

**FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE STUDENTS TO STUDY IN MALAYSIAN  
PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:  
A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Since the number of Chinese students (from China) studying in Malaysian Private Higher Educational Institutions (MPHEIs) is on a rising trend, a cross-sectional survey had been conducted among Chinese students to explore the factors that attracted them to further their studies in MPHEIs.*

**1.0 Introduction**

Malaysia is an important member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), it is regarded as a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural country, with Malays, Chinese and Indians as the main ethnic groups. The Malaysian Government is committed to develop Malaysia as an educational hub in Southeast Asia and to treat education as an important industry especially, higher education, to attract students from the neighboring countries to study in Malaysia. The Government has also implemented adjustments on education policy, such as the issuance of approximately 100% student visas in recent years to strongly encourage foreign students to study in Malaysia.

Higher or tertiary education was classified as an education beyond the secondary school level, which contained the courses leading to degrees, higher degrees and post-graduate diplomas (Gupta, 2008; Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2004). The international students referred to were those individuals who were temporarily residing in countries away from their motherlands and participating in the international education and exchange programs of the host country (Paige, 1990).

**1.1 The First Stage: Malaysian Students Studying Abroad (1957~ Early of 1980s)**

Malaysian higher education began in 1962 when there was only one university after the then Malaya obtained its independence in 1957. Higher education resources were in short supply then (Sivalingam, 2006). In the 1980s, Malaysian higher education encountered problems such as the shortage of higher education resources and low enrolments. Therefore, sending Malaysian students to study abroad became the solution for the Malaysian Government to cultivate talents for the country. The Government offered various types of scholarships or to subsidize the tuition fees to enable Malaysian students to study abroad (Government of Malaysia, 1980).

### **1.2 The Second Stage: The Establishment of Private Colleges (Mid of 1980s ~ Early 1990s)**

In the mid of 1980s, the Government permitted local entrepreneurs to establish private colleges. Initially, most private colleges only offered pre-university courses, English proficiency and mathematics skills to students to qualify them to study abroad. The rapid development of the economy in Malaysia took place after the 1990s. That not only increased employment opportunities but also required a lot of manpower with specialized skills and knowledge. However, the few Government universities then could not meet such educational demand.

In order to reduce the outflow of foreign exchange while alleviating the pressure on the supply of higher education opportunities, the Government successively placed an enormous emphasis on educational developments with the goal to establish Malaysia as the educational hub in Asia (Government of Malaysia, 1986).

### **1.3 The Third Stage: The Establishment of Campuses of Foreign Universities (Mid 1990s ~ Present)**

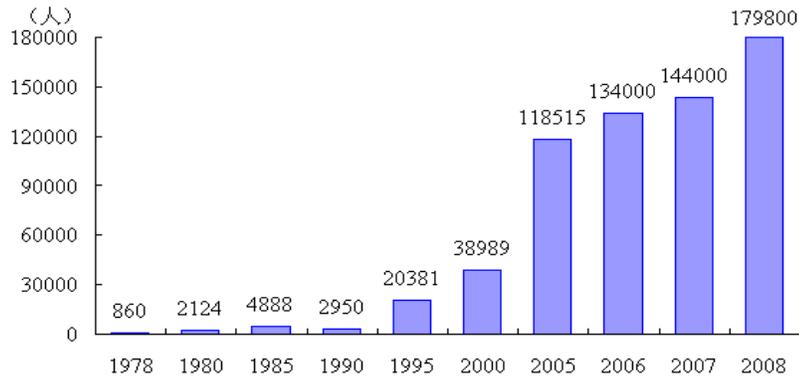
In order to overcome the demand for manpower in specific fields, the Government encouraged the private higher educational institutions to collaborate and cooperate with foreign universities in offering collaborative programs such as “1+2” twinning programs, “3+0” franchised programs, “credit transfer” programs, advanced-standing programs, external degree programs, external professional examinations programs, distance learning programs and joint programs. These types of programs not only offered a cost-effective route for Malaysian students to get quality education locally but also foreign qualifications from the developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada and so on (Government of Malaysia, 1991).

Similarly, with the establishment of branch campuses of foreign universities in Malaysia, students had the opportunity to obtain quality education as well as foreign qualifications from prestigious universities at lower tuition fees. To date, there are 20 universities, 20 university colleges, 5 branch campuses of foreign universities and 470 colleges registered with the Private Higher Educational Institution Management Sector (Rahman, 2010).

### **1.4 The Development of Chinese Students Overseas**

The Chinese Government funded their students to acquire knowledge and skills overseas since China practiced an open policy and experienced economic reformation in the late 1970s. After 1978, sending students to study abroad by the Chinese Government achieved a new milestone. Figure 1 clearly indicates that the number of Chinese (note that from henceforth Chinese students refer to students from China and not Malaysian Chinese students) students studying abroad was only 860 in 1978 and it increased significantly to 179,800 in 2008, while the number of students who returned to China after their education abroad increased dramatically from 248 to 69,300 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009).

**Figure 1: The Number of Chinese Students Studying Abroad**



Source from: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2009)

Since the medium of instruction in MPHEIs was English, it indirectly attracted lots of students from neighboring countries, including China, to study in Malaysia. In the late 1990s, the number of international students studying in Malaysia increased significantly with the rapid establishment of MPHEIs, from 5,635 in 1997 to 70,259 in 2008 (Table 1). The majority of the international students were from China, followed by Indonesia (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2008).

**Table 1: Total of International Students by Top 10 Source Countries**

No.	Country	Private Higher Education Institutions	Public Higher Education Institutions	Total
1.	China	2,385	7,970	10,355
2.	Indonesia	3,828	6,192	10,020
3.	Iran	2,998	3,247	6,245
4.	Nigeria	538	5,516	6,054
5.	Bangladesh	418	3,168	3,586
6.	Yemen	1,212	1,846	3,058
7.	Botswana	4	2,358	2,362
8.	Sudan	632	1,407	2,039
9.	Iraq	1,186	467	1,653
10.	Pakistan	175	1,475	1,650
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20,343</b>	<b>49,916</b>	<b>70,259</b>

Source from: Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2008)

Note: Based on the students' visas/passes issued by the Immigration Department, Malaysia

## **2.0 Research Objectives**

In light of the competitiveness of the job market in Asia, higher education was no longer considered an option, but regarded as a requirement for obtaining employment. This research aimed to study the factors that influenced Chinese students to study in MPHEIs. The specific objectives for the study were:

1. To identify the reasons why Chinese students go abroad for higher education;
2. To determine the sources of information used by Chinese students to choose MPHEIs; and
3. To examine the determining factors influencing Chinese students' choices of MPHEIs.

## **3.0 Methods**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This cross-sectional survey was conducted from July 2011 until October 2011. The convenience sampling method was used in selecting 350 Chinese students from MPHEIs located in Klang Valley Area, such as SEGi University College, HELP University, KDU University College and Limkokwing University. All participants spent approximately 20 minutes in answering the questionnaire, which was developed in two languages, namely Chinese and English.

### **3.2 Statistical Analysis**

All quantitative variables were summarized using the descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, while frequency and percentage were used to summarize the qualitative variables.

The factor analysis is commonly used to study the construct validity of any research instrument or questionnaire. This method aims at classifying a large set of the inter-correlated items in the questionnaire into a smaller number of the underlying dimensions. In the study, the factor analysis was conducted by applying the principal component analysis to construct the aggregate indicators of the factors through a varimax rotation. The results were then classified into the relevant dimensions according to an eigen value cut-off of 1.0; items with a rotated loading factor of less than 0.4 were removed from the dimensions (Hair & Black, 1998).

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 19 was used to perform the analyses for the study. All missing data were excluded from the analyses.

## **4.0 Results**

### **4.1 Response Rate**

Among the 350 respondents, only 303 respondents with complete questionnaires were included in the analyses. Therefore, a response rate of 87% was obtained for the study.

#### 4.2 Demographic Background

Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents were in the age group of 18-29 (93%) and were pursuing Degree programs in Malaysia (66%). Approximately half of the respondents were male students (48%).

**Table 2: Demographic Background of Respondents**

Demographic	Frequency n=303	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	282	93.1
30-39	17	5.6
40-49	4	1.3
<b>Program</b>		
Degree	200	66.0
Master	44	14.5
Diploma	21	6.9
Foundation	19	6.3
Other	16	5.3
PHD or equivalent	3	1.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	159	52.5
Male	144	47.5

#### 4.3 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis with a varimax rotation was used to determine the underlying dimensions of reasons for Chinese students to study abroad. Two dimensions, namely novel experience and better personal development, were found through the factor analysis as the reasons for Chinese students to study abroad (Table 3).

**Table 3: Factor Analysis: Reasons for Chinese Students to Study Abroad**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Eigen value	% of Variance	Cumulative % of variance
<b>Factor 1: Novel Experience</b>					
Overseas educational resources are better than domestic educational resources	.801		1.801	25.728	25.728
Most satisfied with living abroad	.716				

<b>Factor 2: Better Personal Development</b>					
Widen your view		.495	1.722	24.601	50.329
Good language environment		.767			
Foreign qualification has more value		.676			
Get better work opportunities		.668			

Table 4 clearly indicates that direct communication, indirect information source, traditional promotion and decision influencer, were the main sources of information for Chinese students to study in MPHEIs. All of these dimensions explained about 71% of the total variances.

**Table 4: Factor Analysis: Source of Information for Chinese Students to Study in MPHEIs**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
<b>Factor 1: Direct Communication</b>				
Electronic media	.631			
Friends	.845			
Marketing communication	.663			
<b>Factor 2: Indirect Information Source</b>				
Prospectuses and brochures		.817		
Relatives		.739		
<b>Factor 3: Traditional Promotion</b>				
University website			.919	
Press advertising			.547	
<b>Factor 4: Decision Influencer</b>				
Parents				.802
Education agent				.731
Eigen value	1.945	1.598	1.526	1.309
% of Variance	21.614	17.760	16.954	14.541
Cumulative % of variance	21.614	39.373	56.328	70.869

Six dimensions were found to be the leading factors in determining the choice of MPHEIs among Chinese students. These factors were 1) quality learning environment; 2) courses requirements; 3) added value; 4) students' evaluation; 5) price; and 6) decision influencers (Table 5).

**Table 5: Factor Analysis: Choice Criteria for Chinese Students in Selecting MPHEIs**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
<b>Factor 1: Quality Learning Environment</b>						
Quality teaching	.802					
Staff qualification	.751					
Offering of student loans /scholarships	.619					
Major's reputation	.597					
Institution's reputation	.426					
<b>Factor 2: Courses Requirements</b>						
The duration of the course		.851				
Entry requirements		.489				
<b>Factor 3: Added Value</b>						
Availability of facilities and resources			.818			
Programs structure			.751			
Costs of living and types of accommodation						.465
<b>Factor 4: Students' Evaluation</b>						
Students' satisfaction				.739		
The drop-out rate				.728		
Employment prospect				.453		
<b>Factor 5: Price</b>						
Cost of tuition fee					.784	
Flexibility in payment					.467	
<b>Factor 6: Decision Influencers</b>						
Advice from peers, teachers and parents						.814
Eigen value	2.748	2.095	1.966	1.769	1.580	1.433
% of Variance	15.265	11.640	10.923	9.830	8.778	7.962
Cumulative % of variance	15.265	26.905	37.828	47.658	56.436	64.399

## **5.0 Discussions**

Through the study, it can be easily understood that most Chinese students had the perception that a foreign educational experience and foreign qualifications would lead to better employment. Therefore, the number of Chinese students who sought foreign educational experience and qualifications increased tremendously in the last decade.

Since studying abroad is an important event to individuals, therefore, majority of the people will use various reliable approaches in sourcing for relevant information. Although a wide range of information can be obtained from the Internet nowadays, people will still spend times analyzing whether the obtained information are true. Therefore, the trust level of the information obtained from the Internet is rather low. Hence, most will still prefer to source information through the traditional methods, such as relying on the prospectuses and brochures of the higher educational institutions.

Although higher education is non-compulsory, higher educational institutions offer a wide range of the educational services, such as providing comprehensive information about the programs that they offer as well as the details or information about the institutions, etc., to ensure potential students choose the right institution and the educational pathways that suit their needs. In view of the perception that salary and job opportunities are highly likely to be positively associated with foreign qualifications, more Chinese students are gearing towards foreign countries such as Malaysia to pursue their tertiary education with a lower tuition fee. As a whole, this study gathered clear insights from the Chinese students on why MPHEIs as their choice of study.

## **6.0 Research Limitations**

Due to the logistic problem, the study only managed to gather information from Chinese students who were studying in MPHEIs located in the Klang Valley area, such as SEGi University College, HELP University, KDU University College and Limkokwing University. It would be interesting to examine whether the findings of the study would be applicable to Chinese students who were studying in MPHEIs outside the Klang Valley.

For generalization purpose, it would be better to have a large number of respondents in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the results. Due to the time and budget constraints, the findings of the study were only based on 305 respondents who had completed the questionnaire.

It would also be interesting to extend the study to include Chinese students from the public higher educational institutions in Malaysia. Since the study environment, tuition fees, programs offered and facilities are very different between the private and public higher educational institutions in Malaysia, therefore, it would allow researchers to compare the findings further.

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