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EXPATRIATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF KEY FACTORS IMPACTING ATTENDANCE AND PERSISTENCE AT A PRIVATE MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY: AN ANALYSIS OF A 4PS FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Malaysia largely depends on expatriates to develop its economy. The private institution (pseudonym) in Malaysia had not examined the retention of students from expatriate families who might contribute country's future economy. Assessing the expatriate students' perceptions of key factors that impacted their attendance and persistence is timely. The purpose of this study was to make recommendations based on the research findings to the private university and possibly other institutions in Malaysia or elsewhere internationally where serve expatriate students to reexamine the practices, amend (if any), and explore additional strategies to improve their attendance, persistence, and graduation rates. Tinto's model of dropping out guided this



study. Three specific research questions were designed to explore expatriate students' perceptions of individual characteristics, the interactions within the institutional environment, and institutional characteristics respectively that influenced their decisions to attend and persist at the institution. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 5 expatriate students. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, resulting in 10 themes. Based on the study outcomes, a white paper was proposed. The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the study and recommendations to the administrators to increase expatriate students' persistence and graduate rates either in Malaysia, their country of origin, or elsewhere internationally. The recommendations were based on the 4Ps framework.

Keywords

Expatriate students, Higher education, Malaysia, Perceptions, Recruitment/Retention

1. Introduction

The first step to help the institutions increase recruitment and retention of expatriate students is to understand their perceptions about key factors impacting attendance and persistence in their studies. A study was conducted to help the administrators better understand who these expatriate students were, what the key factors attracted them to attend and persist at the institution, and how they have engaged academically, culturally, and socially with the campus community (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Ultimately, this study could help the institution diversify the student body, increase the student population, and provide another source to increase the revenue.

Based on the study outcomes, a white paper which might help the private Malaysian institution (hereafter “*the Institution*”) reexamine and amend the practices, guide their decision-making process, and encourage the implementation was proposed. This study’s conceptual framework was grounded on Tinto’s (1975) conceptual schema for dropout from college.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are the following: 1). Provide an overview of expatriate students’ perceptions about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the Institution and inform the study results to various relevant stakeholders. 2). Recommend a 4Ps framework of retention strategies influenced by the expatriate students. 3). Encourage the



intended audiences to reexamine and amend (if any) the current practices or policies to incorporate the needs, perceptions, and viewpoints of expatriate students.

3. The Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insights about expatriate students' perceptions of key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the Institution. With a guiding question about student perceptions, specific research questions explored expatriate students' descriptions of individual and institutional characteristics as well as the interactions within the institutional environment that influenced their decisions to attend and persist at the Institution. Qualitative data were collected from the expatriate students by conducting the interviews.

3.1 Problem Identification

The identified problems that prompted this study was the Institution's low graduation rates from expatriate students and lack of investigating their perceptions about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence in completing their programs. The Institution had conducted surveys with dropped out students hoping to document their reasons for leaving the Institution. However, the surveys have not differentiated expatriate students from local and international students. The Institution's internal report from 2009 to 2013 (2015) showed various trends:

- The numbers of the first-time expatriate students who enrolled in the undergraduate degrees were 274, which equaled to 94% of total first-time enrolled expatriate students.
- The numbers of expatriate students in all programs except the Ph.D program showed higher dropout during their second-year (66) than in their first-year's study (55).
- The numbers of expatriate graduates were only 39 in all programs. However, the positive side was 149 had progressed from a lower level of the program to a higher level.

3.2 Criteria of the Participants and Scope of the Study

The participants were chosen must meet the following three criteria: first, students who came to Malaysia with their parents and held "Malaysia My Second Home" (MM2H) valid for ten years or other nonstudent passes such as the employment pass, diplomatic pass, and Malaysia PR. Second, they were current full- or part-time students (who have been studying at the Institution for at least one year), graduates, and dropout students who had enrolled in any foundation, undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs. Third, their ages were at least 18 years old.

3.3 Gap Identification

Researchers such as Memon, Salleh, Baharom, and Harun (2013) discussed the satisfaction factors that had affected international postgraduate students to study in the Malaysian institutions. Peterson (2014) also interviewed international students to understand their expatriate acculturation process and provided them with an experiential learning opportunity to facilitate their acculturation process for expatriates. Hence, students who had participated in the project increased their desires to travel overseas (Peterson, 2014). However, no study had focused on the expatriate students' perceptions that were impacting their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution.

3.4 Research Methodology

A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants based on three criteria. The Institution's administrators gave permission followed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)'s approval to conduct the study. The administrator emailed an invitation along with a questionnaire that contained three questions which could identify the eligibility of inclusion of the students.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

The Skype and e-mail interview methods were applied to collect the data. Five expatriate participants (including two enrolled Bachelor and one of each enrolled Ph.D., professional, and foundation program) chose either Skype or e-mail to answer the individual and follow-up individual questions. I followed the IRB approved protocol to conduct the interviews. Each confirmed participant was assigned a code.

3.6 Data Analysis

I adopted a thematic analysis approach to identify themes in the data. The thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). It involves the searching across the data set to find the repeated patterns of meaning, according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

4. Summary of the Findings

The guiding question for this study was *what were the students' (from expatriate families) perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

Research Question 1: *What were the individual characteristics students from expatriate families perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

Below were the identified five themes and the respective sub-themes: (a). Malaysia as a destination for higher education, (b) the Institution as an institution, (c). Support group, (d). Language ability, and (e). Past educational experiences (high school grades). (Table 1)

Table 1: Five themes and sub-themes that were identified to answer Research Question 1

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •advantages of living in the multi-culture setting •affordability •convenience •education standards •part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •flexibility with the visa •scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students •supportive environment •university degree versus a good career prospect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •parents and relatives •high school counselors •friends and peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No sub-theme under this theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No sub-theme under this theme

The theme analyses were listed as the examples as of the page limitations. For instance, expatriate participants highlighted that the advantages of living in the diverse culture settings and a few other factors that attracted them to study and live in Malaysia. As one participant stated, “Malaysia quite peaceful because there are many races here, and they are living very peacefully.” Another considered “It was easy to get an MM2H visa to Malaysia as compared to other countries”. The third repeatedly stated: “... the education standard is quite good...” While participant 1 commented: “Malaysia to be very cheap ... even for the living compared to my country...”

Concerning the part-time work opportunity for expatriate students, one stated “... the government does not allow the [the foreign] student to do a part-time job...” Moving to the sub-theme “the Institution as an institution”, participant 1 mentioned: “... they have lots of scholarship opportunities...” Participant 2 commented: “friendly environment ... I feel at home [laughed] ... I enjoy [laughed]!” Concerning the sub-theme “University degree versus a good career prospect”, one participant expressed: “The Institution was offering a dual-degree ... And my degree was to get a good job. From what I have heard was your degree does matter when it’s



getting a job...” Besides, the findings revealed that all participants had completed the high school studies in their home countries without receiving any counseling, but they did receive strong support from their parents and other family members. Finally, about “the English language” and “the high school grades”, all participants strongly agreed that the former was vital for their university studies. Further, the stronger the communication, academic writing, and reading skills, the better understanding the subjects and the higher chance to graduate. Two participants concurred that the higher the latter, the better the chance to admit the better university with scholarship.

Research Question 2: *What were the interactions within the institutional environment that influenced students from expatriate families perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

The identified three themes and their sub-themes were the followings: (a). Academic integration, (b). Commitment, (c). Social integration and institutional commitment (Table 2).

Table 2: *Three themes and sub-themes that were identified to answer the Research Question 2*

Theme 6	Theme 7	Theme 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faculty behavior • high university Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA) • seminars/workshops (for part-time expatriate students) • time constraints for part-time students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • goal commitment • institutional standards • program commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extra-curricular activities with no additional fees • peer-group interactions • social integration

The themes and sub-themes analysis was briefly discussed as of the page limitations. Participants commented the 6th theme “academic integration” that faculty was helpful, knowledgeable, and supportive. For example, participant 3 emphasized: “... they are very helpful. They are knowledgeable and teach you skills..., the lectures are always eager to help you learn extra skills.” Further, all participants concurred that the high university CGPA is a key

for their success as of the scholarship or financial concerns to continuing studying at the Institution.

Two participants who were part-timers had concerns as of the time constraints and the chances to attend the seminars/workshops to improve their soft skills. Participant 4 noted: “there are some classes are held during weekdays, which make it so difficult for me to attend. I need to take leave for that.” She added: “[the Institution should provide the training about] the social skills, communication skills...[and] critical thinking.” The Ph.D. expatriate participant expressed: “As a part-time, ... A little bit difficult to communicate...we do not have a chance to meet with other classmates. So, it will be good if like (e.g.) if we have [a] monthly workshop/seminar...”

About the theme “commitment”, the findings revealed that all expatriate participants were “goal committed”. For instance, one expatriate participant expressed: “... I want my Ph.D. thesis to serve the community”; another noted that “to be a professional accountant”. Next, four expatriate participants concurred how institutional standards had attracted them and made them commit to the Institution. One emphasized that “the quality of education was one of the key factors that affected my decisions to attend this institution. Participant 2 simply stated: “Because I am so familiar with the standards ... I started my degree there, masters, and the Ph.D ... ” Further, they fully committed to the program they had chosen. Three participants indicated that they committed to the enrolled program as of their educational goals and the prospective career.

Apart from the program commitment, three sub-themes were emerged to reveal how participants’ social integration had made them commit to the Institution. For instance, the positive learning experience with peers was “... learning with students from [a] different culture is a good experience too. We get to know them, their cultural, their ideas and perspectives on different things”, affirmed by one participant. In contrast, one negative side was “they [peers] might have influenced on [her] decision-making.” The findings also revealed that no participants built any informal contact with faculty outside of the class hours.

Research Question 3: (Table 3): *How did the institutional characteristics influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

The identified two themes and the sub-themes (for theme 9) were the followings: (a). College quality, (b). Institutional type.

Table 3: Two themes and sub-themes that were identified to answer the Research Question 3

Theme 9	Theme 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• class and institution size• English language• lack of course coordination• teaching method• warning system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No sub-theme under this theme

The themes and sub-themes analysis was briefly discussed as of the page limitations. For example, one expatriate participants preferred “[the] medium [size of the class] ... average size 20-30...” Another expatriate participant found the difficulty to understand when the lecturers used the “Malay-English” in the class. Two participants concurred that there was a lack of the course coordination. It seemed that no individual study plan to track the progress and program completion. Moreover, four expatriate participants shared their concerns and suggested the areas for improving students’ learning. Accordingly, their persistence. One suggested: “to involve more two-way communication between students and lecturers; and to have more interactive activities where can enhance the relationship between lecturers and students....” Last, one participant commented on the warning system: “the practice of ‘scaring’ as ‘a disturbing tactic to try to keep the students in line’ ...this is a very unhealthy way to deal with students, [especially expatriate student like him]...”

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings, a 4Ps framework for student retention strategies” (Kalsbeek, 2013a; Kalsbeek, 2013b) that focuses on “profile, progress, process, and promise” (Kalsbeek, 2013a) was recommended. A 4Ps framework might help the Institution reexamine the practices and policies and amend (if needs), guide the decision-making process, and encourage the implementation.

Recommendation 1: Profile in Action: Linking Admission and Retention

A profile-oriented retention strategy (Cortes, 2013) recognized that the changes in the admission policies or priorities would shape the overall student profile (Cortes & Kalsbeek, 2012; Spittle, 2013; Wood, Gray-Ganter, & Bailey, 2016). Both institutional and student profiles



marked “the first step in gaining institutional traction in retention strategy”; and they primarily influenced the institution’s retention and completion rates (Kalsbeek & Zucker, 2013, p. 15). Besides, based on the data analysis, this study included a country-specific profile. To conclude, the Institution should focus on the market-centered retention effort and the external market factors as the necessary context for enrollment and retention planning.

Profile in Action 1.1: Institutional Profile

Expatriate participants highlighted few institution-specific factors that attracted them to attend and persist at the Institution. For instance, three of them appreciated the opportunities for obtaining the scholarships that benefited them throughout the university studies. Students who received grant aid or scholarship were likely to enroll and persist in college (Barrow, Richburg-Hayes, Rouse, & Brock, 2014, p. 565). Barrow et al. also concluded, “a merit scholarship combined with performance incentives tied to grades and credits earned” (p.565). Similarly, Binder, Krause, Miller, and Cerna (2015) found that the generous financial aid or performance-based scholarship impacted enrollment and retention in early academic semesters (p. 1).

Accordingly, to attract and retain the future expatriate students, the admission counselors and marketing personals may consider: 1). Promoting (continuously) the scholarship opportunities; 2). Highlighting the Institution’s strong profile information that linked with higher education choices versus the future career prospects, namely, “*international recognition, study abroad opportunity, institution’s good academic record, degree well regarded by employers, the easiness to find a job upon graduation, and industry experience via internships*” (Cheong, Hill, Leong, & Zhang, 2016, p.7); 3). Disclosing the internship and career placement statistics on all marketing and promotion materials and information sessions.

Profile in Action 1.2: Student Profile

As part of the admission requirements that related to student profile, participants affirmed that the higher the high school grades and the TOEFL/IELTS result, the easier for their admission. The academic profile of entering students and the admission decisions shape the retention, progression, and graduation of the students (Cortes, 2013; Kalsbeek, 2013a; Spittle, 2013). Three suggested approaches, namely, “*the use of non-cognitive variables in college admission, a rigorous high school curriculum, and test-optional policies*” (Cortes & Kalsbeek, 2012; Cortes, 2013) might improve recruitment and retention rates, improve diversity and access, and commit the institution’s mission. Thus, proactively considering student’s profile (Spittle,

2013) during the admission is the first step of the retention strategy to help increase retention and completion rates.

Profile in Action 1.3: Country-Specific Profile

Expatriate participants highlighted four positive country-specific factors that attracted them to study in Malaysia. They concurred the factors that identified by researchers (Migin Falahat, Yajid, & Khatibi, 2015; Singh, Schapper, & Jack, 2014), namely, “*low tuition fees, low living expenses, the strategic location, multi-culture and ethics, a safe environment to live, shared the same culture values as students’ home country*”. Thus, emphasizing to the future expatriate students and their supporting group about those positive country-specific factors is suggested.

Recommendation 2: Progress in Action

Four expatriate participants appreciated the support received by the Institution to help them succeed. As a result, they committed to both the program and Institution. Spittle (2013) introduced one concept “*from persistence to progress*” and stressed, the institutions should ensure students progressing well toward degree completion instead of persisting without making satisfactory academic progress (p. 27). Kalsbeek (2013c) affirmed that progressing requires linking retention efforts with core institutional activities (p. 102). Improving students’ progression was vital to retention and student experience (Morgan, 2015, p. 108). Thus, administrators may adopt the progress-centered concept (Spittle, 2013, p. 35) to alter the practices or amend the policies to improve expatriate students’ progression and graduation rates at the institutional level.

Recommendation 2.1: Focusing on the Prize-Degree Completion

The key point of the retention strategy is about making academic progress; and the degree completion is “the outcome of successful meeting the academic requirements of a curriculum” (Kalsbeek, 2013a, p.6). Student background, motivation, and option were complicated and far beyond the university’s understanding and control. Nonetheless, the university administration should focus on improving students’ academic achievement, continuous attendance patterns, and navigation toward a degree (Spittle, 2013, p.30).

Thus, the institutional thinking, practices, and effort required a different level of clarity to graduate students (Spittle, 2013, p. 34). Spittle suggested that administrators may analyze the relevant admission and registration data, invite the questions for decision-making to underwrite strategy (p. 35). As a result, the practices for graduating students would be sharper and more

organized when focusing on students' attendance patterns, academic performance, and enrollment trends than retaining them.

Recommendation 3: Process in Action

Despite expatriate participants appreciated the support received from the faculty and professional staffs, there remained few concerns such as *lack of course coordination, teaching methods, counseling service, and arranging the flexible schedules and workshops /seminars for part-time students with time constraints.*

Recommendation 3.1: Academic Advising versus Course Coordination

Two expatriate participants were stressed out due to no course coordination. Academic advising, a learning-centered, student-focused activity (Darling, 2015) and a strategy to increase retention and graduation, is critical to student success (Kot, 2014, p. 527-528). One key role for academic advisors was to help students create the semester/term class schedules that lead them to complete the programs on time (Darling, 2015; McGhee, 2015). Thus, re-examine the effectiveness of the advising services concerning making the academic plans is necessary.

Importantly, the enhanced academic advising might contribute to the higher completion rate by increasing students' awareness of the courses and credits that needed for graduation (Binder et al., 2015). Mandatory advising also encouraged students to join in degree planning early to achieving long-term goals (Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, & Pino, 2016, p. 34). So, administrators may consider amending the practices of academic advising that link with the advising courses. Besides, administrators may consider other approaches to improve the course advising and ensure students to complete the degrees on time without extra tension. For example, *the streamlining registration procedures, "Finish in Four!"* (Spittle, 2013), *"creating degree audit systems"* (Kalsbeek & Cortes, 2013, p. 5). Advising students to make the coherent semester/term study plans to graduate on time is one key task and responsibility for academic advisors.

Recommendation 3.2: Counseling Service versus Warning System

Few approaches may consider other than meeting with the counselors face-to-face to increase students' self-esteem and social support. Salleh, Hamzah, Nordin, Ghavifekr, and Joorabchi (2015) highlighted the effectiveness of informal support via chat rooms with the peers or conducting the online counseling for those who were comfortable with internet communication. To better assist expatriate students, the counselors may consider using the informal support or conducting online counseling sessions by using a modified face-to-face

counseling model (Salleh et al., 2015, p. 552) and warning them (if need) in an appropriate, caring, and respectful tone.

Recommendation 3.3: Foundation/First-Year Experience versus Institutional Standards

To better connect future expatriate students, administrators may consider re-examining the current practices by focusing on the first-year experience and integrating high-impact activities cohesively from the new academic year. The first year is crucial (Leach, 2016), so does the foundation year. According to Leach, having a comprehensive and coordinated pedagogy to engage students (p. 26) and enrich their learning is pertinent. Focusing on foundation and first-year experience may help improve students' learning experience, increase persistence rates, and boost the institution standards.

Universities are suggested arranging at least two high-impact activities for the undergraduate students throughout their university studies (National Survey of Student Engagement as cited in Tukibayeva and Gonyea, 2014, p. 19). So, they are academically challenged and engaged with their faculty and peers. Therefore, administrators may pay greater attention to improving the first-year experience that affects expatriate students' persistence and reinforce their positive learning for the second year (DeAngelo, 2014, p.53) and years beyond.

Recommendation 3.4: High-Impact Activities versus Academic and Social Integration

Most expatriate participants did not show much willingness or had the time to socially connect with faculty and peers outside of the classrooms, except one expatriate participant suggested not charging the additional fees for attending the extra-curricular clubs. However, one participant had visited the Institution's academic partner in Europe. Besides, another three discussed lacking the part-time job opportunities for expatriate students.

High-impact activities would reinforce the connections between students and their chosen institution (Kuh, 2013), which was a key for them to success. They included: *capstone projects, collaborative assignments and projects, community-based learning, diversity/global learning, field experience, first-year seminars and experiences, internships, learning communities, problem-based learning, student organizations, study abroad program, work-study jobs, writing-intensive courses, and undergraduate research* (DeAngelo, 2014; Felicia & Innocent, 2017; Jacoby, 2015; Kuh, 2013; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014; Young & Keup, 2014). Besides, joining the extra-curricular clubs or attending the social events organized by the student organizations offers the opportunity to form the friendships and connect with the university to be socially integrated (Pearce, 2015, p. 33). The administrators may re-

examine current practices' effectiveness and focus on the coherence of the institutional efforts (Kalsbeek, 2013c) on high-impact activities to improve expatriate students' learning and increase retention.

Recommendation 3.5: Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL)

One full-time expatriate participant shared the positive PAL experience with the tutors, while another one did not feel that it was helpful. Peer learning and assessment is important to prepare students in professional courses by working with others and being responsible for learning (Hodgson, Benson, & Brack, 2015, p. 582). When peer-students and peer-tutors collaborated, they built relationships, gained confidence, and enhanced their educational experience (Bates, 2016, p. 181). Building a trustful relationship between peer-tutors and peer-students is the first step to ensure PAL is beneficial to both peer-students and peer-tutors.

Hodgson et al. (2015) suggested peer-tutors should be aware of the teaching attitude, increase the interest from different levels of learners to motivate peers' learning, consider the positive and constructive feedback, and be pleased with the peers who attended the sessions (p. 591). When the PAL is implemented successfully, it can help students increase confidence and decrease anxiety. It also helps increase their self-esteem, critical thinking, and communication skills (Bates, 2016, p. 182). Eventually, it helps improve the test scores and course performance.

Peer-tutors were consistently challenged by the accuracy and relevance of the materials they were teaching, and the validation of the tutorials offered by their peers (Hodgson et al., 2015, p. 591). Thus, three PAL activities, namely, *teaching training*, *peer teaching*, and *peer assessment* (Burgess, McGregor, & Mellis, 2014, p.1) should be focused and trained by the respective faculty or senior peer-tutors. Besides, peer-tutors are advised to attend interactive workshops (Burgess et al., 2014, p.3) to improve the on-going practices and their effectiveness.

Likewise, one part-time participant found the difficulty to have two-way communication with the lecturer in the large size classes. Suggested by Zher, Hussein and Saat (2016), peer learning strategies also can sustain feedback in the large classroom (p. 1). The key to do so is "communication" (Zher et al., 2016, p.12). Thus, faculty who teach in the large size classes may consider applying PAL to enrich students' experience.

Recommendation 3.6: Strategies for Better Connecting Part-Time Students

Two part-time expatriate participants concerned the time constraint and wished to attend seminars/workshops to improve their soft skills and better manage their time. The classroom is the only place where the part-time students spend most of their time to meet with faculty, engage

the formal learning experience, and built upon their success (Kretovics, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to ensure those part-time expatriate students fully benefit from the classroom experience.

Few approaches could contribute part-time expatriate students' academic success. First, administrators may consider arranging (bi)-monthly workshops or seminars that may impact on their academic progress and success. Participants suggested the following topics: “*social skills, communication skills, enthusiasm thinking, and critical thinking*” or “*motivational and time management*”. Other topics such as “*goal setting, research capability, seminar class readiness, online class readiness, and stress management*” (Khiat, 2017, p. 44) may also be considered. Second, students should be reminded to make the most use of the tutoring and writing labs services (McGhee, 2015) to support their studies. Consequently, part-time expatriate students will complete their degrees or certifications in a smooth way.

Administrators may consider other strategies such as “*study group collaboration, online discussion, and group learning activities*” (Khiat, 2017, p. 45) to ease the time constraints and enrich part-time students' learning experience. Kretovics (2015) concluded attempting to connect students to the campus community directly impacted on their persistence and graduation rates (p. 73). So, creating both online and offline communities are the first step to help part-time expatriate students connect to the college environment. Administrators may take special consideration to help them make their learning meaningful and complete the degrees or certifications on time.

Recommendation 3.7: Teaching Methods

Two expatriate participants concerned about one of their subjects and commented that could be improved to enrich their learning. Their concerns related to the student-centered/learning-oriented versus lecturer-centered /content-oriented learning practice (Leach, 2016, p. 26). It was valuable to “cultivate a student- and learning-centered culture” (Keller as cited in Kuh, 2013, p. 85). Expatriate students expect their lecturers to create the environment to construct the meaning and let them engage actively in learning. Thus, faculty is suggested by Celli and Young (2017) to know their students and the different learning styles and learning theories.

Other effective pedagogic interactions such as *academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-lecturer interaction* could engage the students and enrich their experience (Kuh et al., as cited in Leach, 2016, p. 25). *Peer interactions and learning communities' pedagogy* (Leach, 2016, p. 25) also promoted student engagement. Hence,

administrators may examine and identify the effectiveness of current practices based on the semester/term student assessment to improve future practices and students' learning.

One participant concerned the local lecturer(s) used Malay-English for all course work that made the study difficult. Although “English as a lingua franca is the best option for higher education institutions”, underlined by Kirkpatrick in Hashim and Leitner (2014), “one would still need to restrict it to semi-formal spoken contexts and adopt a form of international English for writing, especially academic writing”. To help expatriate students better understand the local lectures, administrators may consider organizing the seminars/workshops that will bring the local lecturers' awareness of English accent they use and improve the levels of Standard English regarding writing and speaking to achieve adequate academic output.

Recommendation 4: Promise in Action for Institutional Success

Expatriate participants were satisfied, enjoyed the learning experience, and were happy to be part of the family. Their positive responses had three meanings. First, they confirmed that “brand love, positive word-of-mouth, and students' intention to support their university as alumni” (Kalsbeek, 2013b; Rauschnabel, Krey, Babin, & Ivens, 2016). Second, they reflected that “when a brand's promise is kept, the relationship between the brand and its customer deepens” (Kalsbeek, 2013b, p. 51). Third, continuing the postgraduate study at the same institution had confirmed that “the brand performance and brand image constructs played major roles” (Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Hemsley-Brown, 2016, p. 3105). Thus, administrators may consider obtaining permissions from those loyal students to film a short video about their positive academic experience and use it for all marketing and promoting materials for future expatriate students and their supporting group.

Recommendation 4.1: Academic Experiences versus Brand Loyalty and Promise

Three expatriate participants appreciated the continuous support received from the faculty or professional staffs to help them succeed. They also underlined that the positive academic experience and high teaching quality were more important than the institution type.

To be more effective to develop a strong brand, institutions should focus on providing students with positive and meaningful academic experiences (Palmer, Koenig-Lewis, & Asaad, 2016, p. 3033). Importantly, the learning outcomes are the core of the institution's educational promise (Kalsbeek, 2013b); and the brand promise benefits both the institutions and the students (Kalsbeek, 2013a, p.6). As in return, it leads to stronger brand loyalty and support. Thus, the institutions' purposeful approaches should ensure that all students' experiences reflect the brand



identity and brand promise, the institution's mission, and the unique and differentiating dimensions of the institution's educational philosophy and goal (Kuh, 2013, p.81). Therefore, the administrators may periodically examine the effectiveness of the practices that affect students' academic experiences versus brand loyalty and promise.

Recommendation 4.2: Engaging Faculty in Retention

One part-time participant who had time constraints to attend the class faced the difficulty to communicate with the lecture in a large size class. Kalsbeek (2013c) suggested that retention strategies can be effective only when they link with core academic structures and processes (p. 107). Faculty was the most direct, visible, and critical institutional contact especially for those part-time students who only attend the classes (Kalsbeek & Cortes, 2013). Kim and Sax (2014) also underlined that faculty was the key social contacts in the university environment; and they influenced students' learning, development, and the shared values during their interactions (p. 782). Thus, faculty is encouraged to engage the institutional progress-initiative to identify expatriate students who need academic or any other support from the university. Further, those who lead the part-time expatriate students are suggested to be more connected with them.

6. Future Research

Future research may be conducted in several ways: First, reinvestigate the perceptions of key factors impacting expatriate students' attendance and persistence at the study site once the implementation is done. Second, assess the key factors perceived by expatriate students in other local private institutions or even the public ones. Third, conduct a focus group interview if can be arranged to enhance the breadth and depth of information instead of the individual interviews. Fourth, conduct a quantitative study to investigate larger samples of students' opinions.

7. Research Limitations

The study may have a few possible limitations. For example, one limitation was the researcher did not have an opportunity to present and discuss the findings and project with the administrators at the Institution. Instead, they sent the whole project (I had sent to them) which including the findings to their research special project team to review and follow up. Thus, the researcher did not know whether the project was carried out or not. The impact of this study on the attendance of students was unknown to the researcher.

8. Conclusions

From the study's perspective, this paper's purpose was to provide insights about expatriate students' perceptions and key factors about attendance and persistence at the Institution. Rensimer (2015) conducted a study about the expatriate students who mostly enrolled in the international branch campuses in a different regional education hub, namely, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Although the design, purpose, sample, and scope of the study in the UAE context were different from this study, expatriate participants from both studies concurred a few findings concerning the country (or regional)-specific factor(s) and the institution (they had chosen) as an institution. For example, participants concerned about the affordability of the country they live in and whether the institution has a high reputation for higher education or not (p.7)

In this study, a white paper as a project was presented where it covered an overview of these perceptions of key factors. Then, a 4Ps framework for student retention strategies focusing on "profile, progress, process, and promise" was recommended. Specifically, the 4Ps framework was discussed at the private Malaysia institution context to improve expatriate students' recruitment and retention. This paper may serve other institutions elsewhere in Malaysia or internationally where have expatriate students to retain.

Being an expatriate and working for expatriate students for about eight years, I was inspired by my dissertation committee to culminate in this research. The study remains valuable to some extent despite small numbers of participants as the findings of the study provide recommendations to (re)examine, amend the current practices, and develop the strategies to attract, recruit, retain, and graduate future expatriate students. Hence, this paper will provide the administrators, educators, and practitioners with some insights for future exploration and research toward promoting expatriate students' persistence and graduation rates.

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