conflict, and bad attitude towards international students are not influencing factors for the Chinese community.

Pull Factors:

International students are more likely to go for their further education to other places due to the host country's image (Kaur, 2016). Education in the UK is very popular among Chinese students as it is known for having a good image in terms of education service providers. Therefore, a country with a good reputation for catering to international students is more attractive. The better the teaching methods, the better the chance of getting international student enrollment. To get an education from a reputed firm, the chance of getting a good job. Similarly, in Canadian, students are also likely to choose a place to study for the same reasons (Wintre et al., 2015). The favorable climatic condition and ease of visa requirements are highly influencing factors for an international student to choose a place to study; are more attractive. A study mentioned that Chinese and African students choose Malaysia for the same reasons (Americanos, 2011; Cheng et al., 2013; Lim et al. 2011).

Recommendations for Private Higher Education Institutions:

A student-friendly environment is essential for international students if they are willing to take admission in one particular place for their degrees, higher degrees, and post-diploma courses (Chia, 2011). International students feel positive about the education facilitators; and on the other hand, private higher education institutions should emphasize providing a sense of diversity for international students; exchange of knowledge, skills, ideas, and innovation would be their priority to attract international students (Fernandez, 2011). To attract international students, private higher education needs to focus on making their institution internationalized. The more internationalized the more likely case for international students to choose; this concept has been supported in many developing countries as well but the focus should be on improving the quality of education rather than seeking revenues. According to the study of Shah and Nair (2011), it was proposed that there is a shift among international students' decision-making processes due to internationalization as private education service providers are more customized and versatile. Private higher education institutions ideally and constantly required to bridge the gap of decreasing enrollment rates and higher tuition fees (King, 2019). An increase in students' welfare in the institution campus leads to an increase in international students' enrollments (Stauffer et al., 2019). According to Lee (2015), it was stated that an institute with clear instructions of its core values and services that they are willing to offer to international students enhance their decision-making process. A private higher education institution requires having an understanding of students' perspectives and steps to select education institutions. The international students give priority to those places that they can easily understand their core values. Therefore, a private higher education institution to need providing necessary information about its core values offering to international students (Americanos, 2011). International students are keener to be enrolled at a private higher education that provides econometric benefits to them (Morrish & Lee, 2011).

Academic programs and courses enhance and improve international students' enrollment; as larger the range of selecting a course out of many options; the easier the course duration and credit transfer for international students; tend to attract more international students. For overseas education, it signifies program and courses of a private higher education institution are very important for the international student enrollment process (Kharani and Razak, 2013). Any institution with proper accreditation makes those particular places a prospective place to study. The accreditation is cited in many studies as an influencing factor (Fernandez, 2010; Chia, 2011; Cheng et al., 2013; Kusumawati 2013). To provide a clear sense of opinions, ideas, and impressions for international students, an institution with accreditation is a prospective place to study (Koe & Saring, 2012). There is a strong influence of accreditation on institution brand. A private higher education institution with accreditation from a government agency represents good quality of education, job opportunities and gives international exposure to international students. Therefore, a private higher education institution requires accreditation from any responsible government agency image (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman 2012).

Tuition fees have a negative influence on international students' decision-making process to enroll in private higher education. The private higher education service providers are not popular if they charge high tuition fees. Therefore to survive in the education market, this evidence was supported in the study of Wintre, Kandasamy, Chavoshi, & Wright (2015), it was stated that low tuition fees and living costs were the main factors for international students to study in Malaysia than to the USA, Great Britain and Australia (Kaur, 2016). Private higher education institutions can influence international students by the form of scholarship facilities to them or any sort of reduction in financial burden will increase the enrollment per institution. This evidence was supported in the study of Helemt & Marcotte (2011) as it proposed that the lack of scholarship facilities caused a decrease in enrollment rates. It is considered a highly influencing factor for international students; otherwise, it would cause a major drop out of international so a private higher education institution with scholarship facilities influence international students to not leave that place for their education students.

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