A Model of Student Satisfaction: International Postgraduate Students From Asia

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The internationalisation of higher education remains one of the major challenges faced by universities with the increasing mobility and rising expectations of a highly diversified student community worldwide. With the competitiveness of the industry, universities will need to focus on factors influencing student satisfaction to improve service quality where required. This paper draws on the theory of cognitive dissonance dealing with disconformation of expectations that results in customer satisfaction and using structural equation modelling, investigates factors that influence satisfaction of international postgraduate students from Asian countries studying in Australia and concludes with strategic implications for universities.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine the perceptions of the key factors of choice of Australia as a study destination among postgraduate international students from Asia and their impact on student satisfaction as an overall strategy to meet the challenges faced by universities in a globalized education market. In this study the term “postgraduate” is used to describe students who follow graduate studies up to a PhD degree and no post PhD students are included. The analysis is focused on an evaluation of factors of choice considered in choosing Australia as a study destination and the importance of these factors in influencing student satisfaction.

The internationalization of education remains one of the major challenges faced by the universities as a result of the increasing mobility of students worldwide. These challenges are seen as threats as well as opportunities for higher education systems around the world. Drucker (1997) has boldly predicted the demise of “traditional universities” with the growth of open and online universities. International education since then has further widened the scope in cross border education with increasing student mobility, academic mobility, program mobility and institution mobility (Naidoo 2006). Setting up offshore campuses by foreign institutions through branch campuses, subsidiaries or partnership arrangements, providing courses and qualifications to local students has contributed to the expansion of the international higher education. Further the reforms on financing and governance of higher educational institutions world over has had an impact on the delivery of educational services and how the institutions operate. These include curriculum reforms, student exchange programs, development new skills compatible with global and international competencies, promoting inter cultural activities on campus, introduction of new processes to absorb intercultural dimension into teaching research and service (Naidoo, 2006)

The global demand for higher education is estimated to reach nearly 100 million by 2010, more than double the level in 1990 (UNESCO, 1998) During the same period the Asian share of this demand is expected increase from a third at 17 million to nearly half at 45 million. These figures could rise even higher as the income levels in the two major economies in the region, namely China and India, increases resulting in further increases in demand for higher education. A study by IDP Australia projects the global demand for higher education to reach 7.2 million students by 2025 (Bohm et al., 2002) of which 70% of them will be from Asia. According to this study the average compound growth rate for Asia is 7.8% compared to the average growth rate for all countries of 5.8%. This growth trend has been visible in the recent statistics. For example, between 1999 and 2004, the number of mobile students worldwide increased from 1.75 to 2.5 million, reflecting the rapid expansion of higher education overall and seven countries (USA, U.K, Germany, France, Australia, Japan and New Zealand host 68% of the world’s foreign or mobile students (UIS 2006). International students represent 18% of the Australia’s tertiary enrolments during 2002/2003—highest among all other international education service providers in the world. Currently Australia commands 7% market share of the global education market behind USA (23%), U.K (12%), Germany (11%), and France (10%) (UNESCO, 2006). Education has therefore become a global industry, with more people than ever before choosing to undertake an international education across the world with Asia becoming the main driver of this demand (DFAT 2005).

This is largely due to capacity constraints in Asian countries to accommodate increasing numbers students seeking higher education and it is doubtful whether Asian countries are able to increase the required physical capacity and trained academics within a short period of time. Sohail and Saeed (2003) report that despite the industry efforts in developing educational infrastructure, the number of Malaysian students seeking education abroad has not declined dramatically supporting the notion that the available resources are inadequate to meet the demand. It is very likely, therefore, that at least in the short to medium term the international demand for higher education will increase considerably offering opportunities and challenges to higher education institutions around the world.

Marketing education focusing on market driven strategies in the international context has therefore received considerable attention among universities all over the world. This has led to an increasingly competitive and dynamic educational environment. USA, U.K, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have taken the lead in this process targeting markets primarily in Asia such as China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and the Middle East. Considerable effort is required not only to attract but also to retain students in this competitive environment. Superior service delivery to meet students’ needs and expectations and to maintain student satisfaction and loyalty towards study destinations becomes a key objective of the universities. In this process, universities need to cope with the challenges of cultural diversity, varied learning styles, the changing demands of students who are presented with a much wider choice of study destinations, educational programs and study environments than before.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate student perceptions of factors that were considered by International postgraduate students from Asia in choosing Australia as a study destination and the importance of these factors in influencing their satisfaction.

The specific objectives of the study are to:
- Identify the factors influencing choice of Australia as a study destination and their relative importance in students’ decision making process
- Test the relationship of these factors with student satisfaction using structural equation modelling;
- Examine from a marketing point of view, the actions and strategies that universities should take in order to improve the levels of satisfaction among students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing theory suggests that addressing the needs of customer segments ensures customer satisfaction and loyalty leading to organizational success. The creation and the delivery of superior customer value is pivotal in customer satisfaction (Kotler, 2003). Driven by the attractiveness of the international education market in terms of pecuniary and non pecuniary benefits to the respective institutions and the country, higher educational institutions, like many other organisations are concerned with market share, productivity, return on investment and the quality of services offered to their customers (LeBlanc & Nha, 1997). Service quality, in this context, is acknowledged as a key performance measure for excel-
ence in education and a major strategic variable for universities as service providers to increase market share (Donaldson and Runciman, 1995), with enduring effects on the institution and the students it serves.

Whilst there is a body of knowledge relating to how and why international students study abroad and choose particular countries and institutions as study destinations, research on the post-choice behaviour of students and, particularly in relation to regard to their satisfaction with study destinations is limited. The available studies are largely focussed on either one institution or undergraduate students and more importantly, no studies have been undertaken on student satisfaction on a study destination involving post-graduate student groups selected for this study. The present study, therefore, will make a contribution by filling a void in the academic research in this area.

The choice of a study destination is normally considered as a two-stage process, where the student chooses a country first and then the educational institution, though the choice of a country and an educational institution can also be separate and independent of each other. *Socio-economic and environmental* factors/variables such as Safety, Life style, Cost of living, Transportation, Racial discrimination, Visas and Immigration potential, Friends and family, Climate, Culture (Veloutou et al, 2005, Arambewala, 2003, Lawley, 1998, Duan 1997, IDP, 1995) have been associated with the choice of a country as a study destination while *individual level* factors/variables such as Study programs and courses, Fees, Facilities and support services, Intellectual climate, Teaching quality, Teaching staff and methods, Recognition of courses, Image and prestige of the university (Veloutou et al, 2005, Arambewala, 2003, Smith et al, 2002, Townley, 2001, Geall, 2000, DETYA, 2000, Burke, 1986) have been identified in the choice of a university as a study destination. This study investigated 36 of these service delivery factors/variables to evaluate the level of performance on each one of them as perceived by the International postgraduate students to infer their satisfaction.

University education falls into the domain of services marketing where service performances are considered situation specific (Schoefer and Ennew, 2005) and two services cannot be treated as identical if they are performed in different settings and by different individuals (Lovelock et al, 2003; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000, Adler and Graham, 1989). Given the student diversity, differences in learning styles, previous life experiences and the variation in service facilities offered by universities the perceptions of the overall service performance will be different thus contributing a major challenge to universities in terms of sustaining a uniform standard of service performance (Dawson Conti-Bekkers, 2002, Patterson and Smith, 2001). Perceptions formed by students on service performance are the result of the student attitudes which will be expressed either as positive or negative (Keaveney, 1999, Boshoff, 1997) based on how far student expectations on the delivery of the services have been met by the university. If a negative attitude is formed it will be difficult to achieve overall satisfaction and could result in complaints, decreasing loyalty and negative Word Of Mouth (WOM) promotion (Kau and Loh 2006, Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). It is critical therefore for universities to manage student perceptions of service performance in order to improve their attitudes towards the institution ((Bagozzi, 1992). Universities will need to recognize the fact that postgraduate students all of whom are with prior experience in a university service environment (compared to undergraduate students) are expected to evaluate an educational service differently resulting in the formation of different attitudes towards service performance.

Australia’s late entry into international education has offered both opportunities and challenges. It has provided the tertiary sector with increasing student numbers, significant economic benefits, international goodwill and recognition of Australia as a study destination. There is no disagreement that the success of Australian universities in internationalizing education has indeed been spectacular and the current trends indicate more opportunities for Australia with the further expansion of the international student market. Though Australia remains relatively a small player in the global education market with a 7% share, the importance of the industry to the local economy is very significant. In 2003 the exports of educational services contributed over $5.2 billion (Nelson, 2004). Between 1999 and 2004, the international student enrolments increased by 41% with China and India registering the highest growth. In the higher education sector, international students represent over 54% of the total student population, 76% of which are from Asia (AEI, 2005). Postgraduate students comprise 33% of all international students and trends indicate that this sector is growing fast. All these indicate a positive picture for Australian universities are conscious of the challenges for the Australian international education industry in coping with this dynamic environment. The continued increase in the domestic and international competition, the impact of the political, social and other global environmental issues on the international student mobility worldwide, the pressure on the universities to be increasingly self sufficient with external funding as a result of the cuts on federal government funding for education together with structural reforms such as removing the cap on the number of full fee paying students, encouraging institutions to compete against each other for students and funding some of these major challenges (Cull, 2007). The recent introduction of the “Melbourne model” by The University of Melbourne which is designed to shift its education delivery to a two tier higher education structure similar to the US is expected to have wider impact throughout the university sector (Nette, 2007). The growing need for adjustments and changes to meet the needs of the market is therefore evident. Superior service delivery and student satisfaction remain key variables in such a scenario.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980) and the Servqual (Service Quality) model to measure the relative post-choice satisfaction of international students from various Asian countries studying in Australia.

It postulates that customer satisfaction is related to the size and direction of disconfirmation, which is defined as the difference between an individual’s pre-purchase (pre-choice) expectations (or some other comparative standard) and post-purchase (post choice) performance of the product or service as perceived by the customer (Oliver 1980; Anderson, 1973). If expectations are met or exceeded, the customer is satisfied. Dissatisfaction results when perceived performance falls below expectations.

SERVQUAL is an instrument for assessing customer perceptions of service quality in service and retailing organisations (Parasuraman et al, 1988). The construct of service quality is defined in terms of perceived quality—a customers’ judgement about an entity’s overall excellence or superiority. The questionnaire used in this study was an adaptation of the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) and was designed to measure the gap between student responses on expectations and perceptions of the university as a study destination on a seven point bi-polar scale. The responses were sought on 36 statements representing student expectations of the operations and services of the university under desired choice and their post-choice
perceptions. The gap between expectations and perceptions was used as indices to measure student satisfaction in each of the items.

Since its introduction, SERVQUAL with its model of five dimensions of service quality has been widely acclaimed as a major contribution to academic and particularly marketing research literature and was originally used to assess customer perceptions of service quality in service and retailing organisations (Furrer et al., 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL instrument with its application in a variety of research pursuits in services and manufacturing industries (Furrer et al., 2000) became very popular among marketing practitioners and researchers. The major applications, however, were in the service industry. Despite its popularity it remained criticised on its operational and measurement problems, particularly in the use of P-E difference score as a measurement of perceived quality as opposed to performance based measure (Cronin and Taylor, 1994; Carman, 1990), ambiguity in the type of expectations eg. desired or adequate, which would provide different satisfaction responses (Swan and Tranwick, 1981), the link between satisfaction and service quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1994; Teas, 1993) and the number and nature of its dimensions being inappropriate for some service industries such as product services and “pure” services (Llosa et al., 1998). Parasuraman et al., in 1994, responded to these criticisms of the instrument by introducing some adjustments to the scale and its operation. They also defended the disconfirmation based measure of customer satisfaction and its link with service quality arguing that the incorporation of customer expectations provide richer information and have more diagnostic value. Conceding that there is confusion with regard to the causal relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality, they acknowledged that recent research evidence support service quality as an antecedent of customer satisfaction.

Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed method research approach was used for the study that comprised an exploratory review of literature and both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering stages to address the research objectives. The exploratory stage gathered information to guide the qualitative and quantitative stages of the research. The qualitative phase of the study involved three focus groups with the participation of 31 postgraduate international students from three different Australian universities in the state of Victoria. The objectives of the focus groups were to verify and refine variables identified by past research and to determine their relevance to measure post-choice satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The data used in this study was derived from a mail survey conducted among international postgraduate students from Asia studying at five universities in the state of Victoria, Australia. A total of 573 useable responses were received which represented an acceptable 24% response rate.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS was used to analyse the data this method was chosen because it allows the researcher to consider overall tests of model fit, regression weights, correlation coefficients, means and variances simultaneously. SEM allows the researcher to: (1) estimate multiple and interrelated relationships through multiple regression equations, and (2) represent unobserved concepts or variables in the relationships. SEM takes a confirmatory, i.e., hypothesis testing, approach to the analysis of structural theory influencing phenomenon. This methodology represents a causal approach that seeks to examine a set of relationships between one or more independent variables and one or more dependent variables.

Data was checked for coding errors, missing data, outliers and normality of the data (Malhotra et al., 2006). This study utilised both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Exploratory factor analysis was used to extract the items that provided a reliable measure of the constructs under investigation in this study. The analysis was conducted using Maximum Likelihood estimation (ML) with Direct Oblimin rotation. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant (0.000) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was 0.93. The initial results of the factor analysis identified seven factors that conceptually matched the expected descriptions of the constructs.

Reliability of the independent scales was assessed and found to be very satisfactory with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient at 0.70 or above for all factors (Hair 2006; Zikmund 1998) namely, Education 0.92, Image and Prestige .90, Social Orientation 0.89, Technology 0.93, Accommodation .78, Safety,7.8, Economic Considerations .70. The path model’s fit indices indicate a good fit of the model to the data CMIN/DF= 2.71, DF=145, P=.01, GFI=.94, TLI=.96, CFI=.97, RMSEA=.05. The model was also found to be sound with regard to nomological, discriminant and convergent validity. The interrelationships of the 19 independent variables the seven constructs and the dependent variable of satisfaction is presented in diagram 1, the model accounts for 87% of the variance associated with satisfaction.

The fit statistics are sufficient basis for the model’s acceptance as shown in Table 2. The Standardised Regression Weights (SRW) and Critical ratios indicate that there are significant relationships between Total Satisfaction and the seven latent variables with scores for Education 0.26 (8.68), Economic Factors .24 (5.84), Image .19 (7.04), Social Orientation 0.17 (5.03), Technology .16 (5.90), Accommodation .15 (4.67), and Safety 0.08 (2.46). The Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) indicates acceptable statistics with all variables showing correlations above an acceptable level of 0.30 (Holmes-Smith et al. 2005) (See Table 1). All regression coefficients were significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Seven constructs were identified in the study: Education, Social, Technology, Economic, Accommodation, Safety, Prestige and Image. The structural equation modelling indicated that these factors are significant predictors of student satisfaction.

The Education construct highlights the fact that feedback from lecturers, good access to lecturers and quality of teaching are perceived to be the most important variables influencing student satisfaction. McManus (2006) found that universities need to understand student expectations in these areas to provide them with a suitable learning environment. Given the student diversity, universities will need to adapt teaching methods to include non traditional teaching techniques to cater to the specific pedagogical demands of international students (Davies, 2007). Geall (2000) provides evidence of how feedback to students is important given that interaction with lecturers is considered to be an important part of the learning experience and lecturers are accepted as the regular point of contact for all international students. Students therefore expect easy access to lecturers to discuss not only their academic issues but also seek direction on personal issues even before they consult a student counsellor.

It is vital that universities recognise the importance of factors other than direct educational issues, that impact upon the satisfaction of international students. These include issues relating to Accommodation, Safety, Economic considerations. Social issues, Technology availability and the image and prestige of the university.

The Counselling services, social activities, close working relationships with other students and international orientation programs are considered most important variables within the Social
FIGURE 1
Structural Equation Model of Student Satisfaction

TABLE 1
Results of the Student satisfaction model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variable</th>
<th>Measured Variable</th>
<th>SRW</th>
<th>SMC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Valuable feedback from lecturers.</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good access to lecturers</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High standard of teaching with quality lecturers</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Orientation</td>
<td>Counselling services</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social activities</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close working relationships with all students</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International orientation programs</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Considerations</td>
<td>Casual jobs</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost of living</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for migration</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image and Prestige</td>
<td>Image and prestige internationally</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image and prestige in Australia</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image and prestige in home country</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Access to computer facilities</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Availability of modern facilities</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Reasonable cost</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good standard</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All variables loaded with Critical Ratios > 2, therefore significant above .05
construct that influence student satisfaction. Many Asian international students go through stress and adjustment difficulties during the initial period of their enrolment at a university and therefore student counselling services play a major role in student social welfare. Dunn (2001) found that students are likely to face a ‘culture shock’ given the new environment in the university chosen. Houston and Rees (1999) have provided evidence on adjustment problems related to both living support and language among postgraduate international students. Student orientation programs also play an important part of the support services required by students as many consider that such programs are of immense value to them.

Within the economic considerations construct, migration opportunities casual jobs, and cost of living, are considered the most important variables. Australia allows international students to work up to 20 hours a week and almost all international students take advantage of this facility. However, securing a part time/casual job is not easy for many students, particularly for newly arrived students. Burke (1986) found that the lack of opportunities for part time casual jobs is a concern to many students. This appears to be a concern among the postgraduate students. Most of the postgraduate students have been in the workforce in their own countries and therefore expect to find a part time/casual job in the area of interest in which they are professionally qualified. The negative experience resulting from the failure to secure such positions impacts on the overall satisfaction of students.

In regard to accommodation, International students expect student accommodation to be made available by universities or by private agencies to comply with minimum standards of comfort and at reasonable cost. It is also an expectation that such student accommodation is available when required. Few studies make direct reference to accommodation as a factor. Townley (2001) identifies accommodation with food and not as a separate factor while Harvey (2001) rates it as an important factor influencing student satisfaction.

Most postgraduate courses require constant use of computers. Some subjects require computer applications and analysis, and the presence of modern and adequate computer facilities enhances the attractiveness of universities among students. International students expect reasonably modern computer equipment, in adequate quantities to be made available for their use when required. High expectations are formed by students, given the promises made by universities through their promotional material and local agents or consultants in regard to the availability of core facilities such as computer equipment. Harvey (2001) considers this variable to be important in the formation of student satisfaction.

Access to computer laboratories is also another key expectation. This is related to the previous factor and plays a key role in the satisfaction formation of students (Harvey, 2001). One of the key recommendations of the Dearing Committee in the United Kingdom and the West Committee in Australia in 1997 is the introduction of technology in teaching termed as ‘resource based learning’ in which ‘access’ to resources is a pre-requisite. This recommendation is part of the reforms to university structure, teaching strategies and other academic activities to enable the institutions to cope with new challenges in the UK and in Australia. The easy access to computer labs, therefore, becomes a service expected by students enrolled at universities.

Safety is a major concern to international students and their families. Australia has a good reputation with safety particularly when compared to the US European destinations with regard to violence and drug usage over teenagers (AEL, 2002). Parents are worried about it because they will not have much control over their children when they are far away from them. According to the Australian Government, crime rate in the country decreased by 7% between 2000 and 2004 (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2005). This is a very positive thing for Australian Universities. Racial tolerance and acceptance as well as the cultural mix are also considered from a safety perspective and Australia compares very favourably with other countries on these factors.

International students are becoming more critical when choosing their educational institutions (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). Anderson and Sullivan (1993) note that expectations and perceived quality are significant factors affecting the satisfaction of international students. Thus, some higher education institutions have changed their quality management to convey a stronger quality image (Ford et al, 1999). The choice of an Australian university is also influenced by its image and prestige. The expectations formed are based on the information gathered about the university, its courses, teachers and comparative ranking with other universities. Some universities have built up a reputation for certain academic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>SRW¹</th>
<th>S.E.²</th>
<th>C.R.³</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>←----- Accommodation</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Safety</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Education</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Social</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Technology</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Economic Factors</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>←----- Image</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SRW¹ = Standardised Regression Weight. S.E.² = Standardised Estimate C.R.³ = Critical Ratio

High international image and prestige of a university is an attraction to postgraduate students as it is expected that such image and prestige would open up better career opportunities for them. Gaining international image and prestige as an educational institution is a long and an arduous process requiring a commitment to excellence in the delivery of education, and quality research output.

Most students believe some Australian universities enjoy high image and prestige among Asian countries. Mullins et al (1995); Nesdale et al (1995) and The Bureau of Industry Economics (1989) discussed this factor in their studies investigating choice of study destination by international students highlighting that the attraction of a university lies with its reputation in the home country as a recognized institution. Opinions of students differ as the recognition of an institution is partly based on the strength and capacity of the university to deliver what is expected. The diversity of courses, reputation of its teachers and the strength of the alumni population in the home country of a given university are some of the factors contributing to image and prestige of an institution.

This study has highlighted the importance of teaching quality and the role of the teaching staff in generating student satisfaction. It was evident that lecturers remained the primary contact of the students for both academic and non academic issues. While the continuous review of academic programs in terms of their content and quality and the international research profile of the universities is a major requirement, it is clear that universities need to recognize the contribution made by the academic staff in terms of student retention and satisfaction with the study destination. It is important that appropriate recognition of their contribution to support these intrinsic goals is a given to staff.

While universities have invested heavily on student support programs—counselling, orientation programs, and social activities the study reveals that the Asian international postgraduate students display a different attitude towards these services. First they endorse that these services as very important to them as noted by the earlier work undertaken by Kohut (1997) who identified a number of initiatives that would allow international students to interact socially with peers as well as the society at large with a view to enrich student experience. Many international students consider interaction with students of other nationalities, university lecturers, and local community as part of their learning experience. Secondly, being relatively more mature age students than undergraduate student, the nature of the counselling, orientation programs and other social activities and timing are considered very important considerations by these students. It is important therefore for universities to tailor these services to suit the international postgraduate students.

A Similar requirement is evident in relation to social and cultural support. There is a large body of literature on the adjustment problems and academic stress of international students and the importance of adequate support to minimize the “cultural shock” (Dunn 2001). Past studies (Arambewela, 2003) have indicated that university counsellors or advisers are not always their first choice of seeking advice and redress; rather they turn to the lecturers or their own friends and relatives. In this context, creation of a suitable environment whereby students are able to interact with their lecturers, friends and relatives will be important. It is useful to seek volunteers from senior students to be hosts of the new students who enter the university.

In conclusion, this study provides a valuable insight into factors that relate to the satisfaction of international students. These include both educational and non educational factors. This study should provide an opportunity for universities to develop strategies to attract and to satisfy international students.

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