Selection of Institution of Higher Learning for Study Abroad: A Malaysian Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines why international students select the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) as their Higher Learning Institute (HLI) when pursuing higher education. Using a qualitative approach, with the philosophical foundation of case study method, and employing interviews to gather data, a total of 8 postgraduate international students from IIUM were purposefully selected with consideration to their different disciplines, country of origin, study levels, length of stay, and gender. The study finds the international students are well concerned about their selection of the university where they want to enrol. In relation to university selection by international students, the study specifically focuses on some factors which influence the choice of a study destination, particularly a university for higher education. The study reveals that as a HLI of Malaysia, IIUM has a good reputation among the international students although the level of positivity varies from case to case. The results are primarily beneficial to academics and researchers to understand the related issues of how the foreign students select their institution for pursuing higher studies.

Key Words: HLIs, IIUM, international students, higher study, selection criteria, qualitative approach, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education abroad is an important phenomena nowadays. The flow of students across borders has gradually increased due to globalization. Reputed universities all over the world try to make themselves noticeable to international students and build links with universities in other countries in order to enhance their global reach (Lawrence, 2004). Countries are also emphasising on factors such as demographics, economic restructuring, information technology, and their education system, to have competitive advantage against other Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) (Beine, Noel and Ragot,2014). Recently, due to intensive competition, most universities have become more concerned about overseas students. Moreover, in order to survive in the tertiary education market, universities have begun to behave as business entities by adopting more business strategies. Because of this, universities try to speed up their international linkages, open branch campuses, single purpose programs, and other forms of international education, and quality of education for the students.

Countries seeking to gain a competitive advantage in higher education, need to change their education system, adopt a new concept of education, and broadly spread their HLIs as required by the existing environment (Holmegaard, Ulriksen and Madsen, 2014). However, achieving such targets in the global era is not easy task. HLIs must face external challenges such as government interference, international rules and regulations, different ethnicity, languages variation, foreign exchange, global competition, behavioural differences, perception differences, and manifold lifestyles. (María, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006).Though universities are conscious about their quality and image, these external factors sometimes hinder their goals. To overcome this situation, governments can play an important role by enacting policies.

In the Malaysian context, the government plays an important role in shaping higher education. In recent years, it has attempted to transform Malaysia into a regional hub for education leading to the establishment of numerous private and public HLIs delivering quality education. The government also invites foreign universities to open their branch and operate from Malaysia. Many higher education institutions have already adopted some form of business strategy, especially marketing, for strategic activities in their operations. Most of the HLIs in Malaysia target international students as an important means of generating income. Such policies have improved educational opportunities and quality in Malaysia making Malaysia a good place for quality tertiary education.

Students search for diversified knowledge leads them to search for HLIs locally and abroad to provide them with profound academic knowledge, allow them to interact with different people, experience different cultures, learn new concepts and methods, exchange values etc. Thus, selecting a particular HLI is an important matter that may shape not just the life and accomplishment of students' careers, but also their families. Prior to enrolling in an HLI, students begin by collecting information about it to determine whether it suits their needs and expectations. In the case of international students, they first consider their desired country. They then search for information about a particular university in their desired destination. Thus, the main objective of the present study is to identify the university selection criteria by those who study in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criteria for selecting HLIs

While making the decision to enrol in a particular HLI, students have to consider numerous factors. The location of the institution, academic curriculum, reputation and excellence, available facilities, cost of study, availability of financial aid, affiliations with other institutionsemployment opportunities, and total atmosphere have a positive influence on students' decision (Jackson, 1988; Sevier, 1986; Keling, Krishnan and Nurtjahja,2007; Ming, 2010; Tantivorakulchai, 2015). LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) concluded that cost of study in terms of quality is the most important factor, while Ford, Joseph and Joseph (1999) acknowledged times required for completion of program in terms of cost and academic goodwill as the criteria of choice of university. Maringe (2006) contends that flexibility of fee instalments, accessibility of monetary guide, and sensible expenses have a huge impact on students' selection of HLIs. Before enrolling in a particular institution, students expect that the university will offer financial assistance (Jackson, 1988; Litten, 1982; Manski & Wise, 1983, Douglas, Douglas, McClelland and Davies, 2015). Massey and Burrow (2012) stated that in addition to financial aid, students also expect affordable fees for entering a particular university.

Joseph and Joseph (2000) recommended that students consider course and career opportunities and physical facilities for selecting their higher study institutions. Ford et al. (1999) revealed that flexibility, range, and options were the most influencing factors for choosing higher educational institutions. Keling et al. (2007) stated that before enrolling in a particular university, students consider issues such as difficulties for applying, research quality, qualification of staff, fees, availability of suitable courses, and ease and flexibility in enrolment. Moreover, reflections of the institution, its status and position have an influence on students' choice decision (Lay & Maguire, 1981; Murphy, 1981; Keling, 2006; Migin, Falahat, Yajid and Khatibi,2015).

Fernandez (2010) discovered four dimensions in selecting a higher education institution. These include the reasons for students' pursuing higher education, sources of information they used, their intention to choose a public or private university, and the factors that have a positive impact on selecting a particular university. The study concluded that the main reasons for students pursuing higher education are improving their job prospects, gaining knowledge and experience. The study also explains that quality of education and economic factors are the main reasons for which students choose to enrol in a particular university. Students select HLIs considering image and goodwill of the institution, sufficient amenities, and accessibility of programs and courses that suit the students' needs (Parameswaran & Glowacka, 1995).

Sources of information on HLIs

In this competitive era, students are highly concerned about their career. Before enrolling in a particular HLI, students are required to know about what former graduates are doing and whether job opportunities are available (Rothman, Lipset & Nevitte, 2003; Phillips, 1993). However, prospective students do not always know which one is the preferable source for collecting such information. Fernandez (2010) suggested that at present, most students prefer to use the internet. Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010) stated that mass media and ranks (such as QS world university ranking) of HLIs may also be valuable sources of information when choosing HLIs. Moreover, students may depend on friends for collecting information

about higher learning institutions abroad (Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996; Phillips, 1993). Sometimes, they also prefer to visit the campus before deciding to enrol (Morris, 2011; Clement, 1992).

Role of reference group on HLIs

Reference group plays a valuable role when selecting a university for higher education abroad. Potential international students may be influenced by friends, parents, counsellors, other students, teachers, and university admission officers in choosing their universities (Padlee et al., 2010). Chapman (1981) developed a model and explained that the decision regarding university selection is guided by student's individuality in combination with a series of external factors. These factors can be categorised as: the role of influential persons in decision making, the distinctiveness of the institution, and its capability to communicate with potential students. Bearden and Etzel (1982) identified family and social groups as "normative reference groups", or groups that provide the individual with norms, attitude, and values through direct and indirect interaction. As such, the influence of reference groups can extend beyond recommendations and financial support. Previous studies are bereft of critical analysis of the family's role and its relation to choices of international education. Many researchers concurred on few aspects of familiar influence on students choices, such as family recommendation or opinion, but they did not elucidate the full mechanism of influence of those factors on students' choices.

Students' behavioural characteristics and selection decision

International students are highly selective when deciding on an educational institution. Padlee et al. (2010)'s research stated that when deciding on higher education abroad, international students' decision for selecting universities is positively influenced by factors including the learning environment, influencers, focus of university, tuition fees, amenities, socialisation, and location. Among these, focus of university and amenities are most important (Morris, 2011) in attracting foreign student enrolment. In their study, amenities involved space, laboratory, library, cafeterias, and student unions. To measure the quality of academic staff, the study considered educational background of the staff, teaching performance, status, image and medium of instruction.

The researches undertaken by Iannelli and Huang (2014) found a correlation between international students' rate of enrolment and fluctuation of tuition fees. Before enrolling in a particular university, international students examine surrounding environments which include campus life, safety, natural scenery of the campus, social life, and people surrounding the institution compound. They also search for support services such as health service, international schools, part-time jobs, kindergartens, banks, counselling, financial support, and career guidance. Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen and Pascarella, (2009) argued that the main obstacle of selecting a university for international students is cost. There is a negative correlation between tuition fees and student enrolment. The study recommended that to solve this problem, institutions should provide financial aid if it cannot reduce the fees.

Student perceptions of a university are formed by gossip, past experience, and communication exercises (Ivy, 2001). Studies show that a university's decent reputation can unequivocally influence foreign students' inclination for the institution (Mazzarol, 1998; Gutman & Miaoulis, 2003; Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes and Skeldon, 2012). The programs offered by universities are another substantial issue which foreign students consider before enrolment. Krampf and

Heinlein (1981) argued that prospective students look for programs available to assess their suitability. They consider criteria such as entry requirements for a particular program, whether programs are available (Dinther, Dochy & Segers,2011), excellence and diversity of learning (Shanka & Taylor, 2005) and flexibility of course combinations (Holdsworth & Nind, 2006). Substantial manifestation and social life are also valuable factors for selecting a particular university. Price, Matzdorf and Agahi (2003) explained that facilities like computers, study areas, areas of self-study, lab, and library play an important role in international students' selection decision of an institution. Other facilities like recreational and athletic or sports also play some role (Joseph and Joseph, 1998, Maguire and Lay, 1981).

METHODOLOGY

The present research is exploratory and descriptive within a case study framework of qualitative research approach. The study follows the philosophical foundations of a case study approach by considering participant selection, gaining access, data collection, and data analysis. Burchett (2014) affirmed that the case study approach is a confined system or a matter exposed by one or more cases.

Sampling

As the main focus of the study is to explore the reasons for selecting IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia) as a higher study destination abroad, the research samples international students. In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling strategies in order to select the research participants. Sample size for the study was restricted to eight (6 male and 2 female students). Participants were selected from a number of faculties. They were not from the same country of origin to distinguish their thoughts from students from other places. Participants must be enrolled in either a Masters or PhD degree as this would provide them with experience selecting HLIs. Additionally, they are capable of making independent decisions. The participants' demographic profiles are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

Interviewees	Gender	Country of origin	Region	Last Degree Obtained	Current program	Length of stay at IIUM
Interviewee- 1	Female	Egypt	Asian	Masters	PhD	4 months
Interviewee- 2	Male	Nigeria	African	Masters	PhD	2 years
Interviewee- 3	Male	Bangladesh	Asian	Masters	PhD	5 years
Interviewee- 4	Male	Yemen	Asian	Masters	PhD	3 years
Interviewee- 5	Female	Indonesia	Asian	Masters	PhD	4 years
Interviewee- 6	Male	India	Asian	Bachelors	Masters	2 months
Interviewee- 7	Male	Ghana	African	Bachelors	Masters	4 years
Interviewee- 8	Male	Pakistan	Asian	Masters	PhD	9 months

Data collection

The data were collected through face to face interviews with the targeted respondents. Before starting the interview, the sample questions were distributed among them so that they could form an idea of the questions and the answers expected of them. This allowed them to be mentally prepared for the interview which was recorded. Verbal consent was secured from all the respondents before recording the interviews. The maximum time spent for the interview was 13 minutes and 54 seconds, while the minimum was 4 minutes and 42 seconds. The participant responses were transcribed after every interview session.

Data analysis

In this study, information was analysed using an inductive data analysis method. This means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data. They emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis (Sandelowski, 1995). A word-for-word transcription was produced for each interview. No software was used in data coding as a small number of respondents were interviewed. Interview transcripts were re-checked twice to ensure that the content and the procedure of the interview were free from inaccuracy. After transcription, the researcher highlighted every similar and dissimilar, relevant, and seemingly unrelated item to sort students thoughts about higher education abroad, sources of information used, role of influential persons, Malaysia as a higher education destination, and IIUM as a higher study institution.

RESULTS

Students' intension to pursue higher education abroad

All of the respondents acknowledged their own judgments regarding issues of pursuing higher education abroad. When they were asked about their intention of pursuing higher education outside their country, certain common factors emerged. Most of them were treating it as enhancing knowledge, though one respondent partially supported this statement. The typical answer to the question was:

> *"I want to see something new in a new culture with new methods"*.

> *"I would like to get my PhD in abroad because of the knowledge; I would like to explore something new"*.

Two of the respondents explained their views from the Islamic perspective. Among them the female students stated that being educated is important for a woman:

> *"I was more influenced to do something in Islamic perspective"*.

> *"When you are in Islam there is a saying that you have to seek knowledge from beginning until your death. So for me learning is essential. I do believe woman is the first teacher of their children and they began the life of education in their house so for me being educated person is very important."*

One respondent argued that someone can gather knowledge in many ways, but to become creative and innovative, students should go abroad for their higher education:

> *"My country didn't push students' to gain lot of knowledge but if you have a little knowledge, how can you create something new, make innovation from that knowledge. Because of globalization, you can get knowledge from any media or source, but the problem is the way to apply and to create something to make innovation in what you gain already".*

Some of the respondents decided to go abroad for higher education due to lack of opportunities and a number of obstacles faced in their country:

> *"Bangladesh is highly populated country and many students every year are not able to take the place in public universities and private universities are also tight."*

> *"I am interested in Islamic economics and finance and in India we don't have higher education in that stream".*

> *"The political situation in my country is not stable at all and I was not feeling comfortable to stay Egypt at this moment."*

Some students decided to study abroad for broader exposure:

> *"I was a teacher, so I pursue higher studies for getting some exposure, particularly research exposure which is essential for me to flourish."*

> *"I preferred to come outside because I have to take the exposure, the foreign exposure."*

In summary, the study observes that students pursuing higher education abroad are influenced by a variety of factors. Among them, seeking knowledge is the most important. If students want to innovate, then they need to study hard. It is for this reason that they decide to study abroad. Besides this, students also consider Islamic domain, situation of the source country and innovativeness to pursue their higher education abroad. Finally, students' intention is to go abroad to explore something new.

Sources of information used by students

In this research, sources of information imply how students acquire information about different higher education institutions throughout the world. Students need information before deciding to study abroad. They are required to know about the quality, reputation, rank, culture, and atmosphere etc. of the universities. In this study, a number of respondents used Internet as source for collecting information. When they were asked about which sources of information they used, they answered in the following ways:

> *"Usually from my parent, parent's friends and from my friends; also I get some information from magazine, newspaper and web site".*

> *"First and foremost I think my friends. In fact they are the one through what I was getting some information. Apart from it, I was accessing information from internet. I mean internet was great source of information".*

> *"Sources of information are the internet. I also visited some of my relatives who are basically enrolled in different programs in different universities".*

One of the respondents answered the question more specifically and explained that additional sources such as blogs helped him to collect information:

> *"I was accessing information from internet. If you ask me about the particular websites or site like that I was using 'search engine' because 'search engine' is a very important thing like our Google for instance. I also visited some of the blogs, I believe, these are also real influential to get the necessary information. If you would like to access IIUM's information and if you just search the official portal unfortunately you would not get the real picture of it. You have to go through outside the box, meaning that you have to see the blogs that students and other stakeholders used to do. By this blogs you know people basically share their experiences, and when see these blogs, I mean read these blogs you will come to know about all, you will get to know the real picture of it. That's really helping you."*

Among eight respondents, two stated additional sources like the alumni and international conferences helped them to collect information about a particular university for higher education abroad:

> *"First one is I collect information from just recommendation of the IIUM Alumni in Nigeria, Second one is about from internet."*

> *"One was internet of course, and other one, we had a big international conference in my country in which some scholars came. Through interaction with them I got the information."*

One respondent expressed different views. At the initial stage of the interview, he opposed media information but interestingly at the later part his answer strongly supported internet sources:

> *"I trust people but I never trust something which is written in any media. When I wanted to study in New Zealand for instance, I have no friends in New Zealand. That's why, I was made chatting with some New Zealand people. I was trying to build relationship or friendship with anybody in New Zealand from internet; I didn't meet him face to face who could give me information about the study in New Zealand. Ok as for me its better that I take information from internet because some time information which is in internet actually provides what you want to know".*

In summary, the study observes, unlike other aspects of the interview, almost every respondent expressed the same view that the internet is the most effective source for collecting information. Moreover, students can use other sources like friends and relatives, blogs, alumni associations, and international conferences before deciding on a particular university for higher education abroad.

Influential person(s) with whom the students are associated

After knowing the sources of information students used, they were asked about the individual(s) who played the most influential role in their decision making. There was a considerable amount of variation in their answers. Respondents answered this question based on their personal stand point. Some typical answers were:

> *"There were three people having the same influence, my best friend, my husband and my mother."*

> *"I think it should be my wife. She really pushed me to go to cope with my admission to have PhD."*

> *"Of course my wife was playing the main role here. But if you ask me about individuals, in plural forms, ok there are so many people who involved in my decisions.*

One of the respondents mentioned scholars as influential persons together with his parents, friends, and elders:

> *"In terms of taking study support, of course my parent and my elder siblings. They influenced me to do it. Another was my friends and of course some scholars who attended the conference".*

Among the eight respondents, two mentioned Islam as an important influence:

"What's influence me to pursue my study here? They were my father and Islam".

> *"That was my uncle like my parental uncle. He told me that you should go for Islamic studies if you want to take learning in Islamic perspective".*

One respondent surprisingly told that he was self-influenced to take the decision for higher education abroad:

> *"Nobody influenced me because I sponsor myself. So I cannot say my family influenced me. I was self-influenced because I sponsor myself".*

In summary, a significant number of respondents mentioned that friends and family played an important role when making the decision to study higher education abroad. Moreover, Muslim students considered Islamic perspective for doing so. Only one respondent argued that students should be self-influenced if they are capable to make the decision.

Malaysia as a destination for higher study

When asked about selecting Malaysia as a destination for higher study, numerous issues emerged as each respondent had his/her unique perspective. The common factors were cost of studying and religious matters. Almost every respondent considered Malaysia as a Muslim country, which constituted the main factor for their decision. Moreover, in Malaysia, studying is affordable. In addition to these, students also mentioned:

"First factor was the Islamic one, because it is an Islamic country and majority are Muslims. Actually I was targeting to study in developed country but at the same time it must be a Muslim country".

> *"I think first one is cost, second is the environment and this is a Muslim country which I seem very home to me and third one is about tropically this zone is safe".*

> *"Firstly, Muslim country, secondly peacefulness, thirdly Halal food and finally and most importantly I knew few people those who are staying in Malaysia, so I was thinking OK, I am leaving my family but I may have another family here".*

> *"I have chosen Islamic economics and finance. Malaysia is more advanced in that stream than other countries. In terms of cost also it is cheaper and the environment also good, I mean cultural atmosphere and Muslim environment."*

One of the respondents did not consider Malaysia as his first choice. Before coming here, he looked for some western countries, but after realising the cost, he decided to come here.

> *"Basically I was looking for western countries like Canada. But there were some drawbacks there. These prevent me to come here. If you compare currencies with Canada or like other places it's like huge gap compare with my country, I mean 1:80 or 70 or 75. But in Malaysia, the differences between the currencies are small, 1:18 or 19 like this. So in terms of cost it is relatively better choice".*

Interestingly in the later part of the interview, the respondents reported many of the reasons which are contradictory with the previous statement:

> *"If you ask me about the Malaysia the factors that played the crucial role was like Malaysia is a Muslim country. Here basically there is no problem to practice Islam, the education qualities also not bad. I should not say that this is the centre of excellence, it's not yet, but it's very close to be there. The third one should consider Halal food. If you are here but don't really enjoy the food you may be in trouble. You have to live here so long. You will find everything boring".*

Another respondent expressed her opinion from the Islamic perspective:

> *"Malaysia is like mini Hub of Islamic world. You can find Muslims from all over the world and you can find various programs, activities which has Islamic thinking. People here are practicing more of Islamic Shariah and I love it because it influences me, it gives me motivation to be a very good Muslim. What influences me nowadays is learning freely and it is easy for me to find famous Muslim scholars in Malaysia".*

One of the respondents noted that language is the main barrier for selecting a particular higher study destination. Additionally, he reported that when you want to switch to a new country for your higher education, you must determine whether there have been job opportunities:

> *"I choose Malaysia and not Singapore or Japan or China or others, because I have no idea totally about their languages. So if I want to find a job it will be too difficult to find it over there. I choose Malaysia because I can easily find a job in Malaysia, because I can speak Malay language. Secondly the quality of education is good".*

Considering it a Muslim country, one student expressed his opinion:

> *"In fact it's a common thing that when you don't have enough opportunity or when you don't have enough alternatives then you have to select any one from the available ones. Fortunately or unfortunately, I have no alternatives at that moment when I applied for an academic program. Second, Malaysia is one of the Muslim countries. So, I preferred that I should go a Muslim country and an Islamic university as well."*

In summary, there are several reasons for which Malaysia can be regarded as one of the best places for higher education. International students can easily move here because the cost of studying here is not high. Moreover, it is a peaceful country compared to some Asian countries. The quality of education is good. Finally, and most importantly, Muslim students prefer Malaysia as it is a Muslim country. If anyone wants to practice in Islam, learn Arabic, and enjoy Halal food, Malaysia is one of the best places in the world.

IIUM as an educational institution

The majority of the respondents treated IIUM as an institute to serve the Muslim Um¬mah. They preferred to select it because of its Islamic identity, good reputation, and delivering good quality of education:

> *"There are many universities in the world where people are studying so many things in Islamic domain, but IIUM is an exceptional one. The atmosphere, what we call the way of living impresses me. Moreover, IIUM has a high reputation which also influences me."*

> *"IIUM is very sound, quite sound. The qualities of IIUM influenced me to come here and also religious matter."*

> *"It is having… Islamic attitude and culture that's why I selected IIUM and it also has a good ranking. It is Islamic and is delivering a good quality of education."*

Two of the respond¬ents considered IIUM as performing "Internationalization of Islam":

> *"IIUM means International Islamic University Malaysia. Firstly, international and secondly Islamic, That's why I chose IIUM."*

> *"IIUM, the name suggests that you will see two big issues here. First one is Islamic and second one is International. Meaning that, you will find the Islamic environment and international standard of education here. There are some other factors such as tuition fees are affordable. So, from this point of view IIUM is one of the best places in Malaysia".*

Apart from that, one respondent commented:

> *"I am looking for new experience to gain knowledge and to apply that knowledge to make something new. I think IIUM is a good source for gaining knowledge. Another reason was religious matter".*

Another student pointed out that the courses offered helped him decide to come to IIUM:

> *"Because the Islamic economics field is better here at IIUM".*

However, one of the respondents noted that she decided to come here as she could not pursue better options:

> *"It's not my first choice actually for my PhD. I was thinking to do it in European Country. I applied for scholarship in Australia, then for America and for other countries but because of some problem occurred, I also applied in Malaysia in IIUM and finally I am here".*

In summary, the study finds that international students select IIUM over other universities as it has an Islamic atmosphere, good quality of education, and good ranking. Additionally, students may prefer to study here due to the fact that it offers some exceptional courses.

Feeling as students of IIUM

When respondents were asked to share their experience as a student of IIUM, some expressed their positive feelings. Some argued that at the preliminary stage, it is difficult to explain; whereas other respondents explained their feelings indirectly as they are confused about their decision to select IIUM for higher study:

> *"Yes. Actually every day I feel like I made the right decision".*

> *"I did masters from here and also continue to PhD. That means I was highly satisfied on IIUM selection. That's why I continued after degree after one".*

> *"Quite straight forwardly, I say that yes, it's a good decision. I took a good decision and I don't think so that any senses of regret or any bad feelings about that. Allamhamdullah I am satisfied that I decided to get enrolled in IIUM".*

Two of the respondents cited some positive things of IIUM, although they had the expression that it is too early to justify their selection of place of education:

> *"It's too early to say but so far actually I have chosen this based on my gathered information. So my temperament is that I don't usually regret what I do. Taken a decision I usually stick with that, and so far based on what my interaction and other things I can say I don't have any regrets".*

> *"The different issues of IIUM I am just touching here. First one is to do course work, the second one is to comprehensive way and third one is to do research properly. Best experience or not the only thing I can say when I will finish, I can tell you the very good experience".*

Among eight respondents, one female student stated that everything happened because of Almighty Allah:

> *"I cannot say yes or no because everything happens because of Almighty Allah. So, whatever it is happening right now, like I did not get the scholarship or my plan is not going as it is or where am I right now; I do believe it is the best given by Allah. So whenever you trust in Allah, I think everything can be going smoothly. So I never feel down*

> *or regrets for whatever is in front of me. I do believe there is hikmah*
> *behind … so I always believe in Allah".*

Another student shared the same views. As a senior student, he also identified the financial matter so that IIUM should consider this sincerely:

> *"If you ask me to give a straight forward answer this is not easy. Because*
> *if I say 'yes', should not be 'yes', if I say 'no' should not be 'no'. You*
> *have to look at Allah. Things happen because of Allah Rabbul Alamin.*
> *If you see the other things like cost or job opportunity, then of course*
> *I say your decision is not wrong. But for now the current students are*
> *struggling because they do not have sufficient financial support and*
> *other facilities. I think some facilities are required for students. In fact,*
> *in our time you can survive somewhat. Now it is really difficult. So if*
> *you ask me personally somewhat Alhamdullilah I am ok. But if I see it*
> *from the existing other students' perspectives, the situation is not good.*
> *I think, IIUM should take it in a serious way. They should look after it.*
> *They should create opportunities for the students' survival".*

But one respondent shared some negative feelings about IIUM though initially he expressed his experience in a positive manner:

> *"I got many good things from IIUM. I got a lot of experience as well,*
> *good knowledge as well but I also want to say that IIUM not as high*
> *as I imagined before. For instance after coming here, I have visited*
> *some other universities like UM, UKM, UPM or etc. I found they have*
> *another kind of knowledge and another method may be better than*
> *IIUM. That's why I found other universities may have something extra*
> *compared to IIUM".*

In summary, the study finds that most students of IIUM are satisfied being a member of this university. Students like IIUM for its atmosphere, Islamic culture, reputation, and good quality of education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Nowadays, students can go anywhere in the world to study. This is a good way of sharing knowledge. As a student if one has the opportunity to go outside his country, he/she have the possibility to learn many things. This is not restricted only to academia, but it includes a host of other benefits. When students go abroad for higher study, they face different environment that presents unique challenges. For example, they have to interact with different people, and acclimatise a different atmosphere, different culture, and different methods. These help them to learn more, which is not possible if one pursues his/her higher education in home country. Moreover, in most countries, due to limited space and high demand of education, students have to face stiff competition for admission in their own nations' best higher education institutions. As a result, students consider studying in foreign countries and foreign higher education institutions as one of the best alternatives. These reasons lead them to select the institute that best suits their needs and ambitions.

Developed countries adopt different strategies to meet the promising demand of higher education. They attract potential international students by adopting effective marketing strategies. It makes sense to adopt a marketing policy to suit the specific requirements and culture of prospective students in those countries. For achieving the target, countries are engaged with establishing new higher education institutions or open branches of reputed universities. They know, without ensuring quality, it is difficult to attract international students. Malaysia is no exception. It emphasises advancement in this sector for achieving the nation's goal to become a regional education hub. This has attracted international students to study in Malaysia as their destination of higher education.

This study is conducted on the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), one of the reputed universities in Malaysia. In searching the reasons for selecting IIUM, the research highlighted several issues. The study highlighted that before enrolment, international students are interested to ensure the quality of education of this university. The study finds that the image of IIUM as an Islamic uni¬versity that provides quality education and tries to relate Islamic ideology in its entire academic and other curricular aspects is the main reason for its selection among international students. Moreover, the image of the university, good ranking, affordable cost, availability of programs and courses attract many international students to come here. The study finds that the university is a successful institution that can convey its core image towards its target group. Finally, by analysing the outcome of this research and related issues, we can conclude that the results obtained from this research will be valuable to academics and researchers to understand the criteria followed by international students before enrolling in foreign universities for their higher education. However, further research is required since this particular study has a number of limitations including small sample size.

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