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Strategic Management of International Students Theory Implications: Did active Perspective

Emmanuel Luke Balami
Innovative Management Consultant, Nigeria
Che An Abdul Ghani
Lecturer, Faculty of Modern Languages, Universiti Putra, Malaysia
A. A Malgwi
Lecturer, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

Abstract:
The internationalization and liberalization of higher education has caused many countries and higher education institutions to employ aggressive strategies to attract international students to choose their countries as study destination. There are three reasons noted for this move which are revenue drive, global ranking and developing/improving their knowledge economy. However, little is done for the retention of these students in both management practice and especially the application of theory. This study draws upon the Social Contact Theory that focuses on the role Host Country Nationals play in facilitating the cross-cultural adjustment of international students. It is expected that through the instrumentality of this theory, the international student adjustment issues will be reduced. It therefore recommended for more research in this direction and that both government and educational institution policy makers will make use of this as a policy tool.

Keywords: Host country national, cross-cultural adjustment, higher education, knowledge economy, social contact theory

1. Introduction

This article is an attempt to highlight the feasibility of developing a theoretical model and to recommend same for managing international students to ease their adjustment in the host country The current trend of globalisation has not only impacted multinational corporations and created opportunity for online services such as software development across the web; but it has also facilitated internationalisation of higher education. The enrolment in public and private universities has seen a phenomenal growth in terms of proliferation of overseas campuses, development of educational infrastructure mass movement of students across borders and recruitment of academics between nations (OECD, 2011). The increase in number of international students enrolling in universities abroad is associated with two major reasons which are revenue generation and improved economy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).Many countries are eager to have big enrolment of foreign students in their public universities as the latter is a source of income to their countries. However, while the effort and resources engaged in the attraction of international students is unprecedented, the international student experience myriad of problems which precludes their adjustment in the host countries, (Anderson et al., 2009; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Li & Kaye, 1998). A positive experience of residing in the host country will encourage further patronage by prospective candidates who may be in contact with current students or alumni. The theoretical model is intended to address higher education management practitioners' problem of retaining international students (Sangodiah&Balakrishnan, 2014) by attempting to answer questions that relates to the implications of theory in the retention of international students in a host country.

2. Related Literature Review

A number of strategies reused by host countries to attract international students to study in their countries/institutions.Niven, (1987) and Griffith University, (2012) found that Britain's Higher Education Institutions both public and private are involved in rigorously campaign to recruit international students using diverse strategies. These strategies are broadly categorized into five (Woodall, 1989). Some institutions employ different approaches to attract international students using the followings ways:

- Word of mouth advertising
- Development of contacts overseas
- Direct marketing

- Incremental targeting
- Relation of internal provision for students

Other forms of attracting international students include providing aids in the form of scholarships or exemptions of fees to students from neighborhood countries to the host Country. Woodall, (1987) reported an example of this approach in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea on students studying in Australian Higher Education Institutions. Others enjoy some facilities for originating from countries who share membership with the destination country. For example, students from Common Wealth member countries enjoy fee waiver as is practiced in Canada or fee exemptions for developing countries as found in Belgium, (Wood hall, 1987).

However, Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño perceive the pull-factors responsible for internationalization decision in another perspective as indicated in a framework for international students' decision-making process (Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006). Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviños' framework breaks down identified pull-factors into main themes this include:

- Personal reasons (i.e., personal improvement, advice),
- Country image (i.e., cultural distance, city image, cost of living, immigration),
- Program evaluation (i.e., international recognition, specialization), and
- Institutional image (i.e., corporate image, faculty quality, facilities).

Some studies however indicate that any strategies employed to attract international students must take into account the following factors:

2.1. Country of Choice

The adoption of English as a global language has enabled many countries to offer educational services. Many countries have become education destinations besides United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which is another reason the number of students intending to study in English speaking countries have English background (OECD, 2011).

2.2. Reputation of Institutions

Reputation of institutions is one of the determining factors when international student is deciding for a study destination (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Therefore, universities that are listed in Times Higher Education Ranking are usually sought after by international students as the information it contend serves as one of the early interface between the prospective student and the institution. In addition to the ranking issue is the issue of accommodation which is also a factor that can affect a student's choice of a study destination. As pointed out above reputation seems to be top priority in choosing a study destination, however, Niven asserts that accommodation issue is the major concern especially for an international student. This is partly because most educational institutions do not provide accommodate to all overseas students especially those with families, spouses and dependent children in terms of space and variety of accommodations demanded by group of students (Niven, 1987; Li & Kaye, 1998).

2.3. Immigration Policies

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted another factor of concern for an international student is immigration policies. In their quest to woo international students, several OECD countries hadadjusted their immigration policies; this has encouraged the temporary or permanent immigration of international students (OECD, 2011.Australia made it easier for international students who have studied in Australia to become permanent residents by giving "additional points in an immigration point system" (OECD, 2011; Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Canada is also another country that provide job opportunities to international students during their studies and also for those students who graduated from recognized Canadian postsecondary institution to apply for work permit under a Post-Graduation Work Permit Program in order to gain a job experience as a prerequisite to apply for certain permanent residence programs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015).

2.4. Cost

Another significant factor that international students consider when choosing a study destination is cost. However, Mazzarol and Soutarargued that cost influence could be relative, for example, in the case of competitive markets for international tertiary education of similar quality (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Woodhall suggests that lower cost destinations are more likely to attract international students (Woodhall, 1989).

2.5. Other Factors

Other factors that have been found to influence international students' study destination include the followings:

- Flexibility of programmes toward timely completion,
- Recognition of degree abroad,
- Limitation of availability of Tertiary Education in home country,

- Over regulated admission policies at home country,
- Job opportunities, and,
- Bilateral collaborations between home and host countries, (OECD, 2011).
- Parental Influence

While these factors corroborated Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) findings, these factors are not end to themselves, a study on mainland China students cross-border movement finding signifies that parents are the ultimate influencers of overseas/cross-border study destination choice (Bodycott, 2012).

2.6. Challenges Faced by International Students

The movement of students across borders in pursuit of higher education is confronted with several challenges. These challenges may differ by country, institution, financial status of individual student, personality, host country nationals characteristics, language (English) proficiency of student, prior cultural contact experience, financial, others could be psychological problems, health and recreational issues, loneliness, depression, feeling isolation and worthlessness (Yeh & Inose, 2002; Hus, 2003; Andrade, 2006; Dawn, 2008 ; Lui, 2009; Sovic, 2009; Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009; Sherry, 2010; Alavi & Shafeg, 2011, Chen, 1999).

Wenhua and Zhe contributed in highlighting global issues faced by International Students in profiling and categorisingthe above identified challenges into five categories (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013).

As stated above, international students faces challenges during the periods ofadjustment for various reasonsdepending on their backgrounds. Among the challenges are religious practice, finance, social, academic, personaland language (Suseela, & Provaikarasi, 2011)for Mahmud, Amata, Rahmana and Ishak, (2010) the main themes that emerged as issues of concern to international students were culture, climate, and care. Another research conducted in Malaysian higher education institutions was that by Talebloo and Baki (2013),the study findings elaboratemore andcategorised the international students' challenges in a tabular form (Vide Table 2 in Appendix).

2.7. Competition in Attracting International Students

Since the adjustment issue is a global phenomenon and especially that there is rapid development in the higher education sector as witnessed in the Gulf region allocating more budgetary allocations toward educational developments and the proliferation of Western university campuses in different countries (C-BERT., 2014).Any country therefore that intends to participate or wants to succeed in the international education market should be aware of the emergence of the new players in the market like Singapore, Japan and the Arab-Gulf region (OECD, 2011, in Anderson & Bhati, 2012).

Countries promoting higher education especially those from developing nations should note that there is aggressive marketing in the industry and many nations are upgrading their universities and others are committing huge part of their budgetary allocations to the development of their higher education infrastructure and recruiting top quality graduates. For example, countries in the Arab Golf regions since 2007 have rigorously implemented plans of expanding their higher education capacities and infrastructural development by committing more budgetary allocation. Developments in Japan should also be of great interest to Asian countries. Yomiuri ,reported that Japanese government had agreed on a plan to accept more foreign students into its higher education institutions, with a set target of 1 million 2025 (Shimbun, 2007).

Another lesson to be learnt is that of the major host countries (UK, US and Australia), these countries had accounted for hosting half of all international tertiary education students; however, between 2000 to 2009, the number of international students who chose the United States as their study destination fell from 23% of the global international student population to 18% while the United Kingdom also fell one percentage point (OECD, 2011). One of the most recent is that of Australia, there was a sharp drop in international student enrolment between 2010/2011 this was associated with conflicts and which lead to death causing many prospective students especially from Indian to turn to other countries (OECD, 2011). And because of the significance of international students to its economy, Australia took policy measures to arrest the problem (Griffith, 2012; OECD, 2011, p. 328; Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). These policy measures could be seen in the measures taken by Griffith for student retention which are based on literature recommendations (to create an effective orientation experience, to increase personal communication between students and staff, to provide early detection and intervention to risk vulnerable students, to enhance the quality of the learning experience, and to increase student engagement and quality of the campus experience (Scott et al., 2008; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). In summary, this indicates that students have alternative study destinations as such higher education institutions should be innovative and proactive in their approaches to retention of these students.

2.8. Question Arising from Literature and Practice

Looking at the literature so far, especially from studies carried out on international students in Malaysian higher education institutions, the common topics are—causes of adjustment problems; challenges faced by international students, culture shock among students, barriers to adjustment among international higher education students, and other related topics(Balami, 2017). These concerns however, have not been addressed through an appropriate theoretical model.

A suitable theoretical model is therefore proposed by this article to be used to explicate the adjustment and retention phenomenon. The theoretical approach can serve as a general and lasting tool that could be considered by the Malaysian

Ministry of Higher Education (MoHEM) to improve and make the Ministry's "Framework for International Students Management" a more robust policy toolthat can complement the Ministry's effort in the area of retention of current and prospective international students to Malaysia higher education institutions.

2.9. Adjustment—Retention Efforts

While enamours resources have been employed to attract international students and a corresponding number of research have been carried out on international student adjustment issues (Li & Kaye, 1998;Wenhua & Zhe, 2013).However, much still needs to be done in the area of application of theory for policy on addressingmanagement and retention of international students in the host country (Griffith, 2012; Sangodiah & Balakrishnan, 2014; Schulmann & Choudaha, 2014).

The lack of proper management of the international students leads to attrition; therefore, this review article is based on identified gap in studies carried out on international student adjustment in Malaysian higher education institutions (Balami, 2017). Most of the research carried in Malaysia on the international students is about causes of maladjustment but void of theory implications. Some of the adjustment problems re-occurred on the list of adjustment problems identified. For example, accommodation, communication, and an issue of particular concern Expatriate—Host Country National relationships (Niven, 1987; Wan, 2013; Taufiki & Dawi, 2014). The area of expatriate—host national relationship leads us to the main reason for the theory in this article (Social Contact Theory).

2.10. A Theoretical Framework for Adjustment

Studies have reported the importance of host national's roles in assisting international students to adjust in a new environment; these roles include social integration, higher education institutions to prepare ahead in areas of culture, climate and care before receiving international students (Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Wan, et al., 2013; Mahmud, et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, a Monash university study on the impact of multicultural experiences in the development of socio-cultural adaptation among international students reported that, there is a significant positive link between international student multicultural experience and their cross-cultural adjustment (Yusliza & Shanker, 2010).This argument is consistent with the propositions of social identity theory (SIT) which posits that individuals are more likely to have positive attitude and behavior toward those classified as belonging to one of their in-groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This theoretical approach is significant because ethnocentrism is still rampant among students but also faculty as pointed out by Tange, who asserts that international classrooms suffer from problems of 'ethnocentric pedagogy', where Western country university lecturers impose own pedagogical beliefs in perceiving international students to be empty vessels merely to 'be filled with Euro-American knowledge' (Tange, 2008).

2.11. Theoretical implications

The cross-cultural adjustment literature has over time emphasized the need for support for expatriates on foreign assignments as the expatriate struggle to cope with the new environment. While the literature has suggested factors to ease the difficulties experienced by foreigner (who could be assignees sent by their organizations to a short or long term foreign assignment, a foreigner could also be a self-expatriate worker or an international student). A particular study by Mahajan and Toh pointed to the significance of the Host Country National (HCN) who are generally classified into three namely; hostco-workers, host co-students and those host nationals who are neither co-workers nor co-students. This group of individuals can be a great source of information and social support to foreigners (Soo & Angelo, 2007; Mahajan & Toh, 2014). This article therefore suggests theorization of this relationship to establish a theoretical base for the international student adjustment and retention phenomenon.

Social contact theorists suggests four conditions under which contacts between racial groups can result to positive changes, this include:

- Common goals,
- Intergroup cooperation,
- Equal status, and
- Authority support (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, Brown& Vivian, 1986)

The social contact theory was extended by the work of Emerson, who proposed that if people of different backgrounds are brought together, irrational beliefs and racismwill change (Emerson, 2002).

As such, the government can enact policies and practices that will encourage contact betweeninternational students and local students (Griffith, 2012; Smith & Demjanenko, 2011). Putnam referred to this move as 'Bonding Capital' and 'Bridging Capital' (Putnam, 2000) and that multi-racial social contact relationship can be beneficial in promoting cooperation, reciprocity and curb segregation (Yancey, 1999; Emerson, 2000). Another social theorist (Putnam's) framework suggests that some social ties provide 'bonding capital' and that such ties bond people of common interest, resulting in resource sharing and support for each other within their group. It further asserts that, multi-racial social tie is significant because it also influences both bonding and bridging social capital and also encourages creation of life opportunities within the cultural mix (Granovetter, 1973; Yancey, 1999; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Putnam, 2000).This social contact ultimately leads to interactions which then metamorphose to positive sentiments, forming synergy between group members to collaborate between themselvesto carry out group task (Lawler, 1992; Schofield, 1979).

Social Psychologists believed that those who develop emotional attachment to other group members will continue to seek such group membership (Lawler, 1992; Tajfel & Turner 1986).Subsequently,   the effect of social contact with other races or withhost country national will lead to harmonious co-existence and national development.

3. Conclusion

As the proliferation of higher education and movement of students across borders has seen increase, however its direction of low is unpredictable as it is contingent on a lot of factors some of which unpredictable. It is timely and sufficient to allocate time and resources to research and in particular to advance academic theories that will pave way for future studies and to enable policy makers make sound and concrete decisions. It is believed that any research that is not based on theoretical reasoning may be localized and may only serve a specific concern and outcome.

4. Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is obvious that internationalisation of higher education is comparable to commercial ventures as internationalization of education and other educational services have been enshrined into World Trade Organization (WTO) global trade framework (WTO, 1995). The review recommends that administrators of international student management to formulate a theoretical model that takes into account holistic needs of the students.

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Appendix

Category	Specific problems
Personal psychological issues	Homesickness, loneliness, stress, depression, frustration, loss of status or identity, anxiety, confusion, etc.
Academic Issues	Academic progress, academic demands, lack of understanding of the American educational system, lack of effective learning skills for gaining academic success, difficulties in using educational supportive services (e.g. library, academic counselling services).
Socio-cultural issues	Cultural shock, cultural fatigue, stereotyping, prejudice, racial discrimination, difficulties in adjusting to new social/cultural customs, norms and regulations and participating in intercultural/social activities, relationship problems, etc.
General living issues	Accommodation difficulties, difficulties in using student support services, financial stress, dietary restrictions, safety threats, etc.
English language proficiency	Difficulties in communicating with native speakers, understanding lectures, writing up essays, etc.

Table 1: Summary of Problems Faced By International Students
Source - Wenhua & Zhe, (2013)

Categories	Items
Faculties	accommodation, transportation, food and library
Social Environment	cultural, communication & English difficulties
Academic difficulty	academic system, lecturers & methodology & faculty supervisor
International Office Program	Lack of entertaining activities

Table 2: Summary of Problems Facing International Students in Malaysia
Source – Talebloo & Baki, (2013)