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Influential factors contributing to the understanding of international students' choice of Malaysian higher education institutions: Qualitative study with a focus on expected benefits

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Abstract: This research aimed to identify the influential factors contributing to the international students' choice of Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), focusing on the expected benefits. Additionally, the study contributes to the development of the higher education sector in Malaysia by providing recommendations to the HEIs based on the students' perceptions. To achieve this purpose, the researchers utilized a qualitative approach through interviews where the study targeted the international students in Malaysia; 18 students were interviewed until saturation was reached. The thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the interviews where five major influential factors were highlighted and investigated: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness. The results showed that the Malaysian universities provide higher than average services to international students, which met most of their expectations; this is clear through the international students' answers to questions under different constructs such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsibility. The international students believe that the brand image and reputation of HEIs have a positive impact on their choice and expectations, and they believe that Malaysian HEIs are among the world's top universities. The study contributes to Malaysian HEIs in terms of the students' feedback that could be an advantage for existing efforts to develop the academic services of the country.

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Keywords: students' choice; higher education institution; international students; expected benefits; Malaysia.

Introduction

Higher education is the educational stage provided by high schools or other educational institutions. It is one of the crucial roles for students to develop economically and socially.¹ Higher education's main goal is to create and distribute knowledge for personal and social growth. Countries and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have acknowledged the importance of international students and their potential economic benefits. Many overseas students wish to study at foreign universities.² Foreign students choose HEIs for many reasons, including improving their creativity by exposing them to new experiences, acquiring skills and abilities, increasing their chances of owning high-quality jobs in their communities,³ assessing the possibility of learning a new language, providing the opportunity to interact with new language and culture,⁴ developing skills, and providing the experience of living in a new country.⁵

Studying abroad is a life-altering decision for international students. When students decide to study abroad, they frequently consider the consequences of their decisions. The opportunity to learn about various cultures, improve personally, and learn about people's differences is commonly emphasized in the literature.⁶ These opportunities also allow international students to learn

¹ Mukhtar, Umer, Suleman Anwar, Umaid Ahmed, and Muhammad Awais Baloch, "Factors affecting the service quality of public and private sector universities comparatively: an empirical investigation," *Researchers World* 6, no. 3 (2015): 132.

² Yibo Yang, Simone Volet, and Caroline Mansfield, "Motivations and Influences in Chinese International Doctoral Students' Decision for STEM Study Abroad," *Educational Studies* 44, no. 3 (June 30, 2017): 264–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1347498>.

³ Philip H. Anderson, Ann Hubbard, and Leigh Lawton, "Student Motivation to Study Abroad and their Intercultural Development," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 26, no. 1 (August 15, 2015): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v26i1.354>.

⁴ Jeffrey R. Watson and Richard L. Wolfel, "The Intersection of Language and Culture in Study Abroad: Assessment and Analysis of Study Abroad Outcomes," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 25, no. 1 (March 15, 2015): 57–72, <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v25i1.345>.

⁵ Anderson, Hubbard, and Lawton, "Student Motivation to Study," 42.

⁶ Matthias Hennings and Shin Tanabe, "Study Abroad Objectives and Satisfaction of International Students in Japan," *Journal of International Students* 8, no. 4 (October 1, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i4.238>.

about views that differ from their own.⁷ Nations can further improve brainpower and recruit human capital by engaging in joint education programs and studying abroad.⁸

International students use various variables to decide where to study. Massive infrastructure, quick economic expansion, higher living standards, foreign investment attractiveness for the knowledge industry, and clever management are frequently considered.⁹ Those characteristics make countries desirable places to live and invest. International students sometimes lack a particular life plan when migrating to a new country.¹⁰ The new environment may impact the educational process and students' experiments, requiring HEIs to adapt.¹¹ Ge, Brown, and Durst¹² found that the presence of international students in a safe, comfortable, and respectable setting has a favorable impact on students and vice versa. As a result, the experiences of overseas students should be thoroughly examined.

Studies have shown that studying abroad has some advantages.¹³ These benefits include improved education, exposure to outstanding scholars and researchers from around the world, better employment possibilities, and exposure to innovative and sophisticated teaching and learning approaches.¹⁴ HEIs are aware that international students seek higher education institutions with better scientific and research capabilities, higher quality education at

⁷ Irvine Clarke et al., "Student Intercultural Proficiency from Study Abroad Programs," *Journal of Marketing Education* 31, no. 2 (May 2009): 173–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475309335583>.

⁸ Jane Knight, "Internationalization: Concepts, Complexities and Challenges," in *International Handbook of Higher Education* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 207–27.

⁹ Muhammad Zeeshan et al., "Foreign Students' Motivation for Studying in Malaysia," *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 3, no. 3 (2013): 833–46.

¹⁰ Costas Zafiroopoulos and Vasiliki Vrana, "Service Quality Assessment in A Greek Higher Education Institute," *Journal of Business Economics and Management* 9, no. 1 (March 31, 2008): 33–45, <https://doi.org/10.3846/1611-1699.2008.9.33-45>.

¹¹ Arkorful, Valentina, and Nelly Abaidoo. "The role of e-learning, advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in higher education." *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* 12, no. 1 (2015): 29-42.

¹² Lin Ge, Douglas Brown, and Douglas Durst, "Chinese International Students' Experiences in a Canadian University," *Journal of International Students* 9, no. 2 (May 15, 2019): 582–612, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v0i0.272>.

¹³ D Napitupulu et al., "Analysis of Student Satisfaction toward Quality of Service Facility," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 954, no. 1 (January 2018): 012019, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/954/1/012019>.

¹⁴ Tahira Jibein and Masha Asad Khan, "Internationalization of Higher Education: Potential Benefits and Costs," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)* 4, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 196, <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v4i4.4511>.

affordable prices, greater cultural and ethnic diversity, a better climate, and a tourism environment that fosters innovation and learning based on scientific knowledge research, and greater market orientation.¹⁵

Higher education experiment experiences are vital for evaluating students' experiences in light of projected benefits and acceptance of higher education where HEIs are increasingly focusing on enhancing student outcomes.¹⁶ Malaysian universities are joining this adventure. Malaysia is the ninth greatest study destination globally, while Kuala Lumpur is the first most cheap city for students.¹⁷ Malaysia has one of Asia's most competitive educational, economic, and social environments.¹⁸

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has sought to reorganize the higher education system to be responsive to the country's development needs according to Vision 2020. Bakar and Mahmood¹⁹ showed that the growth of the information economy and modern social transitions prompted Malaysian HEIs to reinvest in themselves at many levels to be distinguishable globally. This clear purpose-made Malaysia a global hub of higher education.²⁰ The country has also become a tourist and investment destination, focused on utilizing information and creativity in creating chances and establishing high-risk and profitable ventures.²¹

Current literature focused on the international students' expectations in Malaysia but did not study the perceived benefits from international students'

¹⁵ Mazirah Yusoff, Fraser McLeay, and Helen Woodruffe-Burton, "Dimensions Driving Business Student Satisfaction in Higher Education," *Quality Assurance in Education* 23, no. 1 (February 2, 2015): 86–104, <https://doi.org/10.1108/qaq-08-2013-0035>.

¹⁶ The EvoLLLution, "The Purpose of Higher Education: To Create Prepared Minds," ed. Andrés Fortino, The EvoLLLution, June 26, 2012, <https://evollution.com/opinions/the-purpose-of-higher-education-to-create-prepared-minds/>.

¹⁷ Sultana, Seyama, and Abdul Momen. "International student satisfaction and loyalty: a comparative study of Malaysian and Australian higher learning institutions." *Journal of Intercultural Management* 9, no. 1 (2017): 101-142.

¹⁸ Ndanusa, Mohammed Manzuma-Ndaaba, Yoshifumi Harada, Abd Rahim Romle, and Kareem Olanrewaju. "International education as tourism product: The Malaysia experience." *International Journal of Administration and Governance* 1, no. 4 (2015): 74-81.

¹⁹ Bakar, Muhammad Shukri, and Rosli Mahmood. "Linking transformational leadership and corporate entrepreneurship to performance in the public higher education institutions in Malaysia." *Advances in Management and Applied Economics* 4, no. 3 (2014): 109.

²⁰ Mun Chong Sin, Bin Boon Yusof, and Kit Yeng Sin, "International Students' Satisfaction Level towards Service Quality in Academic Aspect and Loyalty to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 10 (October 28, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbs/v8-i10/4783>.

²¹ Melissa W. Migin et al., "Impacts of Institutional Characteristics on International Students' Choice of Private Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia," *Higher Education Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 20, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v5n1p31>.

perspectives. Besides, most of the studies focused on the postgraduates, but the current study dealt with undergraduates.

The assessment of the quality of service has become an essential need for service organizations; that is to say, many organizations are striving to respond to the expectations of the end-users through adopting strategies and techniques that contribute to meeting the desired quality of the users.²² The importance of the study lies in its objectives to identify the influential factors that enable the HEIs to assess the international students' expected benefits to Malaysian public higher education institutions. Besides, the Malaysian HEIs with primarily international students due to the gap in the literature regarding the international students' choice of HEIs in Malaysia.

Based on the study objectives, the following research questions will be addressed: "What are the influential factors contributing to the understanding of international students' choice of Malaysian higher education institutions?" where this general question can be divided into different sub-questions as follow: How can the Malaysian HEIs meet the expectations of the international students through the tangibility of the physical facilities, the reliability of the services, the responsiveness to their needs, the assurance to abide by high-quality services, and the empathy of the staff and management? The current study results will be valuable to many users, including Malaysian HEIs, international students, and other related stakeholders.

I. Factors influencing expected benefits of international students

When it comes to selecting an educational institution, international students are quite selective. Padlee et al.²³ concluded that when international students choose and decide to study at private universities in Malaysia, their decision is positively influenced by various factors, including influencers, learning environment, university focus, fees, socialization, amenities, and location.

Many HEIs worldwide have evolved into comprehensive educational and course delivery categories. The majority of higher education institutions worldwide provide universities and colleges with several branches and

²² Shanka, Mesay Sata. "Bank service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Ethiopian banking sector." *Journal of Business Administration and Management Sciences Research* 1, no. 1 (2012): 001-009.

²³ Siti Falindah Padlee, Abdul Razak Kamaruddin, and Rohaizat Baharun, "International Students' Choice Behavior for Higher Education at Malaysian Private Universities," *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 20, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v2n2p202>.

campuses of reputable international universities. As a result of the competitive atmosphere in the educational industry, this study believes that some HEIs are progressively presenting their students as educational system clients. These institutions must possess the advertising intelligence and data essential to address the issues they face, particularly in the worldwide arena. On the student side, they are inextricably linked to the educational quality and service, as they are considered the primary decision-makers.

Fernandez²⁴ identified four dimensions in selecting an HEI in his research at the University of Science in Malaysia. In this exploratory investigation, Fernandez explored the factors that influence students' decisions in Malaysia. These criteria included the sources of information, the primary motivations for pursuing higher education overseas, the student's intention to enroll in a private or public university, and the elements associated with a favorable effect on institution selection. The exploratory investigation concluded that the primary motivations for overseas students are to advance their professional prospects and acquire the necessary expertise and knowledge.

The customer's expected benefits are typically the high expectations for the supplied service that indicate the achieved performance. The expected benefits of customers are largely determined by several uncontrollable factors, including previous interactions with other organizations and their marketing strategies, the psychological state of customers during service delivery, the customers' values and background, and the product's image.²⁵ Additionally, the service's predicted benefits for clients are established through a sophisticated process that extensively incorporates the customers' pre-purchase ideas and the judgments of other persons.²⁶

The expected benefits are those advantages students desire or wish to receive from the Malaysian HEIs. In this study, students' expected benefits are associated with various degrees of students' decisions before and after joining Malaysian HEIs, which are associated with previous experiences and the presentation of marketing methods and word-of-mouth communication. The expected benefits from the diversity system and their indicators can be

²⁴ Jacqueline Liza Fernandez, "An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing the Decision of Students to Study at Universiti Sains Malaysia," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2010).

²⁵ Ahmed Beloucif, Messaoud Mehafdi, and Naa Ayeley Komey, "Expectation as a Key Determinant of International Students' Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (June 25, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1108/jarhe-04-2017-0048>.

²⁶ Valarie A Zeithaml, A Parasuraman, and Leonard L Berry, *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

approached via the uncontrollable elements of the expected benefits, which include prior experience, marketing, the students' conception of the purchased product or educational service, their behavior, and the service's depiction. Additionally, the influence of expected benefits on students is influenced by word-of-mouth communications, pre-purchase credibility, and the customers' requirements, experiences, and personal conduct.²⁷

University's reputation is considered a valuable element for foreign students to judge its quality and reputation based on its' recognition and generally expected benefits. Generally, expected benefits are what the individual thinks or believes will happen in the coming future²⁸. On the other hand, Mickelson²⁹ stated that expected benefits are consistent values indicating the experimental actuality faced by the individual (which, in this case, the international students). For example, how the students think regarding their performance in reality given their socio-economic environment and giving their past and present performance academically. Moreover, this study believes that expected benefits usually involve assessing the likelihood of an event, attitude, or result.³⁰

The expected benefits for a certain group of customers are significantly influenced by different factors that apply to international students who are considered customers of the universities.³¹ Given that international students are not a homogeneous group and have different cultural backgrounds, educational levels, and social and economic backgrounds,³² all of these reasons emphasize the need to identify the factors contributing to the understanding of international students' expected benefits.

²⁷ Nuria Huete-Alcocer, "A Literature Review of Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth: Implications for Consumer Behavior," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, no. 1256 (July 25, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01256>.

²⁸ Gorard, Stephen, Beng Huat See, and Peter Davies, "The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation." *York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation* (2012).

²⁹ Mickelson, Roslyn Arlin. "The Attitude-Achievement Paradox among Black Adolescents." *Sociology of Education* 63, no. 1 (January 1990): 44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2112896>.

³⁰ Russell, Marilyn. "Marketing Education." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 17, no. 1 (January 2005): 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110510577680>.

³¹ Janoskova, Katarina, and Pavol Kral. "Perception of selected sportswear brands with an emphasis on expected benefits and features as a prerequisite for customer satisfaction." In *SHS Web of Conferences*, vol. 74, p. 01008, EDP Sciences (2020).

³² Bordia, Sarbari, Prashant Bordia, Michael Milkovitz, Yaxi Shen, and Simon Lloyd D. Restubog. "What do international students want? An exploration of the content of international students' psychological contract in business education." *Studies in Higher Education* 44, no. 8 (2019): 1488-1502.

In the same context, other researchers attempted to identify the expectations of international students by exploring certain factors that may impact determining their expected benefits.^{33,34,35,36,37} These studies showed that international students' expected benefits of higher education institutions are mainly associated with the education expenses, education quality, academic reputation, offered programs, provided facilities as well as the educational environment, including practical advantages and aesthetic sides.³⁸ Additionally, international students expect to find a reasonable computer number, internet access, adequate libraries, and physical facilities besides lower education costs.³⁹ Taking the scope of study discussion to another dimension, Lee et al.⁴⁰ identified the expected benefits of studying abroad among American students. They found an additional factor highlighted by previous researchers, i.e., developing creative thinking.

As for the student's choice, the current study showed that expected benefits from the students' perspective mean the students' perception regarding the quality of the service compared to the service offered in their home country. Choosing a given country is not easy; international students pay close attention to naming the nature of the education service offered in the hosting country and the nature of the courses offered in this country.⁴¹

³³ Nilsson, Per A., and Nannette Ripmeester. "International student expectations: Career opportunities and employability." *Journal of International Students* 6, no. 2 (2016): 614-631.

³⁴ Hu, Claire, Christine Min Wotipka, and Wen Wen. "International students in Chinese higher education: Choices, expectations, and experiences by region of origin." In *Global perspectives and local challenges surrounding international student mobility*, pp. 153-178. IGI Global, 2016.

³⁵ Li, Yue, Nancy Goodrich Mitts, and Susan C. Whiston. "Chinese International Students' Expectations About Career Counseling." *Journal of Career Development* (2019): 0894845319832672.

³⁶ Chemishanova, Marieta. "International Students' Expectations of and Satisfaction with Academic Advising at a Community College." (2018).

³⁷ Fleischman, David, Maria M. Raciti, and Meredith Lawley. "Examining international students' expectations of third-party community engagement as a value co-creation mechanism." *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education* 27, no. 1 (2019).

³⁸ Biggs, John. *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. McGraw-hill Education (UK), 2011.

³⁹ Nadiri, Halil, and Seyed Muhammad Ali Mayboudi. "Diagnosing University Students' zone Of Tolerance from University Library Services." *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science* 15, no. 1 (2010): 1-21.

⁴⁰ Christine S. Lee, David J. Therriault, and Tracy Linderholm. "On the Cognitive Benefits of Cultural Experience: Exploring the Relationship between Studying Abroad and Creative Thinking," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 26, no. 5 (July 19, 2012): 768-78, <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.2857>.

⁴¹ Price, I. F., Fides Matzdorf, Louise Smith, and Helen Agahi. "The impact of facilities on student choice of university." *Facilities* (2003).

Yusoff et al.⁴² showed that students have different expectations regarding the quality of education they will receive from the university. Such expectations can be seen from different aspects, including the quality of academic staff, the content of the courses, and the expectations regarding the physical facilities. Such factors highly affect the decision of the students to enroll in a given university.

One of the core factors, which all international students expect, is the support from their teachers and professors and the support from the staff during their time at the higher education institutions.⁴³ The current study's findings revealed that some international students from different nations believe that the support services are the most essential as they do not fully know the host country's language or culture; neither do they know their path within this country. In most cases, international students depend heavily on the support services provided to choose a higher education institution.⁴⁴ In this respect, Lee et al.⁴⁵ showed that if the students have high expected benefits, this would, in return, affect their satisfaction negatively, where some students may have unrealistic expectations, which the university does not fulfill. Eventually, this will result in students' dissatisfaction.⁴⁶ Universities should consider the expectations of the students to ensure that their expectations are realistic and can be achieved, thus resulting in student satisfaction.⁴⁷

Many other influential factors can make students eager to study abroad. International students are looking forward to higher education institutions that can assist them in developing new skills that later can enable them to participate in the development of their communities and enhance their employment opportunities in prestigious vacancies.⁴⁸ Migin et al.⁴⁹ examined the main

⁴² Mazirah, McLeay, and Woodruffe-Burton, "Dimensions driving business student satisfaction," 87.

⁴³ Ken Zeichner, "Rethinking the Connections between Campus Courses and Field Experiences in College- and University-Based Teacher Education," *Journal of Teacher Education* 61, no. 1-2 (December 30, 2009): 89–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>.

⁴⁴ Rodney Arambewela and John Hall, "An Empirical Model of International Student Satisfaction," *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2009): 555–69, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13555850910997599>.

⁴⁵ Lee, David, and Tracy, "On the cognitive benefits of cultural experience" 768.

⁴⁶ Raoul A Mulder, Jon M Pearce, and Chi Baik, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation," *Active Learning in Higher Education* 15, no. 2 (April 16, 2014): 157–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787414527391>.

⁴⁷ Jean Kesnold Mesird and Kaye F. Sly, "Factors That Contribute to the Adjustment of International Students," *Journal of International Students* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 262–82, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i1.569>.

⁴⁸ Sultana and Momen. "International student satisfaction and loyalty" 101.

⁴⁹ Migin, Falahat, Ab Yajid, and Khatibi. "Impacts of Institutional Characteristics on" 31.

motivations affecting international students in selecting private higher education institutions in Malaysia. Five factors were used to measure the student's choice of the private higher education institution, emphasizing institutional characteristics (cost of education, academic reputation, software, and utilities).

Moreover, the current study benefited from Zeithaml et al.,⁵⁰ who proposed five service quality dimensions: Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Responsiveness. It is believed that each of those five constructs represents a part of the customer experience. Reliability represents the performance ability of the desired service accurately, reliably, and consistently. Assurance refers to employees' knowledge, courtesy, and skill to carry confidence and trust, while Tangibles are accommodations, facilities, and personnel appearance. For empathy, it is the caring provision and the individualized interest of the customers. And lastly, responsiveness is the readiness to provide immediate service and assist the customers. Additionally, the model of Parasuraman et al.⁵¹ was adopted in this study because it covers many areas related to the objective of the present study, e.g., student expectation and perception, which the study invested in building the constructs. This study discovered the links of those components to international students' satisfaction and loyalty.

The researchers argue that international students' prior characteristics, such as university choice, expected benefits, contentment, and loyalty, significantly impact their future and academic performance. The international students' variables provide a framework for selecting, anticipating, and remaining loyal to the university to complete their studies.

Finally, a review of past studies revealed that none addressed the fifth gap in the Parasuraman model. The current study is the first to address this gap and propose a workable solution accordingly.

II. Methodology

This qualitative study follows a thematic analysis method, one of the most common approaches to analyzing qualitative data.⁵² It involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting themes identified within qualitative data. The accessibility and selection of the international students were granted by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The selection of the participants was

⁵⁰ Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, *Delivering Quality Service*, 23.

⁵¹ Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, *Delivering Quality Service*, 25.

⁵² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

based on the following criteria: willingness to be interviewed, already spent at least 12 months studying at one of the Malaysian HEIs, and being nominated by the country-of-origin international student society. Additionally, the focus of the study was on the international students, not on the selected universities, which is why the researchers selected the sample from UTM, where the sample included students from various countries. Before starting the research procedures, the researchers retrieved all required ethical approvals from the research committee at UTM. Furthermore, participants' names and personal information were not coded to maintain research ethics.

II.1. Sample size justification

The study followed Patton's⁵³ suggestion to justify the number of participants. In limited time, it is justified to seek depth by interviewing a small number of participants, overtaking many participants, and seeking breadth of the inquiry. Creswell⁵⁴ pointed out that it takes time to collect qualitative data and analyze them, so the larger size of the participants, the more difficult it is to analyze. Creswell also suggested the number of participants might range from 1~2 to 30~40.

As shown in figure (1), the researchers in this study started the process of data collection by interviewing the respondents based on their home country until there were no new additions to the collected data. At this point, the researchers moved to another country. This is called saturation (no new data was obtained from the selected respondents regarding adding new individuals to the population). Saturation is used in qualitative research to discontinue data collection and/or analysis as no additional data are found.⁵⁵ The saturation was achieved after conducting 18 in-depth interviews with international students, where each interview took 19-30 minutes. The data collection process started by interviewing international students from Bangladesh until saturation, then moved to international students from China until reaching saturation. The same process sequentially continued with international students from Nigeria, Indonesia, Yemen, and Pakistan.

⁵³ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002).

⁵⁴ John W Creswell and Timothy C Guetterman, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 6th ed. (New York, NY: Pearson, 2019).

⁵⁵ Benjamin Saunders et al., "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization," *Quality & Quantity* 52, no. 4 (September 14, 2017): 1893–1907, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>.



Figure 1
Saturation Technique for Qualitative Study

Table (1) shows the code names and home countries of the students who were interviewed as part of the study.

Table 1
code names and home country of participants

#	Code	Background	Country	#	Code	Background	Country
1	BS	Software Engineering	Bangladesh	10	IM	Civil Engineering	Nigeria
2	NE	Industrial Biology	Bangladesh	11	NM	Civil Engineering	Nigeria
3	SK	Computer Network and Security	Bangladesh	12	II	Computer Science	Nigeria
4	RM	Electrical Engineering	Bangladesh	13	SA	Management Technology	Nigeria
5	MH	Electrical Engineering	Bangladesh	14	AT	Mech. Engineering – Aeronautics	Indonesia
6	AM	Software Engineering	Bangladesh	15	MN	Mechanical Engineering	Indonesia
7	MZ	Human Resource Development Management	China	16	LS	Civil Engineering	Indonesia
8	ZI	Biomedical Engineering	China	17	SS	Software Engineering	Yemen
9	SC	Automotive Engineering (Mechanical Engineering)	China	18	AA	Electrical Engineering	Pakistan

II.2. Interviews protocol and data analysis

The interviews were conducted based on the interview protocol of the European Asylum Support Office (2014), which involved different stages. The first stage was the preparation stage, where the interviewer organized the interviews. This stage involved identifying the interviewees, the interview conditions, logistics, and other arrangements. The interviews were conducted at Raja Zarith Sofiah Library, where each interview took 19-30 minutes and included 11 questions, as shown in appendix B.

The researchers provided all logistics to ensure that the interviews were comfortable for the participants. Later on, the opening interviews were organized, which involved establishing and maintaining an atmosphere of trust by introducing the purpose of the study and the questions to be discussed along with the objectives of the study. In addition to ensuring that the interviewee's answers were treated as confidential data, this stage also involved signing an informed consent by the interviewee (appendix A) and taking the participants' permission to record the interviews using an audio recorder. After signing the consent and approving the interview recording, the researchers provided the structure of the ISEB interview. The next stage was the proceeding stage, where the researchers started by asking if the participants had any questions before conducting the interviews. Then the researchers started recording the interview and asked the interview questions. Finally, the researchers concluded the interview after giving the interviewees the chance to add whatever they felt relative to the interview that was not addressed during the interview, including their feedback and recommendations.

ISEB interview included three main parts that are i) introduction, ii) body, and iii) concluding statement. The introduction includes demographic questions and two introductory questions; the body includes ten questions. The concluding statement consists of one question.

After finalizing the interviews, verbatim transcription of research data responses was done, and produced a summary report for the answers of each interviewee. The most popular methods to ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative data include triangulation, receiving feedback from informants, and expert review.⁵⁶ To this end, the researchers triangulated the collected data with related literature to ensure that the collected data was verified with other data. In addition to that, the researchers also conducted member checking, which was defined by Simon (2011: P1) as "the process of verifying information with the targeted group; it also allows the stakeholders or participants the chance to

⁵⁶ Simon, Marilyn K. "Validity and reliability in qualitative studies." (2011).

correct errors of fact or error of interpretations.” The researchers then contacted each of the participants, showed them the summary report for their interviews, and asked them to sign the report to ensure that the data contained in the report was true and matched with what was obtained in the interview. The researchers believe that such a process is essential in validating the collected data.

The analysis of the data collected from the participants involved different steps that eventually resulted in the provision of sufficient data to support the claims of the study. The researchers started the process by examining the collected data in a thorough and detailed manner to become familiar with the collected data and identify the codes for the data, which would help identify the themes to be used for the analysis. The codes used to classify the collected data were nine codes, namely reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, personal needs, experience, communication, tangibility, and common questions code. The researchers set the initial themes for the qualitative data, wrote them, and set each theme’s name. At this stage, the researchers started sorting the collected data into each of the identified themes, which eventually enabled the researchers to identify the themes in the collected data and enabled the drafting of the study results.

III. Results and discussion

The thematic analysis results identified 33 codes related to the factors influencing the international students’ choice of HEIs based on their expected benefits to Malaysia’s Public HEIs. The major themes were identified based on the dimensions of interview sections, e.g., reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness. The interview dimensions were developed based on the literature review performed by the researchers. All these codes were grouped into seven categories. Advanced thematic data analysis constituted five advanced factors: reliability, tangibility, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. Detailed information about the identified nodes is shown in table (1):

Table 1
Results of Thematic Analysis

No.	Codes	International Students (18)		Category of Theme	Advance Theme
		Source	Reference		
	Malaysian universities are among the world-leading universities.	10	13	Institutional recognition	Reliability

No.	Codes	International Students (18)		Category of Theme	Advance Theme
		Source	Reference		
	Malaysia's higher education system is stronger than my country's higher education system.	13	17	Quality of education	Reliability
	In Malaysia, the standard of higher education is better than that of other Asian countries.	14	30	Quality of education	Reliability
	The university that I have joined in Malaysia deserves to be ranked among the world's best universities.	4	8	Institutional recognition	Reliability
	I trust the higher education system in Malaysia.	9	10	Institutional recognition	Reliability
	The university in Malaysia that I attended achieved what it had expected.	14	18	Institutional recognition	Reliability
	Higher education in Malaysia is of a high standard.	13	17	Quality of education	Reliability
	The learning environment at a university in Malaysia increases my experience of studying.	6	6	Education environment	Reliability
	Studying at a university in Malaysia gives me more advantages than studying in my own country.	13	17	Future opportunity	Reliability
	Studying at a university in Malaysia has opened my eyes to new possibilities.	4	4	Future opportunity	Reliability
	Malaysian universities' academic personnel are proficient in teaching.	8	9	Academic staff qualification	Assurance

No.	Codes	International Students (18)		Category of Theme	Advance Theme
		Source	Reference		
	The Malaysian university academic staff are eligible.	14	17	Academic staff qualification	Assurance
	Malaysian university academic staff make an effort to ensure that students understand the materials for the course.	6	8	Academic staff qualification	Assurance
	The Malaysian university academic staff have wide experience in their respective fields.	8	10	Academic staff qualification	Assurance
	Malaysian university academic workers have high qualifications from well-known universities.	13	16	Academic staff qualification	Assurance
	The Malaysian university's non-academic staff are successful in their work.	11	11	Non-academic staff qualification	Assurance
	The Malaysian university's non-academic staff do their job on time.	8	9	Non-academic staff qualification	Assurance
	The buildings are fitted with new technology at Malaysian universities.	7	9	Infrastructure quality	Tangibility
	Buildings are maintained periodically at Malaysian universities.	7	9	Environment	Tangibility
	Malaysian universities have high-speed internet access.	2	2	Infrastructure quality	Tangibility
	Malaysian universities have an environment for learning that encourages the process of learning.	9	12	Environment	Tangibility
	Malaysian universities have convenient accommodation.	7	7	Infrastructure quality	Tangibility

No.	Codes	International Students (18)		Category of Theme	Advance Theme
		Source	Reference		
	Malaysian university classrooms are fitted with modern facilities.	8	9	Environment	Tangibility
	Wide-ranging references are given by Malaysian university libraries.	4	5	Infrastructure quality	Tangibility
	Malaysian university employees regard students as citizens.	8	9	Communication	Empathy
	Malaysian university workers look after their students	7	7	Friendly welcoming	Empathy
	Malaysian university staff listens to the concerns of students.	3	3	Communication	Empathy
	Foreign students are welcome by Malaysian universities.	8	10	Friendly welcoming	Empathy
	Students may communicate freely with employees of Malaysian universities.	7	7	Communication	Empathy
	The cultural differences between local and international students are known to Malaysian university personnel.	2	2	Individual differences	Responsiveness
	Malaysian teaching workers at universities engage students in lectures.	3	3	Engagement	Responsiveness
	Malaysian university academic staff can be openly dealt with.	6	8	Engagement	Responsiveness
	Non-academic personnel from Malaysian universities can be openly approached.	6	8	Engagement	Responsiveness

Reliability indicates that the person needs to perform their duties dependably and accurately. In their answers to the questions under the reliability dimension, it was clear that the brand image and reputation of HEIs influenced the students' choices and expectations. Reputation influences the students' perceptions and expectations. Thus, the Malaysian HEIs strive to maintain a good reputation and guarantee the high quality of their educational programs. Besides, the students focused on the quality of education provided by the lecturers. International students would have diverse aims on the personal level and several expected benefits related to their education and lives in Malaysian universities. In addition, the overseas students will have expected benefits related to their new educational surroundings, assimilation, and future investment during their time in the Malaysian universities. In this study, international students' discussion on universities generally relates to cost of education, academic reputation, quality of education, programs offered, the facility given, and educational environment, including aesthetic and practical advantages; this discussion was further extended by Biggs and Tang.⁵⁷ The assessment of the reliability factor involved assessing the Malaysian HEIs in terms of the quality of the institution, reputation, brand name, ranking, and other relevant matters. The interviews with the students showed that the brand image and reputation of HEIs influence the students' choices and expectations; this finding was supported by Roga et al.,⁵⁸ who stressed that academic reputation plays a key role in international students' choices. The students reported that the Malaysian HEIs are among the best in the world regarding academic education, where an apparent theme in the analysis showed that the higher education system in Malaysia is better than the higher education in participants' countries of origin and that the quality of higher education in Malaysia is better than that in other Asian countries. As for those students who are not aware of the rankings of the Malaysian HEIs, the results showed that they seek a Malaysian HEIs among the world's top universities.

The results of the analysis also showed that students trust the higher education system in Malaysia, mainly the students who found what they expected. Positive answers were received from those who study at HEI that

⁵⁷ John B Biggs and Catherine So-Kum Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does* (Maidenhead, England; New York: Mcgraw-Hill, Society For Research Into Higher Education & Open University Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Renāte Roga, Inga Lapiņa, and Peeter Mürsepp, "Internationalization of Higher Education: Analysis of Factors Influencing Foreign Students' Choice of Higher Education Institution," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 213, no. 2015 (December 2015): 925–30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.506>.

have delivered the services with the expected quality. This finding is in line with the findings of Fernandez,⁵⁹ who argued that international students seek to improve their professional prospects and obtain the required experience and knowledge, where this can be achieved through meeting their expectations by the Malaysian HEIs.

Another aspect of the analysis is the education environment, where the results of the analysis showed that the learning environment in Malaysian HEIs has contributed to enhancing their study experience; however, this response was moderate. Thus, the Malaysian HEIs need to focus on developing the learning environment to enable the university to deliver better service as per the expectations of the students. Similarly, and with the low response, the students reported that studying in Malaysian HEIs has opened their eyes to new opportunities, which indicates that the Malaysian HEIs should focus on linking the students with the labor market to explore new and innovative opportunities.

Following are the answers provided by the participating students where they indicate the lecturers' professionalism and the positive reputation of the Malaysian HEIs:

SY, Respondent (Yemen): *"I found that Malaysian universities, especially UTM, were among the top 100 universities."*

SB, Respondent (Bangladesh): *"The education system here is better than the education system in our country."*

BB, Respondent (Bangladesh): *"The Malaysian education system is much better than our education system."*

IN, Respondent (Nigeria): *"UTM is higher than the schools I wanted to go to, so I chose it because of the world ranking."*

The reliability factor was also confirmed by the results of previous studies in terms of the effect of employees' qualifications and characteristics. The study by Baharun, Awang, and Padlee⁶⁰ reported the significance of recruiting professional human cadres in the HEIs to establish a good image of the education system at HEIs. Chu *et al.*⁶¹ provided justifications to join the Malaysian HEI: the educational quality and the staff qualifications. It is

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Fernandez, "An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing the Decision of Students to Study at Universiti Sains Malaysia," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2010): 107–36.

⁶⁰ Baharun, Rohaizat, Zubaidah Awang, and Siti Falinda Padlee. "International students choice criteria for selection of higher learning in Malaysian private universities." *African journal of Business management* 5, no. 12 (2011): 4704-4714.

⁶¹ Chu, Man Yee, Bi Kai Foong, Chee Liang Lai, and Ai Nee Pang. "Foreign students' enrolment in Malaysian higher education institution." PhD diss., UTAR, 2015

clear that the educational quality and the staff qualifications are two sides of the same coin; the current study also emphasizes this. Also, Morris⁶² indicated that the staff's educational performance, educational background, image, condition, and medium of instruction are critical factors that impact the students' choice, as confirmed by the current study.

The assurance factor reflects the credibility, courtesy, competency, and security that international students need to enjoy in Malaysian HEIs to increase their trust and confidence. The assessment of the students' responses regarding the assurance factors revealed seven main themes, as shown in table (1). The results of the assessment of the assurance factor showed that the students believe that the academic staff of Malaysian universities are skillful in teaching and that they are with a high qualification that enables them to deliver the services at the required quality. It was expected by most of the interviewed students to meet highly skilled lecturers and qualified staff. Before arriving in Malaysia, the interviewed students – who majored in several academic fields at Malaysian HEIs- expected to meet skilled lecturers and qualified professors who would put on effective lecturing approaches. The assessment results also showed that the students believe that the lecturers and academic cadres of Malaysian HEIs exert considerable effort to ensure that students comprehend the courses; however, the response rate to questions under this theme was moderate. Thus, it is important to direct the attention of the Malaysian HEIs toward focusing on this aspect. On the one hand, the assessment results showed that the students believe that the academic staff of Malaysian HEIs have high qualifications from well-known universities and have wide experience in their respective fields.

As for the non-academic staff, the assessment results showed that they are efficient in their jobs and do their job timely and with the required quality.

The answers of the students were mostly positive in this regard, and their impressions indicated that:

MI, Respondent 15 (Indonesia): *"I expected the lecturers to be able to teach the materials I needed to like, cope with engineering subjects and particularly, instead of just learning through a book they should at least provide their knowledge in a way like a university that's very important, from time to time they provide a massive information that from engineering experience."*

RB, Respondent 4 (Bangladesh): *"Teachers have a high level of education. They received their masters and PhDs from European and USA universities."*

⁶² Morris, Huw. "Rankings and the reshaping of higher education: the battle for world-class excellence." (2011): 741-742.

SN, Respondent 13 (Nigeria): "There are common things here like a good education and good lecturers, how they teach to make sure that the students understand."

NN, Respondent 11 (Nigeria): "I suppose they are well qualified, and their characteristics if they are willing to listen to the student's problems and help them, I think that would be one thing to help the students. I think they are patient and do their work."

AP, Respondent 18 (Pakistan): "The management is quite nice."

On the other hand, one of the students' answers was negative in this regard.

SB, Respondent 3 (Bangladesh): "They work too much slowly. The academic staff are good."

The students were expecting to find trained academic staff who are specialized in what they teach. This is because of the traditional perception that foreign students have when they travel to another country to study; they still believe that the academic staff is better abroad.

However, some of the international students have changed their minds about the teaching staff's qualifications and skills. Contact with lecturers was another issue faced by the students, and their poor English-speaking skills could justify this. English is the main language used in most Malaysian HEIs by international students and academic staff.

In addition, the teaching methods were among the concerns of the students. Most students stated this problem. In addition, the students addressed the behavior of student management and care.

The current study results regarding assurance confirm the results of the previous studies, where Đonlagić and Fazlić⁶³ showed that assurance is one of the main determinants that students consider to judge the quality of the service. In addition to that, the same results were also confirmed by the study of Shekarchizadeh, Rasli, and Hon-Tat,⁶⁴ which showed that international students should receive additional attention from universities. Additionally, similar results were also presented by the study of Pedro, Mendes, and Lourenço,⁶⁵ which argued that administrative efforts should be utilized to

⁶³ Đonlagić, Sabina, and Samira Fazlić. "Quality assessment in higher education using the SERVQUAL model." *Management: journal of contemporary management issues* 20, no. 1 (2015): 39-57.

⁶⁴ Ahmadreza Shekarchizadeh, Amran Rasli, and Huam Hon-Tat, "SERVQUAL in Malaysian Universities: Perspectives of International Students," *Business Process Management Journal* 17, no. 1 (February 8, 2011): 67-81, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14637151111105580>.

⁶⁵ Pedro, Eugenia, Luis Mendes, and Luís Lourenço. "Perceived Service Quality And Student's Satisfaction In Higher Education: The Influence Of Teaching Methods." *International Journal for Quality Research* 12, no. 1 (2018).

help international students in a good manner; thus, the efforts of the HEIs should be directed toward improving the teaching environment, including selecting the appropriate teaching staff to be able to act according to expectations and applying the appropriate teaching methods to each particular environment.

Tangibles refer to physical facilities, equipment, and the appearance of personnel as a vital determinants of quality service in the HEIs. Through the interviews, it was clear that the students had no expectations about the tangible stuff in Malaysia before visiting the country. The students expressed their interest in well-designed buildings and effective equipment. Following is some of the feedback provided by the students:

MI, Respondent 15 (Indonesia): *“I love the idea of aesthetic and design. I noticed in the main campus, the doors are quite old as UTM is one of the oldest universities in Malaysia.”*

BB, Respondent 1 (Bangladesh): *“The study materials are enough for a student.”*

SY, Respondent 17 (Yemen): *“The buildings are generally classical, and I like classical buildings, but when I went to the new library here, I was very impressed by the fact that the building is so wonderful and modern.”*

The provision of a successful academic process is interconnected with the well-designed and good appearance of the building and the functioning and up-to-date equipment. Not to mention the role of libraries in providing trustworthy scientific resources. As for the perception of the interviewed students regarding the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials in HEI, the results of the interviews showed that students believe that the study materials and tools are sufficient and of the right quality.

The results also showed that the quality of resources is high. Student NE reported that “the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials are well maintained, regularly changed out to ensure that there are always new perspectives. Sticking to the same few creates stagnation”.

Regarding the internet connection, the students reported that the Wi-Fi needs some improvements in specific areas; it was also reported that the HEIs have good labs. Student MH reported, *“They have good labs. There are too many places so you can work in the library, they have high-speed internet, and you can search for anything. There are many books you can search for anything if you want to read”*.

Students showed that facilities and equipment should be maintained to help them in living, studying, and working in a comfortable environment.

On the flip side, there were some unfavorable responses from the interviewed students. Having said that, student AT reported, "As for equipment and labs, they look ancient. They might be replaced. Moreover, the painting is ancient. For the roads, I guess there are many holes in the road, it is hazardous. I think it will be very wise to fix that. For buses, I want the buses to be more frequent, so we would not have to wait so long for a bus to come. Every hour a bus would come".

The presented results agree with the results achieved by Sultana and Momen,⁶⁶ which revealed that image and prestige in Australia are significant. In addition to that, the study of Yousapronpaiboon⁶⁷ indicated that the expectation of students regarding the quality of education provided by HEI is associated with several factors, where facilities and equipment are the most important ones and related to the tangibility factors and, accordingly, confirming the study results. Morris⁶⁸ considered the university's facilities, including campus, laboratory, cafeterias, students' unions, and library, as an essential factor for attracting the international students and influencing their choice of university. Furthermore, Hanasya, Abdullah, and Warokka⁶⁹ stated that educational and supportive facilities such as lecture halls, libraries, social spaces, health facilities, laboratories, dining rooms, and the accommodations of the local and international students are essential considerations to meet the students' expectations. These results align with the current study's findings and almost exactly the tangibility factor. In the same respect, Vaz and Mansori⁷⁰ found that the physical facilities on the campus play a key role in students' satisfaction. Tangibility has the strongest influence (directly and indirectly) on the students' intention to continue to a higher level of studies and/or spread good word of mouth about the institution to their friends and the society, which confirm the study results.

The study of Ali and Ahmed⁷¹ marked some related factors affecting the expectation of students in terms of the service quality, i.e., perceived

⁶⁶ Sultana and Momen. "International student satisfaction and loyalty" 101.

⁶⁷ Khanhitpol Yousapronpaiboon, "SERVQUAL: Measuring Higher Education Service Quality in Thailand," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 116 (February 2014): 1088–95, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.350>.

⁶⁸ Morris. "Rankings and the reshaping", 741

⁶⁹ Hanaysha, Jalal RM, Haim Hilman Abdullah, and Ari Warokka. "Service quality and students' satisfaction at higher learning institutions: The competing dimensions of Malaysian universities' competitiveness." *The Journal of Southeast Asian Research* 2011 (2011): 1-10

⁷⁰ Vaz, Anthony, and Shaheen Mansori. "Malaysian private education quality: Application of SERVQUAL model." *International Education Studies* 6, no. 4 (2013): 164-170.

⁷¹ Ali, Mazhar, and Masood Ahmed. "Determinants of Students' Loyalty to University: A Service-Based Approach." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018.

academic quality, perceived administrative quality, physical facilities, student satisfaction, university image, and university switching cost.

The assessment of empathy refers to caring for the students by providing them with individualized attention and understanding them well. The assessment of the empathy factor results showed that Malaysian university staff respects students as individuals and that they care about their students. While in return, the students believe that the Malaysian university staff does not listen to students' concerns.

As for welcoming international students, the assessment results showed that Malaysian universities welcome international students with a relatively high response rate, as shown in the table above. The assessment results regarding their ability to interact freely with Malaysian university staff showed that the students could interact freely with Malaysian university staff.

The interviewed students were anticipating better-individualized treatment as a general response and were not entirely sure about the HEIs taking care of them. However, some other students were pleased with the care and attention provided by the HEIs, as seen in the answers below:

MI, Respondent 15 (Indonesia): *"Sometimes they tend to act a little bit angry, they should try to be more patient with students, and treat them nicely and advise them and say that this is the rule and you should follow it."*

SB, Respondent 3 (Bangladesh): *"I found them lazy, most of the time, I complain, or I went to them for something."*

SN, Respondent 13 (Nigeria): *"They should provide caring and individualized attention to the international students because we came from different countries. They have to do this by knowing our problems and giving full attention in order to make us better students and by providing good facilities."*

NB, Respondent 2 (Bangladesh): *"They should bear with us and be patients with the students, especially those who cannot speak Malay."*

IN, Respondent 10 (Bangladesh): *"When teaching in the class, I think they should provide more attention to the international students, especially when they are doing the explanation because sometimes it is not very clear to the international students because of the way they talk and the English also."*

All in all, the students spoke about the compassion and ability of the staff to support the students. They expected very kind care and assumed that all workers were patients and ready for each student to have individual treatment. Moreover, the students used to think that the citizens of Malaysia were very sweet and welcoming. The prevailing stereotypical picture of Malaysian society could explain such aspirations of the Malaysians and working workers. The results showed that for the HEIs to meet the expectations of

international students better, they should focus on linking the students with their instructors since international students expect higher levels of involvement and interaction from the academic instructors and staff along with more participation, psychological assistance, and support.

Finally, the responsiveness factor evaluation includes measuring the ability to assist students by delivering timely service, which summarizes the principle of responsiveness. The study results showed a lack of knowledge of the cultural differences between local and foreign students at the level of Malaysian university staff. Those students are not interested in lectures. On the other hand, the students indicated that it was possible to interact openly with the academic and non-academic staff.

For most of the students interviewed, the readiness of the HEI to respond to the needs of the students is of high importance. Their experience, however, did not meet their standards, according to the students. Most of the students interviewed talked about the staff's lack of understanding of others' cultures, the quality of services, and visa problems. In addition, some students complained that it takes longer for the HEIs to respond to complaints and other problems.

MI, respondent 15 (Indonesia): *"They should have experience with cultural differences."*

SB, Respondent 3 (Bangladesh): *"They should give us better qualities."*

RB, Respondent 4 (Bangladesh): *"They should give us valid information; sometimes it happens as they don't know so much."*

ZC, Respondent 8 (China): *"The two sides should communicate more with each other, take advantage of each other's advantages and help each other better."*

SN, Respondent 13 (Nigeria): *"They should be interested in communication, something like that, and try to give us better services."*

AI, Respondent 14 (Indonesia): *"I had issues with my visa, and they said that they would take care of it. I was left hanging for around a month, so I had to continuously ask them."*

In the same context, some students reflected on their positive experiences.

AI, Respondent 14 (Indonesia): *"They are very helpful, they help you right away, and obviously, that wins my trust."*

NN, Respondent 11 (Nigeria): *"they try to listen and try to help you as possible with anything,"*

From the students' point of view, the responsiveness of the HEIs is measured by the speed and smoothness of the correspondences and students' enrolment procedures, i.e., reply to emails, provision of medical services,

responding to the student's application, and the like. The responsiveness of HEIs or any other types of firms is very significant for customers.

IV. Conclusion

Given the noticeable growth of Malaysia's higher education sector and the increase in the number of international students, the findings of this study may be extremely beneficial for Malaysian HEIs and the Malaysian government in sustaining the sector's prosperity and maximizing its contribution to the country's economy. According to the findings, Malaysian HEIs should pay particular attention to the physical look of their institutions' facilities, as it was determined that these facilities have a significant impact on student loyalty. Besides, it is important to improve the current status of infrastructure at Malaysian HEIs to effectively respond to the expectations of the students through providing continuous maintenance work and follow up.

Malaysian HEIs should invest in their cadres, whether academic or administrative, by strengthening their capacities through systematic capacity-building programs that aim to distinguish the cadre and prepare them to meet the expectations of international students. It was evident that assurance criteria play a significant role in determining acceptance. Establishing a quality assurance committee that oversight every aspect of the HEIs' performance may contribute to the quality of the provided services.

Additionally, Malaysian HEIs should pay particular attention to managing students' expectations by guaranteeing honest and accurate marketing of their services. By managing expectations, universities may ensure that services are stated, retaining student loyalty. State officials can use the study's findings in developing specific legislation that aims to maximize the economic benefits of overseas students and, in turn, contribute to the country's economic development.

Further research could be conducted by replicating them in other states. Additionally, it is worth comparing international students' perceptions of various HEIs, particularly private and public HEIs. Future research could investigate market positioning tactics concerning the expectations of international students and the quality of educational services supplied. Finally, academics and professionals can use the current study's findings to provide a guideline for Malaysian HEIs on improving the quality of services supplied to international students while also increasing student happiness and loyalty. Additionally, this study indicates that additional factors affecting model loyalty be investigated.

Finally, the study had some limitations since the collected statistics are self-reported by international students, and respondents' responses may vary according to their willingness or ability to respond accurately. Respondents may not be sincere in their responses. This study assumed that overseas students diligently distinguish between predicted and perceived benefits throughout data collecting. Lastly, some factors, such as honesty, cannot be quantified to ensure data quality.

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Appendixes

1. Consent form:

Appendix (A) informed consent of the interview

Consent Form

Research Title: International Students' Expected Benefits towards Malaysia Public Higher Education Institutions

Dear Participant,

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study will focus on analyzing international students' expectations of Malaysian higher education in order to suggest a strategy. I am a doctoral student at UTM Johor, Malaysia. This study is being conducted to make a strategy to enhance the satisfaction level of international students in Malaysia.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide demographic information and to do an interview that will take approximately (19-30 minutes). There are minimal risks associated with discomfort to the participants in this study. Study participants may be concerned about the method in which their identities will be protected. You are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable.

You may decline to participate in this study or choose to stop your participation at any point in the research, without penalty or negative consequences of any sort. The benefits of participation include sharing experiences and perceptions. You will receive no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

The study is for research purposes only and not for the decision-making by any organization. The information you provide for this research is anonymous and will be reported as collective summary data only, and no individually identifiable information will be presented. Participants also have the right to review the results of the research.

The records of this study will be kept private. No words linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the researchers will have access to the records. All data collected during this study which include interviews will be stored safely at the researcher's residence for one year, and then it will be destroyed, as a means to protect participants as well as preserve the investment in research.

Your decision regarding your participation will not affect your current or future relations with UTM. You can withdraw at any time without damaging

your relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. Any questions about the gathered data, or requests for a copy of the results may be obtained by contacting the researchers at the contact information shown below:

You can contact XXX or XXX with any questions about this study.

Name of Participant:	
Date:	Signature:

2. Interview form:

Appendix (B) the interview of this study

International Students' Expected Benefits towards Malaysia Public Higher Education Institutions (ISEB) Interview

Name:				
Marital Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Married		
Date of Birth:				
Gender:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female		
Level of Education:	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate		
Name of University: UTM				
Major:				
Country of Origin:	<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladesh	<input type="checkbox"/> China	<input type="checkbox"/> Nigeria	<input type="checkbox"/> Others
	<input type="checkbox"/> Indonesia	<input type="checkbox"/> Yemen	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistan	
Period spent in Malaysia in months: <input type="checkbox"/> Months				

Introduction	Answer
About yourself. Tell me a little about yourself.	
Intro. What is it like to be a student in Malaysia?	
1 Minute. Think of the time when you made the decision to study in Malaysian HEI. Please try to recall all the past memories at that time. Take some time to do that (1min)	

Question	Answer
<p>1. Reliability How can a Malaysian HEI provide the promised service dependably and accurately?</p>	
<p>2. Assurance How should be the qualification and characteristics of the employees of Malaysian HEI?</p>	
<p>3. Assurance How should they act and treat others so they can win your trust and confidence?</p>	
<p>4. Tangibles How should the HEI appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials looks like?</p>	
<p>5. Empathy How should HEI provide caring and individualized attention to the international students?</p>	
<p>6. Responsiveness How can HEI employees help international students to provide a better service?</p>	
<p>7. Common question Do you remember the moment when you decided to choose a Malaysian HEI over all other options? At that moment. Please tell me your story about how you chose a Malaysian HEI?</p>	
<p>8. Personal needs You know that each one of us has needs, and they could differ from someone to another. How did personal needs influence you or others to choose a Malaysian HEI?</p>	
<p>8. Past experience Where did you study for the last degree? According to your last studying experience, can you tell me how did this experience help you to choose a Malaysian HEI?</p>	
<p>9. Communication Can you tell me how Malaysian HEI has influenced you or others to choose to study in it?</p>	
<p>Concluding Statement Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?</p>	

I hereby certify that the transcript of the interview is correct, and I understand that it will be used for the purposes of research only.

Name:

Date:

Signature: