



Evaluating the Learning Outcomes of International Students as Educational Tourists

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Abstract

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to propose a model to identify the effect of overall image on satisfaction and consequently on learning outcomes of international students. In particular, demographic is presented as a moderator variable. A literature review was conducted to identify the theoretical model based on the recognized variables. The paper provides a description of each variable and insights into overall image, satisfaction, learning outcomes, and demographic. The goal of the implementing overall image is to indicate the significant role of destination and university image in the learning outcomes of international students by mediating satisfaction. Another stream of this model is to indicate the role of demographic as a moderator variable between overall image and satisfaction. In addition, the practical implication of this paper extends to a new window for tourism management and universities in different countries involved in attracting international students. This paper makes a strong case for the collaboration of the tourism sector with the education sector to attain worldwide recognition and credibility to meet the wide ranging demands of international students. Finally, this study is one of the first to propose a model to evaluate the learning outcomes of international students as educational tourists.

Keywords: Destination Image, University Image, Satisfaction, Learning Outcomes, International Students, Educational Tourist.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the many changes in the tourism and education have seen exceptional growth in both these industries (Lam et al., 2011). In particular, the convergence of the tourism and education industries has provided mobility and opened up new horizons for international students. This situation encourages students to travel abroad in order to develop their personal abilities and acquire various skills (Kwai, 2009). The students who travel to a country abroad for the purpose of continuing their study are considered international students (Huang, 2008).

International students are particularly characterized as educational tourists because their lives in the host countries are complex and a collection of both educational and tourist experiences (Huang, 2008). These experiences from the destination and university influence the overall impressions and attitudes of persons and shape an image in their mind (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Kotler & Fox, 1995).

Previous academic studies of international students have been carried out on choice of the study destination (Padlee et al., 2010; Michael et al., 2004), trips in the host country (Min-En, 2006), push and pull factors (Lam et al., 2011; Rohmi, 2010; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), study abroad preferences and attitudes (Cardon et al., 2011), adjustment issues (Araujo, 2011; Tarry, 2011; Andrade, 2006; Yusoff, 2011) and their learning style preferences (Boland et al., 2011; Wang & Moore, 2007; Huang, 2005). However, there is a dearth of research that evaluates the learning outcomes of international students as educational tourists.

To address this gap, this research concentrates on the constructed overall image in the mind of international students by focusing on both destination and university experiences. This study could result in better recruitment strategies for both higher education and tourism industries in order to serve the needs and expectations of international students, which make them more satisfied and raise their level of learning outcomes. This approach of higher education supports the aspirations of nation states to be regional hubs of education (Mok, 2011), internationalize higher education (Yusoff, 2011), attract more exchange students (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), and achieve the national economic objectives (Padlee et al., 2010).

The main purpose of this research is to evaluate the learning outcomes of international students who are studying in Malaysian universities by concentrating on educational tourism approaches. In particular, this study strives to determine the impact of overall image on learning outcomes by mediating students' satisfaction. In addition, the role of demographic variable as moderator between overall image and satisfaction is another highlighted stream of this study. Therefore, this research provides opportunities for scholars to focus on international students beyond their academic needs. The following theoretical model (Figure 1) frames the constructs and their relationships in the model. To further understand the salience of implementing overall image on the learning outcomes, the research objective driving this study is as follows:

- 1) To investigate the influence of overall image on learning outcomes as mediated by satisfaction.

- 2) To investigate the role of demographic as a moderator variable between overall image and satisfaction.

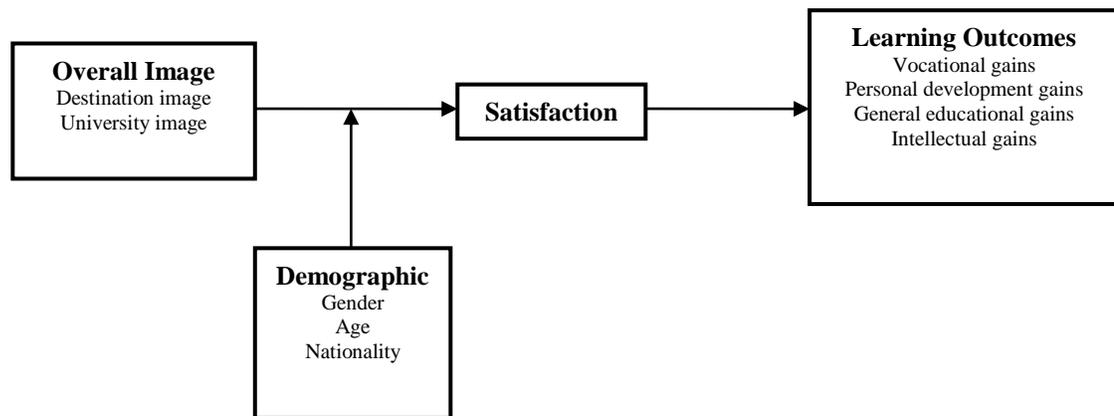


Figure1. The Proposed Theoretical Framework

The proposed model is designed with overall image as an independent variable with two dimensions which are: destination image and university image. Satisfaction plays the role of mediator variable whereas learning outcomes is a dependent variable. Vocational gains, personal development gains, general educational gains and intellectual gains are four significant dimensions of learning outcomes. Demographic variable consists of three dimensions namely, gender, age and nationality is a moderator variable in this model. The following discussion provides an overview of variables and conclusion as well.

2. Overall Image

2.1 Destination Image

According to the World Tourism Organization, image is defined as: “individual or collective ideas about the destination” (Lopesi, 2011). With the rapidly increasing international movement in recent years, building a distinctive destination image has become an important target for some places (Maden et al., 2012) since image impacts the decision taken by tourists when choosing a destination (Lopesi, 2011, Crompton, 1979). Destination image is a collection of various attributes such as culture, nature, society, and tourism infrastructure of a particular destination (Byon & Zhang, 2010; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Thus, an image of destination has significant impact on international students in choosing the study destination that can best meet their expectations and give them satisfaction (Biodun et al., 2012). In fact, the success of any

destination hinges on the needs and expectations of their target tourists (Phau et al., 2010; Mingfang, 2011).

In addition, regarding the take place in the educational market, the tourism and higher education industries should collaborate to create a positive image for international students by offering strong pull factors such as an appealing destination and high quality education (Michael et al., 2004). Therefore, harmonization between two industries creates opportunities and benefits for the destination by attracting more international students. As an illustration, USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are successful in the market in attracting international students from different countries, particularly in Asia such as China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Middle East as they are viewed as the most favorable destinations for tertiary education (Arambewela & Hall, 2008).

2.2 University Image

Image is a mysterious force and a powerful influence in the way people perceive and react to things (Dichter, 1985). In this context, a university image is the sum of all the beliefs that an individual has towards a university (Arpan et al., 2003) and it is fundamental to impress, attract and maintain students (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). Thus, universities should create a distinctive image in the competitive market (Mazzarol, 1998). This unique image of a university can bring satisfaction of students and consequently loyalty (Kheiry, 2012). In this regard, higher education institutions should make a concerted effort to evaluate the university image held by its students (current, or alumni students) (Alves & Raposo, 2010) as well as the general public among whom are potential future students. This ascertained present image assists universities to decide what they want it to be. Indeed, image assessment reveals to the university what strengths to emphasize and what to communicate.

Furthermore, the image of the university is an effective factor in the selection by students (Kotler & Fox, 1995). For a university, the value that is given by the favorable image makes benefits for the educational market (Diaconu & Pandelica, 2011). For instance, Australian universities have made a good image among Asian countries (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). This reality makes an opportunity for these universities to become universities of choice. The image of the university is a strategic component and attaining the desirable image is a long-term program. A university should build in the minds of its students, a positive attitude about the place; establish good relations among students, so that when they graduate they will take pride in

the university from where they have graduated and to which they attach a national identify (Kheiry, 2012).

3. Satisfaction

“Satisfaction is emotional reaction to a service experience” (Oliver, 1981). Customer satisfaction is a particularly significant facet for any industry, especially those in the service sector (Tuan, 2012; Hanaysha et al., 2011). In this regard, university and destination image play a crucial role in increasing student’s satisfaction, which is a noble goal, and achieving and maintaining a competitive edge (Ahmed et al., 2010; Arambewela & Hall, 2009). The desired university image is fundamental in building student satisfaction (Hosseini & Nahad, 2012; Kheiry, 2012). Image is a perceptual view of tangible and intangible organizational elements (Alves & Raposo, 2010) and any type of improvement in the image of a university will increase student satisfaction (Kheiry, 2012). In addition, the destination image has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013; Jamaludin et al., 2012; Mohamad et al., 2011; Assaker et al., 2011; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2005) as this image refers to the mental pictures that individuals hold regarding the place (Khan et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2008).

4. Learning Outcomes

The demands of the global market for employees in the 21st century have focused on adroit individuals (Majid, 2010) rather than one-dimensional graduates with impressive paper credentials. Above and beyond the basic requirement of work knowledge, organizations in today’s employer’s (rather than employee’s) market seek and prefer individuals who also possess good communication skills and are also capable of analytical and critical thinking (Majid, 2010). Such a situation places great importance on the aspect of graduate employability and puts a heavy burden on the shoulders of universities to train highly qualified expertise and scholarly persons (Diaconu & Pandelica, 2011) and thus points to the significance of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes is a product of the learning process which covers two aspects: cognitive and affective outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002). Cognitive outcomes refer to the development of knowledge and professional skills while non-cognitive outcomes focus on changing the attitudes and values of individuals (Ewell, 1985). Computer and communication skills, ability in analysis, synthesis, problem solving and evaluation as well as thinking critically and creatively are some examples of learning outcomes (Mundia, 2012). According to a study by Anderson et al. (2005), psychological and behavioral outcomes are other streams of students’ learning outcomes. Allen and Friedman (2010) emphasize three essential aspects of learning outcomes including cognitive,

affective and behavioral in order to prepare students for their social work and professional life. Likewise, Tam (2007) specifies four dimensions of learning outcomes namely, vocational gains, personal development gains, general educational gains, and intellectual gains. Vocational gains is considered as cognitive learning outcomes since it includes the extent to which knowledge and skills are gained in training, while personal development gains, general educational gains and intellectual gains are related to the affective and behavioral learning outcomes.

In order to succeed and excel in the education market, universities must pay more attention to their students' satisfaction and learning outcomes. Student satisfaction plays an important role in developing students' skills and knowledge that is a significant predictor of enhancing the students' learning outcomes (Letcher & Neves, 2010; Eom, 2009; Tam, 2007). Furthermore, evaluation of student learning outcomes is vital because it indicates the level of institutional effectiveness (Hou, 2010; Astin et al., 1996) and is something of an industry standard for institutions of higher learning (Anderson et al., 2005). Indeed, this evaluation reflects whatever is essential for improving the quality of the university (Scott, 2011). Accordingly, if universities plan to be marketized continually, they should introduce themselves to the market and their stakeholders (students, parents, employers and governments) by exposing their evaluation of learning outcomes (Hou, 2010).

5. Demographic

In this study, gender, age and nationality are effective moderators of the relationship between overall image and satisfaction. Swain (1995) highlighted the differences between men and women regarding their expectations from the same destination. Likewise, Anderson and Littrell (1995) indicated the psychological difference between men and women in their expectations of the host destination. To appeal to both males and females, it is important that the host destination should pay attention to certain characteristics important to each gender because of the differences in perception, preferences and attitudes (Ryan et al., 1998). Therefore, due to varying expectations and psychological differences between men and women, the perceptions and level of satisfaction of educational tourists would vary toward the destinations and universities. In addition, age is another important personal characteristic within the category of demographic variables (Serenko et al., 2006) that affects the needs of customers and plays a vital role in their satisfaction (Matzler et al., 2008). Educational tourists of different ages have different perceptions, expectations, and attitudes toward the host destination and university, as well as different levels of satisfaction. Finally, nationality is also a significant variable that differentiates

tourists and affects their perceptions of a destination, their expected satisfaction levels, and tourist activities (Armstrong et al., 1997; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Huang et al., 1996; Richardson & Crompton, 1988). By implication, difference in nationality means socio-cultural differences and expectations as well that would influence what they are seeking, and how they would interact with the socio-cultural environment of the destination and react to the system and processes of the university in the host country. In this regard, nationality plays important role in destination choice (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008). Accordingly, nationality is a moderator to evaluate the effect of destination and university image on satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we proposed a model that describes the relationship between overall image, satisfaction and learning outcomes. Demographic with three dimensions namely, gender, age and nationality plays as a moderator variable in this research. Also, destination image and university image are two significant dimensions of overall image employed in this research. The highlight point of this research is the application of this model to determine the impact of overall image on satisfaction of international students. The influence of satisfaction on learning outcomes of international students with four significant dimensions namely, vocational gains, personal development gains, general educational gains, and intellectual gains is another stream of the research. This particular research shows how the tourism and education sectors, working in close collaboration and cooperation will be able to achieve the dual goals of promoting tourism and providing holistic quality higher education to international students. The ultimate successful outcome therefore is knowledgeable, competent, well-rounded and eminently employable graduates who leave with fond memories and favorable impressions of the university from which they have graduated and satisfaction with their experience as both students and tourists in a foreign country.

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