Exploring Factors Influencing International Students' Choice

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, the available study choices to international students have increased considerably. Along with this change, the number and diversity of international students eventually improved too. Such developments in international education are observed not only in the traditional host countries but also in the emerging host countries. Most host countries are exerting many efforts on advancing their respective internationalization programs to attract more international students. Central to these labors is the understanding of the students' choices of country destination, higher education institutions (HEIs) or university, and study program for proper fitting. Presently, the choices among international students vary due to many factors influencing their decisions. The students' choices for international education are influenced by individual factors as well as factors non-personal like those related to international sending and receiving countries. A vast number of researches have been conducted to study the factors influencing students' choice of international education; however, the results are still mixed. This study extends the previous researches on factors influencing the choice of international education. Through systematic literature review, this paper aims to explore the factors influencing students' choice of international education. Results, conclusion, and recommendation will be discussed.

Keywords: (choice, international student, higher education, international education).

1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement in the internationalization of education is seen as the 21st global phenomenon as all nations experienced it around the globe (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2014). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the 4.1 million recorded number of globally mobile students in 2010 will rise to 7 million by 2020 (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohn Ibrahim, 2013; Madge et al., 2014). Prazeres (2013) predicts the same by claiming the global foreign student enrolment will increase steadily up to 2025. This rise in internationally mobile students according to Kumar (2015) and UNESCO (2016) will be reflected by the mounting university enrolment worldwide. In 2015, the number of globally mobile students was recorded at its all-time high, around 4.6 million students crossed a border to study and enroll overseas (IEE, 2018).

The above-mentioned positive predictions on growth in the number of international students worldwide are caused primarily by the continuous increase in the need for international education. Nowadays, obtaining an overseas education becomes popular and deemed necessary. Internationalization is the latest *'sine qua non'* of academic excellence (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014, p.370). The progression, however, activated a more intensified level of competition among host countries and universities. Thus, a higher number of educational institutions are increasingly adopting business strategies and behaving like business entities. Most, if not all, host countries vie in winning international students (Zheng, 2012). Attracting international students becomes a challenge that calls for a formulation of sound and robust marketing strategies.

In the last two decades, the available study choices to international students have increased considerably (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Along with this change, the number and diversity of international students eventually improved too. Such developments in international education are observed not only in the traditional host countries but also in the emerging host countries. Most host countries are exerting many efforts on advancing their respective internationalization programs to attract more international students. Central to these labors is the understanding of the students' choices of country destination, higher education institutions (HEIs) or university, and study program for proper fitting. A vast number of researches have been conducted to investigate the students' choice of international education, particularly the factors influencing students' choice of international education (e.g., Ahmad & Shah, 2018; Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Singh, 2016); however, the results are still mixed.

Presently, the choices among international students vary due to many factors influencing their decisions (McCarthy, Sen, & Garrity, 2012). Individual factors, as well as factors non-personal like those related to international sending and receiving countries, are influencing the students' choices for international education. This study extends the previous researches on factors influencing the choice of international education. Through systematic literature review, this paper aims to explore the factors influencing students' choice of international education. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the research methodology of the study which explains the data gathering procedure. Then, the study shows the results of the review of the existing literature on the students' choice of international education as well as the factors influencing such a choice. Lastly, the study concluded with theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

2. METHOD

This article stems from the issue: how the international students choose for their international education? Through its access to reputable electronic databases, the study conducted a systematic and intensive review of the literature to explore the factors influencing students' choice of international education. The study adopted the Popay et al. (2006) approach on narrative synthesis as cited in Brown, Boateng, and Evans (2016). Popay et al. (2006) defined the narrative synthesis approach as *"an approach to the systematic review and synthesis of findings from multiple studies that rely primarily on the use of words and text to summarize and explain the findings of the synthesis"* (Brown et al., 2016, p.64).

From the ScienceDirect, Emerald Insights, Taylor and Francis, Google Scholar, and other databases which publish scholarly journals in the field of social sciences and humanities, the research begins its search by utilizing keywords such as international student, overseas student, international education, study abroad, overseas education, international student mobility, choice factor, student choice, and international student destination choice. The exploration was confined to review and research articles and excluded from the book series, book, chapter in book, and conference proceeding. To avoid confusion and difficulty in translating texts, the searching efforts disqualified the non-English publications and focused only on articles published in English. Concerning the timeline, the study selected only those papers published in the database from 2004 to 2018.

The opening search offered the study with tremendous results. Searches on the three prominent databases (i.e., ScienceDirect, Emerald Insights, and Taylor and Francis) provided the study a total of more than 400,000 titles and abstracts. From the identified titles and abstracts, 106 related articles were considered and reviewed. Before the actual review, a screening process was made to select only interrelated studies and disregard articles not related to the subject matter (i.e., students' choice of international education and factors influencing such choice). From the initial review, the paper was able to identify various influencing factors to international students' choice. The review also helped the study in the development of the assumption that large different factors influenced international students' choices. The notion though needs more framing; thus, an additional literature review was suggested.

The second phase of the literature review provided the study more influences. All the articles considered in the analysis were assessed and analyzed by reading through the abstract first, then the full article (in-depth). The research listed as many external and internal factors affecting the primary variables under study (i.e., international student's choice and factors influencing such decision). From the list, an elimination was performed, prioritizing the factors most relevant to the current intention of the research. Then, through thoughtful analysis, few influences not evident in the literature were considered as they deemed significant in making the research's grounds more precise and concrete. Subsequent investigations were made on eligible factors to analyze their specific contributions further. The results of the examinations were reflected in a conceptual model.

3. RESULTS

3.1 International Students' Choice of Academic Destination

The choice for international education has been regarded as a very complicated decision (Fang & Wang, 2014). It is influenced by push and pull factors (Bodycott, 2009; Fang & Wang, 2014; Zeeshan, Sabbar, Bashir, & Hussain, 2013). Push-pull model mostly underpinned previous studies on the influencing factors on the choice of students for international education (e.g., Eder et al., 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). These push-pull factors have made a choice a result of the mixture of different elements and considerations (Bhati & Anderson, 2012).

The factors influencing the choice of international education have been extensively researched; however, the results are still mixed. Vast number of researches have been conducted to determine factors affecting: (1) *choice of country* (see, Ahmad & Shah, 2018; Bhati & Anderson, 2012; Bhati, Lee, & Kairon, 2013; Eder et al., 2010), (2)

choice of HEI or university (see, Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Basha, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2016; Eder et al., 2010; Roga, Lapina, & Muursepp, 2015), and (3) *choice of program, major, or field of specialization* (see, Dao & Thorpe, 2015; Davies, Tikoo, Ding, & Salama, 2016; Saiti, Papa, & Brown, 2017). In most of these studies, choices were studied separately and independently, though some investigated a combination of any two options (e.g., Singh, 2016). No single study has been made to examine the factors influencing the choices of the country, HEI or university, and program, collectively and simultaneously.

Wang and Tseng (2011) divulged that the study destination choice is a two-stage process. At one point, the student chooses a country first then an educational institution. On the other end, the student has the option to select separately and independently both the country and the educational institution. A differing view was presented by Das and Kochaniewiez (2015) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002, as cited in Farjam and Hongyi, 2015), as they averred that the choice of students for study destination takes three distinctive phases. Initially, the student decides to go overseas for education; second, the student selects which country, and, finally, the student selects which institution or university. On the other hand, Marigine (2006), as cited in Farjam and Hongyi (2015), reflected three levels choice: "first, at the global level, wherein the choice of study abroad by students is explained; second, in the national level, which shows why students choose a university; and, the third level, in which the choice of courses of study has received relatively little attention" (p.42).

3.2 Dimensions of Choice

This study gathered all the pertinent influencing factors to the choices of international students (i.e., choice of country, choice of university, and choice of program) as uncovered in the review of the extant literature. The relevant factors are grouped into seven (7) categories and presented in the following. According to Agrey and Lampadan (2014, p.395), "factors can be categorized into determinant dimensions of choice".

3.2.1 Personal Factors

International education is an aid for a new identity procurement (Pyvis & Chapman, 2006). Studying and living abroad is a great identity transforming experience as well (Qing, 2015). Hence, most factors affecting the choice of international students were found predominantly personal (see, Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Singh, 2016). Previous studies have found own inspirations like intrinsic interest in the course, research, and/or teaching, joy of study, high emotional cost of quitting, self-fulfillment or personal fulfillment, personal development or growth/self-development, prestige, individual achievement, acquiring the degree, and career-related reasons (i.e., professional development, employment/career opportunity, academic career, and career change) as factors influencing students' decision to enroll in international education (see, Alonderience & Klimaviciene, 2013; Ana-Andreea, Liviu, & Alina, 2013; Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Cao, Zhu, & Meng, 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Choi, Nieminen, & Townson, 2012; Coryton, 2014; Eder et al., 2010; Fatoki, 2014; James, 2007; Nyaribo, Prakash, & Edward, 2012; Pope, Sanchez, Lehnert, & Schmid, 2014; Pyvis & Chapman, 2006; Rienties, Luchoomun, & Tempelaar, 2013; Tarvid, 2014; Telcs, Kosztyan, Neumann-Virag, Katona, & Torok, 2015; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007; Zhou, 2015).

Further, factors like opportunities to access domestic education, international exposure, personal experience, the desire to experience other country's culture and student life in

another country, personal freedom, previous study or travel experiences, learning high-quality research, and other factors personal in context were also found to affect students' decisions (see, Bhati et al., 2013; Choi et al., 2012; Naidoo, 2007; Owen & Pfeifle, 2013; Rudd, Djafavora, & Waring, 2012; Safakli & Ihemeje, 2015; Vrontis et al., 2007). Also, few studies argue that international student mobility is driven primarily by the desire of students to grow personally and professionally (e.g., Eder et al., 2010; Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap, & Axelsson 2015).

Table 1. *Personal Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Choi et al., 2012; Fatoki, 2014; James, 2007; Rienties et al., 2013; Tarvid, 2014; Zhou, 2015	Intrinsic interest in the course, research, and teaching
Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; James, 2007; Tarvid, 2014	Joy of study
Zhou, 2015	High emotional cost of quitting
Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Tarvid, 2014	Self-fulfillment/Personal fulfillment
Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Eder et al., 2010; Pope et al., 2014; Tarvid, 2014),	Personal development or growth/ Self-development
Chapman & Pyvis, 2004	Prestige
Vrontis et al., 2007	Individual Achievement
Tarvid, 2014	Acquiring the degree
Alonderience & Klimaviciene, 2013; Ana-Andreea et al., 2013; Cao et al., 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Coryton, 2014; Eder et al., 2010; Nyaribo et al., 2012; Pyvis & Chapman, 2006; Tarvid, 2014; Telcs et al., 2015; Vrontis et al., 2007)	Career-related reasons (professional development, employment/career opportunity, academic career, and career change)
Naidoo, 2007	Opportunities to access domestic education
Bhati et al., 2013	International exposure
Safakli & Ihemeje, 2015	Personal experience
Rudd et al., 2012; Safakli & Ihemeje, 2015	The desire to experience other country's culture
Safakli & Ihemeje, 2015	The desire to experience student life in another country
Vrontis et al., 2007	Personal freedom
Choi et al., 2012; Owen & Pfeifle, 2013	Previous study or travel experiences
Choi et al., 2012	Learning high-quality research
Choi et al., 2012	Other factors personal in context
Eder et al., 2010; Lesjak et al., 2015	The desire of students to grow personally and professionally.

3.2.2 Cultural Factors

Culture is defined as the beliefs, norms, behavioral patterns, and values of a national group (Wilkins & Huisman, 2014). It is regarded as one of the most influential factors to the choice of institutions among international students (see, Dora, Wan Ibrahim, Kasim, & Saad, 2009; Eder et al., 2010; Ozoglu, Gur, & Coskun, 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014). Previous studies, for instance, have found the cultural compatibility as one intervening factors that influenced the trend in the enrollment of international students (e.g., Tan & Goh, 2014). During the transition stage, international students had to deal with wide variety of adjustments which require them to adjust to host country's cultural environment as well as to learn new cultural values and norms (Rujiprak, 2016; Sikat, 2011). The cultural environment of a country and its relative impacts are also important cultural factors as these could have been major contributing factors in the disparities of consumer behavior throughout countries (see, Raskovic, Ding, Skare, Dozen, & Zabkar, 2016; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014).

A cultural distance may occur when there is a mismatch between personality and individual's environment (see, Lee & Ciftci, 2013). Rientes et al. (2013) stated five major dimensions such as power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term-short-term orientation on which cultures differ. The study found that 'masculinity-femininity' had a significant impact on students' study choice. However, the observed large cultural disparities among and between international students were attributed to their countries of origin (Wang & Hannes, 2013). Cultural distance may be caused by cultural differences which may arise mainly from language, religion, technology, national culture (though declining) and course-related qualities, choices of universities, and future careers (see, Dora et al., 2009; Habib, Johannesen, & Ogrim, 2014; Jian, Sandnes, & Huang, 2010; Lu, Dear, Johnston, Wootton, & Titov, 2013; Sikat, 2011; Vergara, Smith, & Keele, 2010; Vrontis et al., 2007).

Culture should be the primary consideration when recruiting international students, especially students from Confucian societies (Bodycott, 2009). Based on previous studies, one of the determinants in school choice among international students was the aspect of acculturation (see, Desa, Yusoof, & Abd Kadir, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Mackay, Harding, Jurlina, Scobir, & Khan, 2011; Migliorini, Rania, & Cardinali, 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2010; Vergara et al., 2010). Acculturation is defined as the process of cultural change resulting from repeated and direct contact between two different cultural groups (Desa et al., 2011; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2015; Vergara et al., 2010). This process theorized that migrants experienced a process of abandoning their cultural heritage and embracing the culture of the host country; (Rujiprack, 2016; Smith & Khawala, 2011; Vergara et al., 2010). Acculturation may result in cultural shock and stress among students; hence, this had been believed to have a tremendous impact over international students' adjustment in the host country.

Desa et al. (2011) revealed that there was no significant difference between genders and age groups when it comes to acculturative stress. Most acculturative stresses came from environment and attitude. The levels of acculturative stress likewise differ among races. Some higher levels of acculturative stress are reported among Asian students (Yu, Chen, Li, Jacques-Tiura, & Yan (2014). Not all international students though suffered from culture shock and stress brought by cultural shifts and unfamiliar culture (Vergara et al., 2010). Some mobile students enjoyed living in a place with a global culture (see, Busher, Lewis, & Comber, 2016). These international students were attracted by the

possible intercultural training to be given by home institutions (see, Cao et al., 2016) and with the desire to experience other cultures (see, Rudd et al., 2012).

Table 2. *Cultural Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Tan & Goh, 2014	Cultural Compatibility
Raskovic et al., 2016; Rujiprak, 2016; Sikat, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014	Adjustment to host country's cultural environment
Desa et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Mackay et al., 2011; Migliorini et al., 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2010; Vergara et al., 2010	Acculturation
Vergara et al., 2010	Enjoyment of living in a place with global culture
Cao et al., 2016	Attraction to intercultural training
Rudd et al., 2012	The desire to experience other culture

3.2.3 Economic Factors

The economic factor is one of the two most influential determinants of international student mobility (Wei, 2013). Previous studies have found the economic situation of the home country, country's economic developmental levels, and gaps between countries inflow and outflow of international students as factors to international students' mobility and decisions (e.g., Bartham, 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Wei, 2013). International student mobility had been viewed as a decision which is largely based on costs including the cost of the program or tuition fee, cost or standard of living, mobility cost, and other related expenses (see, Beine, Noel, & Ragot, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Cao et al., 2016; Coryton, 2014; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Naidoo, 2007; Perkins & Neumayer, 2013; Shanka, Quintal, & MEdman, 2006; Soo & Elliott, 2009; Tan & Goh, 2014; Wei, 2013; Zwart, 2013). One of the primary considerations for students choice of international education is the financial aspect (Dora et al., 2009). Most international students are attracted by the low tuition fees charged by the university. These international students are also motivated to study abroad by possible financial aid or scholarship grants and of the potential increase in the future expected income (see, Beine et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2012; Coryton, 2014; Ozoglu et al., 2015; Perkins & Neumayer, 2013).

The place is also a significant consideration for international higher education mobility (Collins, 2014; Singh, Schapper, & Jack, 2014). Countries sizes (see, Wei, 2013) and location or proximity/distance of the institution from home (see, Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013; Bashir, Hassan, Pasha & Ahmed, 2013; Chung, 2015; Ozoglo et al., 2015; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Shanka et al., 2006; Simoes & Soares, 2010; Soo & Elliott, 2009; Telcs et al., 2015; Wei, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014) were found as influential factors in relation to the place or geographical location of study destination. Other economic factors such as population, climate, and trade, bilateral, or economic relations can also be very influential in students' choice of institutions (Cao et al., 2016; Sikat, 2011; Wei, 2013).

Table 3. *Economic Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Bartham, 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014	The economic situation of the country
Ahmad & Shah, 2018; Wei, 2013	Country's economic developmental levels or economic growth
Wei, 2013	Gaps between countries inflow and outflow of international students
Ahmad & Buchana, 2016; Beine et al., 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Coryton, 2014; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Naidoo, 2007; Shanka et al., 2006; Soo & Elliott, 2009; Tan & Goh, 2014; Wei, 2013; Zwart, 2013	Cost of the program or tuition fee
Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Beine et al., 2014; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Shanka et al., 2006; Wei, 2013; Zwart, 2013	Cost or standard of living
Cao et al., 2016; Eder et al., 2010	Mobility cost (e.g., visa issues)
Choi et al., 2012; Coryton, 2014; Ozoglu et al., 2015	Financial aid or scholarship grants
Beine et al., 2014; Perkins & Neumayer, 2013	Possible increase in the future expected income
Wei, 2013	Country sizes
Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013; Bashir et al., 2013; Chung, 2015; Ozoglo et al., 2015; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Shanka et al., 2006; Simoes & Soares, 2010; Soo & Elliott, 2009; Telcs et al., 2015; Wei, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014	Location or proximity/distance of the institution from home
Cao et al., 2016; Sikat, 2011; Wei, 2013	Population
Cao et al., 2016; Sikat, 2011; Wei, 2013	Climate
Cao et al., 2016; Sikat, 2011; Wei, 2013	Trade, Bilateral, or Economic Relations

3.2.4 Social Factors

International education had been understood as an adjustment to the norms and institutions of the host country (Marginson, 2014). Most, if not all, international students had faced countless changes in a wide variety of areas including adjustment to a new environment (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011). The adjustment is a complex phenomenon; thus, international students do not fit comfortably (Chien, 2016). There is a reported high rate of problems concerning social adjustments (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011). International students' socialization and interactions in a new country were documented as tough across different settings (Wang, Andre, & Greenwood, 2014). However, higher education institutions offered a milieu which helps students recognized ways of life as a norm (Sears, 2011) and made the international students' adjustments a lot better and easier.

Zheng (2012) mentioned that a wide variety of social factors are important to international students, especially to those who come from developing countries. The family plays a prominent role in the study abroad of international students as well as friendship (Ana-Andreea et al., 2013; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2010); thus, recommendations by friends and family are also found to influence international students' choice (e.g., Ozoglu et al., 2015). The sense of belonging is also claimed by international students as important in their decisions (see, Phelps, 2016; Stewart & Ostrove, 2013). They connect advisors' support (Stewart & Ostrove, 2013) and social networks (Beech, 2018; Ding & Li, 2010; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2015) with a stronger sense of belonging. The social network may predict international students transition success in the host country (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2015). Previous studies provide solid evidence that most students capitalized on their social networks to understand international education (see, Beech, 2018). Relational ties generated from colonial linkages were also noted as influential factors to international students' decisions of international education (Perkins & Neumayer, 2013). Service agents' influence likewise is a factor in the choice of international students (Bhati & Anderson, 2012).

Table 4. *Social Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Beech, 2018; Ozoglu et al., 2015	Family's recommendations
Beech, 2018; Ozoglu et al., 2015	Friends' recommendations
Phelps, 2016; Stewart & Ostrove, 2013	Sense of belonging
Stewart & Ostrove, 2013	Advisors' support
Beech, 2018; Ding & Li, 2010; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2015	Social networks
Perkins & Neumayer, 2013	Relational ties from colonial linkages
Bhati & Anderson, 2012	Service agents' influence
Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011	Adjustment to a new environment

3.2.5 Legal and Political Factors

In the context of globalization, the state acted as both the rule-taker and the rule-maker (Pan, 2013). Host country's legal requirements like Visa are certainly and significantly correlated to the number of international students in that particular country (Shih, 2016). Some students are very responsive to changes in student visa policies of the state relative to other global options (Rafi & Lewis, 2013). International students likewise considered safety as a critical factor for study abroad (see, Gong & Huybers, 2015; Shanka et al., 2006). Least significant is the possibility for immigration to the host country (Zwart, 2013).

Table 5. *Legal and Political Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Pan, 2013	Type of government
Shih, 2016	Host country's visa requirements
Rafi & Lewis, 2013; Shih, 2016	Other legal requirement
Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Ahmad & Buchanan,	Safety and security

2016; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Shanka et al., 2006	
Zwart, 2013	Immigration to the host country

3.2.6 Environmental Factors
The environmental quality (Dora et al., 2009), as well as the climate environment of the host country, emerged as significant favorable pull factors for international students' interests in study abroad (Cao et al., 2016). Likewise, social marketing and the corresponding demand for social responsibility were distinctly noticed as factors affecting students' decision-making process (Vrontis et al., 2007).

Table 6. *Environmental Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Pan, 2013	Environmental quality
Cao et al., 2016	Climate environment of the host country
Vrontis et al., 2007	Societal Marketing
Vrontis et al., 2007	Social Responsibility

3.2.7 HEIs-related Factors (Institutional or Education factors)
There is a strong belief that international program could provide a higher quality of education (Chapman & Pyvis, 2004). This notion is affirmed by the studies made by Beine et al. (2014), Branco Oliveira & Soares (2016), Cao et al. (2016), Huang (2013), Ozoglo et al. (2015); Perkins & Neumayer (2013), Roga et al. (2015), Ruhanen and McLennan (2010); Shanka et al. (2006); Soo and Elliott (2009), Wei (2013), Wilkins and Huisman (2011), and Zwart (2013) who mentioned that quality was indeed one of the primary considerations and most essential attraction factors for students choosing international education institutions.

The reputation of the university or institution (see, Alonderience & Klimavicience, 2013; Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Manzuma-Ndaaba, Harada, Romle, & Shamsudin, 2016; Rudd et al., 2012; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011), familiarity with the institution (see, Chapman & Pyvis, 2004), image or prestige of the institution (see, Bashir et al., 2013; Mazuma-Ndaaba et al., 2016; Telcs et al., 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015), quality of education (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Dora et al., 2009; Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007; Yeo, 2009), programs offered (see, Dahari & Abduh, 2011), popularity of the university (see, Soo & Elliott, 2009; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014), facilities or university features (see, Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Rudd et al., 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014), and academic staff prominence (see, Dahari & Abduh, 2011) were also noted as essential attraction factors. However, the university ranking is the most cited influential factor for study abroad decisions (e.g., Ahmad & Shah, 2018; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Tan & Goh, 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). In fact, according to Yeravdekar & Tiwari (2014), the present international education is characterized by ranking obsessions.

Table 6. *HEIs-related Factors Influencing International Students' Choice*

Author	Description
Beine et al., 2014; Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Cao et al., 2016; Huang,	Quality of Education

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2013; Ozoglo et al., 2015; Perkins & Neumayer, 2013; Roga et al., 2015; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Shanka et al., 2006; Soo & Elliott, 2009; Wei, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; Zwart, 2013	
Alonderience & Klimavicience, 2013; Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Chapman & Pyvis, 2004; Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2014; Rudd et al., 2012; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011	Reputation of the University or Institution
Chapman & Pyvis, 2004	Familiarity with the Institution
Bashir et al., 2013; Mazuma-Ndaaba et al., 2014; Telcs et al., 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015), quality of education (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Dora et al., 2009; Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007; Yeo, 2009	Image or Prestige of the Institution
Dahari & Abduh, 2011	Programs Offered
Soo & Elliott, 2009; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014	Popularity of the University
Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Rudd et al., 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014	Facilities or University's Features
Dahari & Abduh, 2011	Academic Staff Prominence
Ahmad & Shah, 2018; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Tan & Goh, 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011	University Ranking
Bhati et al., 2013	Fast-track courses

3.3 Research Hypothesis

From the gathered information in the review of the literature, the research proposes the following useful hypotheses which can also serve as theoretical underpinnings to stimulate future research in this particular area.

> H1+: The personal factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.
>
> H2+: The cultural factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.
>
> H3+: The economic factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.
>
> H4+: The social factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.
>
> H5+: The legal and political factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.
>
> H6+: The HEIs-related factor is directly influential to the choice of academic destination of international students.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

The theories developed above are visually represented in Figure 1. The theoretical model integrates the different influencing factors to explain how international students choose for their academic destination. The choice of academic destination serves as the dependent variable of the study. It is a single item about the international students'

primary criterion in choosing academic destination whether country, university or program. The choice of academic destination is a categorical variable with three nominal categories including country, university, and program. On the other hand, the 'seven dimensions of choice' such as personal, cultural, economic, social, legal and political, environmental, and HEI-related factors serve as the independent variables.
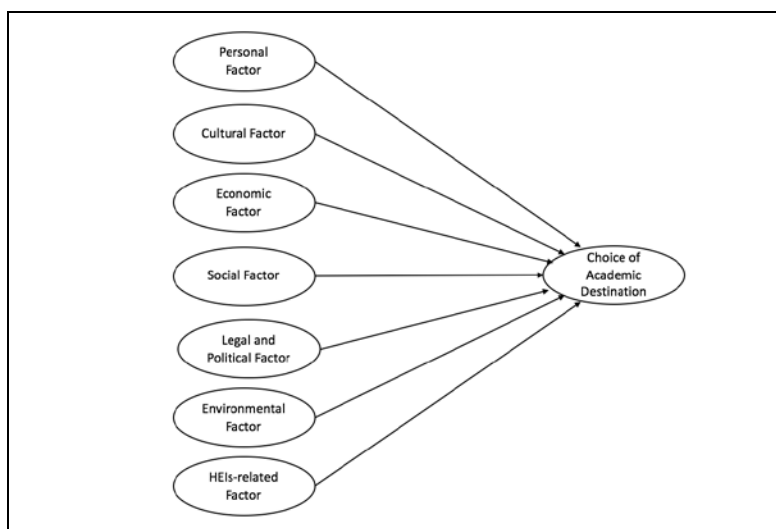
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article aims to explore the factors influencing international students' choice of international education. The study's literature review shows that the available study choices to international students nowadays turn out to be broader and more complex. These complexities make the study abroad decisions extra complicated. The data synthesis indicates that seven major categories of factors are influencing students choice of international education. These influencing factors to the choice of international students consist of personal, cultural, economic, social, legal and political, environmental, and HEIs-related factors. The study's findings suggest that future studies should consider the factors as mentioned above in the empirical investigation against the choice of international students regarding their international academic destination.

Though there exists significant literature on influential factors in the choice of study destination, choice of institution or university, and choice of study program; none has had focused on the Philippines as a research locale. Though there were studies conducted in Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Kenya, India, Thailand (e.g., Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Bhati & Anderson, 2012; Bhati et al., 2013; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Dao & Thorpe, 2015; Migin, Falahat, & Khatibi, 2015; Nyaribo et al., 2012; Singh, 2016), most of the researches on influencing factors were conducted in non-Asian countries like United States, Australia, Canada, Iran, Portugal, England, Turkey (e.g., Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Eder et al., 2010; Nafari, Arab, & Ghaffari, 2017; Saiti et al., 2017; Shanka, et al., 2006; Simoes & Soares, 2010). Future research, therefore, should also

consider extending studies on factors influencing international students' choice of academic destination to unmapped countries like the Philippines.

As choice deemed to be a mental process of action selection and reinforment learning which highly relates to choosing among options, deliberately and intently (see, Martins, Bhattacharya, & Kumar, 2012), this study recommends that future research should also consider how the decision-making process impacts the choice of international students or how this process possibly interacts in the proposed relationship between the different factors and choice for international academic destination amongst students.

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