

Global Perspectives on Recruiting International Students

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Global Perspectives on Recruiting International Students: Challenges and Opportunities

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Contents

About the Editors	vii
About the Contributors	ix
Preface	xiii
Chapter 1 Key Factors in the Selection of an Educational Tourism Destination	1
<i>Melissa Rikiatou Kana Kenfack and Ali Öztüren</i>	
Chapter 2 Study Hard but Do Tour to See the World: Tourism of Chinese Students who Studied in the United States	37
<i>Carol Huang and Connie Chuyun Hu</i>	
Chapter 3 The Role of Social Media Marketing Activities on International Students' Brand Preference: A Study on English-Speaking Universities of Germany	51
<i>Hasan Evrim Arici and Nagihan Cakmakoglu Arici</i>	
Chapter 4 Use of Web Analytics and Social Listening to Attract International Students	65
<i>Rakhi Tripathi</i>	
Chapter 5 Promoting the Internationalisation of Students in University Strategic Goals: A Case Study	81
<i>Carla Del Gesso</i>	
Chapter 6 Exploring Institutional Culture and Its Impact on International Student Recruitment Capabilities	97
<i>Melissa James</i>	
Chapter 7 Recruiting Educational Tourists from Countries Under International Sanctions: The Case of Iranian Education Market	111
<i>Cahit Ezel</i>	

Chapter 8 Geopolitics and Global Events: International Student Recruitment in a Time of Disruption	125
<i>Joseph M. Stokes</i>	
Chapter 9 Challenges to Admission for Indonesian Sponsored Applicants to a US Graduate Program in Education	139
<i>Adrian Rodgers</i>	
Chapter 10 The Qualitative Study of Factors Influencing to International Students' Satisfaction: The Case of a Private University in Turkey	155
<i>Ayşe Collins, Zeynep Goknil Sanal and Aygıl Takır</i>	
Chapter 11 Are Chinese Students Studying at European Universities Satisfied? Performance and Challenges	173
<i>Marta Melguizo-Garde and Ana Yetano</i>	
Chapter 12 How to Integrate International Students into the Local Society and How That Will Affect Their Satisfaction Level	187
<i>Janet M. Howes</i>	
Chapter 13 Living Closely Together but in Parallel - Multi-dimensional Challenges to the Integration of International Students in a Danish 'Muscle' Town	197
<i>Annette Aagaard Thuesen and Eva Mærsk</i>	
Chapter 14 The Impact of Cultural Adjustment on International Student Recruitment and First-Year Success	215
<i>Clayton Smith</i>	
Chapter 15 International Chinese Students' Cultural Experience and Cultural Support in the UK	231
<i>Yimeng Zhang</i>	
Chapter 16 The Future of International Student Recruitment	245
<i>Belal Shneikat</i>	
Index	257

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Preface

As we observe the tremendous growth in the internationalisation of higher education, we not only see larger number of students who wish to study abroad but also institutions that wish to attract international students. This book provides an in depth look at the competition among countries and universities in the process of recruiting international students. Thus, it can provide invaluable information for policy makers, researchers as well as students who wish to understand internationalisation of higher education.

Recruitment of international students provide numerous benefits and opportunities for both the host communities and the students. While the international students contribute to the cultural, economic and social welfare of the host community, they gain from being exposed to a new environment, develop their skills in adaptability and their proficiency in a new language which will improve their prospects for employment. Overall, the opportunities from meeting of ideas and cultures will spark innovation and open many opportunities.

The book brings together the most up-to-date and comprehensive scholarly contributions on recruiting international students written by authors representing a variety of geographical and academic backgrounds. The book covers a wide range of topics such as educational tourism, role of social media in recruiting international students, internationalisation and institutionalisation, challenges to admission, satisfaction of international students, and integration and cultural adjustment.

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Chapter 1

Key Factors in the Selection of an Educational Tourism Destination*

Melissa Rikiatou Kana Kenfack and Ali Öztüren

Abstract

It is salient to be acquainted with the key elements that determine educational tourists' decision in selecting an overseas destination while considering the rise of international competition amidst nations concerning international students. There has been a growth in the number of nations committed to attracting educational tourists. This issue is evident in countries involved in higher education (HE), such as Northern Cyprus, identified as an educational tourism destination. Northern Cyprus can attract a whopping number of tourists, and the higher population is most likely to be made up of international students regardless of its interdiction on direct flights and political pressure. This chapter centres on analysing educational tourists' motivators in selecting a tourism education destination abroad and on revealing effective recruitment and promotion plans towards attracting them.

The chapter includes the descriptions and discussions of educational tourism, the HE industry over the years, globalisation and internationalisation of educational tourism, factors influencing educational tourists' decision-making process and key elements influencing educational tourists' decisions in HE institutions.

At the end of the chapter, a case study is presented that reports the findings of interviews with educational tourists, overseas recruitment agents and Eastern Mediterranean University staff responsible for promoting the institution. The results identified eight factors affecting educational tourists' decisions on study destination. Those factors comprise cost, ease of access,

*This chapter is based on the first author's Master of Science thesis in Tourism Management.

location, social factors, quality of education, instruction language, cultural environment and communication quality. The sub-factors of the main eight factors are scholarships, destination's scenery, safety, friends' and relatives' influence and cultural differences.

This chapter brings a significant knowledge about the motives that affect educational tourists in selecting at a particular HE destination. Based on the study's findings, educational institutions may consider various recommendations to redesign their strategies towards attracting educational tourists more effectively. Generally, this study promotes an apprehension about the diverse elements that affect educational tourists' selection of a destination study. An in-depth understanding of these factors will help education institutions' decision-makers better develop plans of action to provide desired services to educational tourists, attract and keep them in return.

Keywords: Educational tourism; higher education institutions (HEI); educational tourists; motivation; destination choice; North Cyprus

1. Introduction

The trade in international educational services in advanced countries constitutes a vital aspect of their economy. It has become a multibillion industry to those countries, thus, constituting their primary means of revenue (Cheung, Yuen, Yuen, & Cheng, 2011). International students have, therefore, become a feasible target for many countries.

Travelling with the aim of learning is not a new concept. Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted in this regard (Paul, 2010). The number of studies carried out to acquire an understanding of educational tourists' travel decisions and motives behind destination preferences is very few. Abubakar, Shneikat, and Oday (2014) affirmed that studies were done by tourism researchers' in-depth apprehension of educational tourism components in terms of choice motives, and recruitment strategies are few. Educational marketers' in the higher education (HE) industry need to obtain an in-depth understanding of educational tourists' preferences and motives behind their preferences to achieve their primary aim, which is to attract international students and acquire benefits.

Deciding to further education in a foreign land is a sensitive and compound decision, deriving from a set of motives from 'why deciding to leave a country', and 'where to go'. It is a whole process in which some desires are birthed, arising from a need, and followed by the eagerness to satisfy the need. Many factors are involved in this process: the reasons behind the decision to travel abroad for educational purposes, the desired attractiveness in the future country and HE abroad, and the process of selection of the final country and higher education institution (HEI) (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010). Therefore, educational marketers need to get acquainted with the specific needs of educational tourists to know how to provide them with services that will enhance their satisfaction.

Marketers may use various ways to gain knowledge of the educational tourists' needs and wants (Joyce, 2012). According to studies, one significant tendency

in the HEI is online marketing, targeting students' needs and wants with regards to HEI. In reaction to this, hosting countries like the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia inculcate effective marketing techniques to attract international students (Taplin, 2012). Hence, education marketers need to be fully acquainted with the needs of students (Eder et al., 2010). The merge of tourism and education rightfully birth the Educational Tourism, adding to the tourism industry (Lam, Tong, & Ariffin, 2016).

HEI communicates the messages they want to convey through various media mediums, hence, the need to reckon these ways is due to the increase in the importance of marketing communications. HEI mostly use e-mails, websites and other digital channels to disseminate information amongst students, lecturers and the university. The first medium of information for prospective students and parents generally is often a website (Pugsley & Coffey, 2002). Websites are critical when it comes to choosing a study destination. By this, HEI has to review many areas in setting up messages that will be efficacious in passing the right knowledge needed digitally to those in need. This includes students from different cultural backgrounds and languages. This brings the necessity to consider culture while setting recruitments plans (Bagautdinova, Gorelova, & Polyakova, 2015). Studies have revealed the importance of protecting the information directed to various groups of students. The different communication methods and mediums used for student interaction need to be identified concerning cultural, linguistic and communication quality. In respect to this, modern-day studies can be termed to be a critical interrogation to highlight conditions that influence the decision of prospective students.

In light of the increasing competition between countries and institutions for international students, new ways to market post-secondary education progressively become more critical (McCarthy, Sen, & Garrity, 2012).

Recent studies have pinpointed that the three major English-speaking study destinations are Australia, The United Kingdom and The United States of America (Abubakar et al., 2014), predominantly in HEIs. Thus, various academicians from the aforementioned English-speaking nations have examined educational tourists and HEI recruitments plans (McCarthy et al., 2012; Taplin, 2012). Northern Cyprus, as a developing destination, currently is dealing with a lack of research dealing with understanding the needs of international students and deciphering efficacious mediums to reach out to these students. Therefore, there is an urgent need to interrogate the factors influencing the students' decision and mobility, specifically for the student, agent and staff. Knowledge of these factors will facilitate HEI institutions to establish effective plans for inducing educational tourists. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the lacuna in the research about international students marketing strategies and international students' decisions for an educational tourism destination like a Northern Cyprus.

Tourism actors are increasingly focussing on enhancing consumer information due to the rapid increase in world tourism (Brown & Hall, 2008; Tefera, 2015). In the same manner, the educational tourism sector has also expanded in size, and the growth has been attached to globalisation, increased global correctness, political freedom, civilisation and relative peace (Webster & Ivanov, 2014). There is a visible growth in the travel for the education sector, undisputed, but it remains largely ignored by both industry and academia (Abubakar et al., 2014). There is a need for

academic institutions to align their services to meet the needs of the various international students' segments and to take hold of the educational tourism market. To make the student's experience enjoyable, students' attractions to specific areas in the country have to be reviewed to meet their expectations. This helps the institutions to know how to configure their curriculum to meet the needs of overseas students. More importantly, institutions need to know the need to equip students with boundary spanning skillsets across industries, cultures and countries (Abubakar et al., 2014). A growing niche market cannot be ignored due to the population of students from various countries in the HE sector in Northern Cyprus (Abubakar et al., 2014). This research would be of great interest to academic institutions in the country and local governments of North Cyprus. Lai et al. (2014) noted the international students' market to be highly heterogeneous and requires effort to the segment. This study will help the country and universities develop appropriate strategies that incorporate international students' needs as a market segment. Educational tourism is an important economic activity for developing countries and all countries generally. As more and more governments are privatising or commercialising HEI (Antra & Seema, 2018; Kwong, 2000), HEI's financial tenacity can be improved by the benefits of educational tourism (Antra & Seema, 2018). The attraction of several students coming into a particular destination can help institutions redeem poverty and foster economic growth (Hipsher & Bulmer, 2016). By this, the multi-dimensional facet of educational tourism can help to acquire a lot and draw interest from a diverse audience (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). The combination of education, tourism and movement of students for study purposes and the interrelationship with other economic variables make the research area appealing to interdisciplinary scholars (Lesjak et al., 2015). Moreover, Pitman et al. (2010) call researchers from various disciplines to explore this research scope.

2. Literature Review

The following section focusses on reviewing the relevant literature on educational tourism, putting an accent on educational tourists' motives and preferences in choosing a destination for studies.

2.1. Educational Tourism

We may have been regarded as 'tourists' at some point in our lives. Conceptualising tourism varies depending on the source and person. There is no consensus with regards to the definition of tourism, and nearly every institution defines tourism differently (Lai, Gibson, & Muthaly, 2014); based on expatiating tourism with the basic terms, it can be seen as follows.

Tourism can be seen as the movement of people in or out of a country, with the intent of leisure and trade (Holden, 2000). A visitor can be taken to be someone who travels to a new destination outside his/her usual environment for a specific purpose and for a stipulated time. This includes holidays, leisure and recreation, business, health, education or other purposes. This scope is much broader than tourists' traditional perception, which included only those travelling for leisure.

McIntosh et al. (1995) endorsed this view by stating that tourism is:

The sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments, and host communities in attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors.

To prevent the disaccords from defining tourism, UNWTO equally posits that

Tourism comprises of the activities of people staying in new places outside their natural environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes. (UNWTO, 2010)

There is a major distinguishing between mere travel and tourism. For tourism to happen, a displacement has to occur, an individual has to travel, using any means of transportation.

Tourism comes in two aspects, which are domestic or international. International tourism consists of incoming and outgoing movement of people considered as tourists. One active constituent of tourism is its diverseness of sectors, which aid in providing products and services to both visitors and locals. Tourism is a constantly changing industry that demands the capacity to adhere to customers' needs and desires, since customer's pleasure, safety and satisfaction are the tourism industry's primary concerns.

Over the last few decades, travelling has become part of our daily lives. Individuals from different origins shuffle between countries for acquiring new experiences, knowledge or skills. These activities are regarded as educational tourism (Larson & Ankomah, 2004).

Due to the growing recognition of teaching and learning and enhancing technical excellence, educational tourism is developed. Visiting another country to learn about new cultures, study tours or work and practice locally acquired skills in a different environment such as international training programs (World Tourism Organization, 2012) is one of the main focus of the educational tourism activities.

Ritchie, Carr, and Cooper (2003) gave a more encompassing definition of educational tourism as

Tourist activity is undertaken by those who are engaging in an overnight vacation and engaging in an excursion for whom education and learning are a primary or secondary part of their trip. This can include general educational tourism and adult study tours, international and domestic university and school students' travel, including language school, school excursion, and exchange programs. Educational Tourism can be independently or formally organized and can be undertaken in various natural or human-made settings.

2.2. HE Industry over the Years

Transformation is often described as a complex, open-ended concept (Venter & Tolmie, 2012). One of the significant global boomings in the industry has been the growth of HEIs (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). International education was recognised as one of the more significant service industries between the 1980s and 1990s (Mazzarol, 1998). According to Venter (2015), the implication is that ‘knowledge transmission and production should be pursued in dialogue with global contexts’. Thus, Mazzarol, Soutar, and Sim (2003) determined three flows of globalisation in the HEI area. The first flow had to do with students travelling to a foreign country at a specific academic institution. At the start of the twentieth century, it became standard and equally gained ground currently. The second flow was when academic institutions established cooperation through ‘exchange’ programs with other institutions to be known in the international market. This became popular in some continents such as Asia, as many scholars moved to another country to gain their degree. They have to know about these institutions through information provided in their school because of the exchange program agreement. Regarding the third flow, it was ushered in when courses started to be delivered online, known as ‘distance learning’, and it gained ground in the higher institution market (Mazzarol et al., 2003).

Several reasons could be attached to international education demand. Traditionally, it was compelled by intentions to raise the graduate’s economic and social status, especially within the HE sector (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Besides, low access to HE in many countries in Africa and Asia, for example, as well as educational tourists colonial tie amid his home country and the study destination country has played a massive role in birthing educational tourist’s displacement and choice of study destination (Chou, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Thus, considering the fast escalation of HEIs, gaining the knowledge of various ways of attracting international students has become considerably necessary (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Researchers have grouped the factors influencing students to travel abroad for study purposes into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors between their home and host country (OECD, 2017). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) define the ‘push’ factors as domestic factors and pull factors as external influencers; in other words, push factors are domestic factors encouraging outward mobility and pull factors are vital external factors in the educational tourist’s destination preference. In brief, studies point out that painful economic and social conditions dominant in the home country mainly play a role in pushes students in a foreign land; meanwhile, educational tourists’ choice in preferred HEI abroad is dependent on several ‘pull’ factors. Going by this, deciding where to study is crucial for both educational tourists and parents (Mazzarol, 1998). The HEI in countries like the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, which receives a massive number of students from across the world, have come to be market-oriented by adopting professional marketing strategies to admit international students (Mazzarol et al., 2003). The number of students studying abroad has been recorded at 150,000 approximately in 1955 (Naidoo, 2009) to 2.8 million in 2007 (UNESCO, 2009), 5 million in 2014 (ICEF, 2015), and is expected to reach 8 million by 2025 (OECD, 2017).

The influx of international students in North Cyprus still maintains the status as a valuable topic. The United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and France are the significant educational tourism destinations (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). North Cyprus has striven to be acknowledged as an edu-tourism destination regardless of the impediment on a direct flight and unbearable political conditions North Cyprus is capable of attracting more than 103,000 edu-tourists (TRNC Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021a).

Registered at 21 universities in Northern Cyprus (TRNC Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021b). Three decades ago, The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was proclaimed unrecognised by many countries except Turkey; yet thousands of young people coming from more than 100 countries study at its universities, despite its economic and political segregation from the world by international trade sanctions and travel interjections; education has, therefore, become the significant pitch of its economy.

Therefore, comprehending the significant conditions that influence the choice of study destination has become salient for HE administrators. Abubakar et al. (2014) posit:

Specific factors related to the choice of North Cyprus as a location for higher education have not been the focus of prior research. However, the location has been noted as an important factor in international students' choice related to higher education.

2.3. Globalisation and Internationalisation of Educational Tourism

Deciding to leave a country of origin to another one is a whole process, and there are many motivators attached to it (in both making the decision to leave the country and deciding where to go to) (OECD, 2017). Due to digital globalisation and the rise in competition in the educational tourism sector, there has been an increment in the inquisition of the mechanism faced by educational tourists in selecting an HEI destination (Alsharari & Nizar, 2018). Because of this, recruitment and promotional activities in HEI have escalated beyond the ordinary. Thus, HEI has been transformed from a dormant marketing domain to a highly marketed sector (Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010). Alsharari et al. (2018) asserted that globalisation and internationalisation are not similar. Internationalisation emphasises strategically established relationships; internationalisation in HEI comprises partnerships with other HEI, exchange programs and educational tourist's recruitment. Meanwhile, globalisation is a picture of the competitiveness and the intensified collaborations in the world (Heather & Haydn, 2010).

2.4. Apprehending Educational Tourists' Decisions

International educational tourists' preference is an exciting aspect to study; this is because of the demand for HEI abroad and competition. Hence, education marketers need to know and understand prospective students' influencing factors in

their decision-making. [Ivy \(2010\)](#) highlighted the three dimensions of the choice model. The total amount of money spent on a student's studies and the choice of education instead of work is what is being regarded as the economic model of student choice. At the same time, the social part has to do with the student's family relationship, personal motivation, ability and other areas of life. When the monetary aspect of the model of a student's choice blends with the student's family relationship and other aspects of life, it is then regarded as the information processing model for the student's choice. This is what determines the decision of a prospective student ([Ivy, 2010](#)). Researchers assume that it is quite uneasy about distinguishing educational tourists' choices. [Maringe \(2006\)](#) posits that a student's choice is not based on fact or reason; instead, it is based on feeling so. Therefore, the process is not rational. [Petruzzellis and Romanazzi \(2010\)](#) opine that choice is a concept of complexity, which is a fusion of three elements. All three are connected. These concepts are the following: the context, the key influencers and the choosers.

The primary focus of research into education choice behaviour is to focus on the key elements that influence decision-making ([Doria, Mohd, & Abdul, 2017](#)). [Foskett and Hemsley-Brown \(2001\)](#) point out differences in the mannerism of students' choice. This is majorly due to the foregrounding and emphasis on the belief of spending so much money on good services in HEI as a medium of preparing for the future career. [Maringe and Carter \(2007\)](#) have categorised general decision making into a five-stage process. This has identified problems that need their solution to recognition, discovering the information, examining the option, deliberating on the purchase choice and finally weighing the purchase decision. Some other researchers equally identify a consecutive sequence in the way educational tourists decide to further their studies overseas. The first resolution comes when an individual prefers institutions outside his country instead of their home country; after this, the individual begins to consider a study destination and then resorts to a particular institution ([Chen, Chen, & Lee, 2010](#)). Some students do not go through searching and choosing an institution but instead directly select an institution ([Chen et al., 2010](#)).

Nevertheless, many students go through various stages when choosing an HEI abroad ([Abubakar et al., 2014](#)). In the first level, the student chooses to go abroad to study with the influence of the 'push' factors within the motherland. In the second stage, the student decides on the study destination and examines the conditions that make the host country more attractive with 'pull' factors. Lastly, the student gets to select the institution in the final and third stage, with an additional 'pull' factors, deriving from what makes an institution preferable and attractive over its opponents, such as the institution image, accreditations, range of courses offered and staff professionalism ([Abubakar et al. 2014; Wong, Daisy & Peggy, 2018](#)).

2.5. Factors influencing Educational Tourists' Decision-Making Process

Recent studies have identified numerous factors affecting educational tourists' choice of learning destination ([Doria et al., 2017](#)). Amongst them are the 'push'