

Curriculum, Administrative Easiness, Educational Pricing for the Programme Enrollment Intention: A Case from a Private Higher Education Institution in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Selecting a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is getting more challenging nowadays as there are many higher learning institutions in Malaysia. This paper is to discuss and find out main factors in Programme Enrollment Intention (PEI) for tertiary level students in independent variables of curriculum, administrative easiness and pricing. Regression analysis was used to study the causal relationship between PEI and independent variables. The findings indicate that curriculum and administrative easiness are two factors that have significant influence towards PEI. Discussion and limitations of the study are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Programme Enrollment Intention, curriculum, administrative easiness, pricing, private higher education institutions*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M10*

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is getting more challenging nowadays as there are many higher learning institutions in Malaysia. There are more than 20 private universities and not counting hundreds of private colleges in Malaysia (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad & Othman, 2009). This paper is going to discuss and find out main factors in Programme Enrollment Intention (PEI) for tertiary level students.

Basically, programme or curriculum is one important factor in selecting a higher learning institution (Brown & Green, 2006), as this may determine the career of the student in the future. Additionally, students may select a HEI base on its pricing, as there many HEIs in Malaysia, pricing for a similar degree are vary, this can be seen from an e-learning based university that may offer a bachelor degree for merely RM20,000, some HEIs such as foreign university branch in Malaysia may charge a similar programme fourfold easily.

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Administration of the HEIs is also crucial factor for selection of HEI. This may include the management of the HEI, general administration of student services, facilities of HEI, and financial matters and support from HEIs (Abel, 2005; Lim & Suhaiza, 2010).

Apart from these three factors, there may be many other factors such as advertising and location (Ming, 2010). But the three mentioned factors are always more common in selecting an institution, all these three factors may form the main PEI factors of the students. In a nutshell, this paper is going to explore three major factors in PEI with questionnaire and quantitative analysis to determine whether the three factors are important for PEI.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Curriculum

Curriculum is one of the main factors in selecting a higher learning programme and thus ultimately it may affect the enrollment of a programme. Curriculum can be defined as “organization of a course of study” where it encompasses the whole scope of learning from beginning to the end of a programme (Brown & Green, 2006). They further elaborated that a programme of study (i.e. a diploma or a degree) is an example of curriculum. Therefore, in this study, curriculum is referred as programme.

There are studies that indicate the importance factor towards student enrollment. For example, Yusof, Ahmad, Tajuddin and Ravindran (2008) reckoned that programme is one important attribute for selecting a higher learning institution. In another example, Wagner and Fard (2009) have demonstrated that the content of a programme affects the tendency of students to study in at colleges and universities. Programme is ranked as the main criterion for parents and students in selecting higher learning institutions (Ming, 2010; Baharun, 2002; Ford, Joseph & Joseph, 1999).

As discussed, the availability of curriculum (i.e. programme) may deem important in selecting a learning institution. It may affect student enrollment and thus it forms one of the independent variable for this study.

1.2. Administrative Easiness

Apart from curriculum, administrative easiness of a university is another predictor of enrollment intention into a programme. Administrative system is synonym for bureaucracy which refers to a system for controlling or managing a nation, company or organization that is operated by a good number of officials who are employed to follow rules carefully (Araújo & Branco, 2009). Excessive red tape, slowness of procedure as well as the unnecessary multiplication of people, rule and forms could negatively impact students' intention to enroll (Wagner & Fard, 2009).

Prerequisite courses are common in college curricula and they establish the preconditions for enrollment in subsequent courses (McMillan & Adeyemi, 2008). McMillan and Adeyemi further explained that elimination of prerequisite courses could enhance students' intention to enroll.

The level of administrative support available to students is another crucial factor. Student support services tend to impact the success of distance education, which include helpdesks,

well-trained administrative staff, student networks and appropriate facilities (Abel, 2005). According to Endres, Chowdhury, Frye and Hurtubisin (2009), faculties at higher education institutions which demonstrate timely, interactive and knowledgeable factors are predictors toward students' satisfaction. In addition, a study from Oaks (1996) shows that success in attracting, serving and retaining students relies more on the performance of student support services at HEIs. In another study, factor such as prerequisites in a programme at HEIs could induce anxiety and fear among students and parents (Islam, Gygi, Gardner & Gooch, 2005).

In the case of a relationship between financial support and student enrollment at HEIs, the existence of financial support influences positively students decision to enroll at HEIs (St. John & Noell, 1989; Braunstein, McGrath & Pescatrice, 1999). In the case of postgraduate programme such as MBA, Lim and Suhaiza (2010) indicated that financial support has been identified as one of the main predictors of students to enroll for that programme. In short, colleges and universities should make more grant money available for deserving students and at the same time ensure that the financial support information be made available and easily applied by students seeking financial assistance.

1.3. Pricing

There are history of research studies to examine the relationship between tuition prices and financial aid and how these two factors affect access to higher education. These research have been published over the last three decades by Heller (1997), Leslie and Brinkman (1987) and Jackson and Weathersby (1975). These studies have utilized a broad range of research methodologies; have used different samples of students and have been conducted at different times.

Jackson and Weathersby (1975) and McPherson (1978) examined seven studies and ten studies respectively and found that first, enrollment rate is negatively associated with the tuition price and second, enrollment rate is positively associated with the amounts spent on student aid. These findings were confirmed by Leslie and Brinkman (1987) that increases in tuition price lead to declines in enrollment, decreases in financial aid also lead to declines in enrollment and the higher the tuition price charged by the competitors lead to increases in enrollment.

The findings of Leslie and Brinkman's studies in mid-1980s (Leslie & Brickman, 1987) were further confirmed by the findings in Heller's study in the mid-1990s (Heller, 1997). The findings of Heller's study revealed that students in mid-1990s were more sensitive to tuition price increase or aid cuts than the students who attended higher education institution in mid-1980s. Heller (1999; 2001) conducted another two studies and the author's finding in these studies remained unchanged.

1.4. Programme Enrollment Intention [PEI]

The term intention is defined as a person's action towards certain behavior in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Teo & Chwee, 2010). Teo and Chwee believed that attitude influences behavioral intentions. In addition to that, an Attitude-Behavior Relations Theory states that there is a strong relationship between attitude and behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). According to Ajzen (1991), a person's action is determined by behavioral intentions, which in turn are influenced by an attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms.

Intention is also defined as likely to act in order to achieve meaningful objectives (van der Hoek, Jamroga & Wooldridge, 2007). van der Hoek, Jamroga & Wooldridge (2007) further explained that a person will only drop an intention if he believes the intention has either been achieved, or is unachievable.

In relation to student enrollment in higher education, Lim and Suhaiza (2010) argue that the components of programme enrollment intention (PEI) are based on the dimensions of learner characteristics, learning institution characteristics, technology and perceived risk. The findings of their study revealed that learner characteristics, technology characteristics and perceived risks are determinants of the intention to enroll an academic programme. Among the constructs of each determinant is intrinsic motivation, computer self-efficiency, facilitating conditions, reputations, financial supports, technology acceptance, and social and source risks. Their study however focused on the on-line postgraduate programme at Malaysian HEIs.

There are researchers who conclude that demographical factor such as gender influences people in enrollment intention for Science programme at HEIs (Barnes, McInerney & Marsh, 2005). Barnes *et al.* suggest that strategies aimed at reducing sex differences in enrollments in elective science courses would benefit from focusing on alleviating sex differences in students' interest, career and performance considerations. It is differences in these three constructs which are largely responsible for the differences in enrollment behaviour. Other researchers has emphasized the effects of country and higher education image, attitude, subject norm and perceived behavior control in students' enrollment intentions towards offshore programs (Li, 2008) and the course content of a programme (Dyer, Lacey & Osborne, 1996).

In relation to achieve the state of sustainability at HEI, Fonseca, Macdonald, Dandy and Valenti (2011) point out that student enrollment to HEI is used as an indicator for determining future sustainability of the HEI. Meanwhile, Ledden and Kalafatis (2010) emphasize on psychological factors such as emotions and knowledge in order to measure perceptions of students toward learning at HEI. They further explain that the element of satisfaction is derived from emotions and knowledge and finally affect the intention of students to study. Alves and Raposo (2010) further study the importance of satisfaction as a salient variable to enrollment intention. Their purpose of their study is to analyze the influence of image on student satisfaction and loyalty. Their model shows that the image of HEI is the construct that most influences student satisfaction and loyalty. The satisfaction and loyalty are measured through intention to recommend the higher education institution; and intention to recommend study programmes at the higher education institution. In the Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) study, loyalty was measured by student intention to: consider the business school as his/her first choice for education, to continue his/her program at the business school and intention to encourage friends to study at the business school as well as the intention to recommend it as the best in its area.

An exploratory study with a descriptive survey was used as a method of inquiry to explain the relationship between parental involvement in financial management and enrollment in education (Koross, Ngware & Sang, 2009). Koross *et al.* believe that parental participation can demonstrate positive impacts on the processes of teaching and learning; and thus provide satisfaction students to enroll in the education programme. The satisfaction from

students then contributes to the guarantee for HEI for their future sustainability (McCollough & Gremler; 1999; Fonseca *et al.*, 2011).

To improve student enrollment at HEIs, education administrators need to have knowledge in educational services (Javalgi, Joseph & LaRosa, 2009). In seeking new globally diverse markets, education administrators must craft marketing strategies that recognize consumer demand and consumption characteristics as well as service design and delivery options that fit market needs towards their HEIs. In a related literature, Bennett, Mousley and Ali-Choudhury (2008) examine the role of student affairs department at HEIs as a critical success factor for future student enrollment intention. Students who claimed that they had obtained the greatest advantages from the student affairs department tended to be “academic” individuals who were highly committed to being a student, intrinsically motivated to study, high in academic self-concept, academically able, and prior to their entry to the institution had been well-prepared for university life.

1.5. Hypotheses

A conceptual framework was designed from the theories of Planned Behaviour (Teo & Chwee, 2010) and Attitude-Behavior Relations (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). The model is shown in Figure 1 below:

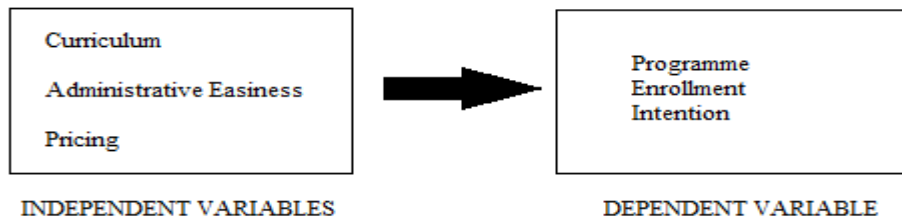


Figure 1. Conceptual framework between curriculum, administrative easiness, pricing and programme enrolment intention in this study

This has lead to the development of the following hypotheses:

- H1: Curriculum is positively related to Programme Enrollment Intention
- H2: Administrative Easiness is positively related to Programme Enrollment Intention
- H3: Pricing is negatively related to Proramme Enrollment Intention

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study involved a cross-sectional survey using standardized, structured self-administered questionnaires. A total of 250 undergraduate students from a private higher education institution participated in this study. The sample was selected randomly from a population of 1,500 students pursuing degree programmes in Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Business Administration, Accounting and Logistics at the Faculty of Management and Information Technology. A convenient sampling was used in this study.

A questionnaire was developed for the purpose of this study and the items in the questionnaire were derived from review of existing literature (see Brown & Green, 2006;

Endres, Chowdhury, Frye and Hurtubisin, 2009; Heller, 1997; Ajzen, 1991). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'. A pilot study was done on 20 undergraduate students from the same private higher education institution. They were asked to rate the relevance of each item on the Likert scale and to give feedback or suggestions for improving the instrument. The feedback received was analyzed and changes to the instrument were minimal, involving clarification of unclear items and combination of redundant questions. In this study, the independent variables were curriculum, administrative easiness and pricing while the dependent variable was programme enrollment intention. The Cronbach's alpha for the overall questionnaire (37 items) was 0.900.

SPSS software version 17 was used for data analysis. Preliminary data screening was conducted to check for any violations in normality and to check the presence of outliers. The data from the sample fulfilled all of the assumptions allowing for parametric tests to be conducted. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were computed to describe the general pattern of data obtained. Inferential analyses of Pearson Product-Moment correlation and linear regression were used to unveil any relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable.

3. RESULTS

There were 249 questionnaires being analyzed. Table 1 shows that majority respondents were students from BA (Hon) in Accounting and Finance (43.4%). Other respondents were from Diploma in Logistic Management (2%), BA (Hon) in Accounting (20.5%), BA (Hon) in Business Administration (11.2%), BA (Hon) in Logistics Management (18.9%) and BA (Hon) in Marketing (4%). The respondents comprised of local students (63.5%) and international students (36.5%). There were 53.8% of female students and 46.2% of male students. Majority of the students were aged in between 21-25 year-old (91.2%).

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents (n=249)

	Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Programme			
	Diploma in Logistic Management	5	2.00
	BA (Hon) in Accounting	51	20.50
	BA (Hon) in Accounting and Finance	108	43.40
	BA (Hon) in Business Administration	28	11.20
	BA (Hon) in Logistics Management	47	18.90
	BA (Hon) in Marketing	10	4.00
Student Category			
	International Student	91	36.50
	Local Student	158	63.50
Age Group			
	Below 20	63	25.30
	21-25	179	71.90
	26-30	6	2.40

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	31 and above	1	0.40
	Male	115	46.20
	Female	134	53.80

Source: authors

A simple regression analysis was conducted to examine the significance of the causal relationship between curriculum, administrative easiness and programme enrollment intention. Table 2 shows that the curriculum, administrative easiness and pricing were accounted for .357 (i.e. R Square) of the variance in dependent variable (programme enrollment intention). The F statistics yielded for 45.298 in programme enrollment intention at the 95 percent confidence level. The results of regression analysis supported hypotheses H1 and H2 but not hypotheses H3. H1 and H2 posited a positive causal relationship (H1: $\beta = .384$, $t = 5.80$, $p < .001$; H2: $\beta = .317$, $t = 4.551$, $p < .001$). In this study, pricing was indicated as not significance towards programmed enrollment intention.

Table 2. Results of Regression Analysis

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	29.364	3	9.788	45.298	.000*
Residual	52.940	245	0.216		
Total	82.304	248			
R Square = .357; Adjusted R Square = .359					
Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.		
Curriculum	.384	5.840	.000*		
Administrative easiness	.317	4.551	.000*		
Pricing	-.102	-1.784	.076		

* Significance at $p = .05$ level (2-tailed)

Source: authors

4. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The overall objective of this study was to investigate the nature of independent variables in Figure 1 and its relationship to PEI. From the findings, this study confirmed that two independent variables: curriculum and administrative easiness have significant positively influence towards enrollment intention for private HEIs. However, pricing does not influence the program enrollment intention.

Similar with the previous studies, curriculum is deemed important in selecting an institution as found out by Yusof, Ahmad, Tajuddin and Ravindran (2008), Wagner and Fard (2009) and Ming (2010). Students mainly selects the field (or rather curriculum) that a HEI offers, not the university in overall as some university maybe very famous in overall such as California Institute of Technology but in terms of business school ranking, student may choose the lesser known university such as Boston College that offers best business programmes (Wagner & Fard, 2009).

Administrative easiness is deemed significantly important in this research. The findings is supported by previous studies where factors in administrative supports make student life easier (Abel, 2005). Furthermore, the availability of financial supports from the HEIs would attract new students to enroll in their programmes (Lim & Suhaiza, 2010).

As shown in the Results Section, the variable of pricing did not indicate significant influence towards PEI. In this study parents and students did not consider pricing as the main selection criteria even though previous studies from the Literature Section indicated the importance of pricing factor to influence students' intention to student at HEIs. A study from Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) explained that parents prefer quality programmes rather than pricing factor when selecting HEI for their children. However, in this study, since the significant level is closed to 0.05 ($p=0.076$), it may also indicate that pricing is deemed important in selecting an institution.

Further, the results also support partly the proposed model (see Figure 1) based on the empirically validated independent variables (curriculum, administrative easiness and pricing), which are reliable and valid for the case of this private higher educational institution. These findings are important in advancing the research literature in that they contribute empirical evidence of association between curriculum, administrative easiness, pricing and PEI. However, for the generalization purpose, a similar study should cover a variety of public and private higher educations institutions in Malaysia.

There are some limitations that must be considered in future research. Firstly, a major limitation of this study is the small sample size ($n = 249$). Therefore, the power of the test is weaker. When a study has a lower sample size, the likelihood of encountering Type-I and Type-II errors occurring is higher. If the study has a higher sample size, it allows increasing the significance level of the findings. Large sample size is expected to represent the characteristics of the population studied. Secondly, the findings are based on a single private higher education institution which may be affected by bias.

Finally, data were collected at the single point in time, which does not allow for changes in perceptions over time. A cross-sectional analysis cannot confirm the direction of causality implied in the proposed model (Figure 1). It is suggested a longitudinal study needs to be conducted for future research.

In summary, this paper reports on an exploratory investigation of the relationship between curriculum, administrative easiness, pricing and PEI. This study endeavors to make both theoretical and practical contribution to the literature. It also contains several implications for future research. The findings enhance our understanding of the curriculum, administrative easiness, pricing and PEI in the context of a private higher education institution in Malaysia. The findings stress the need for this private higher education institution to focus more on curriculum and administrative easiness variables since they significantly contribute to the intention of students and their parents to enrol in the university. The findings could prescribe potential practical implications for stakeholders in the private higher education industry in ensuring the curriculum and administrative easiness variables are competitive enough to influence students and their parents to enrol in the university. Periodical review on these two variables from the management is a must in order to gain competitive advantage. Finally, ensuring the curriculum and administrative easiness variables that can influence PEI may lead the management to focus on training and development for preparing a reliable workforce to manage curriculum and administrative matters in conjunction with student matters.

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