

Factors Affecting the Tendency of International Students to Pursue Study in Universiti Malaysia Sabah

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Abstract--- *This study discusses about the tendency of international students to pursue their study in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the factors involved in their selection. The enrolment of international student in higher institution nowadays has become a significant element to be recognized as the world-class study center. Therefore, various efforts and strategies need to be designed to increase the number of international student. Understanding the factors affecting the decision of an international student can give an idea to the university in order to implement the appropriate strategy and simultaneously attracting them to enrol the programme resulting a positive effects towards the university itself. There are two main objectives of this study which is firstly, to identify the factors that influence international students to study abroad and secondly, to evaluate Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) selection factor as a destination for international students. The methodology of this study is using a qualitative research method and a case study type. A total of 20 respondents from various nationalities were randomly selected and interviewed in depth to get the required appropriate data. Based on the conceptual framework of Suh Li Phang (2013), the factors influencing university selection by international students were divided into three significant categories ie (i) communication (ii) location and (iii) social. The author analyzed the causes for international students to choose UMS and found three newness as a contribution to the body of knowledge. Hence, this information should be adapted to develop a better plan of international student enrolment strategy in UMS and to ensure the sustainability of Malaysia higher education sector.*

Keywords--- *Factors, International Students, Tendency, Study, Abroad, Higher Education, Enrollment, Internationalization*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inline with the Malaysia Vision 2020, internationalization especially in the higher education sector has become one of the main agenda that often critically discussed not only in Malaysia but also in institutions of higher learning worldwide. Within the Strategic Plan of Malaysia Higher Education, it is also has been highlighted about the importance of internationalization implementation by exploiting the intellectual, physical and human capital resources to achieve nation's the goal which is to upsurge the universities' international visibility as a hub of academic excellence. These days, students are motivated to develop their global employability, marketability as well as global skills to be able to strive in the international level. Learning abroad could actually give them an opportunity to be themselves, to build credence, to meet and to understand the other culture that will positively

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impact themselves (Douglas, Jennifer and Carolyn, 2008; Herlina 2017). Additionally, Studying abroad give the students an ability to move outside the normal local academic routine and to get an 'international experience' as the added value in their resume afterwards. Therefore, understanding the international students' motive and factor that influence their tendency to study abroad is very much crucial for the higher learning institution to develop their internationalization strategy based on the demand and supply idea effectively. Conceptually, a university is a party that provides service to international student. Meanwhile, the international student is like a consumer with varying demands and expectation before furthering his or her study overseas (Sivasamy, 2016).

The Malaysia National Education Philosophy (NEP) states that, *"Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large"*. Thus, this country needs a competitive and relevant higher education system to ensure its global excellence. To acquire this goal, the higher learning institutions in Malaysia has been executed through multiple activities such as integration of international dimensions in the process of student recruitment, teaching and learning, research and innovation, and the management itself. We can see that without a proper analysis of strategy, it is difficult for internationalization to be implemented. This strategy should considering a decision of when, how and which market to enter. It is also said that to ensure a successful internationalization, the level of risk and uncertainty ought to be reduced by selecting the correct strategy and method. Market knowledge is an important element in designing an effective internationalization method (Faroque & Morrish, 2015) In the context of internationalization of the university, its market refers to foreign students who are learning in the local higher education institution and they are contributing to the financial sustainability for the university concurrently.

Table 1 shows the total number of international students registered at the public university in Malaysia from year 2012 until year 2017.

Table 1: International Students' Enrolment in Malaysian Public Universities (2012-2017)

Year	Number of enrollment
2012	26,232
2013	28,826
2014	27,042
2015	26,405
2016	25,824
2017	27,766
Total enrollment	206,854

Resource: Statistik Pendidikan Tinggi 2017 (updated annually): <http://mohe.gov.my/en/download/awam/statistik/2017-3>

In the statistics shown above, at year 2012 until 2013 we can see an increment number of international students registration in Malaysia Public University. But the decline has occurred since 2013, from 28,826 enrolments to 25,824 enrolments in year 2016. Fortunately in year 2017, after the nation has emphasized the internationalization approach in every higher learning institutions, resulting an increment of 1942 enrolments in that year. Efforts to enhance the internationalization and number of international student enrolment in Malaysia are carried out to respond to the calls and challenges raised. Nevertheless, international student enrollment statistics still show inconsistent changes as the number of students increases and sometimes decreases.

Through the awareness of increasing global competition in the foreseeable future, most higher education institution have set their vision and mission to achieve international education as a national priority and academic responsibility. The Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has embarked on an effort to achieve university internationalization through the strategic plan focusing on Key Result Area-3 (KRA-3) for certain years which aim to enhances the visibility and reputation internationally. Among them include endeavour to improve the international achievements by increasing the amount of international students and to intensify the mobility programme for the student and staff, enhancing a collaboration between institution and international agencies (UMS Strategic Plan, 2018-2022). At Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) when the parliament passed its establishment after being declared by the Malaysia Sultan YDP Agong under section 6 (1) of the Universities and Colleges Act 1971, it established the Center of International Affairs (PHEA) which is known as Global Internationalization and Engagement Center (PPPG) to support the university's mission towards internationalization through strong international co-operation, facilitating academic, research and student exchange activities, creating conducive learning environments for international students and further promoting international student recruitment and promotion activities (Irma Wani Othman et. al, 2014) now. The focus of this study is on Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) which is one of the four comprehensive university in 20 Malaysia public universities. The figure below show the statistic of international student enrolments in UMS to session 2016/2017

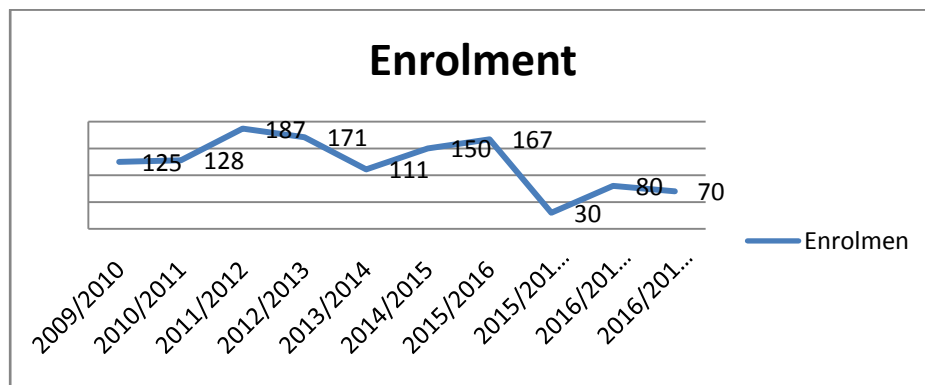


Figure 1: International Student Enrollment Statistics (Undergraduate) Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) to Session 2016/2017 (February)

Source: Global Internationalization and Engagement Center (PPPG) UMS

[data received on January 31, 2018]

Although there is an increment in the number of enrolment for international student in the year 2017 totally at most of the public university in Malaysia, the different occurrence happen in the focus study area. The number of international student enrolments (undergraduates) in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been decreased inconsistently as shown in Figure 1.1 until February 2017 Session 2016/2017. This has led the author to think about the cause of changes in the number of international student enrolment and at the same time indicate the shift of international students' tendency in choosing this university as well as Malaysia as the destination country for study abroad. This is definitely influenced by the various factors that will be discussed through this study.

II. OBJECTIVES

- i. to identify factors affecting international students to further their studies abroad and,
- ii. to evaluate international students' decision to Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

III. RESEARCH SCOPE

This study is expected to benefit the institutions of higher learning and the country's higher education sector in the globalization era where understanding of the international student's tendency in choosing UMS as a study destination can be manipulated to attract more international students intending to pursue studies in Malaysia. The sample of the study consists of (i) undergraduate and postgraduate students from various nationalities who are currently studying at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), (ii) international students who studied or still studying at UMS for at least six (6) months to one (1) year and (iii) Status of funding is without sponsorship or with sponsorship.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internationalization concept

The concept of internationalization of higher education is certainly synonymous with the 21st century global world with various sectors and institutions competing fiercely to achieve the status of international organization. This concept is very wide and can be seen from different dimensions. Internationalization emphasizes strategic relationships while the internationalization in higher education includes international intake, staff exchange and collaboration between universities around the world. Over the past 30 years internationalization of higher education institution has become a major growing industry in the world (Ota, 2018). Through a national perspective, internationalization is defined as the process of integrating international, cultural or global dimensions into goals, functions and means of delivery in higher education (Knight, 2015). It has also been supported through the definition made by Weidinger, Kordel & Kieslinger, (2019) that internationalization is a process of integration of different dimensions internationally and cultural diversity into the purpose, function (teaching, research, service) and delivery of higher education. It refers to all aspects of internationalization, whether across borders or not. Based on these definitions, it is clear that cross border education is part of internationalization. Knight (2015) further refines the definition of education across borders as human mobility, programs, suppliers and projects across the country's official boundaries. Human mobility involves students, academics, staff, experts and can occur in many ways including full-time degree programs, student exchange, industrial training, fieldwork, short-term programs and many

more. Meanwhile, the mobility of academicians, staff and experts is seen through teaching, research, Attaché, and referrals. Mobility in terms of study program was carried out through collaboration between domestic and foreign institutions in a form of franchising, twinning and validation (Weidinger, Kordel & Kieslinger, 2019). In general, the internationalization of higher education implemented aim to improve the dignity of a university. Various efforts have been made to support the implementation of internationalization and one of the internationalization initiatives is to attract more international students to come and study at host country (Suzanne, 2019).

International students

International students also known as foreign students are defined as an individuals who are recognized by a country other than their home country. Typically, international students are under special permit or visa for program and course study purposes at recognized institutions. Meanwhile, according to scholars Page and Chahboun (2019) has defined an international students as an individuals who are or want to investigate knowledge across borders of their own country. According to Chou and Ching (2015), international students are students who carry out all or part of their high learning experience in countries other than their home country. Chou and Ching (2015). are later supported by Shapiro, Farrelly and Tomas (2014) who acknowledged that international students are those who move from their home country to another country to pursue a higher level of education such as colleges and universities level. As a result, the definitions of international students are vary by country and continent.

Conceptual Framework of Suh Li Phang (2013)

The conceptual framework of this study are based on the result of Suh Li Phang (2013) study which examines the factors influencing the results of international students in the selection of study destinations overseas. This approach uses the perspective of multi-dimensional movement which results in development in several factors and the movement of its own business. Suh Li Phang(2013) has classified the factors of selecting international universities into three major factors, namely communication factors, location factors and social factors.

a. Communication factor

Communication factor refers to the quality of communication through two channels which is (i) online communication channel and (ii) offline communication channel. Aksoy, Uzunoglu & Akyar (2017) said that the quality of communication is one of the main factors in influencing the decision of the students to further their studies abroad. The online channel works before implementing the program application process and place of study. Most students are more likely to use online search engine to collect information. Yahoo!, Bing and Google Search are said to be the most popular channel used by international students. A university is able to provide enough information to attract more potential students to participate in the programmes offered at the university through a quality communication channels (Ngozi, Ifeoma and Nebo, 2015). Meanwhile, offline communication channels used after students arrive at the university overseas. One of the communication type is the face-to-face interaction, where the students and university representative meet at an educational exhibitions in their home country and creating opportunity for the university representative to influence the prospective international student's decision. Higher education institutions are able to attract more international students if the sufficient awareness of the importance to have an effective communication exists. Communication occurs when a message is transmitted from the sender to a

recipient with a purpose, expression and medium in the environment (Aksoy, Uzunoglu & Akyar, 2017) Today's scenario proven that internet has become the fastest and important tool for communication in a technologically advanced globalization era (Reddy & Kumar, 2016). There is an undeniable relationship between culture and communication. According to Wei, Eric, Ching & Ming (2017) scholars, culture is a combination of interpretations that can affect one's behavior, including beliefs, values, norms and social practices. Wei, Eric, Ching and Ming (2017) said that relevance exists between culture and communication, which at the same time contributes to the understanding of inter-cultural competencies. When the communication occurs on the internet, cultural aspects need to be considered. This is because the internet offers an alternative communication channels apart from the traditional communication channels such as printed media, word of mouth and public relations that are normally used to recruit new potential students (Willis, 2018). Undoubtedly, the internet allows marketers to give out information with different cultural targets, including oral and non-verbal content (Ewah & Osang, 2018). They suggest that the availability of different languages on the website is very helpful in enhancing the potential bonds that symbolize respect for culture. Ewah and Osang also emphasize the importance of communication through email as the context of low communication and dispatchers should be more sensitive to the recipient's background and culture.

b. Location Factor: Attraction Destination Studies

Location factor is also an important element that will affect the choice of learning location where a complete education of the destination provides different impact (Sanghyeop et al, 2018). The attractions of a study destination according to Suh Li Phang (2013) can be divided into seven sub factor which are: preferred destination country, institutional image, programme and course offered, language, international environment and cost of study.

i. Preferred Destination Country

Countries are considered to be attractive according to its reputation in terms of the safety and openness of the local communities in accepting foreign students. In addition, factors such as a stable political environment, individual freedom of speech, low unemployment rate, economic stability, diversity of races and cultural and educational standards in the country (Teerapat & Athapol, 2015) are also being contemplated closely. Previous studies show there is a high tendency of international students to make a choice based on the desire to live in a big city throughout their study abroad (Nicholls 2018). It also refers to the size of the city, infrastructure facilities such as housing and transport systems. Apart from that, social life in the host country can become an attraction that lead the student's social life, including activities that organized by student associations and festive celebrations in certain state throughout the year.

ii. Institutional Image

The institution's image has a direct impact in the international students' decision to select a study destination overseas (Sunarsih, 2018). It allude to the status, position, accreditation and reputation of a university as well as the graduate employability are among the key criteria in forming a good institutional image. Nevertheless, institutional image may affects student university selection because the image of the university is highly related to the international status and the field of expertise that is owned by a university. The field of university expertise in particular research is able to create future career opportunities that can benefit students when they return to their

home country. The importance of relationships between a university and industry is also seen as a major factor in decision making. Factors like inviting lecturers or professionals from related industries as well as giving lectures to students are seen as an advantage to open up opportunities for students to develop relationships between industries and thus increasing employment opportunities when students graduate. The findings suggest that the reputation of study institutions and job opportunities after graduation is considered as an important factor in influencing international students in selecting university programmes and countries.

iii. Programs and Courses

While contemporary programmes and versatility of the courses can be a major factor in influencing the international students selection. Usually international students will refer to a program or courses that has a comprehensive learning content and meet the market expectations and job requirements. While offering programs containing courses involving external industries such as attachment, industrial training in hands-on form give an added value to students indirectly (Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman, 2012).

iv. Language

Language teaching and learning is also being considered as a very critical factor influencing the decision to choose courses and learning destinations. Many students show a tendency to choose a country that uses English as a mandatory language (Spolsky & Sung, 2015) in lecture or class. However, the interest and willingness of students to learn local languages can be enhanced with the help of local communities as well as university that gives a chance to learn a dominated local language as an option for the international students. The university can also show concern over the efforts to empower local language by providing a language classes especially tailored to foreign education. Local language proficiency by international students is seen not only to provide self-confidence to those groups but it is also regarded as an added value to international student qualifications that are able to benefit them in the future (Chuing et al., 2015). However, for the assessment of the course followed by exams as well as university assignments, students still tend to follow it using English.

v. International Environment

Internationally-oriented learning environment is an important element in choosing the destination countries to pursue study (Tran, 2019). Internationalization of a university can be identified through the university's website where it can be accessed through different languages and provides feedback from international students who are currently enrolling a programme at the university. Concentration of student feedback can be evidenced with the experience and learning of new cultures in a country. Hence, issues such as cultural gaps can be transformed into an attraction to the new students to experience the culture of the host country as well as to provide different perspectives in an international standard of higher education (Lee and Morrish, 2012).

vi. Cost of study

The cost of study that related to fees and living expenses will definitely being taken into account as the majority of students who come out of the country are self-sponsored without receiving any scholarships. Therefore, for low-cost countries would be a good option for students who do not have substantial financial support (Yao et. al, 2017)

Whereas internal political situation of a host country such as the inflationary wave is also considered as a factor that can affect the selection of students who are keen to do part-time jobs while studying. In addition, opportunities for scholarships and financial assistance offered by a university to students who are enrolling for example students with excellent academic performance are the catalyst for the decision they choose for the university. (Herlina, et al, 2017) Some of the universities offer scholarships to students who are coming from third countries as the university's good will of the institution towards human capital development. There are also universities that constantly working to promote and increase student entry rates by using agent services to bring in a group of students from outside the country (Tran, 2019). The method shows the increase in international student enrolment statistics that is not only benefit the university directly but also providing student some deduction in tuition fees.

c. Social Factors: Social Networks

The social network of students refers to the relationship environment around the student. A network of relationships are created between the family, friends and academic networks such as academician and staff of the university to they prefer.

i. Family and Friends

Social relationships either from families, relatives or friends in a destination or host country may influence the student's decision to pursue their studies in that country (Lee and Morrish, 2012). Information and support from family and friends are seen to provide an impact of trust that has a strong influence on the perception of an individual. The previous study found that although students emphasized the selection of the destination country was based on self-selection, feedback from family discussion and friends will indirectly influenced their perceptions of a university and the study programme (Tran, 2019). Active social networks are able to increase their decision-making periods to learn to leave the country.

ii. Academician

Recommendations from academician consisting of Professors and lecturers can alter the results of student selection of university overseas. The suggestions from academician are often seen as having high values and generating student confidence in a university. In other words, the views of academician have a credibility and credible information (Suh Li Phang, 2013).

iii. Student Testimonials

While, student testimonials are obtained from students who are taking part in a program or already finished their study in the preferred university overseas either through the university website or directly from the student group could actually have a big impact on the selection. The previous study found that this method refers to the experience and views of the students when giving a clearer picture about a student life in a particular program, university and country (Teerapat & Athapol, 2015). While the information is more convincing and has a higher confidence value if the student's testimonials come from the same cultural background and country of origin. Although culture is not seen as a major factor in influencing international student's decision, past studies suggest that some aspects of the culture are considered as justifiable and implicit judgments of the decision making.

V. METHOD

The methodology conducted in this study is using a qualitative research method and case study type to identify the reasons behind the selection of UMS as a study destination abroad for international students. It is the responsibility of a researcher to understand the sampling procedure in carrying out a study. It aims to learn how to select a quality and accurate study sample so that it does not deviate from the main objectives and goals of the study (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the selected sample consisted of international students who studying at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The qualitative research method does not require a large number of samples but it will depends on the question given to the respondents. Therefore, in this research semi-structured interviews are used specifically to obtain empirical data to achieve the goals of the study.

Sample criterias

- Undergraduate or post-graduate international student.
- Sponsored or paid student.
- Various nationality
- Studying in UMS at least six months to one year
- Voluntary participation

Sampling techniques

This study uses a 'non-probability' sampling technique to select a sample that has been identified based on the predefined characteristics.

Sample Size

In the study conducted using this qualitative method, sample size to determine the number of respondents interviewed was not taken into account. Sampling characteristics are based on research questions by identifying respondents' criteria. This study interviews a small number of respondents but is expected to provide in-depth and comprehensive input.

VI. FINDINGS

The researcher classifies the interview results into three main factors based on the research questions and references from the theoretical framework. Some of the questions raised during the interview session are as follows;

Objective 1:

Identify factors that influence international students in furthering their education abroad.

- Why do you want to study abroad?*
- What is your goal of studying abroad?*
- How do you choose cities and countries for study abroad?*
- What were your expectations before going to a foreign study destination?*

- v. *Are there similarities or differences between your home country and your country of study?*
- vi. *Are you able to learn a lesson in a country of study without going abroad?*
- vii. *If you were given the opportunity to study abroad, would you leave?*
- viii. *What do you think is the biggest factor influencing students' decision to study abroad?*

Objective 2:

Evaluate international student decision making at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)

- i. *How do you get information about UMS?*
- ii. *Why did you choose to study at UMS?*
- iii. *What are your expectations before coming to UMS?*
- iv. *What experience did you have while studying at UMS?*
- v. *Do you think you can get a better job when you study at UMS? Why?*
- vi. *Do you think that the quality of education at UMS is better than yours? The suspect.*
- vii. *How is the international environment and facilities at UMS?*
- viii. *Do the programs and courses offered at UMS meet your preferences?*
- ix. *Are you satisfied with your tuition and living expenses while studying at UMS? Why not?*
- x. *What is your goal to study at UMS?*

In this study, 20 respondents were interviewed and demographic characteristics were classified into gender, age, program type and nationality (see Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteritics	Freque ncy	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	8	40
Female	12	60
Age		
19-25	13	65
26-30	5	25
31 above	2	10
Programme		

undergraduate	14	70
post-graduate	6	30
Nationality Profile		
Algeria	2	10
Bangladesh	1	5
China	2	10
Kemboja	1	5
India	1	5
Indonesia	1	5
Jepun	2	10
Korea	1	5
Kenya	1	5
Laos	1	5
Myanmar	1	5
Filipina	1	5
Pakistan	2	10
Thailand	1	5
Republik Timor Leste	1	5
Vietnam	1	5

Through interviews conducted with twenty respondents, several factors influencing international students to pursue further study abroad have been identified and classified into three main groups based on the conceptual framework referred to in this research. The three main groups in question are section a) Communication Factors related to the quality of communication between respondents and universities as well as communication channels; b) Location Factors: The destination of the study includes the country of study, the image of the institution, the program and course offered, the language, the international environment, the culture, the costs involved and the geographical position. Whereas, section c) describes the social factors involved in social networking around students. This is related to the social network of the respondents themselves. However, these factors are interrelated and overlap in many ways.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 3 details that international students preferred an online communication channel as a way to deliver and to receive an information about the prospective study destination. Meanwhile, in UMS, the international students received information through academic agent and roadshow. Next is the location factor that referred to the attraction of study destination.

Table 3: Element of Prospective Study Destination

Objective 1	No. of response
<i>Communication factors -</i>	
i. <i>online communication channel</i>	18
ii. <i>offline communication channel</i>	5
 <i>Location Factor</i>	
<i>(Attraction of the study destination)</i>	
i. <i>Institutional Image</i>	10
ii. <i>Programme and course</i>	7
iii. <i>Language</i>	7
iv. <i>Culture</i>	12
v. <i>study cost</i>	5
vi. <i>Geographical location</i>	4
 <i>Social Factor</i>	
i. <i>family and friends</i>	2
i. <i>academician</i>	2
ii. <i>students' testimonial</i>	1
 Objective 2:	
<i>Communication Factor:</i>	
i. <i>Academic roadshow</i>	1
ii. <i>Agent</i>	4
 <i>Location Factor</i>	
<i>(Attraction of the study destination)</i>	
i. <i>International environment in UMS</i>	5
ii. <i>Language</i>	2

iii.	<i>Culture of Sabah</i>	6
iv.	<i>Employment Opportunity</i>	1
v.	<i>university image</i>	3
vi.	<i>programme & course offered in UMS</i>	12
vii.	<i>Cost</i>	4
viii.	<i>International Experience</i>	1
ix.	<i>Exchange students program</i>	1
<i>Social factor: Social network</i>		
i.	<i>Academician</i>	2
ii.	<i>Students / Alumni Testimony</i>	4

Most of the international students was attracted to the culture of the host country at first before considering the other motives. However at UMS, a lot of international students choose to study in this university because of the programme and course offered. Within social factor category, family, friends and academician play an important role to influence the international students' decision making in choosing study destination abroad, whereas at UMS, the testimony of student and alumni gives more influence to the international students university selection decision. Lastly, there are three newness identified in this research as presented next:

Objective 1

- *Location factor - geographical location*

Objective 2

- *Communication factor - agent*

- *Location factor - Exchange student programme*

All of these factors are clearly stated by the respondent and related to each other.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study applied the conceptual framework of Suh Li Phang (2013) to address the two objectives formulated by the author and all relevant factors were found in the findings has answered the two objectives. For the first objective, to identify international student factors abroad, there is a new finding of factors that is different from Suh Li Phang's (2013) conceptual framework which is the geographical positioning factors. This geographical positioning factor arises when the international students choose a study destination that is near to their home country to enable them to return home frequently. Whereas, for the second objective, the assessment of international students' decision to UMS, the findings highlighted two new factors that are not in the conceptual framework of reference, which are the agent initiative factor and also the student exchange program that have led international student to choose UMS as their destination of study. This factor was discovered because one of the student

recruitment strategies in UMS was through an agent initiative. In addition, UMS is actively pursuing a student exchange program which is seen as a great initiative to expand the university's international reputation and at the same time increase the number of potential international students in various aspects.

The main contribution of this study is to highlight the importance of those stated factors that have a significant influence towards the international students' tendency in choosing Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). From the three main factors, the location factor is the most referred aspect and have an influence to the tendency of international student to choose UMS as their university overseas. Therefore, UMS needs to intensify its promotion and develop effective marketing strategies to show the uniqueness of the university that will benefit students who are furthering education in Malaysia. This knowledge is key to formulate an effective recruitment strategies for UMS and other institutions of higher learning to attract more international students specifically.

IX. FUTURE STUDIES

Future research could use this study in different institutions of higher learning for longer periods, as each institution tends to change their marketing strategy to accommodate a changing group of students. In addition, consideration for a more random sample may provide a better insight into long-term changes in reaching consistency and conclusions. As this study focuses on a group of international students who are studying at a selected university in Malaysia. Therefore, further exploration may be done in other public higher education institutions, such as a private institutions of higher learning. The views expressed by the international students involved in this study are only apply to those who studying at UMS. Further, identifying factors for a selected group of students can provide deeper insights and meaningful results rather than superficial studies that focus only on the overall picture. In addition, focus can be placed on evaluating the factors identified in this study to determine whether there is a correlation between these factors. This is possible with the initial design of the study using an online survey for international students. More research needs to be done to evaluate web content to measure usability, functionality and design as the website is an important channel used by students to find preliminary information about the university. At the same time, universities need to consider the cultural issues highlighted in past research. For example, from a demographic perspective to show how students find information online and respond to university email responses. The availability of online surveys in different languages may solve the emerging language problem.

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