FACTORSAFFECTED UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS' DECISIONS ON STUDY IN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM OF THAILAND HIGHER EDUCATION, STUDY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN WESTERN BANGKOK

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Abstract— A higher education institution needs to understand its customer needs and wants in order to remain competitive and survive among higher education providers, same as any other business institution. Some literatures have investigated the importance of student choice criteria as the decision is crucial on an individual's future life. Although studies on student choice criteria have been carried out, none have addressed these in Western Bangkok area. This paper aims to explore the factors that influence toward senior secondary students' choices in the selection of an international program in University, Thailand. Quantitative research throughout Western Bangkok was carried out with 400 senior secondary students only in public schools. Preliminary results indicate that students considered 25 criteria for selecting an international program in university of Thailand. The five most important factors are 1) Location is conveniently reached by public transportation, 2) Location is clean, beautiful and safe, 3) Officers and supportive staff members can speak English, 4) Adequate various faculties in international programs are available to choose from and 5) Good safety and security system for both inside and outside of building. By determining what is important to students when they choose the international programs in Thai universities, this current study will help universities to promote their institutions and to have a greater knowledge about the underlying motivations of students for furthering study in higher education. Limitations of the study are discussed and future research direction is provided.

Keywords— International Program, Higher Education, Upper Secondary Students, Public School.

I. INTRODUCTION

The governance of the higher education system throughout the world has changed considerably in the recent years, transforming from the dependency of funding by government to competitive markets. Some universities have responded by engaging in structural reforms to become more efficient and effective in decision making and operations and to be more economic within the limits of available resources. The transformation in higher education has been also influenced by intensifying global competition, declining funding and changing demand patterns. As Thailand, competition increases in the higher education institution (HEd.) sectors, public and private universities increasingly view students as consumers and try to market their institution intensively. These changes indicate that universities have to compete for students in the recruitment markets. However, HEd are not immune from having to respond to competitive pressures by improving service delivery and better governance. Consequently, both public and private universities have been supporting themselves to respond to such challenges by understanding and influencing the student choice process among prospective students. Moreover, one of the ASEAN Economic Community influences toward Thai young people is English language which could be an important factor of choosing to study in the international program of Thai university. This current research is one of the consumer studies undertaken in the context of factors affected by upper secondary students' decisions for selecting an international program of Thailand higher education, only study in public schools in Western Bangkok.

Thailand is facing new challenges in the higher education sector. These challenges include government reforms in higher education, namely, a move towards establishing institutions as legal entities and changes in university autonomy and funding mechanisms. The main driving force behind changes is that an interesting number of universities in Thailand were seen as being inefficient and ineffective. Some universities responded to the same criticism by engaging in structural reforms to become more efficient and effective in decision-making and operations, and to be more economic within the limits of available resources. In spite of these efforts, there are still calls for universities to improve the quality of education services and the efficiency of education expenditures.

Higher education system in Thailand has changed. One of the most delicate issues in the transformation toward a legal entity is changes in university funding. The government acts more as a funding agency and implements a block funding mechanism based on output or the number of graduates produced instead of student enrolments. In addition, universities are also free to generate income in other ways, such as through consultancy or cooperation with industry. The quality of Thailand higher education is monitored through a quality assurance board. Thus, university management

has shifted towards a more corporate system. Thai universities are aware that the government's financial support cannot keep up with the need to improve quality. While tuition fees act as one source of revenue, the responsibility for setting the level of tuition fees is no longer in the hands of the central government. As part of this autonomy, universities may now collect tuition fees directly from the students and may set their own tuition fee levels which were previously set by the government. In this situation, universities are operating in more competitive recruitment market. Therefore, it is important for the universities to understand about how to attract more students and how to market themselves. Much of the existing literature on choice criteria in relation to the selection of universities has been conducted in developed country settings focused on attracting international students, such as New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA, Canada, and Europe. As Thai universities are focused on the local market which is usually confined to students from their specific region, attracting local students to study at the university is still a major concern in Thailand. Therefore, this current research will explore the relevant factors that help to emerge any international program in Thai higher education institutions context. An understanding of the student market requires Thai higher education institutions to gain knowledge regarding the institution selection process. Studying the student choice criteria provides a basis for higher education institutions to understand their customers and to develop their service quality, since it presents an integrated view of all the characteristics that may influence the students' satisfaction and their word-of-mouth communication. If the universities know which factors students use to evaluate and choose a university, they can ensure that they address those factors through their service and other marketing strategies. The identification of the institutional factors that a student may consider in selecting a university is a matter of importance to Thai Higher Education administrators who are concerned with the long-term effectiveness of their institution enrolment practices. As pointed out by Hoyt and Brown (2003), it is important for an institution positioning itself in the academic marketplace by identifying those choice factors that would aid researchers and university marketers to better understand the student target market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies in Asian countries predominantly found that reference groups such as siblings, friends, peers, relatives, teachers and other influential people influence a student's choice of a university. Teachers from secondary school, and parents, for example, can exert a strong influence on students' decision-making in Thailand. Wagner and Fard (2009) also discovered that families, friends and peers have a strong influence on the student's choice of university in Malaysia. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between influences from families, friends, peers and students' intention to study at a higher education institution. Yamamoto (2006) reported that parents and friends are also considered as external influences to the student selection of a university in Turkey. However, in California, the qualitative study of Chicana students by Ceja (2006) also contend that parents and siblings as influential people on their choice of university. These studies highlight the important role of protective agents, namely parents, siblings, family and relatives during the college choice process. Previous studies on choosing a university have also explored the influence of personal factors. Raposo and Alves (2007) noted that personal factors show the greatest positive influences on student choice of a university in Portugal. For Turkish students, Yamamoto (2006) found that personal preference was the most influential factor in university selection. However, in this study, perception, learning, memory, motives, personality, emotions and attitudes were not discussed in detail. Dawes and Brown (2002) detected that before choosing university, students went through three decision sets namely the students' awareness set, consideration set, and choice set. Individual background is also relevant to the student choice of a particular university according to Kim (2004), Nora (2004) and Dawes and Brown (2002). Nora (2004) identified that all students, regardless of their ethnicity, were more likely to re-enroll if they felt accepted, safe, and happy at their colleges. However Tavares (2008) revealed that in Portugal, students' choices seemed to be most influenced by gender and family background. The family's cultural and economic capital influenced not only the probability of entering higher education, but also students' choices of program and type of institution.

III. RESEARCH METHEDOLOGY

The aim of this study was to investigate the level of importance of factors that contribute to the decision of choosing to study an international program in a university in Thailand. The population of this study included upper secondary students (M.4-6) only public schools, in Western Bangkok. The sample for this study consisted of 400 respondents who were studying between January and April of 2015. The public schools in Western Bangkok were chosen as a main area of study because it provided good demographic in which a variety of samples could be obtained. Moreover, the results can be compared to Eastern Bangkok in a future research plan. The sample size of 400 respondents was determined by Taro Yamane table with a 0.05 level of significance. The data collation was done via a Thai questionnaire to elicit respondents' answers. There were three parts of questionnaire. Part one was about the demographic information of the respondents. Part two was about

level of importance in each factor that contribute to the decision of choosing to study an international program in a university of Thailand, and part three was about the reason why not choosing to study international program in Thailand. The instrument was pre-tested with experts. Subsequently, some questions were deleted or combined with other questions in order to avoid participant fatigue and repetition. Also, 30 respondents were tested in advance to find ways to improve the questionnaire in order to obtain an acceptable Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of more than 0.70 for each question.

IV. RESEARCH FINDING

The exploratory study revealed emergent themes as factors considered by upper secondary students when selecting an international program of Thai university. The students revealed that they made decisions based on a combination of several factors. On average, participants mentioned many factors that affected their decision to choose a university rather than relying on only one factor. The result indicated that 1) Location is conveniently reached by public transportation, 2) Location is clean, beautiful and safe, 3) Officers and supportive staff members can speak English, 4) Adequate various faculties in international programs are available to choose from and 5) Good safety and security system for both inside and outside the building are the five most important choice criteria for those students who aim to join an international program in a university of Thailand. The next five factors that respondents rated as follows, 6) Every foreign teacher is qualified with a master's degree or higher qualification, 7) Full facilities are effective for learning in a classroom and equal as the factor of students expect to speak English fluently after completion the course, 8) Students expect to have the better opportunity to get a better job after completion the course, 9) Students expect to earn more salary/money than other institutions that studying in Thai language and 10) Provide field trip and workshop for students to learning outside the classroom.

TABLE I
LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE

	Mean	*Rank*
Top Five Factors		
1.Location is accessed by public transportation	4.65	1
2. Institute environment is clean, beautiful and safe	4.61	2
3. Officers and supportive staff members can speak English	4.47	3
4. Adequate faculties are provided	4.30	4
5. Safety and security systems both inside and outside of building	4.13	5
Average 5 categories	4.43	

***From TABLE I** : the mean score can be used to rank the highest to the lowest*

CONCLUSION

Proximity and Accessibility

The location of the campus can be reached by public transportation was the most important criteria for mean 4.65 out of 5.00. Not surprisingly, this factor was of highest importance to those students who lived in or closed to Western Bangkok which normally quite far from the city in Eastern Bangkok. In this vein, the importance of residential location in determining educational institution was apparent. Going to a nearby university allows students to more easily maintain family ties. The common reason was they want to stay near their family so that they could make contact and visit their family frequently. If "out-of town" campuses, public transportation is definitely required for respondents. However, a large number of students is using public transportation because they are not allowed to have driving license before 18 years old. In addition, using public transportation, they will potentially be able to save a lot of money. Using public transportation instead of driving alone in a car is good for the planet and good for budget as well. In these responses they may follow parental advice and opinion to choose a local university which close to their home or easily accessed. Some students may consider rental accommodation and food expenses (breakfast and dinner) as a significant factor in the choice process of the location of university. The location of universities is likely to be especially significant for disadvantaged students, since there are many financial benefit associated with living at home during study, such as saving on rent, food, utilities and travel. The important issue may be "ability to live at home" and "save the money for rent and food". It encouraged students to consider choosing a university the easy access by public transportation.

The result suggests that students who live in close proximity to a university would apply to that one rather than a more prestigious university further away. In contrast, some respondents who choose to study in another region wanted to develop their self confidence to be able to live independently while away from their parents

The location of the campus was significantly important for respondents. Respondents felt secure when they could study at a university near home. This line of thought parallels Archer's et al (2003), Pugsley's (2004), Reay's (2001) who underscored that students considered their emotional security while participating in the `risky' and unfamiliar world of higher education by choosing a nearby university, especially for those who are first generation educated and from working-class families. Choosing a nearby university also allowed students to keep closer to their family members, friends, and significant others, as supported by earlier studies. On the contrary, one respondent chose to study far away from their family as part of learning to be independent. In parallel to the views of Christie (2007) "the geographical mobility

marks a significant stage in the transition that young people make to adulthood and independence, bringing with it the opportunity to access a new city and a new lifestyle". In this sense, leaving home is an accepted and valued part of the university experience.

Even though some of those above findings matched attributes found in the current research, respondents in this current research mentioned an extra factor that influenced them to choose a university. According to the result, present and future students expect good quality products and have specific views on what characteristics are important to them. In brief, this exploratory study used an appropriate methodology to establish a basis for later quantitative research.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitation of this paper came from the use of only a quantitative technique. As a consequence, the findings may not be fully integrated with the knowledge of marketing mix. This research has limitations that restrict the generalization of its findings and open up directions for future research. Firstly, only schools in Western Bangkok were investigated. This means that the information gathered and the conclusions reached may require further testing in other provinces in Thailand. Secondly, the study only conducted at public schools and did not cover private schools and other vocational institutions because they are different types of education institution.Therefore, future research should use both quantitative and qualitative technique. Also, future studies should cover not only the level of importance of each factor but also the reasons that participants are satisfied or are not satisfied with any other factors. Then, it will possible to develop more global marketing strategies that are suitable to increase the number of oversea students.

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