

2017

Expatriate Students' Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution

Jin Deng
Walden University

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Jin Deng

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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2017

Abstract

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at a Private Malaysian Institution

by

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2017

Abstract

Although Malaysia primarily relies on expatriates to develop its economy, a private Malaysian institution had not examined the retention of expatriate students who might contribute toward the country's future economy. The problem that prompted this study was the institution showed low graduation rates for expatriate students and had not assessed the perceptions of key factors that impacted their attendance and persistence. The purpose of this study was to provide insights about expatriate students' perceptions of key factors about attendance and persistence at the institution. Tinto's longitudinal model of dropping out and the conceptual model guided this study. With a guiding question about students' perceptions, specific research questions explored expatriate students' perceptions of individual characteristics, the interactions within the institutional environment, and institutional characteristics that influenced their decisions to attend and persist at the institution. Qualitative data were collected using interviews from a purposeful sample of 5 expatriate students. Data were transcribed and coded inductively, resulting in 10 themes: Malaysia as a destination for higher education, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) institution as an institution, supporting group, English language, past educational experiences, academic integration, commitment, social integration and institutional commitment, college quality, and institutional type. A white paper was proposed as a project that included recommendations to stakeholders. The positive social changes were to promote future expatriate students' persistence and graduation rates, enhance their learning, and prepare them to be the future leaders in Malaysia, their country of origin, or elsewhere internationally.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project study to my parents, without whom this project study would not have been possible. I appreciate all their support and understanding, especially during the last two years' unexpected long transition.

I also dedicate this study to my uncle who is also my godfather. Without his encouragement and support some years ago, I would not have a chance to pursue my further study abroad, which was a turning point in my life. Further, I would not be able to finance the doctoral study by myself one day. Sadly, he passed away a few years ago. He will be remembered for the rest of my life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge to my project study committee, Dr. Carol Spaulding, Dr. David Mathieu, and Dr. Elsie Szecsy for their support that assisted me in completing this study. As my Committee Chair Dr. Ieda Santos, who provided support, guidance, and encouragement, and for this, I sincerely appreciate. I also appreciate my second member Dr. David Mathieu, who showed me the directions and provided me expertise and guidance to continue this study especially when I was at the crossroad a few times. I am thankful to the University Research Reviewer Dr. Elsie Szecsy, whose feedback led me to expand my thinking and had a wider perspective about this study.

I would appreciate to Mr. Martin Kisseleff, the former president of “César Ritz” Colleges, who inspired me to pursue the doctoral study. I would not take this step without the talk with you back in 2010. I also express my gratefulness to Mr. Georges Ortiz, my former lecturer and mentor for years, who helped me make it to attend the required residency. Sadly, he passed away in 2015. Like all your students, I miss your lectures and hiking trips with you while studying and visiting in Switzerland.

I extend the deepest gratitude to the administrators at the study site for their support, trust, and understanding. I also appreciate the help from the participants and the whole Khor family who helped me in various ways while conducting the research in Malaysia. Otherwise, I would not have been able to complete this study.

I express my gratitude to my former deans, colleagues, and church friends who encouraged me from time to time or kept me in prayers to complete this study.

Finally, thanks to God for giving me strength and a sense of peace in my heart and mind to complete this study especially during the challenging times.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Malaysia is one of the Southeast Asian countries that depends on expatriates to develop its economy. In 2010, The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, 2015) estimated that around 8.2% of the total Malaysian population was migrant workers/expatriates. More recently, the Asia Pacific (AP) Migration Network (2015) reported that about 2.9 million expatriates, with most of them coming from 12 Asian countries, legally lived in Malaysia. The local workers consider certain jobs undesirable due to the nature of the work such as in the construction, agriculture, and manufacture fields (Athukorala & Devadason, 2012). Nor'azman (2015) reported that local people were selective about jobs in various sectors that led the country to depend on expatriates. Clearly, expatriates contribute positively to the Malaysian economic growth.

The AP Migration Network (2015) indicated that only 10% of expatriates in Malaysia hold a tertiary education, with 40% having no formal education. Although the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2014) reported that 589,443 expatriates in Malaysia were at the high school and college-age between 15 and 24, these data could not indicate that they either had enrolled at the local high school or higher education institutions for two reasons. First, the Human Development Social Protection and Labor Unit (HDSPLU, 2013) had reported that the ages of the most foreigner (or expatriates) in Malaysia are from 15 to 35. Second, the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry of HIED or MoHE) in Malaysia considered those children from expatriate families are international students, so the Ministry of HIED did not collect their information separately (Data Management Officer, e-mail communication, November 25, 2015;

Director, e-mail communication, December 31, 2015). Thus, it is unclear about the exact number of students from expatriate families who have enrolled, retained, and graduated from all higher education institutions in Malaysia. However, there is evidence about the first-time enrollment, yearly dropout, program progression, and graduation numbers of students from expatriate families at the local setting.

The Local Problem

The local setting for this study is a private institution owned by a corporate organization based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Ministry of HIED in Malaysia accredits this institution, which has various branch campuses in different states of Malaysia. To protect the private Malaysian university that includes two campuses at one location as the study site, I referred the institution as a MoHE university or MoHE throughout this study. The MoHE Institution was established as a college in the 1980s. After about a decade of development, the numbers of students grew rapidly and led to the development of a newly built campus with comprehensive ranges of facilities to meet ever-growing students' academic and residential needs. The college was transformed into a university college, an institutional status which was recognized according to the Malaysian higher education system and approved by the Ministry of HIED and the Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA), Malaysia. A few years later, upon the approval by the Ministry of HIED in Malaysia, it was upgraded to be a fully-fledged university. The MoHE Institution offers diverse programs ranging from a diploma to bachelor, masters, and doctoral programs. MoHE also offers professional programs such as Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW).

The problem that prompted this study was that the MoHE institution (the local setting) had high dropout and low graduation rate for students from expatriate families (MoHE institution internal report, 2015). This institution had not conducted any study to investigate retention of students from expatriate families or studied their perceptions about attending and persisting in completing their courses and programs (University Administrator, personal communication, September 28, 2015). Further, the institution has conducted surveys with dropped out students hoping to document reasons for them leaving the university. However, the surveys had not differentiated students from expatriate families from local and international students when studying their reasons for dropping out (University Administrator, e-mail communication, September 29, 2015). The importance of investigating dropout factors of students enrolled in the higher education institutions would help the local institutional administrators better understand their perceptions of retention and persistence in higher education (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2012b). Thus, this study attempted to study factors that influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at the local institution.

Students who hold either of the following nonstudent passes are considered as students from expatriate families: Malaysia My Second Home Visa (MM2H), diplomatic pass, dependent pass, residence pass, employment pass, and Malaysia PR (University Administrator, personal communication, September 28, 2015, June 23, 2016). Appendix B showed the overall numbers of students from expatriate families who enrolled both undergraduate and graduate programs at the MoHE institution between 2009 and 2013 was 290 (MoHE institution internal report, 2015). Appendix B also indicated that the overall dropout numbers of students from expatriate families in their first- and second-

year were 55 and 66, respectively (MoHE institution internal report, 2015). However, only 39 of total enrolled students from expatriate families graduated from the MoHE institution (MoHE institution, internal report, 2015). As of the low graduate numbers, as shown in Appendix B, this study was relevant and timely as the MoHE institution would benefit from learning about expatriate students' perceptions to increase the future enrollment and retention of students from expatriate families.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The problems at the local level could be considered that the MoHE Institution had low graduation rates (Appendix B) and had not investigated the perceptions of students from expatriate families about attending and persisting in completing their courses and programs (University Administrator, e-mail communication, September 29, 2015). Appendix B (MoHE institution internal record, 2015) showed various trends. First, the numbers of first-time students from expatriate families who had enrolled in the diploma and bachelor degrees from 2009 to 2013 were 274, equaled to 94% of total first-time enrolled expatriate students. Second, the numbers of expatriate students in programs other than Ph.D. program showed higher dropout during their second-year than in their first-year's study. Third, although the numbers of graduates from expatriate families were as low as 39 in all programs, there were 149 students from expatriate families who had progressed from a lower level of the program to a higher level, which was positive. Nevertheless, there was a lack of information about what factors were attracting and retaining these students and what strategy administration might take to promote greater expatriate enrollment and retention. Consequently, the study would be meaningful when

a researcher conducted surveys or interviews by purposely identifying and analyzing students from expatriate families.

Several researchers (Abdullah, Wasiuzzaman, & Musa, 2014; Jalali, Islam, & Arifin, 2011; Memon, Salleh, Baharom, & Harun, 2013; Zeeshan, Sabbar, Bashir, & Hussain, 2013) had discussed the factors that affect international postgraduate students' service satisfaction or their motivations to study in Malaysian institutions. Peterson (2014) also conducted one study to understand international students' process of expatriate acculturation through interviews. Further, as of the globalization trend, Peterson introduced the People Go Global project by providing students with an experiential learning opportunity about the process of acculturation for expatriates (2014). Thus, students who had participated the project increased their desires and interests to pursue overseas travel in the future (Peterson, 2014). Apparently, no study had focused on the perceptions of students from expatriate families about key factors that had an impact on their attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Various researchers (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Brandenburg, Taboadela, & Vancea, 2015; Erin & Maura, 2014; Orth, 2015; Voin & Gérard, 2013) discussed international graduate students' enrollment, retention, or perceptions of higher education experiences. For example, Erin and Maura (2014) studied graduates' retention from their nationality's perspective in an American institution. Orth (2015) focused on perceptions of Saudi Arabian students' higher education experiences in a major Australian institution. However, no information was about the perception of attendance and persistence of expatriate students in the United States or Australia.

The studies also discussed the impact of one major program that attracted students to enroll among the higher education institutions in Europe (Brandenburg et al., 2015; Voin & Gérard, 2013). Financed and initiated by the European Commission, Erasmus is a leading program that attracts students to participate and contribute to the global competition for talents, according to Brandenburg et al. (2015) and Voin & Gérard, (2013). Despite more than 3 million students who had participated the Erasmus program with above 4, 000 institutions from 1987 to 2013 (Brandenburg et al., 2015, p. 5), no study had been carried out to focus on their perceptions of factors that influenced them to attend and retain at the institutions they chose. After thoroughly searched the recent literature by inserting the keywords *students from expatriate families, enrollment and retention, and perceptions*, lacking information on the perceptions of students from expatriate families about their attendance and persistence is also shown in Europe.

Some studies (Fernandes, Ross, & Meraj, 2013; Wilkins, 2010; Wilkins, 2013; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; and Wilkins & Huisman, 2013) were found in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) context that included the considerations of students from expatriate families from different perspectives. The topics included students' satisfaction and loyalty, students' school choices, and the outcomes and impacts of the market situation on students recruitment, and their experience, quality, and institutional strategies (Wilkins, 2010; Wilkins, 2013; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; and Wilkins & Huisman, 2013). Although these studies examined student experiences in the UAE, none of them had focused on expatriate students' perspectives about factors affecting their attending and continuing in higher education studies at the institutions in the UAE. Likewise, no

other study was found about the problem I would investigate from the rest of the educational hubs.

This section discussed evidence of the problem from the professional literature. It provided insights for institutions in Australia, Europe, and the United States attracting and recruiting the international students. The section also discussed views of expatriate students who had enrolled in the international branch campuses in the UAE. Apparently, there was a lack of information to guide institutional practices in recruiting and retaining expatriate students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms would be used throughout the study:

Adult Students: Students who are older than 24 years of age and pursuing a degree, certificate, or diploma are adult students (Tilghman, 2012). In the literature, they also referred to as *nontraditional students* (Kretovics, 2015; Newbold, 2015; Tilghman, 2012), *commuter students* (Jacoby, 2015; Kretovics, 2015; Newbold, 2015), or *professional students* (Tilghman, 2012). They normally registered and held the part-time students' status. For this study, those terms are used interchangeably.

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA): The ACCA students, similar to those students who enrolled the undergraduate programs, needed to complete their A Levels in the high schools at the ages of at least 18 years old and above (University Administrator, e-mail communication, June 28, 2016). Instead of taking a formal bachelor degree program, according to the university administrator, they enrolled in the ACCA professional accounting program as the full-time students (e-mail communication, June 28, 2016).

Dropout: Tinto (2012a) defined dropout “as referring to students who fail to obtain college degrees within a specified period” (p. 36). It was important to note that students who decide to transfer to other institutions to continue and obtain their college/university degrees are not counted as dropout students.

Expatriate: The term refers to any migrant worker, guest worker, foreign labor or professional worker who work outside of their birth country (AP Migration, 2015). In Malaysia, expatriates were those high-skilled foreigners who were employed in both private and public sectors with the managerial, executive and technical positions (Kassim, 2014, p. 11).

Expatriate Student: The university administrators had identified student who hold a MM2H Visa that was valid for 10-year or under the diplomatic pass, dependent pass, employment pass, residence pass, and Malaysia PR were students from expatriate families (personal communication, September 28, 2015, June 23, 2016).

Foreign workers: Foreign workers are semiskilled or unskilled migrant workers in the country and they are considered migrant workers by their local employers and the legal system (HDSPLU, 2013).

Globalization: Globalization was “shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization”; and “it connected distant communities and expanded the reach of power relations across the regions and continents” (Held & McGrew as cited in Tare, 2012, p. 5).

Individual characteristics: Individual characteristics included the following: “family background, individual characteristics, ability, past educational experiences, and goal commitment” (Tinto, 1975).

Institutional characteristics: Three different institutional characteristics were related to dropout: “institutional type, college quality and student composition, and institutional size” (Tinto, 1975, p. 111-115).

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW): According to the university administrator, after students had completed the ACCA qualification, they were able to enroll the ICAEW program (e-mail communication, June 28, 2016). At this stage, they were required to work under an ICAEW authorized training employer to take the ICAEW exams, the university administrator added (e-mail communication, June 28, 2016). That is, they were part-time working students and had completed their first degree (University Administrator, e-mail communication, June 28, 2016).

Interaction within the college environment: It included academic integration, social integration, social integration and institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975).

International student: A student who traveled abroad to study was considered as an international student (Slethaug & Manjula, 2012). For this study, a student who was from a non-alaysian country holds a visa for studying at a Malaysian higher education institution was considered as an international student.

Internationalization: Internationalization was “an ongoing process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the process, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight as cited in García & Villarreal, 2014). Internationalization was fueled by globalization and represented the positive exchange of ideas and people (Guo & Chase, 2011).

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): KPI was an effective measure and evaluation to the output of the institution's quality that used for future planning and improving institutions' performance (Ong, Muniandy, Ong, Tang, & Phua, 2013).

Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) Program: The MM2H was promoted by the Malaysian Government to encourage and allowed foreigners who met certain criteria to live in the country on a 10-year renewable, multiple-entry social visit pass (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia [MTCM], 2014). The program welcomed all citizens whose country were recognized by Malaysia despite race, religion, gender or age, added by the MTCM (2014).

Private Higher Education Institutions (Private HEI) Status: According to Ministry of HIED (2014) in Malaysia, there were four levels of private HEIs: private HEI with university status, university status (branch campus of foreign institution), university college status, and college status respectively.

Professional Program: According to the university administrator, the MoHE institution offers professional programs such as ACCA qualification and ICAEW qualification to students who were keen to become the licensed professional accountants (e-mail communication, June 28, 2016).

Transnational Education: Transnational education refers that learners who studied programs in a country other than the awarding institution where was based (Wilkins, 2016).

Significance of the Study

To address the problem and to increase the future enrollment, retention, and graduation rate for students from expatriate families at the study site, this project study

explored the key factors that had influenced them to enroll and continue their studies at a private Malaysian institution. The results might also provide a broad view for local educational authority, educators, and administrators from other Malaysian-based institutions where the institutions also recruited and retained students from expatriate families. The institutions' quality level and performance is determined by the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education institutions. Thus, improving the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates were the KPIs that could enhance the institution's reputation, competency, viability, and overall institutions' quality level.

Understanding the perceptions of expatriate students' attendance and persistence in their studies could be the first step to help the institution increase the recruitment and retention of students from expatriate families. More importantly, this study might help the institution's administrators better understand who these expatriate students were, what the key factors were that attracted them to attend and continue at the institution, and how they have engaged academically, culturally, and socially with the campus community (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Ultimately, the study could help the institution diversify the student body, increased the student population, and provided another source to increase the revenue.

The study's potential impact on social change is twofold. The first is to promote attendance, continuation, and graduation rates among students from expatriate families in Malaysian higher educational institution. The second is to enhance students' learning and prepare them to be the future industry leaders in Malaysia, their home country of origin, and/or elsewhere internationally.

Guiding/Research Question

The guiding question for this project study was *What were the students' (from expatriate families) perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?* This project study would address the following subquestions:

1. What were the individual characteristics students from expatriate families perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?
2. What were the interactions within the institutional environment that influenced students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?
3. How did the institutional characteristics influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature included Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012b) theories and practices as the conceptual framework to identify the topics for this study. The primary search engines were Education Research Complete (ERC), Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Sage Premier. The research keywords included the following terms: *expatriate/international (students), globalization, higher education, internationalization, perception, recruitment, retention, and Malaysia*. I searched scholarly journals from 2012 to 2016 to obtain a more in-depth perspective about higher education in Malaysia and worldwide.

A few special notes concerned citing and referencing the articles for this study. First, I cited articles repeatedly to address multiple topics that relevant to the literature

review. Second, I incorporated a few articles that were over 5 years old to provide the conceptual framework as of the significance to the literature. Third, although this study was about student recruitment and retention, I cited various Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012b) articles about students' dropping out to understand how to retain students from the institutions' perspective.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included following themes: Tinto's series of theories and studies about dropping out, leaving college, and completing college (1975, 1993, 2012b). As Tinto (1993) stated, to address the practical question of what institution could do to retain the students, institutions and administrators must firstly define "dropout" and consider why and how students drop out. The answer to that question was critical to the development of the retention program. Hence, Tinto's theories would be considered as the foundation of this study.

The constructs of the theory include three aspects (Figure 1): (a) individual characteristics, (b) goal commitment and (c) institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975). The Tinto's (1975) interplay of the constructs of the theory identified students' dropout patterns and provided insights for institutions.

Tinto (1975) developed a longitudinal model of dropping out and discussed how factors such as family background, individual attributes, and precollege schooling had an impact on students' goal and institutional commitment. Thus, both goal commitment and institutional commitment affected students' grade performance, intellectual development, and peer-group and faculty interaction respectively, which led to academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975). Ultimately, both academic integration and social integration

would lead students to reach another level of goal commitment and institutional commitment, as Tinto stated (1975). Eventually, they influenced students to make the dropping out decisions.

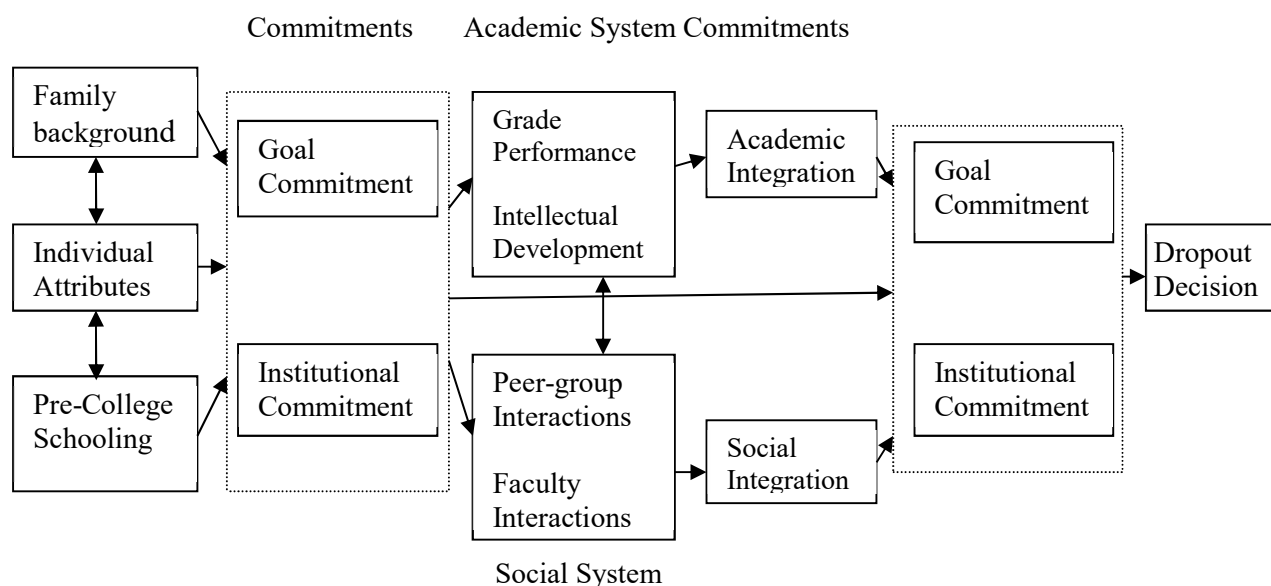


Figure 1. A conceptual schema for dropout from college. From “Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research,” by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research*, 45, p. 95.

Tinto (1975) discussed goal and institutional commitment and emphasized that the key to students’ success in higher education was their willingness to achieve their goals. Tinto concluded that students’ commitment to academic or career goals would lead them to persist and succeed in college. Further, students who had clear career goals would have higher graduation rates compared with those who did not, Tinto (1975) concluded. Hence, understanding students’ levels of goals may help them achieve their college success.

In his model, Tinto (1975) argued that students’ academic and social integration closely related to their persistence in attending the institution. However, Tinto (1993)

suggested that educators should address how institutions modify the policies and alter the activities to retain the students instead of focusing on their dropout decisions. As Tinto (2006) commented, “It was one thing to learn and understand symptoms; it was another thing to understand a gap in practice and knew what actions could be taken from the administration side to help students continue, graduate, and succeed.” (p. 6). The model of dropping out factors by Tinto implied the key considerations that influenced students’ commitments, and aspects of improving their academic and social integration to enhance their goal and institutional commitments.

The analyses from drop-out theory and practices revealed various key points. First, Tinto (1975) concluded that the higher the degree of integration of a student into the college system, the more commitment to the institution he or she chose and the better chance to achieve the college goals. Then, Tinto (1993) affirmed that it was the student’s level of the commitment to both the goal of college completion and the institution itself that determined whether he or she decided to attain the goal. Likewise, Tinto highlighted that it was pertinent for institutions to observe and collect the feedback from students about withdrawal reasons, even if they had less relevance to the goal of college completion and the institution where they registered (1993). It was vital for institutions to understand students’ levels of commitment and collect as accurate information as possible about their withdrawal reasons.

Tinto (1993, 2012b) concluded that students’ commitment to the institution itself influenced the decision to remain enrolled or transfer to another institution. That is, the greater one’s commitment toward the achievement of his or her academic goals within a specific institution, the higher chance of institutional persistence, according to the

researcher (Tinto, 1993; 2012b). Equally important, students who desired to graduate from the specific institution were likely to persist and complete the degrees compared to those who did not have an institution preference (Tinto, 2012b).

Although Tinto's (1975) theory was developed and practiced primarily to understand and promote the success of college students in the United States, it could be transferred to other institutions worldwide. Over 400 institutions both in the United States and internationally, have used Tinto's (2014) 40-years of research on student success. Further, Perna (2014) considered that Tinto's scholarship was theoretically grounded, so his theory was relevant to learning and understanding college student success globally. Besides, Perna emphasized, "it was this theoretical grounding that allowed the transferability of findings across national contexts" (p. 30). Thus, this current study was developed based on this theoretical grounding.

Additionally, various international studies cited Tinto's (1975) theory. For instance, Neuville et al. (2007) cited Tinto's student integration model (1982, 1997) in a study of a Belgium-based institution to explain and predict the first-year university students' academic performance. Tinto's theory also had been cited as the fundamental part of the study that guided educational leaders in private universities in Thailand to develop effective retention strategies in international programs that benefitted all stakeholders (Asavisanu & Mhunpiew, 2014). Hence, Tinto's (1975) theory was appropriate to provide a foundation for examining students' dropout reasons in higher education institutions in Malaysia. The institutional practices recommended by Tinto (1993, 2012b) might also guide administrations to help students to complete college by applying an institutional action framework.

In the above paragraphs, I discussed Tinto's theories (1975, 1993, 2012a, 2012b), which were the foundation for this study concerning students' attendance and persistence at the MoHE institution.

Review of the Current Literature

The literature review was organized into three sections by following Tinto's (1975) synthesis of research topics about the dropout process: *individual student characteristics*, *student interactions within the college environment*, and *institutional characteristics*. Due to the limited published studies on expatriate students, this review also includes studies on international students to relate to expatriate students, who share the similar or the same characteristics with those international students to some extent.

Individual Characteristics. Students have diverse individual characteristics and backgrounds before they join the university. For example, Misran et al. (2012) commented that family and friends had influences on Asian students' decision making when they pursued their higher studies. They also affirmed that family's socioeconomic status (SES), namely, parents' education, occupation, and family size, affected students' decision in choosing the institution. Likewise, Lian (2011) found that African students' families had direct influences on their children's attending and persistence at the Malaysian institutions. In contrast, Stephenson (2016) noted that participants from institutions either in Malaysia or the United Arab Emirates were either "economically powerful but politically marginalized minority groups" or "recently mobile students from the geographic region" (p. 1). Understanding students' characteristics may help university admit and enroll the students better.

Family background. I did not find any studies that discussed the influences of family background or just family influence concerning expatriate students' university studies. Based on studies on international students, various factors impacted international students' persistence in the United States setting or elsewhere. Westbrook and Scott (2012) indicated that the family played an important role when students made decisions before joining the universities, confronted challenges, coped with adversities, and persisted during their higher educational journey. Despite the geographic location difference, Zeeshan et al. (2013) also affirmed that parents' interest in making their children educated played a crucial role, especially those whose parents who had the university level education. To conclude, parents played an important role and had a strong influence on students before and during their higher education journey.

Migin, Falahat, Yajid, and Khatibi (2015) examined the impact of the cost of education factor on international students in the Malaysian setting. However, Migin et al. concluded that the cost of education negatively impacted on the students' choice of Malaysian private institutions. Even when the cost of program fees in the private institutions was more expensive than in the public ones (Migin et al., 2015), the total educational cost at the Malaysian private institutions remained the lowest compared to other developed countries (Chapman & Chien, 2015; Education Malaysia Global Services, 2015; Migin et al., 2015). The affordable expenses with a high quality of higher education in Malaysia were the key factors to attract international students.

Researchers (Aswad, Vidican, & Samulewicz, 2011; Zeeshan et al., 2013) confirmed that the attributes, such as the quality of the family relationship, the interest, and expectations from parents, had heavily impacted on individual's education, despite

the differences in cultural background, geographic location, and timeline. Other researchers (Lian, 2011; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012; Strom & Savage, 2014) also found that the stronger the initial support by social networks such as family and friends, the more positive influenced on the success and commitment of first-year students. Researchers (Lian, 2011; Strom & Savage, 2014) also affirmed that family and friends' continuous support positively impacted on students' commitment to persistence and graduation. To conclude, family and friends play a crucial role before and during the students' higher education journey.

Ability. Students' abilities, personality, and attitudinal differences impacted their persistence during the university studies. For example, Banumathy & Vikneswaran, Akiba as cited in Yee and Mokhtar (2013), reported that international students in the Malaysian context had faced challenges because of the different teaching styles compared to their home country, especially when English was not their first language. Singh (2014) concluded that international graduate students used to struggle with reading and writing aspects of English although they had successfully passed their first degree of CGPA requirement and English language requirement. Thus, there was a need to improve international students' English language skills. Additionally, various practices should be considered to improve international students' English and the learning ability. For instance, Yee and Mokhtar recommended that the institutions should offer continuously the intensive English program or special English program for preparing for students' academic program as well as training faculty. Further, Singh suggested that the universities might cultivate students' reading and discussion habits to improve academic socialization skills. However, I did not find that any study had examined the English level

of expatriate students and if there was a need to improve their language skills in the English-speaking learning environment at the private Malaysian institutions.

Past educational experiences. The grade point average (GPA) was important for students' future development and success, and they directly or indirectly affected the individual aspirations and expectations for higher education (Tinto, 1975). Various researchers (Ezeala, Swami, Lal, & Hussain, 2012; Ndaaba, Harada, & Abdullateef, 2014; Singh, 2014) agreed that it was vital to consider students' past educational experience; despite the target students in Ndaaba et al.'s (2014) study had gained a prior Malaysian higher education experience. Ndaaba et al. commented that the prior experience affected their future perceptions of education experience, while Singh pointed out those international students' previous educational background had been heavily influenced by the first language used during the studies. Hence, it was critical for institutions reviewing students' high school grades and learning some information about their performance before enrolling them into the college.

Goal commitment. A student's goal commitment determined his or her persistence and completion of the program (Bean, 1980). Strom and Savage (2014) underscored that family and friends' support positively impacted on students' initial commitment to the goal of university studies. Thus, it was imperative not only for students to make educational goals and commit towards the goals but also for institutions collaborating with the family to ensure shaping their expectations and achieve their goals.

Interaction Within the College Environment. Academic integration and social contact were two keys that contributed to students' long-term success. By joining the learning community, students could learn what they could not experience during the

routine class hours. As the university GPA was pertinent to students' retaining their studies in the American University setting (Bean, 1980), developing the interpersonal relationships in the classroom and on-campus learning community was one significant way for students to improve their university GPA. Likewise, authors (Rienties et al., 2012; Rienties, Luchoomun, & Tempelaar, 2014) discussed the challenges that international students confronted during their higher education outside of their home country both academically and socially. Rienties et al. (2012) encouraged students to build informal contacts with university staff, participate the extracurricular activities, and join the collaborative learning (Freeman, Millard, Brand, & Chapman, 2014) to build the positive social integration. To conclude, students needed to continue their academic studies and engage in various social activities to be exposed to diverse cultures and the learning environments to enrich their experience.

Another significant approach for students to graduate on time was to connect with faculty closely. Severiens and Wolff (as cited in Rienties et al., 2012) recommended students to communicate with faculty regularly both inside and outside of the classroom. Mamiseishvili (2012) also affirmed that students who frequently met their faculty and academic advisors were more academically integrated. Besides, Rienties et al. (2012) noted that social integration was "the extent to which students adapt to the social way-of-life at the university". Hence, students were encouraged to connect with their peers, faculty, and staff as well as join various social and cultural activities to persist and succeed better in college.

The institutional commitment was a key to any institution's success in recruiting, retaining, and graduating the students (Tinto, 2002). It was not simply the words or the

mission statements that printed in the shiny brochures and flyers, remarked by Tinto (2002). Rather, Tinto (2002; 2012) commented that it should be the institutions' action to invest the resources, provide the incentives and rewards to enhance students' learning, retention, and success as well as promote their social and intellectual developments. Understanding the trends that influenced the international students who desired to pursue their degrees or other professional programs could also help faculty and staff better guide, assist, and counsel students to increase their success. Thus, this study could provide a clearer picture for the administrators about who expatriate students were and what attracted them to attend and persist at the institution. The study also could help understand how they engage academically, culturally, and socially with the campus community (Mamiseishvili, 2012) with faculty, advisor, and professional staffs.

Institutional Characteristics and Dropout. Certain institutional characteristics and circumstances impacted the institutional dropout. The institutional characteristics were commonly defined such as public or private, region of the country, and campus population size (Oswalt, Lederer, & Schrader, 2015). The key question was what and how institutional decisions and activities influenced students' dropout from that institution. By answering this question, the institutional administrators should consider how each institution could alter the activities, improve the processes, diversify the communication channels and mostly important, modify the policies to retain and graduate more students.

Institutional type, college quality, and student composition. Factors like the institutional type, college quality, and student composition impacted on students' dropout behavior. In the Malaysian context, researchers (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Dahari &

Abduh, 2011) concurred that international students preferred more facilities for entertaining and exercise as well as preventing them from any psychological problems (Alavi & Mansor, 2011). According to Dahari and Abduh, university facilities were the third key factor from the perspective of international postgraduate students. Moreover, researchers (Baharun, Awang, & Padlee, 2011; Jalali et al., 2011; Migin et al., 2015) confirmed that universities' facilities were one of the most important factors to consider when students made up their mind to enroll. Thus, the quality of the universities' facilities was an important factor to retain the students.

Class size, clubs, and societies were other factors that impacted students' persistence at an institution. Students would be dissatisfied when their class sizes were bigger than before (Jalali et al., 2011). Migin et al. (2015) highlighted that the clubs and societies were an avenue not only for international students' entertainment but also for developing their leadership and character. Nonetheless, no study had examined whether universities' facilities, class size, social clubs were important to expatriate students at the private Malaysian institutions.

The academic staff was one of the determinant factors that attracted international students. The academic staff elements included "teaching quality, staff qualification, teaching quality, the medium of instruction, reputation, and image" (Baharun et al., 2011, p. 4707). According to Baharun et al., higher education institutions with large faculty with qualifications and facilities might attract more students. The Ministry of HIED (as cited in Yee & Mokhtar, 2013) also reported that international students expected a higher level of interaction, involvement, and psychological support from the academic staff.

Hence, the qualified faculty with certain levels of teaching quality will attract better students to enroll the institution.

Similarly, Jalali et al. (2011) have identified a significant theme that concerned the faculty quality, namely, classroom delivery, feedback to the students while in class and on assignments, and the relationship among the students within the classroom. Likewise, Govender, Veerasamy, and Noel (2014) highly recommended academic staff must understand the international students' academic difficulties concerning language, culture, communication or any other matters. To make students satisfy and build the institution's image, Jalali et al. suggested all university staff should bear in mind "the moment of truth" by providing memorable services to the students and "to adhere to the principles of quality customer service". Besides, Migin et al. (2015) emphasized that academic reputation positively impacted international students who chose the private Malaysian institutions. Based on the study findings, the factors about programs and qualifications, institutional reputation, resources and facility, and faculty quality heavily impacted students' decisions to attend and persist at the Malaysian institutions.

The internationalization and globalization of higher education. The internationalization of higher education had been determined as one major challenge and a key issue for all institutions around the world (Ahmad, 2015). According to Knight as cited in Ahmad (2015), "Internationalization was a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education" (p. 488). In contrast, globalization was viewed as "the movement of socio-historical relational phenomena, some of which are explored to analyze the higher education issues in a global world" (Gomes, Roberston, & Dale, 2012, p. 222). There was

a high level of competition for job opportunities in the international labor market as of globalization (Nkang, 2012). Thus, Ho, Bulman-Fleming, and Mitchell (as cited in Urban & Palmer, 2014) identified that higher education institutions applied two strategies to diverse students for the globalized labor force and to internationalize campuses: recruiting international students and arranging study-abroad programs.

Internationalization is “response to globalization.” (Beck, 2012; Rumbley, 2015). Chao (2014) commented, internationalization of higher education not only became a key policy directive and drove across the countries, regions, and continents gradually but also as “a result of the increased interdependence brought about by the twin process of globalization and regionalization”. Further, Marantz-Gal (2016) considered internationalization was increasingly recognized by the higher education institutions as a strategic point to promote research opportunities and improve the qualitative aspects of curriculum development. The examples of the internationalization were the ever-increasing number of the mobile students (Altbach, 2014; Ahmad, 2015), international branch campuses (Altbach, 2014), the administrative staff (Brandenburg, 2016), international advisory councils (Altbach, Mihut, & Salmi, 2016), and internationalization of curriculum (Jiang & Carpenter, 2014). To conclude, as one of the most significant phenomena, internationalization impacted the higher education institutions globally (Rumbley, 2015). Strategically speaking, internationalization enhanced higher education institutions’ quality, reputation, and visibility.

The higher education institutions also needed to integrate local culture into one homogenized international standard (Chao, 2014), involved students in participating internationally informed research, and engaged them with cultural and linguistic diversity

(Leask, 2014). Therefore, Jone (2014) underlined that students should possess the ability and develop the skills to interpret local issues within a global context and judge the impact of global issues on their personal and professional lives.

Students could recognize the importance and be enthusiastic about the internationalization of higher education (Mitchell & Vandegrift, 2014). They not only sought ways to gain internationalization awareness but also identify their own personal and interpersonal skills to achieve diversity and cross-cultural awareness and competency, as Mitchell and Vandegrift commented. Nevertheless, Jiang and Carpenter (2014) noted: although it was one of the effective approaches for increasing expatriate students' cross-cultural competency, managing diversified student, faculty, and staff was a key challenge concerning the cultural, linguistic and social barriers. In the Malaysia setting, Abidin, Mansor, and Abu (2013) reported, there was a rising need for the skilled expatriates to perform the international assignments that were significant for country's economy. Thus, the better understanding the importance of internationalization and globalization of higher education, the better-planned strategy for applying to promote expatriate students' attendance, persistence, and graduation at the private institutions.

Implications

A private Malaysian institution had not differentiated expatriate students from their local and international students or studied their perceptions about the key factors that affected their attending and persisting at the institution. This study used previous empirical studies in the United States context as groundwork to help understand students' persistence and withdrawal patterns (if any), the root causes of leaving college, and institutional strategies for assisting students in completing college. The anticipated

findings of this study might provide insights on how students' (from expatriate families) individual characteristics, interaction within the college environment, and institutional characteristics impacted their attendance and persistence at the university in Malaysia. The potential findings might not only help the institution but also the local educational authorities better understand expatriate students' needs, wants, expectations, and perception at other Malaysian private institutions.

A report consisting of a white paper or policy recommendation using the data and analysis from this project study might provide support to the administration in increasing students' (from expatriate families) recruitment and retention, and might help guide the institution to develop a retention policy and implement it to retain expatriate students. Besides, another possible project based on study findings might be recommendations for targeted academic and student support services to increase expatriate students' recruitment, retention, and graduation rates at an institutional level. A white paper report of the findings of this study also could provide insight to the local educational authorities such as MoHE about students' (from expatriate families) perceptions concerning attendance and retention in the higher education institutions in Malaysia.

Summary

In Section 1, Tinto's theory and conceptual model about drop out were critically reviewed. In details, I reviewed and discussed how individual characteristics, interaction within the college environment, and institutional characteristics impacted students' decisions to continue or drop out of school. I discussed how family background, individual characteristics, past education experience, goal commitment, ability, academic integration, social integration, social integration and institutional commitment, institution

type, college quality and student composition, and institution size influenced students' decisions to continue or drop out. Then, I critically reviewed current literature using constructs from Tinto's theory about students' persistence or dropout behaviors. Section 2 provides a detailed description of the research design and approach used to understand students attending and retaining at a private Malaysian institution.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of key factors that were affecting students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. The following research question guided this study: What were the students' (from expatriate families) perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?

This section describes the qualitative research design approach adopted in the study and rationale. It is followed by presenting the setting and sample, ethical consideration of participants, data collection, and data analysis. This section also discusses the role of the researcher, and limitations of the study. By using a qualitative case study approach, results from individual interviews and individual follow-up interviews are presented. Evidence of the quality of the project description based on the study outcomes are presented.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This project study began with a problem with low graduation rates for students from expatriate families at a private Malaysian institution. Qualitative research aims to explore a problem in order to have a deep understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) considered that it was appropriate to address a research problem in which the researcher needs to explore the variables. In other words, through conducting this research, I could learn how participants interpreted their experience and constructed their worlds. I was also able to understand what meaning they attributed to their experience (Merriam, 2009). Thus, a qualitative research method was considered to

provide insights about the perceptions of key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at a Malaysian private institution.

There are four types of qualitative research: ethnography, case study, phenomenology, and grounded theory research (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). A qualitative case study was selected for this study for two reasons: First, a case study is an inductive investigative strategy that aims to search for meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2009). It is grounded and holistic. Second, Merriam (2009) considered a case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). It also allows investigators to focus on a case and retain a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). Further, a case study reveals not only what about the phenomenon and what it might represent but also values for its ability to capture the complex action, perception, and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). This study focused on a group of students from expatriate families who shared the similar experience and perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. Hence, the research questions were designed to reveal an in-depth understanding of students' (from expatriate families) perceptions of their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, a case study was a logical research design for this study.

Moreover, a qualitative case study is a process of investigation and analysis as well as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), a case study can play an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base, benefitting institutions studying educational innovations, informing policy, and evaluating programs while allowing readers to learn from a case through the researcher's narrative description and to transfer the practices to

similar situations. In this qualitative case study, I focused on one private Malaysian institution setting and investigated the perceptions of students from expatriate families about their attending and persisting at their university. I also sought to explore their experiences, opinions, and suggestions regarding individual characteristics, interaction within the college environment, and institution characteristics that concerning their joining and persisting at the institution.

Other qualitative research designs make different contributions and have special proposes. For example, ethnography research aims to discover the essence of a culture and its unique complexities to *paint a portrait* of the group, its interactions, and its setting (Lodico et al., 2010). I discarded ethnography research because it mainly explores culture-related topics such as attitude, knowledge, value, and beliefs that influence certain group of people' behavior (Lodico et al., 2010). Although this study indirectly sought to understand how culture differences influenced students' decisions, students' perceptions as of reflection of culture values were of interest.

While phenomenology research focuses more on an individual's interpretation of his or her experience (Lodico et al., 2010), it was not selected because it did not focus on a *single unit* or a bounded system like a case study does. Additionally, as the purpose of the study does not need to build a theory that is *ground* in the data, as Lodico et al. (2010) stated, grounded theory approach was not appropriate for this study. Therefore, taking the characteristics of each study model into consideration, I conducted a single, holistic, explanatory case study at a private Malaysian institution to explore the perception of expatriate students concerning attending, persisting, and graduation through interviews.

Participants

In a qualitative study, purposefully identify the participants and sites could help best learn and understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). As Creswell (2012) stated, the understanding emerges through a detailed understanding of participants on a particular site can provide useful information, help others learn about the phenomenon, or let the silenced people share their opinions.

It is pertinent to define participants according to certain criteria and the case requirements before the data collection. The initial criteria for purposefully selecting participants were students who came to Malaysia with their parents and held either MM2H valid for 10 years or under the diplomatic visa or their parents' visa. They have been studying at the institution for 2 years or above, and their ages were at least 18 years old. Hence, to better understand the perceptions of students from expatriate families, the university administrator at the study site helped identify the students who have met the above mentioned three criteria and invited them to participate in the study.

Due to the lack of responses, and based on Walden IRB approval, I expanded the criteria to select potential participants. The updated criteria of the potential participants also included those under the category of *nonstudent pass*, such as the employment pass, Malaysia PR, and residence pass. They were current students, graduates, and dropout students who had enrolled in any foundation or preuniversity, undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. They were either full- or part-time students who held the employment status. They had different profiles and characteristics, so they could better share diverse insights and opinions to answer the interview and research questions.

The number of participants varies from one qualitative study to another. Creswell (2012) considered that a researcher's overall ability to provide a full study diminishes with the further new participant or site. Creswell advised qualitative researchers to study a few individuals or a few cases to provide an in-depth description of individual or site. I decided to choose purposefully 12 students from expatriate families for my study to ensure the adequate data to answer the research questions.

I followed the suggestions by researchers (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015) to justify the number of participants. Creswell (2012) pointed out that it takes the time to collect qualitative data and analyze the data, so the larger size of the participants, the more difficult to analyze the cases. Creswell also suggested the number of participants might range from one or two to 30 or 40. Similarly, when the researcher had limited time, he or she could recruit many participants and seek breadth of the inquiry (Patton, 2015). Otherwise, he or she could seek depth by interviewing a small number of the participants.

For this study, the final participants were chosen purposefully from the categories of nonstudent pass and who have been studied at the institution for 1 year and above, and their ages were at least 18 years old. To better understand the phenomenon, participants who represented diverse nationalities from different age group and enrolled in any programs were chosen purposefully. No matter which level of participants were chosen, they could provide a certain level of valuable and relevant information as they had been retained at the institution for at least one year.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

There was a need to obtain the permissions and to gain access to participants and the site before conducting qualitative research. As a student researcher, upon the

submission of the written approval on the Letter of Cooperation (Appendix C) from the study site, I obtained approval from the IRB at Walden to conduct the study (approval number 05-18-16-0351432). There was no need to obtain the IRB approval from the private Malaysian institution as per the follow-up meeting with the university administrator. Nevertheless, I obtained permission from the director of the international office who was the authorized administrator at the study site to conduct this study.

Once I received the Walden IRB approval, I e-mailed the university administrator to request him to send to all potential participants identified earlier an e-mail invitation (Appendix D) and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix E). The questionnaire contained three questions which could identify the eligibility of inclusion of the students in the study. The university administrator e-mailed an invitation (Appendix D) and the questionnaire (Appendix E) to 97 expatriate students. As there were no responses, the representative e-mailed a reminder (Appendix F) approved by the IRB. From the 10 students who replied, three met the study criteria. When I received the answered questionnaire from these three participants, I e-mailed them the consent form individually and asked them to reply to me via e-mail by inputting "I Consent" on the subject line.

Due to lack of responses, I made two change requests for procedures and obtained the permissions from the authorized and university administrators at the study site and Walden IRB. The requests were about to include current students who were enrolled Pre-U or foundation program and professional program students, graduates, dropout out students who had enrolled Pre-U program, undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs students. Besides, to accommodate a certain group of the students' schedules (e.g., working students), I requested the inclusion of e-mail interviewing as an option to

allow students to answer the questions at their convenience instead of meeting via Skype.

The Walden IRB approved these two requests.

After Walden IRB had approved the changes in procedures, 66 students were included. All were contacted by their university e-mail address. Some of them who had provided their personal e-mail address were also contacted; some others were not contacted due to the personal e-mail name was obviously a parent's e-mail address (University administrator, e-mail communication, December 7, 2016). They were sent one invitation (Appendix I or Appendix J) and two reminders (Appendix F & Appendix K). Only two students replied and participated in the study after the change in procedures had been approved.

Despite the change in procedures to increase the number of participants as explained in the above sections, the total number of participants was five. Table 1 shows the total number of the participant in the study; the program enrolled, the number of years living in Malaysia, and the number of years at the MoHE Institution.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Information

Participant No.	Program Enrolled	No. of years living in Malaysia	No. of Years at the MOHE Institution
S6P1	BA (Hons)	2.5 years	2.5 year
S3P2	Ph.D.	9 years	9 years
S5P3	BSc (Hons)	5 years	3 years
S10P4	Professional Program	7-8 years	4 years
S14P5	ADTP* & Foundation/ Pre-U Program	2.5 years	2 years

*Note: * ADTP: American Degree Transfer Program*

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

As I was not an employee of the study site, there was no need for me to maintain professional distance and separate my role as a student researcher from my professional role to ensure the biases are minimized during the data collection. However, to establish a positive researcher-participant working relationship, I practiced the following methods. First, I made efforts to build rapport neutrality, and interview relationship with potential participants as suggested by Patton (2015). I conducted Skype or e-mail interviews, used WeChat or WhatsApp and Walden e-mail as the communication tools throughout the research.

As I would not meet the participants in person, I uploaded one professional picture on all communication channels during the data collection so they knew who was in contact with them. I also thought and acted like a qualitative researcher when I spoke to them. I did not show any judgment or express my favor or disfavor during the interviews. Second, I used to use my Walden e-mail address and WhatsApp/WeChat (with the consent of the participants) for all communications throughout the data collection. I identified myself as a student researcher who was conducting a study to fulfill doctoral degree requirements. I also ensured that I would keep their identification fully confidential to gain their trust.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Taking ethical protection of participants' rights into consideration throughout the data collection is important. To protect participants' rights, first, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course (certification number 1313372). Second, I obtained permissions from the authorized and university administrators to

conduct this study at the study site as well as to implement the changes for procedures which were approved by the Walden IRB. Third, I obtained the approval from Walden IRB to conduct the study. Two requests for changing procedures were approved by the Walden IRB.

Fourth, I strictly followed the guidelines offered by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) to ensure the participants did not feel coerced. For example, I respected the participants' privacy and protected their identity by assigning a designated code for every participant before the data collection. The codes were assigned and confirmed once the participants submitted their consent and the codes were used throughout the whole study and will not be revealed to outsiders. I would not identify students by name, and I assured them that their responses would be kept confidential. I also ensured to abide the terms of the agreement with those whom I contacted with for conducting the study. Finally, I obtained an informed consent form from each participant before scheduling the mutually agreed timings and dates for conducting the interviews either by Skype or by e-mail and kept them for future reference as required by Walden University.

Data Collection

In qualitative studies, the detailed data might be collected through interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2003). In this case study, to collect expatriate students' perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution, individual semi-structured interviews (Appendix G) and follow-up individual interviews (Appendix H) were used as the primary mode of data collection.

Describe and Justify the Data Collection

When behavior and feelings cannot be observed directly, and the past events or activities are impossible to duplicate, Merriam (2009) suggested conducting interviews to collect adequate data. Merriam also pointed out that interviewing is the best technique when conducting intensive case studies of a few individuals who were selected purposely. To answer the research questions, I conducted individual interviews and follow-up interviews with the same participants.

The open-ended questions were designed to elicit expatriate students' comments or suggestions about what areas the university management could work on to improve students' learning, retention, and graduation rate in the long run. The probing questions would prompt the participants to elaborate and clarify their responses and understandings to the initial open-ended interview questions to ensuring gathering as rich and detailed information as possible during the interviews. The follow-up interview questions offered an opportunity to ask probing questions into concern areas noted by expatriate students.

Identify Data Collection Instrument and Source

I collected the data through self-developed interview questions. I asked questions (Appendix G) of the individual participants based on Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012b) theories and used an interview guide. It was necessary to explore more information after reading the initial interview transcripts. Hence, I asked the follow-up questions (Appendix H) based on Tinto's (2012a) theories about completing college during the follow-up individual interviews. The interview questions were reviewed by my Committee Members and approved that the questions would not harm the potential participants and could be easily understood, so I did not conduct the pilot study.

I chose to conduct the individual interviews and follow-up interviews by Skype because one of the benefits of conducting Skype interview is the convenience regardless the distance. According to Seitz (2015), the Skype interview allows researcher and participant to see each other at their comfortable space. Then, based on Walden IRB approval, I added an e-mail option because e-mail interviewing enabled participants who have difficulty to meet on Skype. James (2007) affirmed that e-mail interviewing could be flexible and increase reflexivity for interviewees in views of time and space to construct, reflect, and learn from their experiences in education research.

Gaining Access to Participants

Upon receiving permission from the authorized administrator of the international department, the university administrator supported me with the requests that related to the study. Once received the Walden IRB's approvals, the university administrator e-mailed an invitation (Appendix D or Appendix I or Appendix J) and demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) to a list of pre- and reidentified expatriate students who had met the study criteria as the initial communication. Afterward, I took over whenever I received any responses from the potential participants and followed the Walden IRB-approved procedures and protocols to arrange for the rest of the data collection.

The final numbers of participants were determined by the students who replied to my e-mail and who met the study criteria. Although the total participants were only five, they represented students from all programs (foundation, undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs) either at full- or part-time status. As of the small sample size, I aimed to seek broader and deeper understanding and insights from the participants while made them feel at ease. Interviewing participants from various majors with ranges of ages

and various nationalities provided different lenses into the participants' perceptions. I ensured to arrange the interviews by Skype or e-mail according to students' choices and the mutually agreed timings and dates.

Data Collection Procedures

Skype interview - Each interview which was conducted by Skype was recorded by Skype MP3 recording software and an audio recorder which installed in my Huawei mobile phone (as backup). Three participants met me on Skype from their home or in the office to conduct the interviews. I sent them a reminder either one day before the interview by e-mail or (a few hours before) by WhatsApp on the day of the interview. The same procedures were applied for those who participated in the follow-up interviews by Skype. They were clear about the informed consent and allowed me to record the interviews and take notes during the interviews. I followed the Walden IRB approved interview protocol (Appendix L) and asked them questions.

All participants showed their willingness to answer the questions and shared the experiences. Participants represented two (full-time) undergraduate students and one (part-time) graduate student. The individual interviews held between 27 minutes and 37 minutes; and the follow-up interviews lasted between 12 minutes and 36 minutes. I attempted to keep the interviews within the timeframe for both interviews.

All three participants agreed to complete the member check once the interview summary was ready. I added their comments (if any) or corrected the information when the audio was not clear that caused the transcription was not fully reflected the participants' meaning. It was participants who chose the interview timings and dates. They had sufficient time between two interviews and proofread the interview summaries.

Email interview – Only two participants willingly responded both interview questions by e-mail. One has been enrolled the (part-time) professional program, and another had graduated recently from the foundation program.

I e-mailed the individual interview questions (Appendix G) to the participants once they replied me the “I consent” statement and personal communication identifications. According to the procedures approved by the Walden IRB on the “Informed Consent” statement, I requested participants to read, answer the questions, and reflect the responses carefully before returning me within the timeline for both interview and follow-up questions. When I received the responses, I read them two-three times to find out whether there was any information that needed to be clarified. I asked both participants a few additional questions to seek further clarification and have a better understanding of their experience.

Managing Collected Data

I created one research folder and subfolders to manage better the collected data in Google Drive. The subfolder, named according to the code I assigned once the participant confirmed to participate. It included the e-mail returned “I Consent” form, interview transcripts and (proofread) interview summaries for both individual interview and follow-up interview, e-mail communications with each participant that related to the study, and all recorded data (if conducted by Skype) that marked by the code I assigned. The electronic copies of all interview transcripts and summaries were kept in a password-protected laptop which only could be accessed by me.

Additionally, an excel spreadsheet was created to record the data concerning each participant’s code, interview method (Skype or e-mail interview), received date of the

Demographic Questionnaire, dates of informed consents sent and received from participants, and interview schedules. The information was consistently updated and maintained on a password-protected personal laptop which was only accessible by me. The personal identification information such as e-mail address, Skype ID, Mobile number, and WeChat or WhatsApp ID were recorded in a separated password-protected sheet for my reference only.

Role of the Researcher

I did not hold any professional responsibility at the study site. However, I still followed Creswell's (2003) suggestions to take steps to reduce or avoid any bias. First, to provide potential participants a better understanding of the setting, participants, and the topic, I wrote a short statement to provide them the background information. Second, I followed Creswell's advice to comment on connections between the student researcher and the potential participants. I also used multiple strategies such as individual interview and follow-up interviews as of the further concerns or questions arise to validate the data to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Third, to protect the human participants, I discussed the steps to obtain permission from the Walden IRB with them. By taking those strategies, I could reduce the bias during my research.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis is an ongoing, complex, and dynamic process when conducting both simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). I followed Merriam's strategy to begin analysis during the data collection. I also followed the advice from researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009) to organize, code, synthesize,

and search for patterns. To make sense of data, I adapted Merriam's approach to consolidate, reduce, and interpret what participants' responses.

I adopted a thematic analysis approach as I was interested in finding themes in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined the thematic analysis is a method that can identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data. It involves the searching across the data set to find the repeated patterns of meaning. According to Braun and Clarke, there are six stages to perform the thematic analysis: to familiarize the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes, and produce the report. I followed the guidelines of the six stages introduced by Braun and Clarke when I conducted the analysis.

To become immersed in the data and gain important insights, I chose to do the hand analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 2012) and typed and organized handwritten field notes (Patton, 2015) from both individual interviews and follow-up interviews that conducted by Skype. I prepared a copy of interview summary the next day, repeatedly listened to the audio recording to check the summary before sending to the participants for proofreading and to ensure the meanings were caught accurately. Once I received the proofread summary, I reread the edited copy and made notes or comments on it. There was no need to do the transcription for e-mail interviews as they wrote their answers.

I kept in mind Creswell's (2012) six steps while analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data. That is, "preparing and organizing the data, exploring and coding the database, describing findings and forming themes, representing and reporting findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings, and validating the accuracy of the findings (p. 236)." Firstly, I read, made notes, and highlighted the responses question by question

from one participant to another across the interviews. Next, I looked for the similar words, phrases, or ideas being used by interviewees across all the interviews including the follow-up ones and organized them into a word document. While reading the transcripts and organizing the ideas, the codes were surfaced and created. Then, I developed a list of codes and subcodes (Appendix M). Later I assigned data to the appropriate codes and subcodes.

Patton (2015) discussed two types of qualitative analyses: First, “deductive analysis” mainly determines the qualitative data that supports a study such as existing general conceptualizations, explanations, results, and theories (Patton, 2015). Second, Patton defined “inductive analysis” as introducing new concepts and theories, giving explanations, producing results from the specific qualitative study’s data. In this study, I carried out an inductive analysis. Therefore, with my list of codes and subcodes, I coded the data inductively. Appendix M exemplifies how I coded the data.

Next, I thought about what and how things data fitted together, as Patton (2015) suggested. I looked at the coded data to look for themes. For instance, I identified the patterns and themes that concerning Malaysia as a destination for higher education and group them together which were discussed by different participants (Appendix N). I also verified the meaningfulness and accuracy of data that would be placed in each category.

Finally, to organize the data and answer the research questions, I followed Patton (2015) to interpret findings at different levels and analyzed them (Appendix M) to interpret for meaning. To determine substantive significance, I analyzed the data to identify different themes or topics and address the questions asked by Patton such as: to

what extent the findings deepened understanding of the perception studied or were useful for informing policy or improving a program.

Evidence of Quality

Three common strategies to achieve the internal validity or credibility were known as triangulation (such as conducting the follow-up interview with the same participant), member checks, and auditing by one external professional (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam, member checks or respondent validation process allowed the researcher to take the preliminary analysis to the participants and asked them to proofread whether the interpretation was as accurate as to their experience.

To assure accuracy and credibility of the findings, first, I used member checks during and after the interviews. All three participants who conducted the interviews by Skype were received a copy of the interview summary for both interviews for proofreading and approval. Other two participants who chose to respond by e-mail had agreed that they needed to reflect well their responses for all questions (as member check) before they returned to me. Further, I used the comments to refine my follow-up individual interview questions. I asked participants to check whether the description was complete and the identified themes were accurate or not. I accomplished triangulation by having follow-up interviews with the same participant.

I requested one professional expert who has a doctoral degree to be the study's external auditor. She has been working in the higher education field as a researcher or a quality assurance manager in the US and the UAE for about 15 years (or above). I sent to the Committee firstly for comments about the codes and results. Some of the codes and themes were revised based on feedback. Then, I sent the interview transcripts to her to

proofread and check whether the themes that identified were appropriate. The transcripts did not disclose participants' names, ages, and nationalities. No further comments that pertinent to the study were added. Thus, I employed three methods (member checking, triangulation, and auditing) to assure the credibility of the findings of this study. Besides, as both interviews and conversations were interwoven with observation (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015), I paid attention to the participants' ways of expressing themselves during the Skype interviews to triangulate emerging findings.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

As labeled by Merriam (2009), there was a situation called “negative or discrepant case analysis.” In other words, researchers should intentionally seek data which might inconsistent with other emerging findings, cited by some writers in Merriam. In this study, I considered there were various discrepant cases that either hard-to-classify or unexpected (Creswell, 2012).

For example, first, one participant shared the only negative experience during the studying of the Pre-U program. However, she studied at another branch campus that was under the same education group of the study site, but it was not at the MoHE itself. Second, one of the interview questions was about the warning system. According to the participants, it seemed that this issue was more relevant to the international students especially connected the class attendances and warning system with their visa renewal matter, not directly for the expatriate students; the warning system did not have much impact on them. Regardless, one participant reported that “I, including many of my friends, have been subjected to such tactics, where the authorities have tried to scare their students by ‘bluffing.’” Participant also used the word “international students” a few

times in the responses. No matter whether the warning system is for expatriate students or international students, coordinators are suggested to change the approach and communication tone when dealing with the similar matters.

Results

The result section is organized by the research questions, based on the guiding research question “*What were the students’ (from expatriate families) perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*” Research Question 1 was answered by the responses analyzed from the Interview Questions #1-#5, #9-#10; Research Question 2 was answered by Interview Questions #6-#7 and follow-up interview questions #11-#15, and Research Question 3 was answered by Interview Question #8.

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

Five themes emerged and are presented based on the responses from Skype and e-mail interviews. Expatriate participants compared various subtopics under two themes: Malaysia as a destination for higher education and MoHE as an institution. Three other themes were: support group, language ability, and past educational experiences (high school grades) respectively.

Malaysia as a destination for higher education. Expatriate students identified five subthemes that related to attending and persisting at a private Malaysian university. They were: (a) advantages of living in the multiculture setting, (b) affordability, (c)

convenience, (d) education standards, and (e) part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students).

Advantages of living in the multi-culture setting. Expatriate participants underlined that the advantages of living in the diverse culture settings were one key factor that attracted them to study and stay in Malaysia. As expatriate S6P1 described...

I got quite used to Malaysia [after stayed for one year], like Malaysia culture and everything, I got quite adapted [to] certain thing of it ... I am learning about the cultures ... I am learning a lot of things about the western cultures. Probably if I [had] not come to Malaysia, I would not have learned certain things and cultures ... Malaysia is [a] mixed culture of [the] country that needs to understand.

Expatriate S5P6 also found “Malaysia quite peaceful because there are many races here, and they are living very peacefully.” Expatriate S10P4 affirmed: “It is a multiethics country, i.e., Malay, Chinese, and Indian which make English is [a] common language and widely spoken. Thus, I will be able to improve my English and Chinese language much faster as compared to [my country].”

Affordability. Four expatriate participants compared Malaysia as a destination for higher education either with their home country or the academic partner institution in Europe. For example, expatriate S6P1 commented:

Malaysia to be very cheap ... even for the living compared to my country.... I have been there [the academic partner institution in Europe]. I could have spent more than what I am spending here [in Malaysia]. In a way, so it's quite affordable.

Expatriate S10P4 had a different view: “One of the main factors was that in Malaysia I [could] get an overseas degree, such as [a European] degree without needing to go to [Europe], and the course fee is much cheaper as compare to other countries.”

Convenience. Three expatriate participants discussed convenience regarding easiness to go back to their home country and to obtain an MM2H visa to Malaysia. For example, one expatriate commented that “It was easy to get an MM2H visa to Malaysia as compared to other countries”. Likewise, another two expressed the convenience to travel to their countries. As S6P1 said, “It’s just 4 hours flight back from my country. I can go and come back [at] any time. I just look at the convenience”.

Education standards. Two expatriate participants remarked that the good education standards in Malaysia were difficult to compete. For instance, one expatriate participant repeatedly stated: “... the education standard is quite good. And the thing that teach[es] the students, I would say it is [a] high standard.”

Part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students). Two expatriate participants discussed the part-time work opportunity from the country-specific point. One stated “... the government does not allow the [the foreign] student to do a part-time job (which is one of the drawbacks to studying[ing] in Malaysia).” Another one commented: “Unlike many other countries, in Malaysia, students are not allowed to work part-time and [do not] have any opportunities to support themselves financially. They depend solely on their parents or guardians to fund their education in Malaysia.” In contrast, the third expatriate discussed the matter at the university level. “Although it was a random thought, to gain some experience in the field,” the expatriate participant said: “... I think the university should support...”

MoHE as an institution. Four subthemes were identified that related to attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. They were: (a) flexibility with the visa, (b) scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students, (c) supportive environment, and (d) university degree versus a good career prospect.

Flexibility with the visa. Two expatriate participants who were MM2H visa holders found that the MoHE University was flexible with their visa after they had approached more than one institution to apply or ask for the transfer. Therefore, they chose to (re)join the MoHE University. Just like one expatriate participant stated: “My dad [had] already paid a lot for [a] MM2H visa. I [did not] want that money and effort to go waste, plus applying for [a] student visa would require spending more money....”

Scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students. Expatriate participants positively discussed the MoHE’s various scholarship program. S6P1 mentioned: “... in MoHE University, they have lots of scholarship opportunities ... It all depends on your hard work....” Expatriate S3P2, a scholarship holder for master and Ph.D. studies, commented that “... For the Masters, if you are very good [at] the degree level, you will get the scholarship [at the MoHE].” Expatriate S5P3 proudly shared that she could apply for the scholarship because her high school grades were high.

Supportive environment. Expatriate S3P2 highlighted that “supportive environment” was one key factor that impacted her decisions to persist at the MoHE. Few other influential factors were: “friendly environment ... I feel at home [laughed] ... I enjoy [laughed]!” S3P2 also shared: “Because they [the MoHE University] provide me the full lab equipment to do my experimental and all because my research needs a lot of

lab equipment.... In Malaysia, any other institution does not have the equipment as they have.”

S5P3 expressed more than once during the interviews that “I like the friendly people [from the international department] over there [when she had made the first visit before joined the MoHE].” S5P3 also commented: “The good quality of the lectures... the people from the facility department and the people from the international department are quite friendly here ... they help you if you are in trouble.”

University degree versus a good career prospect. Two expatriate participants were attracted to join the MoHE University by the dual degree certificates and a degree with honors that would obtain upon their graduation. One pointed out: “[The academic partner institution in Europe] offers a degree with honors....” Moreover, the expatriate participant stated: “I have a plan to get a good job in a corporate world, working outside [of my country]. Communication is a subject that MoHE is offering and is an easy way to move to the corporate world especially....” Another expatriate expressed: “The MoHE University was offering a dual-degree ... And my degree was to get a good job. From what I have heard was your degree does matter when it’s getting a job...” When I asked few extra questions from the expatriate participant, who supposed to do a 3-month internship after finishing the on-campus studies in January 2017 whether she had sought the advice of an academic advisor or faculty for the future internship and career. An expatriate participant responded:

Only studies.... Not yet about my future career, not yet....I [would] go and meet few lecturers and get the advice from them ... I wish I can find a job here [in Malaysia] in a good organization. That’s the only wish. I wish so badly.

[Interviewer: When you look for the internship, you may stay in the same organization afterward if you perform well]. That's right. If I perform well, they will offer me a job...

Supporting group. Expatriate participants identified three subthemes. They were: (a) parents and relatives, (b) high school counselors, and (c) friends and peers.

Parents and relatives. All expatriate participants have continuously received their parents' support throughout their studies such as financial or emotional or both. For instance, expatriate S6P1 stated: "My parents supported me throughout my whole school life ... My father like, he quite supported me with my decision [to choose a degree with the honors]". However, it was her younger brother, who said "... since we have the second home visa, why not go to Malaysia? You won't have any visa issue or stuff" made her decide to choose the university in Malaysia.

Expatriate S3P2 expressed: "It was because my aunt and uncle are here [in Malaysia]." S3P2 repeatedly emphasized the support from the family: "because of the economic ... and I put the time for Ph.D. studies ... My father who always wants me to finish my Ph.D., [then] my husband also even wants me to go for the postgraduate". S3P2 added: "when I feel I want to stop, they never let me [laughed]."

Expatriate S5P3 gave an example about the support from the family: "Although MoHE's fees are quite high. I want to study in a university which has a good education standard... So my family is quite supportive regardless of [the] high level of fees." S5P3 also explained that it was her sister influenced her to decide to study at the MoHE.

Participant replied: "My sister [had] studied [the diploma] at [the] MoHE University..., so she told me that [the] MoHE is nice."

Apart from the financial support, expatriate S10P4 responded: "...they [her parents] feel like Malaysia is quite a good choice for it," so she came to Malaysia to study. Unlike other expatriate participants, expatriate S14P5 replied: "...When I came to Malaysia with my parents in 2013 to receive our MM2H..., my father made me register at [the] MoHE University." S14P5 added:

My father holds great value for education and so provides me with full financial support. My mother spends 3-4 months a year here to provide other support....My father advised me that even if I had to study something as simple as BBA, I should study abroad (anywhere) as this enables youngsters to gain much more exposure as compared to studying in their home country.

High school counselors. The interview results revealed that all participants had completed their high school studies in their home countries without receiving any counseling before coming to Malaysia to seek the higher education studies. The responses among expatriate participants were similar, such as "There were no high school counselors while I studied."

Friends and peers. Only two expatriate participants who had few (selected) friends from their high schools showed their support for the studies. In contrast, one expatriate participant indicated that "Most of my [her] high school friends have attended local university" [in her country]. So, they did not have any influence on her decision to study in Malaysia. The Ph.D. student replied, "I am a part-time student, I do not have much time to meet with the classmates or labmates." She did not mention the impact of the high school friends, which was a long time ago.

Language ability. All expatriate participants strongly agreed that the English language was important for various reasons: such as “enrollment” (S6P1), “need to communicate using the English language ... at the degree level ... at the master and Ph.D. level, [it] is important for the communication, understanding, and writing” (S3P2), “lack of English skills will make it very difficult to understand the subject” (S10P4), “the education is given in the English language” (S14P5). Expatriate S5P3 explained:

when you study with [the] students from different countries so that you interact with them. Also, all the lectures are conducted in English, so you should understand and write in English, for better report writing for your assignments, for better presentations, and better understanding the lectures.

Past educational experiences (high school grades). Expatriate S3P2 considered: “for the master degree or Ph.D. level, it does not matter”. Then, she emphasized: “But it comes to the degree, it is very important because sometimes you will look for the scholarship opportunities, ok? So the high school grades are very important.” S5P3 confirmed S3P2’s point: “... my high school grades got me scholarship, so that is good.”

Expatriate S14P5 replied: “Good high school grades are a requirement for admission in good universities unless you have any other exceptional talents that may work instead.”

Two expatriate participants had the different opinions ... “any other grades really did not matter.... later on, once you did the university, the school grade just did not matter....” (S6P1); participant from the professional program replied, “It did not apply to my situation [to get a scholarship because of the high school grades were high].”

In summary, five themes with subthemes were identified concerning the individual characteristics perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. These were: (a) Malaysia as a destination for higher education, (b) MoHE as an institution, (c) supporting group from parents and relatives, (d) language ability, and (e) past educational experience (high school grades). Conclusions from the analysis indicated that the findings concerning advantages of living in the multicultural setting, affordability, convenience, and education standards impacted on expatriate participants' attendance and persistence at a Malaysian private institution. Further, expatriate participants discussed the necessities to provide part-time work opportunities for expatriate students in the country and the institutional level to help them attend and persist better at a private Malaysian institution.

From the perspective of the MoHE as an institution, the findings revealed that expatriate participants considered five subfactors that heavily impacted on their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. They were: (a) flexibility with the visa, (b) scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students, (c) supportive environment, and university degree versus a good career prospect. However, the findings did not confirm that friends, peers, or high school counselors had any impact on expatriate students' attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution.

Concerning language ability and past educational experience (high school grades), the expatriate participants agreed that the higher the English language test scores and high school grades, the easier getting admissions to attend a private Malaysian university. Further, the higher the skills in communication, academic writing, and reading, the better understanding the subjects, easier completing the programs, and better persisting at a

private Malaysian university. Besides, the higher the high school grades, the better chance to obtain the scholarship when applying for the bachelor degrees.

Research Question 2: *What are the interactions within the university environment that influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

Three themes emerged and are presented below to demonstrate how interactions within the institutions and social and academic integration had impacted expatriate students and their university lives at the MoHE. These were: (a) academic integration, (b) commitment, and (c) social integration and institutional commitment.

Academic integration. Four subthemes emerged to explain how expatriate participants were academically integrated and what the services were needed to help current and future expatriate students to be more academically integrated. They were: (a) faculty behavior, (b) high university Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA), (c) workshop/seminar (for part-time expatriate students), and (d) time constraints for part-time expatriate students.

Faculty behavior. Faculty behavior encompassed helpful, knowledgeable, and supportive faculty as discussed by expatriate participants. Expatriate participants shared various positive learning experience with faculty, such as: “counseling” (S6P1), “supportive” (S3P2), “helpful and knowledgeable ... and eager to help you learn extra skills” (S5P3). As expatriate S6P1 described: “I just cannot get along with a few people ... I went to my faculty and shared my problems, and they counseled me very well. In a way they counseled me, I think that’s made me a much better person....”

Expatriate S3P2 positively stated: "... as mentioned, because I have been there for many years, like the supportive lecturer, supportive supervisor." Similarly, expatriate S5P3 emphasized: "... they are very helpful. They are knowledgeable and teach you skills..., the lectures are always eager to help you learn extra skills." In contrast, expatriate S10P4 responded with a slightly different opinion: "Get to know many people [faculty] from [a] diversified background with different experience, which will subsequently broaden my knowledge."

In contrast, one expatriate participant noticed one trend from the local lecturers: I have also noticed that the Malaysian teachers do not take criticism well, especially from international students [expatriate students like the participant]. It might be due to the culture in this part of the world, where the teachers are believed to be always right. But instead of holding grudges against students when faced with such situations, the teachers should adopt a more welcoming approach to criticism and work with the students, rather against them. After all, a teacher's job is to educate.

High university CGPA. All expatriate participants considered that the high university CGPA is important and for the students' success as of the scholarship or financial concerns to continuing studying at a private Malaysian institution. Expatriate S6P1 firmly responded: "I only need to concentrate my grades." Expatriate S5P3 considered "the success is about the students' grades," while expatriate S14P5 believed: "every university would want their students to succeed."

The Ph.D. expatriate participant considered that the high university CGPA holder met the university criteria to apply and obtain the scholarship from the university

continuously. Thus, the financial burden would be less. On the contrary, expatriate S10P4 had two perspectives: first, “high CGPA represents higher success rate in the future.” Second, “[professional program] will only cost around half price of the total of [the] whole degree course, provided if I have passed the exam smoothly. Thus, considering the financial position, it would encourage me to study harder to pass the exam.”

Time constraints for part-time students. Two part-time expatriate participants discussed the challenges that faced due to the time constraints. Expatriate S3P2, who met the supervisor during the Ph.D. study “once a week or once in two weeks” expressed:

The most important are the time constraints and other commitments ... Time constraints and financial ... I do not have any [other concerns] because they give me everything [that] I need ... Only the time constraint, I cannot commit a lot.

Expatriate S10P4 added: “there are some classes are held during weekdays, which make it so difficult for me to attend. I need to take leave for that.”

Workshop/seminar (for part-time students). Part-time expatriate students lacked the time and the opportunities to attend the seminars/workshops to improve their soft skills and better manage their time. S3P2 expressed:

As a part-time [expatriate student], ... A little bit difficult to communicate...we do not have a chance to meet with other classmates. So, it will be good if like (e.g.) if we have monthly workshop/seminar. Sometimes, we feel that we lost our direction ... like, don't know how to proceed. Of course, when we feel that, we go and see the supervisor. But if [the university] organize[s] the workshop for the part-time [expatriate] students and especially the postgraduates, it will be good. I believe that the Institute these days has [the seminars/workshops] for the full-time

students. For the full time, it will be no problem. Only for the part-time students have the problem ... For example, regular seminars/workshops will be good.

Expatriate S10P4 replied: “[provides some training that related to] the social skills, communication skills, enthusiasm thinking, [and] critical thinking.”

Commitment. Three subthemes emerged and are presented to demonstrate how expatriate participants’ (a) goal commitment, (b) institutional standards, and (c) program commitment had impacted on their institutional commitment.

Goal commitment. All expatriate participants had their education and occupational goals in their minds, except S14P5, who seemed to decide while studying at the MoHE University. Expatriate S6P1 explained how her educational goal made her decide and motivated her to join the MoHE University: “Since I am quite getting into the business world and communication world, so he [my father] told me like to go for it [to choose the MoHE University].”

Further, S6P1 considered:

Communication at the MoHE provides lots of opportunities compared to my country since I am going to get a degree, I can analyze certain things which I was not able to do it back home. This is my educational goals, and becoming more learners and educating myself. I am educating myself because I want to stay prepared for any rough circumstances in future so that I can deal with it.

Expatriate S5P3 stated her educational goals for the moment....,

for now, I want to complete my bachelor's, then I want to get a job here, in Malaysia. Because I like Malaysia, that's my goal for now. I want to get as best grades as I can ... So that's my goal.

The Ph.D. and professional program students knew their educational goals: “I want my thesis to serve the community. I want my Ph.D. thesis to serve the community” (S3P2); “to be a professional accountant” (S10P4).

Institutional standards. Four expatriate participants discussed how institutional standards made them attract and commit to the MoHE Institution. As the [bachelor] program is a dual degree program, S6P1’s father, who supported [the European education] more than [another education system] made her decide to join the MoHE.

Expatriate S3P2 simply replied: “Because I am so familiar with the standards ... I started my degree there, masters, and the Ph.D ... ” S10P4, who desired to be an accountant replied: “I have surveyed some universities, MoHE is one of the best tuition centers providing ACCA course ... Thus, MoHE is the institution that I have chosen.”

Expatriate S5P3 discussed various reasons that made her choose and continue at the MoHE after she had surveyed a few universities, talked with her sister and few other students, and visited the university in person. Finally, S5P3 emphasized that “the quality of education [at the MoHE University] was one of the key factors that affected my decisions to attend this institution. As S5P3 commented, “Few [named] private universities are kind of torture their students to get money from them as many days as possible. The MoHE is not like that ... Unlike a few [named] private universities, the MoHE is not a money-laundering university”.

Expatriate S14P5, who had already transferred to another local private institution to pursue the bachelor in Architecture after completed the foundation program replied:

I was the only student in the ADTP course who wanted to study Architecture...

The university did not have much experience for architecture students ... So I

decided to withdraw from ADTP to avoid problems in admission in the U.S. in the future.

Program commitment. Except S14P5 was keen in a different degree program, other participants showed their full commitment to the programs they had chosen. Accordingly, they demonstrated their full commitment to the institution. As S6P1 said: “It is more based on are you liking the degree or not ...” Three participants indicated that it was more about their educational goals and a perspective career that made them commit to the program they enrolled. For example, S10P4 had a clear educational goal to be a professional accountant; and it made her commit to the professional program at the MoHE Institution.

Social integration and institutional commitment. Three subthemes emerged and are presented to reveal how participants’ social integration made them commit to the institution. They were: (a) extracurricular activities with no additional fees, (b) peer-group interactions, and (c) social integration.

Extracurricular activities with no additional fees. One expatriate participant who “preferred the extracurricular activities, such as sports and dance club” stated:

As far as I know, they [the University] take certain fund for this program. I think it should be open for everyone because we are part of such a reputable university. We are paying a lot. So, I think these extracurricular activities should be open [to] everyone instead of paying for certain extracurriculum.... [or] it sometimes discourage[s] students to go and join the clubs.

Peer-group Interactions. To better understand how peer-group interactions influenced expatriate participants’ persistence during their studies, they were asked to

share one positive and one negative experience of learning with peers. Two of them seemed to have a more negative aspect of experience with peers about the group project compared with others. For example, one expatriate participant expressed:

Learning with peers ... depends on what kind of peers do you get. I am talking about the group assignment right now, so there are some group projects when you are lucky, you get good group mates. And you really can learn from them. They will teach your stuff you do not know. Then you can teach the stuff they do not know, right? So, we help each other, and we do assignments together. If you are unlucky, then you will get the group mates who do not help at all.

Nevertheless, expatriate participant affirmed that "... learning with students [peers] from different culture is a good experience too. We get to know them, their cultural, their ideas and perspectives on different things."

Similarly, expatriate S10P4 consented that "positive of learning with peers is that you can share [with] your knowledge (other than what you have learned in the institution)." However, S10P4 considered that the negative experience of learning with peers was "they [peers] might have influenced on [her] decision-making."

Unlike others, expatriate S3P2 discussed the positive and negative learning experience from the perspectives of a full- and a part-time student:

Because especially during the degree and master time, as a full-time student, I had the classmates. We share [d] the problems, and we can [could] study together. As a part-time student like at the Ph.D., it's difficult to meet and communicate.

Because either I am not free or he or she is not free, so it is difficult to have the time to meet and to communicate.

At first, expatriate S14P5 had answered plainly: “I prefer to study alone and so have not had any major influential experiences to mention.” To better understand his background and position with this response, I asked whether he had worked any assignments or projects with his classmates during his studies. If so, I added, please give one example of each what his positive or negative experience of learning with them at the Pre-U level was. He e-mailed back with his further responses:

We hardly had any group work in Pre-U at the University. I was older than my class fellows ... I hardly made any friends in class at Pre-U as they were younger and our mindsets did not match.... Therefore, I cannot think of any meaningful experience. I mostly interacted with the teachers instead.

Social integration. Expatriate participants discussed the frequencies they had contact with their faculty, academic coordinators, counselors, or peers during their studies outside of the classrooms. Expatriate S3P2 confirmed that she had met her supervisor whenever needed: “Sometimes, we feel that we lost our direction ... like, don’t know how to proceed. Of course, when we feel that, we go and see the supervisor.”

Expatriate S5P3 responded that she had built the formal contacts with [the] lecture but had not built any informal contacts with them. S5P3 also positively responded that she had met with her academic advisor “Quite often ... Only studies....”

Further, S5P3 discussed three aspects that related to social integration with peers. First, about her experiences with one study group outside of classes, S5P3 expressed that she had not attended any social activities, but [had] taken part in the computing service, which was about teaching orphanage students ... basic Microsoft word and Microsoft excel ... [It was] just once. Next, when I asked her about any study group she had

attended outside of the classes, she was not even clear about the name of the group she attended at the beginning but said....,

I think it is something like peer-teaching during my second year, so the seniors helped me understand, you know the subjects. I just went for few classes twice, then I did not find helpful, so I just stopped going, and I started on my own. That was more productive.

Third, expatriate S5P3 confirmed that she stayed with her family which was quite far from the university. Thus, she had less time to contact with the on campus classmates; especially she needed to rush to home once the classes were over to avoid the traffic.

Expatriate S10P4, who was a part-time student, responded to the question concerning contacting faculty or academic coordinator to discuss her study progression: “Not at all.” Participant did not join any groups outside of the classes that might help improve academic progress either [much because of the time constrains].

Expatriate S14P5, who had gone through a very difficult experience, was unaware that the university provided the counseling service during his studies and stated:

The university should also invest in better counseling practices. As mentioned, I have studied here for two and a half years and never once been counseled by the university for any of my problems. In fact, I am not sure the university even has proper counselors.

Then, I asked the participant a few additional questions for clarifications. One of them was if he was aware of the counseling services department and had approached before the counselor. Expatriate participant replied:

I missed out on many opportunities due to my attitude towards school. I believe many others would too. I believe if the coordinators or counselors would themselves call students once a month or so to have small meetings with students just to ask about their lives and try to have the students open to them, this would benefit the students a lot. I know it would have benefitted me in many ways.

Some [expatriate] students don't see advantages for themselves in interacting with these personal much, and some are shy, afraid (or other reasons), but I believe all students can benefit from this, even if they don't realize. If the university is capable of such practices, they would greatly improve their students.

In summary, the findings had four indications concerning the interactions within the university environment. First, six factors positively impacted on expatriate participants' attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. They were: (a) faculty behavior, (b) high university CGPA, (c) goal commitment, (d) institutional standards, (e) program commitment, and (f) positive peer-group interactions. Second, expatriate participants from undergraduate programs consistently sought the opportunities to seek the advice from the faculty even outside of the class hours while others from the foundation program, professional, and graduate programs did not do so. Third, the part-time expatriate students had time constraints to connect with their academic coordinator, faculty, and peers. Finally, no participants stayed on campus accommodation.

To help future expatriate students persist better at a private Malaysian institution, participants gave three suggestions. First, the part-time expatriate participants suggested the University providing monthly seminars/workshops during the weekends to improve their soft skills and better manage time. The professional expatriate student also

suggested the University giving more flexible timetable in attending lecture classes or facilitating the e-learning opportunity to help them balance the working schedules.

Second, one expatriate participant suggested the University providing extracurricular activities and club facilities without additional fees. Third, one expatriate participant suggested that the counselors and academic coordinators regularly contact and counsel the expatriate students about their academic matters and personal concerns to help them settle down smoothly in a new environment and persist at the University.

Research Question 3: How does the institutional characteristic influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?

Two themes emerged and are presented below. They were: (a) college quality, and (b) institutional type.

College quality. Five subthemes are presented to illustrate whether and in which areas that expatriate participants considered there were needed to improve to help them and future expatriate students to persist and graduate from the MoHE institution. These were: (a) class and institution size, (b) English language, (c) lack course coordination, (d) teaching method, and (e) warning system.

Class size. Expatriate participants discussed their preferences for the class size. Expatriate S6P1 stated: “I think the smaller, it's better ... our lecture[s] are quite bigger. There are around 40, 42-46 students ... In the business school ... It's about 200 [students] ... I used to select the tutorial that only has few students in it ... I did understand [better].” Similarly, expatriate S10P4 pointed out “The size of the class is too big (more

than hundreds in class). It makes it very difficult to a student to have two-way communication with the lecturer when they have anything that they don't understand.”

Expatriate S3P2 shared: “[I prefer the] medium [size] ... average size 20-30. [If it is small, like a few, it's] too boring. Too big is not to concentrate.” According to expatriate S14P5, “.... the class size does not matter for me”.

English language. One expatriate participant mentioned the using of “Malay-English” by the lecturers which made the understanding difficult.

I had a Malaysian (Tamil) lady as my English teacher, and her English was great. However, I cannot say that for my other (non-English) Malaysian teachers ... I think this may be due to the “Malay-English” that is practice in this part of the world. Most of my Malaysian teachers are unable to differentiate between the Malay-English and British English and tend to use it in class as well as on paper. This causes problems for the international students [expatriate students like the participant] as they at times don't understand what the teachers are trying to convey, thus leading towards confusion. The biggest problem due to this is caused when students are in the examination halls. I faced this problem multiple times, as at times I failed to understand the requirements of the questions correctly. Many times, the Malaysian teachers use incorrect grammar which results in me losing precious marks. I believe this should not be acceptable.

Lack course coordination. There was a lack the course coordination, and it seemed no individual study plan for tracking students' progress and program completion. Two expatriate participants shared their negative experience which was coincidentally happened in their last semester before their graduation. One of them even faced the

critical situation that occurred in the last month of the semester that almost made the participant unable to graduate on time.

Expatriate participant discussed in a “serious” way:

OK, the first thing which needs to be corrected is the coordination between the lectures because some lectures assumed that the previous lectures have like taught you, so there should be some coordination between the lectures, so they would know what should expect from the previous semester students ...

To make it clear, expatriate S5P3 gave an example...,

Right now, I am taking Distribution System, right? My Distribution System required me to have a basic knowledge about Data Communication - a year-two elective. My Distribution System teacher, he assumed that our previous lecture taught us about the Data Communication. This is where the problem arose because my new lecture assumed that [these students] we’ve already known about the Data Communication. But we do not know any single thing. So, this problem would have been overcome if my new lecturer was in touch with my old lecturer and they communicated about the things we have learned to be addressed.

It was not clear how this could happen at the beginning, expatriate S5P3 gave a further explanation: “It’s the prerequisite.” When I asked another question concerning the syllabus and study plan, participant added:

The program handbook [syllabus] which we were given is only mentioned the prerequisite to [the] Distribution System is Computer Network, which we have already done. When I took the class, ...the lecturer told us Data Communication is also the prerequisite. But Data Communication is not a compulsory subject to

the Computer Science students. However, Distribute System is a compulsory subject for the Computer Science students. So, it is all messed up....

Later, I asked S5P3 if they were still in this situation, the participant responded: Yes, we [were] still in the same situation and nothing has been done about it, the students are supposed to do self-study for subjects...to learn things on their own, the university will not take responsibility [for] it. All the new [current] lecturers can do is to teach some basic, the rest is up to us to study.

In the beginning, expatriate S14P5 had not shared any example about the positive and negative learning experience with faculty. Expatriate participant simply wrote: “I have not had a major negative experience with my teachers.” Then, I asked him a follow-up question to recall and provide an example of positive learning experience with faculty “apart from they have been helpful and nice.” Instead, S14P5 shared the worst situation that closed to his graduation months ago:

To graduate from CIMP, you [students] are required to pass seven subjects. I passed three in the first semester and had four in the second semester. However, two of my subjects (ENG4C and ENG4U) are considered as one subject only. That meant that I only had six subjects. I was unaware of this until the final month of the second semester. This meant that I could not graduate CIMP until I had seven subjects, and for that, I had to take another semester.

Expatriate S14P5 continuously wrote:

This was a very bad time for me.... I couldn't digest the fact of taking the 3rd semester. I was very angry and very sad ... Luckily, I had a chance. I was told that if I were to complete one subject from an “online virtual school” in two weeks,

the school would allow me to graduate ... Completing a 4-month course in two weeks... in the middle of the final exams of the other four subjects [it] was next to impossible. I was also told that I was to get no help from the university or the teachers to pass this subject.... Against all the odds, I not only managed to pass the subject, but I scored an “A”.

Teaching method. Four expatriate participants shared their concerns with examples or gave suggestions about the areas that need to improve to enhance student’s learning, and consequently, their persistence. Expatriate S6P1 compared the teaching methods with two subjects: one was about a lengthy lecture which made her feel pressured; another was about sort of debates during the tutorial which led her learning. Expatriate S6P1 explained:

For teaching methods, there are two subjects. It like one subject is like the lecture is too lengthy, it takes really (really) long time to end ... even today we had the lecture and the exams after 2 weeks ... and we just ended our lecture, a final lecture today, and the lecture is like continuous. So, I felt pressured at that time. The stress level is also increased...

Then, S6P1 discussed how she had learned during one of the tutorials:

Ah, like, during the tutorials, especially we are a team during the tutorial. When we have sort of debates in the class, like, a person speaks about his opinion, while others opposed it; then we gave our opposing idea about it. Then we learn more. That was one of the best ways we learn lots of the chapters during the tutorials....

Afterward, S6P1 discussed another subject which seemed not organized:

And for another class, lectures were ok, but the tutorials were like never like the tutorials. It's like every Wednesday we have this tutorial presentation. Two pairs will present, and it consists ... something like 5-10% it was continuous. At the end of the time, like for the last 2 weeks, I did not go for these tutorials, because someone else is presenting, then why should I go? So, in a way, I was skipping the class, just for tutorials for the whole semester I felt that it was not organized the tutorials properly for this subject.

Before the end of the discussion about the teaching method, S6P1 reconfirmed that "Yeah, it's like we have a discussion; and we do our research. That is easier to understand like we are getting better prepared than we do in the lecture".

S5P3 compared those lecturers who were good for delivery and who were not:

Like, I defined "good" in regards of ... they put certain points in slides, in the presentation slides, then when they are explaining and gave examples during the presentation, so the students can easily understand.

On the contrary, expatriate S5P3 continuously shared:

While [some] other lectures assumed that we know everything, they do not explain. When we tend to ask them what does this mean, they made even more complicated. Like easy explanation of the things, easy delivering and more practical, then will be better ... IT is a more practical thing because what they are teaching us is more theory than practical.

When talked about the areas that are essential to improve to help better students persist and graduate at this university, as an IT student, expatriate S5P3 expressed:

I think rather than give students more theoretical stuff; they should make students do more practical things, more kind of things which we will do in our practical life ... So what we need to do, we need to learn, or what we need to practice is more about the practical work. How to work in the practical life?

As a professional expatriate student, S10P4 suggested: “to involve more two-way communication between students and lecturers; and to have more interactive activities where can enhance the relationship between lecturer and students, such as some mini games that contribute one or two marks in carrying marks.”

Warning system. All five expatriate participants shared different viewpoints about the warning system, except S6P1, S3P2, and S14P5 seemed to link the warning system with the international students’ visa issues, but they were not so clear. For example, expatriate S3P2 replied:

I think it all depends on the individuals and the lecturers. Some I think are ok, but some will be penalized like no attendance will be given, you know, after late for 15-minute ... And the warning system, I think it would be only for the international students, they need to renew the visa ... Because to renew the visa, they need to meet 75% or more for the attendance; else immigration won’t allow you [the student] to renew [the] student’s visa ... If they cannot renew the visa, they will have to stop, leave the classes, and leave the country.

One expatriate participant shared an example that concerning the warning system which made him and his friends (who were like him as expatriate students) scare. He considered “the practice of “scaring” as “a disturbing tactic to try to keep the students in

line.” Expatriate participant also believed: “This is a very unhealthy way to deal with students, especially the international students [expatriate students like participant].

To better explain, S14P5 wrote what had happened recently to one of the friends: He was unable to wake up in time for his midterm exam. When he woke up, he found a text message from the coordinator of his course on his mobile phone. The message read, “You have been eliminated from the course as you did not manage to show up for the exam. It is advised that you may leave back for your home country as soon as possible and would have your student visa canceled.”

However, upon further inquiry, his friend found out that the coordinator was only bluffing and this message was meant to scare him to come for classes. Expatriate S14P5 considered there were the negative impacts and the consequences which might bring to those expatriate students:

Such practices cause a heavy deal of stress upon the students, and many fail to cope with it. International students [expatriate student like S14P5] are living far away from their homeland, and many tend to feel quite lonely. This may also cause them to build up hate for their institution and lead to big problems.

Nevertheless, the initial response from expatriate S14P5 concurred with S10P4 that the positive practice of the warning system. As expatriate S10P4 stated: “It is good to enhance students in [the] aspect of self-discipline and get ready [for] themselves in [the] final exam to access their understanding on current learning progress.”

Institutional type. When asked about how important the institutional characteristics were for participants when they were considering enrollment at the MoHE

Institution, none of five expatriate participants did mind the type of the institution. For instance, S6P1 expressed:

I do not mind whether is public or private as long as the environment is really (really) good, that what I am experiencing at the MoHE University. It's more about the quality of the education and quality of the work ... It all depends on the quality how the education is given. So it [is] not [the] matters whether is public or private. It is all about the quality of the education.

In summary, the institutional characteristics perceived as influencing expatriate students' attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution were class size (for professional program students and undergraduates), English language (using the standard English language for all the course work in the foundation program), lack course coordination, teaching method, and the warning system. Further, the findings indicated that no expatriate participants did mind the institution type they had chosen and decided to enroll. Instead, they paid much attention on the factors such as the environment (S6P1, S3P2), the institutional support (S3P2), the quality of education (mentioned twice) and the quality of work (S6P1), [as long as] the education is good (S3P2, S5P3), and the teaching quality (S10P4).

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of the project study was to study students' perspectives on factors that influence their persistence at the local institution. The final analysis will follow the guiding question: "What were the students' (from expatriate families) perceptions about attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?" The findings were also organized by research questions, which concerned about the individual characteristics of

students from expatriate families, the interactions within the institutional environment, and the institutional characteristic impacted their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution respectively.

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

This question examined the perceptions of students from expatriate families about the individual characteristics that influenced their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. Three themes emerged have answered this research question that either fully supported Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework or to some extent: (a) supporting group of parents and relatives, (b) language ability, and (c) past educational experiences (high school grades). Two themes were discovered and generated which reflected *Malaysia as a destination for higher education* and *MoHE as an institution*. Expatriate participants highly valued that academic reputation (Migin et al., 2015) and institutional reputation (Jalali et al., 2011) positively impacted their decisions when they chose a private Malaysian institution.

Supporting group. The results have confirmed previous findings in the literature in the US university setting and elsewhere that the family had played a key role throughout students' higher education studies (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 2005; Tinto, 2006; Westbrook & Scott, 2012; Zeeshan et al., 2013), especially Asian students (Misran et al. 2012). The findings also confirmed previous findings done by researchers (Aswad et al., 2011; Tinto, 1975) that the attributes such as the interest and expectations from parents had a heavy impact on expatriate students' higher education experience. However, the

current study findings disconfirmed other researchers like Misran et al. (2012) and Tinto (1975) that the friends and peers had many influences on expatriate students' commitment to persist at the institution. Besides, unlike in the US setting where had the high school counselors, no connections could be found concerning their influences on those expatriate students' attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution.

Language ability. The findings revealed that expatriate participants did not have any difficulty due to English were not their first language. All of them were aware of the importance of the English language skills, which are used to studying in an international environment. Rather, they had already developed a certain level of English skills before they attended the undergraduate or professional programs. Expatriate participants pointed out the importance of the high level of English skills could help them understand better the subjects in the classroom where using English as an instruction, make progress of their studies, and persist at a private Malaysian institution.

Past education experience (high school grades). The findings from the expatriate participants disconfirmed the conclusions by Tinto (1975) about their high school characteristics were essential in the US setting because they had a direct impact on students' aspirations, expectation, and motivation for higher education. There were no connections about their aspirations and motivations of their high schools' grades with their higher education studies. Rather, I discovered that expatriate participants only considered the high school grades made them accepted easily and applied for the scholarship by the university in the Malaysian setting. The findings revealed that the higher the high school grades, the higher chance to be accepted and to obtain a scholarship to persist at a private Malaysian institution.

Malaysia as a destination for higher education. Findings supported previous studies conducted on international students in the Malaysian setting. For example, students from expatriate families also considered that the affordability of the high education in Malaysia was much lower than in other developed countries (Benjamin, Marathamuthu, Muthaiyah, & Raman, 2011; Chapman & Chien, 2015; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Education Malaysia Global Services, 2015; Migin et al., 2015).

The current study also found that expatriate students had considered as the advantages of living in a multicultural setting and being convenient to study in Malaysia, where was not far from the home country (Migin et al., 2015) but provided with the high education standards. Additionally, the findings concerned part-time work opportunity discussed by the participants disconfirmed the same factor revealed by Cheng, Mahmood, and Yeap (2013), which was insignificant. Rather, expatriate participants wished the country officials allowed them to work like in other developed countries and the institution assisted them to apply for the part-time work opportunities to earn pocket money and gain practical experience.

MoHE as an institution. Expatriate participants underlined a few other factors which made them decide to attend and persist at a private Malaysian institution but were not mentioned in other studies. (a) Flexibility with the visa. Two expatriate participants highlighted the easiness of acceptance with no additional expenses as of visa concerns made them decide to (re) attend the university. (b) Scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students. The undergraduate and graduate students positively discussed that there were many opportunities with high chances to apply for the scholarships to help them attend and persist at the university with less financial burdens. (c) Supportive

environment. The undergraduate and graduate expatriate students repeatedly mentioned that the helpful and supportive administrative personals and faculty made them feel like the people, feel at home, and enjoy. Thus, they were eager to attend and persist at the University. One of them even completed her bachelor and masters degrees and had been enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University for a few years. (d) The university degree versus a good career prospect. Undergraduates highly valued the dual degree certificates and a degree with the honor they would receive upon graduation, which would help them secure a good job in a corporate organization they desired. Findings confirmed Migin et al. (2015) in the local literature. That is, expatriate students believed that when they enroll at a reputable institution (with their high university CGPA); they are guaranteed with a well-paid job opportunity in their specialization upon graduation.

Research Question 2: What are the interactions within the university environment that influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?

This question examined the perceptions of students from expatriate families about the interactions within the university environment that influenced their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. Three themes emerged to answer this research question that either wholly or partially confirmed Tinto's (1975) framework. They were: (a) academic integration, (b) commitment, and (c) social integration and institutional commitment.

Academic integration. Two subthemes extracted in the Malaysian setting confirmed Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework in the US setting: (a) faculty behavior, and (b) high university CGPA. Another two subthemes: "time constraints for part-time

students” and “workshop/seminar (for part-time students)” also confirmed the findings in Tinto’s (1993) concerning the retention strategies for adult students.

First, the findings from the undergraduate and graduate expatriate students confirmed previous studies (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tinto, 2012a) that they built an official connection and met either their advisors/supervisors or faculty regularly both inside and outside of the classrooms about the academic matters or the future career-related matter. Concurrent with other findings (Govender et al., 2014; Jalali et al., 2011, Tinto, 1975), expatriate participants said that helpful, knowledgeable, and supportive faculty/supervisor for any academic matters had a positive impact on their persistence.

Second, like studies conducted on international students (Bean, 1980, Tinto, 1975) in the American university setting; this study indicated that high university CGPA was also important to expatriate students’ persistence at a private Malaysian institution. The consideration from the father of the Pre-U expatriate concurred with the previous findings (Rienties et al., 2012; Rienties et al., 2014), that is, students were encouraged to pursue the higher education studies outside of the home country to expose to diverse cultures and social activities, to value the differences, and to enrich the life experiences.

Commitment. Two subthemes (goal commitment and program commitment) which were extracted fully confirmed Tinto’s (1975) conceptual framework. “Institutional standards” was the third subtheme, compared by the expatriate participants with two criteria: (a) between other local institutions and the University itself, and (b) the education system offered by the University’s academic partner institution in Europe versus another education system in one international branch campus in Malaysia. Similar to Migin et al. (2015), this study found that academic reputation positively and

significantly influenced expatriate participants' decisions to select and attend the private university in Malaysia.

First, all expatriate participants had clear educational and career goals in their mind, and they committed to fulfilling their goals. Despite the geographic location difference, the findings confirmed Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework that expatriate participants who had clear goal commitment determined their completion of the program and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. The findings also confirmed that the higher the expectations and the stronger goal commitment they had, the better chance for them to persist and complete the program on time.

Social integration and institutional commitment. Two subthemes "social integration" and "peer-group integration" did not confirm or partially confirmed Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework respectively. The third subtheme "extracurricular activities with no additional fees" was a newly identified theme that aimed to encourage expatriate students to join the sports and dance clubs during their university life.

Extracurricular activities with no additional fees. The findings from the only expatriate participant concurred with the previous studies (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Dahari & Abduh, 2011, Tinto, 1975) in both the US and the Malaysian setting that expatriate student preferred facility for entertaining and exercise. Further, the participant suggested the university providing the facilities with no extra fees to encourage expatriate students' attendance and to enrich the learning experience during the university studies. Apart from that, the only expatriate graduate student who considered the lab equipment were important for her Ph.D. study to do the experiential tests. Other findings did not confirm that "facilities are the important factor when students decide to attend the university," as

other authors concluded (Baharun et al., 2011; Dahari & Abduh, 2011; Jalali et al., 2011; Migin et al., 2015).

Peer-group integration. Only the positive side of “peer-group integration” confirmed Tinto’s (1975) conceptual framework. Expatriate participants discussed various negative aspects of the peer-group integration from the perspective of a full-time student versus a part-time student (S3P2). For instance, the negative learning experience with peers when were required to carry out a group project (S6P1, S5P3), and the possible negative influence from the peer when participants made a decision (S10P4).

Social integration. Concerning joining the study group or building social contact with faculty outside of the class hours, the findings did not confirm Tinto’s (1975) conceptual framework nor the conclusions or suggestions from Mamiseishvili (2012). Expatriate participants from undergraduate, graduate, professional and Pre-U programs did not show much willingness nor had time to join the study group or socially keep in touch with faculty after the classes. No social contacts were engaged with faculty /supervisors or coordinators discussed by participants, except one participant preferred to join the sports and dance clubs to do the extracurriculum activities.

As none of them stayed on campus accommodation, they were less likely to have time to engage the outside of the classroom activities to discuss course content that impacts the retention, which contrary to what DeAngeo concluded (2014, p. 63). Hence, expatriate students are encouraged to seek opportunities regularly to join the social and culture activities to build the connections with their faculty/supervisor, academic coordinators, and peers to building social integration.

The findings concerning the counseling service discussed by the expatriate participant confirmed that “students were unaware of the support services offered by the university.... the least-known support service was counseling.” (Harris, Campbell Casey, Westbury, & Florida-James, 2016) The findings also confirmed with Harris et al. that “accessing support was an indication of more severe problems and ... perhaps be too ashamed to admit accessing help and that they would worry about how staff and their peers would view them on the admission of struggling. Thus, expatriate students are advised and encouraged to seek counseling help for their personal and academic well-being whenever needs. The findings also indicated that there is a potential need to educate the expatriate students to seek support when they confront difficult situation to smooth and enrich their university studies and improve their retention.

However, the findings confirmed the conclusions by Mamiseishvili (2012), which indicated that expatriate students who enrolled four-year undergraduate program and graduate program focused more on academic integration than social integration. Consequently, they showed enthusiastic at their studies, committed to finishing the program, and persisted at a private Malaysian institution.

Research Question 3: *How does the institutional characteristic influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

This question examined the perceptions of students from expatriate families about the institutional characteristics that influenced their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution. The themes/subthemes were emerged to answer this research question: college quality and institutional type either wholly or partially

confirmed Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework or the previous findings in the Malaysian setting: (a) class and institutional size, (b) English language, (c) teaching method, (d) warning system, and (e) institutional type. *Lack coordination* was a newly identified subtheme by participants.

College quality. The findings from this study either fully, partly, or did not confirm the literature either from Tinto (1975) or related to the Malaysian context or both. First, although no participants showed dissatisfaction when their class sizes were bigger than before (Jalali et al., 2011), S6P1 preferred the small classes by "selecting the tutorial that only has few students." The part-time professional student S10P4 considered it was a negative experience as she found the difficulties to have a two-way communication with the lecturer. Nevertheless, participants preferred to attend the small or medium-size of the class with the average of 20-30 students or less.

Second, the findings from participants confirmed with Tinto (1975) that academic staffs played a key role in their attendance and persistence at the private Malaysian institution. Participants discussed few elements of academic staff (Baharun et al., 2011) and considered there were rooms for improvement. For example, as of lacking the course coordination, two participants shared the critical experience in the last semester (or even the last month of the semester) of the program that almost made them unable to complete the program and graduate on time.

Two participants also pointed out the teaching methods for a few subjects that could be improved to help them better understand and persist at the University. The finding has confirmed the previous study done in the Malaysia context about the international students by Slethaug and Manjula (2012). Like those international students

who came from a diverse culture and educational background, participants shared their opinions by using the open discussion and class debates (p.5) to engage them and to enrich their learning experience.

The findings confirmed with Tinto (1975) and affirmed that it was positive to practice the warning system to keep students in track and train their self-discipline. However, one participant reported that the approach and the tone used for warning by the coordinator were not appropriate. It is considered as “a disturbing tactic to try to keep the students in line,” which “is a very unhealthy way to deal with students, especially [for] international students [expatriate students like him].”

The findings concerning the English language from the expatriate students’ perspective concurred with the conclusions from various researchers (Slethaug & Manjula, 2012, Yee & Mokhtar, 2013) about the international students in the local setting. That is, “some lecturers speak English with Malay accent also impose a difficulty in their learning” in the Malaysia setting.

Institution type. Results indicated that expatriate students had proved that their English language results and high school grades to the private institution admission officer as part of the selection criteria for the University’s consideration of their admission. The practices at this private institution had concurred with Tinto (1975) that the selection process took place before the entry, which normally led lower dropout rates than in the public institution. In the meantime, participants did not mind about the institution type they attended. Instead, they paid much attention to the factors such as quality of education, quality of the lecturers, supportive environment, and atmosphere, which were more important than the institution type.

Project

Based on the findings of this study, ten themes emerged that related to attending and persisting at a private Malaysian university. Among them, five themes concerned the individual characteristics perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. Theme 1 revealed that participants considered that *Malaysia as a destination for higher education*. The subthemes were (a) advantages of living in the multi-culture setting, (b) affordability, (c) convenience, (d) education standards, and (e) part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students).

Theme 2 revealed that participants highly valued *MoHE as an institution* for their higher education studies. The subthemes were (a) flexibility with the visa, (b) scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students, (c) supportive environment, and (d) university degree versus a good career prospect.

Theme 3 revealed that *supporting group* was one of the key factors that influenced their decisions to attend and persist at a private Malaysia institution. The subthemes included (a) parents and relatives, (b) high school counselors, and (c) friends and peers. However, only parents and relatives had much impact on their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution.

Theme 4, *English language*, identified by the participants as an important factor in various ways during the higher education studies. Theme 5, *past educational experiences (high school grades)*, considered by the participants as an important factor for admission to the undergraduate program and obtaining a scholarship at a private Malaysian institution. However, the high school grades did not apply for those graduate or professional students. No subthemes were revealed under the fourth and fifth theme.

Next, three themes demonstrated how interactions among peers and faculty within the institutions and social and academic integration had impacted expatriate students' persistence at a private Malaysian institution. Theme 6 *academic integration* explained how participants had integrated academically and what the activities were needed or services were improved to help the future students to be more academic integrated. The subthemes included (a) faculty behavior, (b) high university CGPA, (c) workshop /seminar (for part-time students), and (d) time constraints for part-time students.

Theme 7 *commitment* demonstrated participants' commitments to their personal goals, the programs they chose, and the institutional standards strongly impacted on their institutional commitment. The subthemes included (a) goal commitment, (b) institutional standards, and (c) program commitment.

Theme 8 *social integration and institutional commitment* explained how participants' social integration with their peers and faculty made them commit to the institution. The subthemes included (a) extracurricular activities with no additional fees, (b) peer-group interactions, and (c) social integration.

Finally, theme 9 *college quality* and theme 10 *institutional type* emerged to demonstrate how the institutional characteristic had influenced students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution. The subthemes under the theme 9 were (a) class and institution size, (b) English language, (c) lack of course coordination, (d) teaching method, and (e) warning system. No subthemes were identified under the tenth theme.

Based on the analysis, I concluded that a project in the form of white paper can be a best way to convey the findings and provide recommendations to various stakeholders

at the study site. According to Stelzner (2007, p. 9), “white papers can educate readers on an organization’s value proposition in a soft-sell manner.... and they may spread across the organization quickly.... to help people make decisions”. Therefore, a white paper, which “argues a specific position or solution to a problem” (Sakamuro, Stolley, & Hyde, 2015, p. 1; Stelzner, 2010, p.1) is the most appropriate project based upon the expatriate participants’ responses. The white paper consists of a concise, informative outline of the project study which includes the methodology, data analysis, and the findings and results from the data analysis. Further, the white paper includes a detailed project description, its timeframe, and the suggested recommendations for the implementation of the project.

For this study, an outline of the key factors found in the study that impacted either positively or negatively on expatriate students’ attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution is provided in the white paper. The white paper proposes recommendations to the stakeholders at the study site on how to increase expatriate students’ attendance and persistence by amending the practices, developing strategies, or adding a policy. I will also highlight the points that need to bring the administrators attention to amending the practices concerning the Pre-U, undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional expatriate students.

Summary

In Section 2, I introduced the qualitative research design and approach, justified the rationale for the design, and provided details about the setting and sample as well as ethical consideration of participants. I also discussed data collection and management procedures, analyzed data, and explained the role of the researcher. In this section, the

results and interpretation of the findings were also described, and the project was proposed. In Section 3 a detailed description of the project is provided.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The private Malaysian university showed low graduation rates and had not especially investigated the perceptions of expatriate students about attending and persisting in completing their programs. Based on individual and follow-up individual interviews with the same participants, this study investigated expatriate students' perceptions of key factors impacting attendance and persistence at the MoHE institution. In total, 10 themes were revealed: *Malaysia as a destination for higher education; MoHE as an institution; supporting group; language ability; past educational experiences (high school grades); academic integration; commitment; social integration and institutional commitment; college quality; and institutional type*. From the participants' perspective, each theme has its new strategies that linked with the theme for increasing future expatriate students' attendance and persistence at the university.

A white paper would benefit various stakeholders at the MoHE University by providing them with insights about the factors that impacted participants who were expatriate students and graduates' attendance and persistence at the university. The white paper consists of introduction, the problem, the methodology (criteria for participation, data collection, and data analysis), a summary of the research findings, recommendations, conclusion, references, and figures.

The goals of this project were to (a) provide an overview of perceptions of expatriate students about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the university and inform the results of the study to various relevant stakeholders at the study site; (b) recommend a 4Ps framework (*profile, progress, process, and promise*) of

retention strategies influenced by the expatriate students; and (c) encourage the intended audiences to reexamine and amend the current practices to incorporate the needs, perceptions, and viewpoints of expatriate students.

Rationale

The data gathered from the individual and follow-up individual interviews with the same participants developed the student retention strategies as the institution-wide initiatives to reexamine and amend the practices. As discussed in Section 1, the MoHE University had not especially investigated the perceptions of expatriate students about key factors impacting their attendance, persistence, and degree completion. As of a small fraction of the total numbers of students, there was a lack of strategy to support their progression and degree-completion at the MoHE University. A white paper would inform the university administrators, faculty, and professional staffs about the strategies to increase expatriate students' attendance, persistence, and graduation rates as well as enhance their learning experience.

A white paper underlines key findings and their implications for practice to an identified audience (Creswell, 2012). It can be a persuasive and succinct document that bring the decision makers' high attention and lead them to take an appropriate action. Explicitly, white papers are an effective format to present a position or a solution to problems in a clear and concise manner (Sakamuro et al., 2015) to target specific audiences who are the decision makers or who can influence decision-making personals in the organizations.

A white paper was chosen to engage the stakeholders and share with them the research findings and recommendations. The study investigated the perceptions of

expatriate students and revealed ten key factors that influenced their attendance and persistence at the study site. However, the focus of the study did not look at any instructional strategies or operational aspects of practices such as academic advising, counseling, or financial aid. Accordingly, through this white paper I will present the findings and recommendations in order to assist administrators who are concerned with students' experience to take action to reshape the experience of future expatriate students and increase their attendance, persistence, and graduation rates.

Further, the university administrators may understand expatriate students' perceptions of attendance and persistence in higher education. Using a white paper to present the findings and recommendations also offers an opportunity to address the necessary authorities to make the needed changes and to ensure the implementation. The implementations may increase the future attendance, persistence, and graduation rates of expatriate students. Besides, the white paper may serve to inform other private Malaysian universities' administrators on a national level about expatriate students' perceptions of attendance and persistence in higher education.

The project includes 10 themes that revealed by data collection and analysis: *Malaysia as a destination for higher education; MoHE as an institution; supporting group; language ability; past educational experiences (high school grades); academic integration; commitment; social integration and institutional commitment; college quality; and institutional type.* The MoHE University is a well-reputable university in Malaysia and these retention strategies are aimed to promote expatriate students' future persistence and graduation rates and foster their learning experience to be the future industry leaders in Malaysia, their home country of origin, or elsewhere internationally.

A literature review was conducted to guide the development of the project concerning the suggested retention strategies.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature explains that the genre is appropriate to use the white paper format to present the research findings and recommendations to the targeted audience for this project. The review also explores the retention strategies to increase future retention and graduation rates of expatriate students at the study site. I accessed various databases through the Walden University library for the review of the literature, such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest, and Sage Premier.

I also searched Google Scholar for peer-reviewed articles between 2012 and 2017. The key words and phrases included *academic advising, admission, adult students, brand loyalty and promise, collaborative learning, counseling, dual degree, educational evaluation, first-year seminars and experiences, high-impacted activities, international English, Malaysia, merit or performance-based scholarship, part-time (or commuter) students, peer learning or peer-assisted learning, position papers, retention strategies, student-centered/learning-oriented learning style, white papers (in education), and writing effective white papers.*

The White Paper Genre

A white paper used to be an official government report (Sakamuro et al., 2015) and a business document (Hyde, 2017). According to Hyde (2017), the white paper is designed purposefully to “convey policy, present technical information, or propose a problem and solution.” (Slide 2). The white paper also aims to advocate that a certain position is the best way or a solution is best for solving a typical problem with two

unique characteristics, according to Sakamuro et al. (2015). First, it is distinctive regarding audience, purpose, and organization (Sakamuro et al., 2015). Second, it is authoritative and informative in nature (Sakamuro et al., 2015). Hence, to define the purpose and be specific about the scope are the keys for writing a concise white paper. To persuade the intended audience, the writers need to focus on their needs and address the problems they want to solve. Besides, Hyde highlighted that the writers should think about how they expect the audience to use their white paper. Thus, the white paper is an appropriate format to share the information concisely for this project.

To better present white papers and gain the attention from the busy decision makers, a few guidelines on organizing a white paper should be considered. For example, it should include an introduction that comprises identification of the issue and statement of the position, a body that includes background information, supporting evidence, and a discussion of the issue from both sides, and a conclusion that contains suggested actions and possible solutions (Xavier University Library, 2014). Hyde (2017) considered that a white paper should include three elements: front matter elements, main elements, and back matter elements. In addition, Hyde suggested that the white paper should be written in an objective and truthful way. In other words, it should include accurate and relevant information that derived from the research without biased or noncredible sources (Hyde, 2017).

There are various ways to market white papers. The role of the telemarketing acting as part of the distributing strategy is equally important to the content (Juhl, 2016). Juhl (2016) also discussed the effectiveness of the combination of white paper distribution channels: e-mail newsletters, social media, paid search, sharing, and telemarketing.

Similarly, Mosenson (2016) suggested a few other approaches to promote white paper such as website, industry association, online news release, and webinars and SlideShare. Further, Blue Telemarketing Valley ([BTV],2016) commented that the preferred content format and the most strategic approach to target the audience and share the information is the white paper, especially when the information contains text with images. BTV also revealed that almost 60% of the participants from their study preferred to receive the white paper in a digital format and read it on screen. Plus, the study also revealed that the white papers that include web links and videos easily attract the audience's attention (BTV, 2016). Thus, it was necessary to find an effective marketing way to present this white paper to the stakeholders to capture their attention and influence their decisions.

Like other white papers for the marketing purposes, this project is comprised of a title, abstract, introduction, the problem, the methodology, conclusion, and references following the standard and template described by Gerard (2016), Sakamuro et al. (2015), and Xavier University Library (2014). Upon obtaining the final approval from Walden, I will send this white paper to the administrators who will e-mail to all other internal stakeholders.

The above explained what white paper is and its structure. Below I will include a review of literature that shows recommendations in the white paper. Then, I will refer to the findings. The purpose of a white paper is to advocate for a certain solution that is best for solving the problem (Sakamuro et al., 2015). When it is used for the commercial purposes, it could influence the key decision makers' thinking and potentially alter the processes for the benefit of current and prospective customers (Sakamuro et. al., 2015). Educational researchers use white papers to make recommendations and publish in the

educational websites such as Education Week Research Advisor website or journal articles. As I have made recommendations about the retention strategies, the white paper is an ideal format to present the recommendations to the key decision-makers.

A 4Ps Framework for Student Retention Strategies

Based on the study findings discussed on Section 2, it is necessary to reexamine and amend the practices in a cohesive way and explore additional strategies to improve attendance and persistence of expatriate students at the MoHE University. The results provided a platform for various stakeholders to facilitate the discussions collaboratively and constructively to identify and implement the strategies to increase the future expatriate students' attendance, persistence, and graduation rates.

For this project, I considered that “a 4Ps framework for student retention strategies” (Kalsbeek, 2013a, p. 5; Kalsbeek, 2013c, p. 101) might help the MoHE University reexamine and amend the practices, guide their decision-making process, and encourage the implementation of my recommendations. The framework that focuses on *profile, progress, process, and promise* (Cortes, 2013; Kalsbeek, 2013b; Kalsbeek & Zucker, 2013; Kuh, 2013; Schroeder, 2013a; Schroeder, 2013b; Spittle, 2013) may guide the administrators at the study site to reexamine their practices from a holistic view to increase the student retention and graduation rates. I will discuss this framework in the following paragraphs.

Profile. The analysis indicated that four key factors that linked with admission had attracted expatriate participants to study at the MoHE University. With a profile-oriented retention strategy (Cortes, 2013), it is recognized that the changes in the admission policies and priorities shape the overall student profile (Cortes & Kalsbeek,

2012; Spittle, 2013; Wood, Gray-Ganter, & Bailey, 2016). Both institutional and student profiles marked “the first step in gaining institutional traction in retention strategy” and they primarily influenced the institution’s retention and completion rates (Kalsbeek & Zucker, 2013, p. 15). Kalsbeek and Zucker (2013) also underlined that retention and completion rates “are determined and defined in underlying ways through market position” and institutional retention efforts should begin with the institutional profile and market position (p. 15). Besides, based on the data analysis, this study included a country-specific profile. In conclusion, the institution should focus on market-centered retention effort and the external market factors as the necessary context for enrollment and retention planning.

Institutional profile. The most convincing evidence that impacted tuition fees suggested that students who received greater grant aid or scholarship were more likely to enroll and persist in college (Barrow, Richburg-Hayes, Rouse, & Brock, 2014, p. 565). Barrow et al. (2014) also concluded, “a merit scholarship combined with performance incentives tied to grades and credits earned” (p.565). Similarly, Binder, Krause, Miller, and Cerna (2015) found that the generous financial aid or performance-based scholarship impacted the college enrollment and retention in early academic semesters. The current findings revealed that expatriate participants underlined a few institution-specific factors that had attracted them to attend and persist at the MoHE institution. Thus, admission counselors and marketing personals may continuously promote scholarship opportunities to attract the future expatriate students and their supporting group and to retain them.

Tucciarone (2014) concluded that students aimed to earn a college degree can secure a well-deserved career with earning potential. Similarly, Tucciarone suggested that

an internship to promote the future careers was another essential credential for fresh graduates, and it was a key selling point for institutions to connect the prospective students. Thus, speaking with future expatriate students about internships during the college search stage may convince them to shift from the institution search stage to the institution choice stage.

Admission counselors may consider the following approach when connecting with the potential expatriate students and their supporting group: (a) highlighting the institution's strong profile information that linked with the choices of higher education versus the future career prospects, such as "international recognition, study abroad opportunity, institution's good academic record, degree well regarded by employers, the easiness to find a job upon graduation, and industry experience via internships" (Cheong, Hill, Leong, & Zhang, 2016, p.7), and (b) disclosing the internship and career placement statistics on all marketing and promotion materials and information sessions.

Country-specific profile. Malaysia has become an active player progressively in international education with various advantages. The study findings indicated that expatriate participants highlighted four positive country-specific factors that had attracted them to study in Malaysia. Researchers (Cheng et al., 2013; Iloh & Tierney, 2013; Migin et al., 2015; Singh, Schapper, & Jack, 2014) concluded that few factors, namely, *low tuition fees, low living expenses, the strategic location, multi-culture and ethics, a safe environment to live, shared the same culture values as students' home country* were advantages. Cheng et al. (2013) also reported that the medium of instruction among most of the Malaysian private institutions is English, and the institutions offer a variety of the programs at the international standard level. Thus, the advantages to having greater

opportunity to access a high quality of higher education in a convenient and inexpensive way are suggested to emphasize to the future expatriate students and their supporting group.

Student profile. Cortes (2013) highlighted that the admission process is a powerful lever to improve retention and graduation rates. The academic profile of entering students and the admission decisions shape the retention, progression, and graduation of the students (Cortes, 2013; Kalsbeek, 2013a; Spittle, 2013). Three approaches, namely, *the use of non-cognitive variables in college admission, a rigorous high school curriculum, and test-optional policies*, suggested by researchers (Cortes, 2013; Cortes & Kalsbeek, 2012) might improve persistence and graduation rates, improve diversity and access, and commit the institution's mission. Thus, proactively considering student's profile (Spittle, 2013) during the admission is the first step of the retention strategy to help increase retention and completion rates.

Progress. The analysis revealed that four participants appreciated the support they had received and the impression that had created by the university to help them succeed academically. Spittle (2013) introduced one concept "from persistence to progress", and stressed that the institution should ensure students progressing well academically toward degree completion instead of persisting without satisfactory academic progress (p. 27). Morgan (2015) also considered that improving student's progression was important to retention and student experience. Further, Kalsbeek (2013c) affirmed that progressing requires linking retention efforts with core institutional activities. Thus, administrators at the MoHE University might consider adopting the

progress-centered perspectives (Spittle, 2013) to alter the practices and add the policies to improve expatriate students' progression and graduation rates at the institutional level.

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

Accordingly, the institutional thinking, practices, and effort required a different level of clarity to graduate students, not simply retaining them (Spittle, 2013). Spittle (2013) also suggested that administrators may analyze the relevant admission and registration data, invite the questions for decision making, and underwrite strategies. As a result, the practices for graduating students would be sharper, more organized, and more systemic when focusing on students' attendance patterns, academic performance, and enrollment trends than simply retaining them.

Process. Expatriate participants appreciated the support received from the faculty and professional staffs. However, the findings revealed that there remained a few concerns which needed to be improved in terms of processes or practices to help increase expatriate students' retention and graduation. To improve overall processes and services by developing systemic approaches that related to students' enrollment is one of the key strategies to increase retention and graduation rates. For example, as DePaul University ([DePaulU], 2012) practiced, integrated student services in a one-stop center for three key

services: financial aid, student accounts, and student registration and records where staff members were cross trained to speed up students' enrollment transactions as well as reduce the time and anxieties.

Academic advising versus course coordination. The findings revealed that two expatriate participants were stressed out as of lacking course coordination at the last semester or even very close to the graduation. Academic advising, a learning-centered, student-focused activity (Darling, 2015) as well as a strategy to increase retention and graduation, is critical to student success (Kot, 2014). One of the key roles for academic advisors was to help students create the semester or term class schedules or academic plans that led them to complete the programs on time (Darling, 2015; Kot, 2014; McGhee, 2015). Hence, reexamine the effectiveness of the advising services regarding making the academic plans is necessary.

Importantly, Binder et al. (2015) commented, the enhanced academic advising might contribute to the higher completion rate by increasing students' awareness of the courses that needed for graduation. Mandatory advising also encouraged students to join in degree planning early to avoid achieving long-term goals (Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, & Pino, 2016). Hence, administrators may consider amending the practices of academic advising service that links with the advising courses.

Administrators may consider other approaches to improve the course advising and ensure students to complete the degrees on time without extra tension. For instance, the streamlining registration procedure or "Finish in Four!" (Spittle, 2013; University of Arizona, 1998); "creating degree audit systems and online Degree Progress Reports" (Kalsbeek & Cortes, 2013, p. 5); or "creating the clearer degree completion roadmaps"

(Spittle, 2013, p.32). Advising students to make coherent semester/term study plans to graduate on time is one of the key responsibilities and tasks for academic advisors.

Counseling service versus warning system. The analysis showed that one expatriate participant had concerned about how, how often, and in which tone for counselors and advisors to approach the foundation or the first-year expatriate students who were shy or hesitated to seek help. Few approaches may consider other than meeting with the counselors face-to-face to increase students' self-esteem and social support. Researchers (Horgan, McCarthy, & Sweeney, 2013; Salleh, Hamzah, Nordin, Ghavifekr, & Joorabchi, 2015) highlighted the effectiveness and benefits of informal support via chat rooms with the peers or using the online counseling for those who were comfortable with internet communication. Besides, Miami University (2017) introduced a mobile app called *the Just in Case App* to connect students and families for any emergencies of students and their friends. To better assist expatriate students, Salleh et al. suggested the counselors might consider using informal support or conducting online counseling sessions by using a modified face-to-face counseling model (p. 552) and in an appropriate, caring, and respectful tone. Administrators may also consider introducing a similar mobile app to assist them in a less formal but an effective way.

Foundation/first-year experience versus institutional standards. The findings showed that four expatriate participants discussed how institutional standards had attracted them and made them commit to the MoHE University. Further, based on the analysis, no expatriate participant had discussed the negative learning experience in their first-year, except one hardly experienced the group work while studying the foundation program.

The first year is crucial (Leach, 2016), so does the foundation year. According to Leach, having a comprehensive and coordinated pedagogy to engage students (2016) and enrich their learning is pertinent. Kot (2014) highlighted that the centralized academic advising is another approach that most relevant for the first-year students because it assists them in various ways to make them success. For example, “completing the core curriculum, choosing appropriate courses, planning educational careers, selecting majors, using campus resources, and developing success strategies” (Kot, 2014, p. 554). Thus, focusing on the foundation and first-year expatriate students’ experience may help improve their learning experience, increase their persistence, and boost the institution’s standards.

Institutions are suggested arranging at least two high-impact activities for the undergraduate students during and after their first-year respectively (National Survey of Student Engagement as cited in Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014). Thus, they are academically challenged and engaged with their faculty, peers, or both. Accordingly, administrators may pay greater attention to the retention effort which starts from improving the first-year experience that affects expatriate students’ persistence and reinforces their positive learning at the university for the second year (DeAngelo, 2014) and years beyond.

High-impact activities versus academic and social integration. The findings revealed that expatriate participants had not showed much willingness or had the time to connect with faculty and peers outside of the classrooms socially, except one suggested the University should not to charge the additional fees for attending the extracurricular clubs. The analysis also indicated that it was beneficial for expatriate participant who had

visited the academic partner institution in Europe. However, the findings showed that three expatriate participants had discussed lack of the part-time job opportunities for them, which was a disadvantage.

High-impact activities would help reinforce the connections between students and their chosen institution (Kuh, 2013), which was a key for them to success. Researchers (DeAngelo, 2014; Jacoby, 2015; Kuh, 2013; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014; Young & Keup, 2014) identified: capstone projects, collaborative assignments and projects, diversity/global learning, field experience, first-year seminars and experiences, internships, learning communities, service learning or community-based learning, student organizations, study abroad program, work-study jobs, writing-intensive courses, and undergraduate research. Besides, Pearce commented that attending the extracurricular clubs or other social events organized by the university and student organization offers the opportunity to form friendships, to be socially integrated, and to connect with the university (2015). Therefore, the administrators may reexamine the effectiveness of current practices and focus on the coherence of the institutional efforts (Kalsbeek, 2013c) on high-impact activities to improve expatriate students' learning and increase retention.

Peer-assisted learning (PAL). The findings disclosed that one full-time expatriate participant had shared the positive PAL experience with the tutors and preferred to attend the tutorials instead of the large size classes. However, others did not feel that it was helpful. Likewise, the findings reported that one part-time expatriate participant had found difficult to have a two-way communication with the lecturer in the large size classes. Peer learning and assessment is important to prepare students in professional

courses by working with others and being responsible for learning (Hodgson, Benson, & Brack, 2015). Bates concluded that when peer-students and peer-tutors collaborated, they built relationships, gained confidence, and enhanced their educational experience (2016). Thus, building a trustful relationship between peer-tutors and peer-students is the first step to ensuring PAL is beneficial to both peer-students and peer-tutors.

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

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

Peer learning strategies also can sustain feedback in the large classroom, as suggested by Zher, Hussein, and Saat (2016). Zher et al. (2016) pointed out that "the key to sustaining feedback in a large classroom is communication" (p.12). In contrast, the University of Arizona (n.d., p. 2) suggested "collaborative learning in large classes."

Thus, lecturers who teach in the large size classes may consider applying peer-assisted learning or collaborative learning strategy to enhance students' experience.

Strategies for better connecting part-time students. The findings disclosed that part-time expatriate participants who enrolled professional and doctoral programs had expressed their concerns about the time constraints and wished the university should arrange seminars/workshops to help them improve the soft skills and better manage their time to balance various responsibilities.

The classroom is the only place where the part-time students spend most of their time to meet with faculty, engage the formal learning experience, and built upon their success (Kretovics, 2015, Tinto, 2012a). Few approaches could contribute part-time expatriate students' academic success. First, administrators may consider arranging bi-weekly seminars/workshops that will directly or indirectly impact on their academic progress. Few topics such as "goal setting, procrastination management, assignment preparation, exam preparation, note-taking capability, research capability, seminar class readiness, technical readiness, online class readiness, and stress management" (Khat, 2017, p. 44) may be considered. Second, McGhee (2015) suggested students should make the most use of on-campus tutoring and writing labs services to support their studies. Consequently, part-time expatriate students will be smoothly completed their degrees or certifications in a more balanced way once they better master the study skills and manage the time and are more motivated.

Administrators may consider other strategies such as "study group collaboration, online discussion, and group learning activities" (Khat, 2017, p. 45) to ease the time constraints and enrich part-time expatriate students' learning. Kretovics (2015) concluded

that attempting to connect students to the campus community directly impacted on the persistence and graduation rates. In other words, creating both online and offline communities for part-time expatriate students are the first step to help connect the college environment. Fostering an institutional-wide academic advising culture also could support their persistence and graduation (Darling, 2015). Administrators may take part-time expatriate students into special consideration to help make their learning meaningful and complete the degrees or certifications on time.

Teaching methods. Participants discussed various concerns that related to the concept of “student-centered/learning-oriented” versus “lecturer-centered/content-oriented learning style” (Leach, 2016, p. 26). Commented by Keller as cited in Kuh (2013), it was valuable to “cultivate a student- and learning-centered culture” (p. 85). That is, expatriate students expected their lecturers to create the environment to construct the meaning and change the conceptions by actively engaged in learning instead of passive learning. Concluded by Kuh et al. as cited in Leach (2016), other effective pedagogic interactions, such as academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-lecturer interaction could engage them and enrich their experience (p. 25). Peer interactions and learning communities’ pedagogy discussed by Leach also promoted student engagement. Thus, administrators may reexamine and identify the effectiveness of current practices based on the semester/term student assessment to improve future practices and students’ learning.

The findings revealed that one expatriate participant shared one concern about the local English lecturer(s) used Malay-English instead of Standard English for all course work, which made the study difficult. Although “English as a lingua franca is the best

option for higher education institutions,” underlined by Kirkpatrick in Hashim and Leitner (2014), “one would still need to restrict it to semi-formal spoken contexts and adopt a form of international English for writing, especially academic writing.” (p. 16). To help expatriate students better understand the lectures, administrators may consider organizing the seminars or workshops that will bring the local lecturers’ awareness of the accent of English they use and improve the levels of the Standard English regarding writing and speaking to achieve adequate academic output.

Promise. The analysis reported that one expatriate participant had completed Bachelor and Masters and had been enrolled the doctoral program at the University for a few years. Other two were also enthusiastically shared their positive learning experience. Keeping “promise” indicates that to make sure all students’ expectations and experiences are aligned with the promise of the university’s goals and brand (DePaul University, 2012). Expatriate participants’ responses confirmed that “brand love, positive word-of-mouth, and students' intention to support their university as alumni” (Kalsbeek, 2013b; Rauschnabel, Krey, Babin, & Ivens, 2016). Their responses also reflected that “when a brand’s promise is kept, the relationship between the brand and its customer deepens” (Kalsbeek, 2013b, p. 51). Further, continuing the postgraduate study at the same institution had confirmed that “the brand performance and brand image constructs played major roles” (Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Hemsley-Brown, 2016, p. 3105). Hence, administrators may consider obtaining permissions from those loyal expatriate students to film a short video about their positive academic experience and use it for all marketing and promoting materials for future expatriate students and their supporting group.

Academic experiences versus brand loyalty and promise. The findings indicated that three expatriate participants were appreciated the continuous had support received either from the faculty or professional staffs or both to help them success, although one noticed that the local lecturers had not taken criticism well. To be more effective to develop a strong brand, Palmer, Koenig-Lewis, and Asaad (2016) suggested that institutions should focus on providing students with positive and meaningful academic experiences. Importantly, students' learning outcomes are the core of the institution's educational promise (Kalsbeek, 2013b); and the brand promise benefits both the institutions and the students (Kalsbeek, 2013a). As in return, it leads to stronger brand loyalty and brand support. Thus, the institutions' purposeful approaches should ensure that all expatriate students' experiences reflect the brand identity and brand promise, the institution's mission, and the unique and differentiating dimensions of the institution's educational philosophy and goal (Kuh, 2013). Accordingly, the administrators may examine the effectiveness of the practices periodically concerning expatriate students' academic experiences versus brand loyalty and promise.

Engaging faculty in retention. The findings revealed that one part-time expatriate participant with time constraints had found the difficulty to communicate with the lectures in a large classroom. Kalsbeek (2013c) suggested that retention strategies can be effective only when they link with core academic structures and processes. Faculty was the most direct, visible, and critical institutional contact especially for those part-time students who only attend the classes (Kalsbeek & Cortes, 2013). Kim and Sax (2014) also underlined that faculty was the key social contacts in the university environment, and they influenced students' learning development and the shared values during their

interactions. Thus, faculty is encouraged to engage the institutional progress-initiative to identify expatriate students who need academic or any other support from the university. Further, those who lead the part-time expatriate students are suggested to be more connected with them and guide them.

Project Description

The white paper that includes the research findings and recommendations will be distributed to the relevant stakeholders to increase expatriate students' attendance and persistence at the MoHE Institution. Upon receiving the final approval for the project study from Walden University, I will e-mail the white paper to the authorized and university administrators and discuss the details (time, date, and venue) to present the findings and discuss the recommendations with all relevant stakeholders at the MoHE University. The following sections will outline the potential resources, existing support, potential barriers, roles and responsibilities, the timetable for presenting the white paper to stakeholders, project evaluation plan, and implications for social change.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The authorized and university administrators allowed me to conduct the study and were aware that this study was focusing on the perceptions of expatriate students about the key factors that impacted their attendance and persistence. It was the first study that is focusing on the expatriate students' perceptions about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the study site. Plus, both administrators showed their full support throughout the study especially during the research stage. Afterward, I had mentioned once to the university administrator that I hoped that the final approved

project by Walden would be implemented and could be helpful to them to some extent. It seemed that it was okay.

I will e-mail the white paper to the university administrator once I obtain the final approval for this project study from Walden University in September/October 2017. In the meantime, I will request to present the findings and discuss the recommendations at the mutually convenient time and date either in late September or early October 2017. I will also request the administrators to invite all other concerned stakeholders to attend this presentation in one meeting room where the multimedia equipment and stationeries are available for the presentation and discussion.

Potential Barriers

One possible potential barrier is the recommendation may not be implemented as of the small numbers of the expatriate students are not easily identified or possibly ignored by faculty or professional staff. They are only a small percentage of the total number of the international students, which is a much smaller fraction of the total student populations. It needs the additional time and effort to identify them individually. Faculty and professional staff may consider them the same as those international students. It confirmed with Wood (2017) that the innovation needed additional time to carry out, which is a major barrier for any successful change.

Another possible potential barrier is as an external researcher from abroad; I do not have any influence on any relevant stakeholders such as decision-makers or faculty or professional staffs. Further, practically speaking, it may not be feasible for me to travel to the study site often for the follow-up meetings but will make available to answer any additional questions either by e-mail or via Skype during the implementation.

Nevertheless, I recalled that the University had used to implement before the students' feedback based on the institutional-wide surveys they conducted to improve the services and qualities. Thus, the potential solution to these barriers is to create a clear, strong, and succinct white paper that will gain the high attention from the decision makers and indicate the need for the possible amendments and changes.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I will plan, in collaboration with the authorized and university administrators, a mutually convenient time and date either in September or October 2017 for two-hour to present the white paper to the key stakeholders, discuss with them, and answer any questions. Table 2 illustrates the specific timetable to present this white paper to the relevant stakeholders at the study site.

Table 2

Timetable for presenting the white paper to stakeholders

Timing/Note	Activity	Participants
10am-10:30am	PowerPoint Presentation on "Expatriate Students' Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution" by researcher	Administrators, faculty manager(s), marketing, admissions, and student affairs directors /managers
10:30am-11:15am (Breakdown to groups to discuss the findings and recommendations and write down any comments)	Discuss topics concerning "Profile in Action1-3"; "Promise in Action 1."	Group 1: Admission and marketing; administrator
	Discuss topics concerning "Progress in Action"; "Process in Action 3-7"; and "Promise in Action 1-2".	Group 2: Academics; administrator
	Discuss topics concerning "Process in Action 1-2."	Group 3: Student support; administrator
11:15am-11:55am	Synergize the group discussions by presenting the comments, answer the questions, and seek the collaboration from other groups for implementation	Administrators, faculty manager(s), marketing, admissions, and student affairs directors /managers
11:55am-12pm	Closing and Thank you for participation	To all participants

Roles and Responsibilities

I am responsible for writing and distributing the white paper upon receiving the final approval from the Walden University to the university administrators, who will help send to other relevant stakeholders. I will also be responsible for answering the questions from the intended audience during the presentation of the research findings and recommendations for this project study. I will request all intended audience to read the white paper before the presentation, consider the recommendations, and actively participate in a discussion to give any comments or suggestions for changes in the recommendations and implementation.

Project Evaluation Plan

The purposes of the white paper for this project refer to (a) provide an overview of perceptions of expatriate students about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the University and inform the results of the study to various relevant stakeholders; (b) recommend a 4Ps framework of retention strategies influenced by the expatriate students; and (c) encourage the intended audiences to reexamine and amend the current practices to incorporate the needs, perceptions, and viewpoints of expatriate students. As the white paper aims to target the specific audiences, formative evaluation is considered because it is an ongoing and involves assessment to seek specific information and judgments (Beyer, 1995) from the audiences. In contrast, Popham (2013) defined that the summative evaluation aims to “determine the worth of the matured, already-completed education program” (p. 20). In other words, it helps administrators to decide whether the program will continue or terminate. Thus, I will conduct the formative and summative evaluation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) for this project.

The formative evaluation of the effectiveness of the project will be based on the discussions with university stakeholders followed by comments, concerns, questions, and suggestions, which will be noted down to modify the procedures. The stakeholders include the institutional and departmental administrators, the concerned faculty, and professional staffs from the student affairs and the international office. Table 3, key questions in planning formative evaluation, developed by Beyer (1995), will be used when conducting the ongoing formative evaluation.

Table 3

Key questions in planning formative evaluation

What are the perceptions of the key factors impacting expatriate students' attendance and persistence at the University?	What do we need to find out?	Who will evaluate?	How can we secure this information?

Adapted from How to Conduct a Formative Evaluation, by Beyer, B. K. 1995, p.14. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development). Copyright © 1995 by Beyer, B. K. Charts and figures may be reproduced for educational purpose only.

The summative evaluation of the effectiveness of the project will be ascertained through the amendment of practices and newly developed retention strategies by the institutional administrators. Eventually, the effectiveness of the project will be tracked continuously and reviewing of the persistence and graduation rates for those expatriate students on a semester or an academic year basis. Additionally, expatriate students'

university CGPA and the numbers of the years for completion also may be tracked and assessed as part of the evaluation.

Project Implications

Social Change: Local Context

This study aimed to address the problem the MoHE University had low graduation rates concerning expatriate students and had not investigated especially the perceptions about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence. The white paper will be presented to various stakeholders about the essential factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the MoHE University. The recommendations for improving the practices have the potential to make a positive institutional change on campus for students from expatriate families when discussions are held and actions are taken.

The amendments of the practices such as improving the practices for advising courses, altering the approach to counseling, improving foundation and first-year experience, enhancing PAL practice, and adding the strategies to connect part-time expatriate students better. The amendments will result in the implementation of the practices and develop the strategies that will directly address expatriate students' concerns. Eventually, social change will be shown for better persistence and graduation rates without tension, and better communication among faculty, staffs, and peers.

Moreover, the presentation of the white paper to various stakeholders will make them aware of expatriate students and understand their expectations and concerns. Thus, they will collaborate to promote their attendance, persistence, and graduation within the institution. Institution-wide constructive and meaningful discussions and collaborations on topics will bring different levels of the stakeholders from various departments together

to share the thoughts and insights. The interactions will promote the positive social interactions among the colleagues from multiple departments and better understand each other's responsibilities.

Social Change: Larger Context

The white paper presented recommendations to amend current practices and develop new strategies to promote the attendance, persistence, and graduation rates of future expatriate students. The recommendations can be considered by other local institutions in Malaysia where recruit expatriate students. Further, once the expatriate students successfully graduate from the university, they will apply the knowledge and skills they have learned to contribute the economic, intellectual, and social development of the community where they live to make a positive social change either in Malaysia, their home country, or elsewhere. Besides, the recommendations equally apply to other institutions internationally where to recruit and retain expatriate students to help them examine their practices and promote their expatriate students' attendance and persistence.

Summary

A white paper as a project was developed based on the perceptions of the key factors from expatriate students. In Section 3, I presented a brief description of the goals and explained the rationale for using the white paper as the project genre. I also presented the review of the literature, discussed the needed resources, barriers, roles, and responsibilities in implementation, and described the project evaluation plan. Finally, I summarized the potential positive social changes and indicated the importance of the project to local stakeholders and in a larger context. Section 4 will discuss the strengths and limitations of the study, my reflections, and recommendations for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I reflect on the project study, its strengths and limitations, and recommendations for alternative approaches. Various characteristics that impacted students' attendance and persistence have been researched for years, especially in the American context among all types of the institutions. There was little research that focused on expatriate students in private Malaysian universities. By recommending a 4Ps framework of retention strategies influenced by the expatriate students, I wish to present to all concerned stakeholders at this private Malaysian university and encourage them to re-examine and amend the current practices to incorporate the needs, perceptions, and viewpoints of expatriate students.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The design of this project was a white paper, which itself is a strength. White papers are informative documents that concisely outline the problem and offer suggestions to key decision makers who have time conscious to solve problems (Sakamuro et al., 2015). The white paper serves as a guide that offers recommendations for the amendment of the practices and developing the strategies to promote future expatriate students' attendance, persistence, and graduation rates. It gives the voice to those expatriate students being the first study concerning their attendance and persistence at the study site, which is another strength of this study. Further, this project's recommendations can be considerably applied to other institutions in Malaysia or elsewhere where they serve expatriate students.

A possible limitation of this project is, as an external researcher, there may be some difficulties in obtaining continuous feedback from the research site to make the necessary changes while implementing the project. Another limitation is that not all stakeholders may attend the session that planned to present the project or not all of them will read and embrace the recommendations. The only initiative and effective way what I can take is to make the project as precise and to the point as possible to catch the institutional key decision makers' first attention and consideration.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Recommendations for alternative approaches may include conducting course evaluations and a full evaluation report that focus exclusively on expatriate students' services and activities. Based on the interview responses, the study site had made efforts to provide the positive learning environment and enrich students' learning experience. However, it seemed unclear whether those services and activities had equally impacted the university lives of expatriate students, especially those graduate, professional, and possible foundation expatriate students. Therefore, the immediate need is to focus solely on conducting the course evaluations and evaluating the services from expatriate students on a semester/term basis to find out whether they are effective or not.

Scholarship

The doctoral process made me a novice scholar in the higher education field. My previous education background and years of experience were rooted in the international hospitality management. Thus, to complete this project study, I had to shift and expand my way of thinking all the time. Further, it was my first time to describe the educational problem, consider the possible methodology that best addresses the local problem, and

propose the relevant strategies to resolve the problem. Besides, researching another study site after the first one suddenly withdrew from my study made me gain valuable experience as an independent researcher. Although the process was painful and overwhelming, it was valuable in the end. I was also able to transfer the interpersonal skills and strengths from my previous profession to a role as an independent researcher. Finally, the experience taught me to navigate the way to study different size, scope, and reputable level of the institution in the different contexts and to develop the project.

Project Development

Throughout the interviewing and data analysis stages, I started to think about what the strategies could be recommended to a well-established and highly reputable institution to promote their expatriate students' persistence and graduation rates. The research committee approved developing a project in the format of white paper. However, finding a convincing retention strategy was another challenge for me. After various attempts, I proposed a 4Ps framework of retention strategies to the committee and received the approval to incorporating this frame in the project.

The primary task for this project was to choose an appropriate genre of the project. The white paper was chosen as it condensed the lengthy results into a succinct and clear document. Thus, it could be easily read and understood by the audience. The white paper calls for an institutional collaboration for a cohesive effort to focus on increasing expatriate students' future attendance, persistence, and graduation rates as well as deepen their learning experience. Although the white paper did not provide a specific solution to the problem, it is a channel for collaboration among various levels of stakeholders to amend the practices and identify the new strategies to increase future

expatriate students' attendance, persistence, and graduation rates and enrich their learning.

Leadership and Change

The process of conducting this study has challenged me to move out of my comfort zone at various crossroads to navigate the unknown road. To ensure a project to gain the key decision makers' attention at the study site, I need to keep abreast with the relevant scholarly articles and the professional practices in the field to be able to discuss and share with the stakeholders at various levels. I also have gained confidence and knowledge to assist the project to be implemented.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Reflecting on my doctoral journey at Walden University, I knew that the process has made me grow progressively in several ways: professionally, personally, and scholarly. The experience of developing a project in a format of a white paper helped me develop my skills in various ways. For example, searching the peer-reviewed literature, choosing the appropriate scholarly articles to write the literature review, building and winning mutual trust and understanding from the potential study partner(s) and participants who may not have a chance to meet in person in my lifetime, gaining the extra tremendous patience while expecting the IRB approvals, recruiting participants, using Skype and e-mail interviewing participants from abroad, transcribing and analyzing the findings, and developing a project followed by writing a white paper. I also learned to relate my research results to the literature to guide my research and the project.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I embarked on this journey aimed at acquiring evidence-based knowledge and practices that would help me grow to be a scholar-practitioner and an educator in the higher education field. This study required me to develop myself as a practitioner that far beyond my expectations and imaginations. For example, the unexpected withdrawal from the former study site pushed me to leave my comfort zone by researching a new site to support the study in a different country. The whole process was painful and stressful, but it remolded me and paved me the way to gain the first-hand experience as a practitioner in an unfamiliar but highly reputable institution to learn to identify the educational problems and study them. Additionally, unlike the first study site where only had one or two majors, participants at this private Malaysian university were from various disciplines ranging from undergraduate to graduate levels. Participants also included those who enrolled foundation and professional programs. With years of experience and education mainly in the hospitality field, it was a challenge to interview participants with the diverse academic background at the beginning. Plus, the process and years of hard work to earn the doctorate have equipped me with new knowledge and skills in the higher education field. Besides, I acquired knowledge from my participants, my research committee, other professors, and peers at Walden. Hence, all the knowledge and skills gained thus far to this study have prepared me to be a practitioner.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This research investigated a rare but critical problem concerning expatriate students' perceptions of key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian institution, a rapid developing regional education hub. Once the

institution's administrators decide to amend the practices and develop the retention strategies that aim at improving expatriate student persistence and completion, this project study becomes pertinent as the recommendations may potentially improve their persistence and completion rates as well as enhance their learning experience.

As an external researcher, I learned that it is critical to identify the problems cautiously when undertaking the research for the project study, followed by conducting the research and analyzing the data carefully. It is also vital to select the appropriate genre for project based on the research findings. Therefore, I could embark on the relevant research to develop the project which may provide appropriate recommendations for amending the practices or adding a retention policy to solve these problems. Moreover, I consider that any recommendations must be communicated respectfully through appropriate and relevant channels to the decision-makers with an open mind and heart for any opinions and feedback possibly receiving from them. As a result, by amending the practices, adding a retention policy, and incorporating these strategies, the recommendations of this project may potentially have a wider impact on those local and international students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The potential impacts of social change of this research are twofold. The first is to promote the persistence and graduation rates of future expatriate students at the study site. The second is to enhance their learning experience, equip them better to be the future industry leaders to contribute the economic growth and make the social change in Malaysia, their counties of original, or any other countries they work and live. Collecting the data from a small number of participants was unintentional. Nevertheless, it is my

hope that by sharing my study with the institutional administrators and other practitioners who serve expatriate students, they will be interested in examining their own university's services and practices and making an impact on them.

These recommendations potentially have a positive impact on expatriate students' persistence and completion rates and improve their academic experience both for full- and part-time students. Noticeably, the findings derived from this project study have voiced from expatriate students to amend the practices and improve the effectiveness. Accordingly, the improved completion rates may also enhance various KPIs that evaluate the success of the institution and promote a more positive image and branding of the institution. Additionally, the successful individuals who complete the program will positively contribute the economic growth and make the positive social change of the community where they work and live in various ways as a whole.

It is a holistic effort that the students' retention and graduation initiatives are taken on an institutional level based on the data and research-based findings and results. Being the first project study which provides research-based data, it concerned the expatriate students' perceptions of key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the MoHE University. Consequently, the main implication of this project study includes providing the study site with an overview of a 4Ps framework for student retention strategies. This project also implied the need to reexamine the effectiveness of the practices that applied to the expatriate students by academic and professional staffs in the areas of academic advising, counseling, peer-assist learning, and student success workshops/seminars for part-time students. The internal stakeholders may evaluate those areas collaboratively and share the opinions and suggestions with each other.

To some extent, this doctoral project study provides personnel at the study site with the meaningful and relevant recommendations to amend the current practices and identify the new strategies to attract, retain, and graduate the future expatriate students. Further, the project's recommendations may be considerably applied as part of the institutional strategies that aim to improve expatriate students' persistence and completion at other similar private institutions in Malaysia or elsewhere. Theoretically and practically speaking, a 4Ps framework for student retention strategies may be applied in other local institutions or internationally where serve expatriate students.

Future research may reinvestigate the perceptions of key factors impacting expatriate students' attendance and persistence at the study site once the project is implemented. Additional research could also assess the key factors perceived by expatriate students in other local private institutions or the public ones. Apart from conducting interviews and follow-up interviews with the same students, future research could use a focus group if time permits (and can be arranged) to enhance the breadth and depth of information. Future research also could review the institution's official documents and records, provided by the sensitive data are willingly shared by the potential study partners. Alternatively, future research may conduct a quantitative study by designing the surveys to investigate larger samples of students' opinions.

Conclusion

Being an expatriate as well as working for expatriate students for about eight years, I was inspired by the second member to culminate in this research for my doctoral study. A qualitative case study was designed to collect expatriate students' perceptions of key factors that impacting their attendance and persistence at a private Malaysian

institution. Despite small numbers of participants, the study remains valuable to some extent as the findings of the study provide recommendations to (re)examine, amend the current practices, and develop the strategies to attract, retain, and graduate future expatriate students. Thus, this study will provide the administrators and practitioners with some insights for future exploration and research toward promoting expatriate students' persistence and graduation rates. Consequently, the implications for making the positive social changes are evident.

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Appendix A: The Project

EXPATRIATE STUDENTS’ ATTENDANCE & PERSISTENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF A 4PS FRAMEWORK

Jin Deng

ABSTRACT

Malaysia primarily relies on expatriates to develop its economy, the private Malaysian institution (pseudonym) had not examined the retention of expatriate students who might contribute country’s future economy. Assessing the perceptions of key factors that impacted their attendance and persistence is timely. The purpose of this white paper was to make recommendations to the private university and possibly other institutions where serve expatriate students to reexamine and amend the practices in a cohesive way and explore additional strategies to improve their attendance, persistence, and graduation rates based on the research findings.

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INTRODUCTION

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

Based on the outcomes of the study, a white paper is proposed, which might help the private Malaysian institution reexamine and amend the practices, guide their decision making process, and encourage the implementation.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Tinto's (1975) conceptual schema for dropout from college.

The goals of this white paper are to:

- Provide an overview of perceptions of expatriate students about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence at the University and inform the results of the study to various relevant stakeholders.
- Recommend a 4Ps framework of retention strategies influenced by the expatriate students.
- Encourage the intended audiences to reexamine and amend the current practices to incorporate the needs, perceptions, and viewpoints of expatriate students.

THE PROBLEM

The problems at the local level could be considered that the University had low graduation rates from expatriate students and had not investigated their perceptions about key factors impacting their attendance and persistence in completing their programs. The institution had conducted surveys with dropped out students hoping to document reasons for them leaving the university. However, the surveys had not differentiated expatriate students from local and international students when studying their reasons for dropping out. The University's internal report (2015) showed various trends:

- The numbers of first-time expatriate students who had enrolled in the diploma and bachelor degrees from 2009 to

2013 were 274, equaled to 94% of total first-time enrolled expatriate students.

- The numbers of expatriate students in programs other than Ph.D. program showed higher dropout during their second-year (66) than in their first-year's study (55).
- The numbers of expatriate graduates were as low as 39 in all programs. However, it was positive that 149 expatriate students had progressed from a lower level of the program to a higher level.

THE METHODOLOGY

Criteria for Participants

The study that informed this white paper used a purposeful sampling method to recruit participants from the private University based on three defined criteria. First, participants were students who came to Malaysia with their parents and held “Malaysia My Second Home” (MM2H) valid for 10 years or under the diplomatic visa. Those who were under the nonstudent pass category, such as the employment pass, Malaysia PR, and

residence pass were also included. Second, they were current students, graduates, and dropout students who had enrolled in any foundation, undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs. If they were enrolled during the study, they hold either full- or part-time student status, and they have been studying at the University for at least one year. Third, their ages were at least 18 years old.

Data Collection Instrument

The Skype interview and the e-mail interview methods were applied to collect the data. Five participants chose either

Skype or e-mail to answer the individual and follow-up interview questions. I followed the Walden IRB approved interview protocol to conduct the interviews.

Data Analysis

I adopted a thematic analysis approach to identify themes in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns

(themes) within data” (p.79). It involves the searching across the data set to find the repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

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

Malaysian institution? Ten themes were identified to answer the research questions (Figure A1).



FIGURE A1. Expatriate students' perceptions of key factors

Five Themes (Theme 1-Theme 5) were identified to answer the **Research Question 1: What were the individual characteristics students from expatriate families perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?**

Theme 2: MoHE as an Institution

The subthemes described: (a) flexibility with the visa, (b) scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students, (c) supportive environment, and (d) university degree versus a good career prospect.

Theme 3: Supporting Group

The subthemes included: (a) parents and relatives, (b) high school counselors, and (c) friends and peers. However, only parents and relatives had much impact on their attendance and persistence at this private Malaysian institution.

Three Themes (Theme 6-Theme 8) were identified to answer the **Research Question 2: What were the interactions within the institutional environment that influenced students from expatriate families perceived as influencing attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?**

Theme 1: Malaysia as a Destination for Higher Education

The subthemes described: (a) advantages of living in the multicultural setting, (b) affordability, (c) convenience, (d) education standards, and (e) part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students).

Theme 4: Language Ability

Participants strongly agreed that “*English language*” was very important in various ways during the higher education studies.

Theme 5: Past Education Experience (High School Grades)

This subtheme was important for admission to the undergraduate program and obtaining a scholarship at this private Malaysian institution. However, the high school grades did not apply for those graduate or professional students.

No subthemes were identified under the fourth and fifth theme.

Theme 6: Academic Integration

The subthemes included: (a) faculty behavior, (b) high university Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA), (c) seminars/workshops (for part-time expatriate students), and (d) time constraints for part-time students.

Theme 7: Commitment

The subthemes in this theme included: (a) goal commitment, (b) institutional standards, and (c) program commitment.

Theme 8: Social Integration and Institutional Commitment

The subthemes included: (a) extracurricular activities with no

additional fees, (b) peer-group interactions, and (c) social integration.

Two themes: (Theme 9-Theme 10) were identified to answer the *Research Question 3: How did the institutional characteristics influence students from expatriate families attending and persisting at a private Malaysian institution?*

Theme 9: College Quality

The subthemes included: (a) class and institution size, (b) English language, (c) lack of course coordination, (d) teaching method, and (e) warning system.

Theme 10: Institutional Type

There were no subthemes identified under this theme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“A 4Ps framework for student retention strategies” (Kalsbeek, 2013a; Kalsbeek, 2013b), which focuses on “profile, progress, process, and promise” (Kalsbeek, 2013a) is recommended

(Figure A2). A 4Ps framework might help the MoHE University reexamine and amend the practices, guide their decision making process, and encourage the implementation.

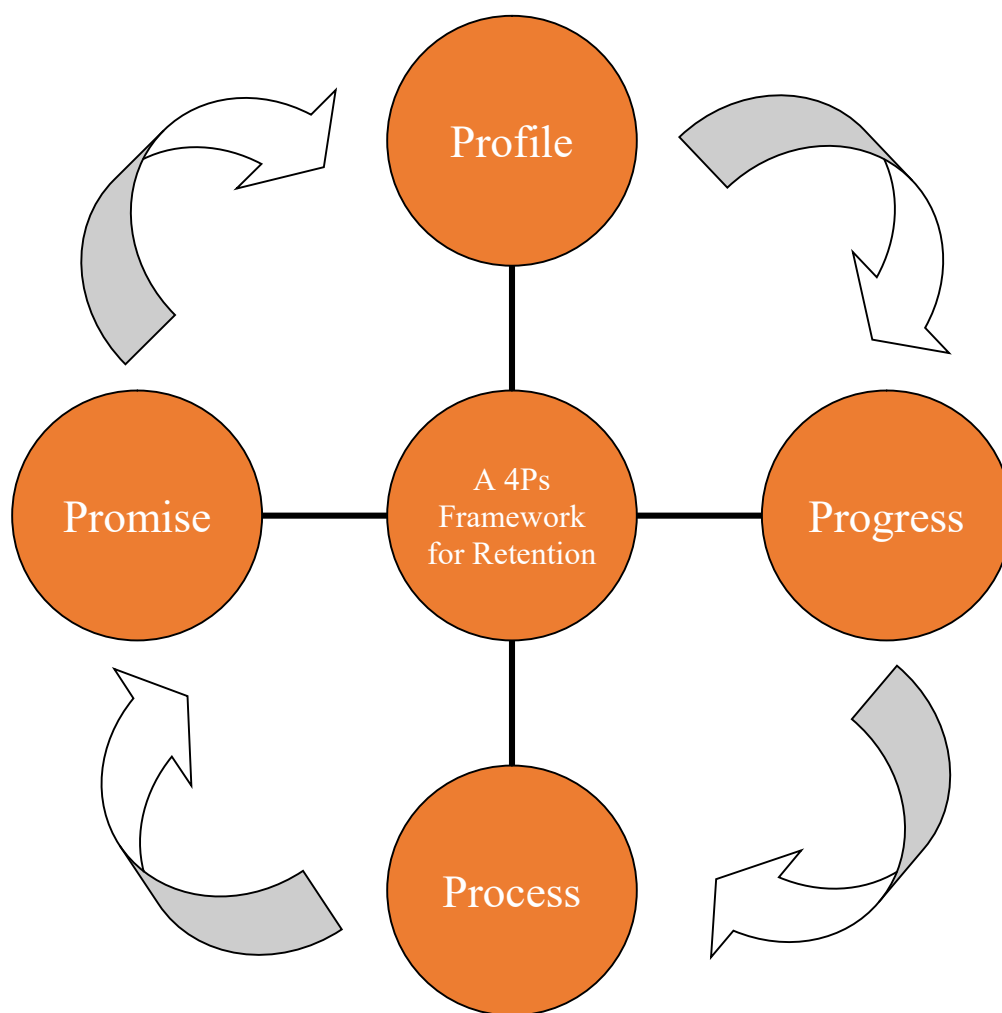


FIGURE A2. A 4Ps framework for student retention strategies

Recommendation 1: Profile in Action: Linking Admission and Retention

The analysis indicated that four key factors that linked with admission had attracted expatriate participants to study at the MoHE University. The importance of the first retention strategy is to promote the academic profile and preparedness of the newly enrolling students while keeping “a mission-balanced socioeconomic and demographic mix” (DePaul University [DePaulU], 2013, p. 1) at the same time.

Kalsbeek and Zucker (2013) underlined that both institutional and student profiles marked “the first step in gaining institutional traction in retention strategy”; and they primarily influenced the institution’s retention and completion rates (p. 15). DePaulU also concluded that the student profile concerning academic, financial and demographic characteristics is the strongest driver to promote the retention (2013). Further, it can be reshaped in various ways to align with both the institution’s mission and market position in the higher education field, pointed out by DePaulU (2013).

Recommendation 2: Progress in Action: Focusing on the Prize-Degree Completion

The result of the study revealed that four participants had appreciated the support received and the impression that created by the university to help them succeed academically. As in return, they highly committed the program and institution they had chosen. DePaulU (2013) pointed

There were various successful examples of “profile” strategies. For example, first, *using the non-cognitive variables in college admission, a rigorous high school curriculum, and test-optional policies*, suggested by researchers (Cortes & Kalsbeek, 2012; Cortes, 2013) may improve diversity and access, and commit the institution’s mission. Second, few practices from the University of Iowa ([UIowa], 2015) include aligning scholarships selection from a holistic review by linking to the profile (p. 1), communicating the “profile” broadly among the academic and professional staffs to ensure all are familiar with it (p. 1), and collaborations among various departments (p. 1). Third, emphasizing the University’s strong institutional profile information which closely linked with the choices of higher education versus the future career prospects, such as, “the easiness to secure a job upon graduation, and gaining the first-hand industry experience via internships” (Cheong, Hill, Leong, & Zhang, 2016, p.7).

out that the second retention strategy aims to make certain that students’ initial as well as their continuous academic progress will lead them to complete a degree at the institution (p.1).

Spittle (2013) stressed the importance “*from persistence to progress*”, and emphasized that the institution should focus on students progressing in their academics toward degree completion,

which was pertinent to retention and student experience (Morgan, 2015, p. 108). Underlined by Kalsbeek, (2013b), progressing requires linking retention efforts with core institutional activities (p. 102). Hence, the administrators may stand from “the progress-centered perspective” (Spittle, 2013, p. 35) to alter the practices and add the policies to improve expatriate students’ progression and completion rates at the institutional level.

Few examples of practices which may help students make steady progress are

Recommendation 3: Process in Action

The findings revealed that expatriate participants appreciated the support received from the faculty and professional staffs. Nevertheless, a few concerns remained that related to *course coordination, teaching methods, counseling service, and arranging the flexible schedules and workshops /seminars for part-time students*. DePaulU (2013, p. 2) underlined that the third retention strategy focuses on improving and integrating all processes and services that may increase students’ retention and graduation rates.

Although students’ characteristics are likely related to attendance, persistence, and completion rates, the third retention strategy which addresses processes, activities, and policies adopts a more systemic perspective to pay attention more to high-risk processes than on at-risk persons (DePaulU, 2013; Kalsbeek, 2016). Hence, this approach may lead to

below: (a) creating “*online Academic Progress Report*” and expect faculty to provide the prompt feedback on students’ progress especially in the first quarter (DePaulU, 2013, p. 1). (b) creating “*degree audit systems and online Degree Progress Report*” for faculty, academic advisors, and students to better map and ensure students to make steady academic progress and graduate (Kalsbeek & Cortes, 2013; DePaulU, 2013) on time without tension or a clearly defined four-year plan/(major) in progress (UIowa, 2015, p. 1).

improving the learning experience not only for expatriate students but also for other students at large. Consequently, it may bring greater impact on institution-wide attendance, persistence, and completion rates.

Few examples of “process” strategies are the following: (a) creating the streamlining registration procedure or “Finish in Four!” (Spittle, 2013; University of Arizona, 1998); (b) considering using informal support or conducting online counseling sessions by using a modified face-to-face counseling model (Salleh, Hamzah, Nordin, Ghavifekr, & Joorabchi, 2015) and in an appropriate, caring, and respectful tone; (c) focusing on the foundation and first-year experience (Leach, 2016) and integrating high-impact activities (Kuh, 2013) starting from the upcoming new academic semester/year; 4) enhancing three peer-assisted learning (PAL) activities, namely, *teaching training, peer teaching, and peer assessment* (Burgess, McGregor, & Mellis, 2014) to improve the ongoing practices and their effectiveness.

Recommendation 4: Promise in Action for Institutional Success

The analysis had two indications. First, one expatriate participant who completed her bachelor and masters and was close to finishing her doctoral program at the University satisfied and enjoyed the learning experience. Second, another two were enthusiastically shared their positive learning experiences. DePaulU (2013) stressed that the fourth retention strategy aims to ensure students' expectations and learning experiences are aligned with the promise of the institution's mission and brand (p. 2).

DePaulU (2013) stated that students who enroll at the institution have their aspirations and expectations that live up to its brand promise. Accordingly, the key strategy for the institutional enhancement and brand promise is to ensure that students' educational experience is fostered and improved both

inside and outside of the classroom. Hence, students may benefit fully from that brand promise. Besides, DePaulU (2013) emphasized that the commitment extends and connects that the retention strategy that is directly related to the institutional marketing (p. 2).

There are various examples of "promise" strategies. For instance, (a) enhancing quality instruction through expanded professional development programs (DePaul, 2013) such as using standard English for all course work instead of Malay-English; (b) examining the effectiveness of the practices periodically concerning the academic experience versus brand loyalty and promise (Kuh, 2013) among expatriate students; (c) encouraging faculty to engage the institutional progress-initiative by identifying expatriate students who need academic or any other support from the University; and (d) providing transferable skills workshops/seminars regularly for part-time students.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this white paper was to provide insights about expatriate students' perceptions and key factors about attendance and persistence at the University. The problem that prompted this study was the institution showed low graduation rates for expatriate students and had not assessed the perceptions of key factors that impacted their attendance, continuation, and graduation.

In this white paper, an overview of these perceptions and key factors was presented. In addition, a 4Ps framework

for student retention strategies focusing on profile, progress, process, and promise was recommended, and might help the University reexamine and amend the practices, guide their decision making, and encourage the implementation.

More specifically, the 4Ps framework of student retention strategy was recommended and discussed to improve expatriate students' experiences and their persistence. This white paper may serve other institutions elsewhere where have expatriate students to retain them.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For more information, please contact XXX.XXXX@XXXXXXXXX.XXX.

Appendix B: 5-Year Enrollment, Progression, & Graduation Overview

MoHE Institution ^a	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Newly Enrolled Students						
• Diploma (2.5-year)	15	3	11	11	12	52
• Bachelor (3-year)	45	30	57	50	40	222
• Masters (2-year)	3	2	2	3	4	14
• Ph.D ^b	0	0	1	1	0	2
Subtotal	63	35	71	65	56	290
1st Year Dropout Numbers						
• Diploma	0	2	0	5	3	10
• Bachelor	6	11	6	6	7	36
• Masters	1	4	0	3	1	9
Subtotal	7	17	6	14	11	55
2nd Year Dropout Numbers						
• Diploma	0	1	0	4	6	11
• Bachelor	4	4	10	14	13	45
• Masters	1	2	4	1	2	10
Subtotal	5	7	14	19	21	66
2.5 or 3rd Year Dropout						
• Diploma (2.5 year)	0	0	0	0	2	2
• Bachelor (3 rd year)	7	6	5	4	4	26
Subtotal	7	6	5	4	6	28
(Program) Progression						
• Diploma	0	3	0	9	11	23
• Bachelor	17	21	21	24	24	107
• Masters	2	6	4	4	3	19
Subtotal	19	30	25	37	38	149
Graduates						
• Diploma	0	0	0	0	6	6
• Bachelor	5	3	6	4	5	23
• Masters	1	1	3	3	2	10
Subtotal	6	4	9	7	13	39

Note: Adapted from the MoHE institution internal report (2015) with consent.

- The MoHE institution includes two campuses: one college and one university.
- Ph.D. program: no dropout student or graduate occurred between 2009 and 2013.

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Jin Deng
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX

May 8, 2016

Dear Jin Deng,

Based on review of the PowerPoint and the communications with my representative about your study, I give permission for you to conduct the study at this MoHE institution. As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit and conduct Skype interviews with our current students from expatriate families whose ages are at least 18 years old, and who have studied at the institution for nearly two years or above (either in diploma or bachelor or master degree programs), obtain participant verification of interview contents (member checking), collect and analyze the institution's enrollment, progression, dropout, and graduate data that related to the topic, and report the results of your findings in your doctoral project study. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing you enrollment, progression, dropout, and graduation data that related to your study, assisting in participant recruitment and/or data collection. (e.g. forwarding the Walden IRB approved invitation letter and the demographic questionnaire to the pre-identified students on your behalf and e-mailing a reminder in case the numbers of students does not meet the study requirement). We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. Your responsibilities include ensuring that all participants' identities are kept anonymous, complying with Walden University IRB requirements for research, and not disseminating any confidential information about our institution.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside your supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB. I also understand that our institution will not be identified in any way in your proposal or final study.

Sincerely,

Director, International Office

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verifies any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix D: 1st Email Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Study as a Student from Expatriate Family

Dear Student,

I would like to introduce myself as a doctoral candidate in education. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The title of my study is *Expatriate Students' Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution*. Your input is needed to help understand the perceptions about key factors that influence you to attend and persist at this institution as a student from expatriate family.

For the purpose of this study, students who meet all three criteria will be invited: first, you hold Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) Visa that is valid for ten years or under the diplomatic visa or your parents' visa. Second, your age is at least 18 years old. Third, you have studied at the university for nearly two years or above.

I will be organizing a 60-minute individual interview and a 30-minute follow-up interview during the month of May/June 2016 at the mutually agreed timings and dates. The interview(s) will be done by Skype. We will be discussing experiences of students from expatriate families like you in deciding to attend and persist at this private Malaysian institution. Please be ensured that all information will be kept confidential. No one at your institution will know once you decide to participate, and your involvement will not impact your academic standing.

You will be invited to participate in an individual follow-up interview to share insights about your personal experience and opinion if I need further clarification. Afterward, you will be requested to spend less than 90-minute to review the individual interview summary and 45-minute to review the follow-up interview summary to confirm if the key points have reflected your views and give comments.

If you are interested, please fill in attached Demographic Questionnaire and e-mail me directly to XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX. Once I receive your response, I will contact you for "informed consent" and schedule the mutually agreed timing and date for Skype interview(s).

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or mobile as shown below.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Sincerely yours,

Jin Deng
Ed. D Student, Walden University
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX
Mobile: XXX-XXXXXXX
WeChat & WhatsApp ID: XXXXXXXX

Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire

Please fill in the blanks:

- Which program have you completed or currently enrolled at this institution?

- How many years have you been living in Malaysia? _____
- How many years have you studied at this institution? _____

Appendix F: 1st Reminder

Subject: 1st Reminder about the Study as a Student from Expatriate Family

Dear Student,

Follow by the “Email Invitation to Potential Participants in the Study” sent to you one week ago, I am sending you a gentle reminder to invite you once again to be part of my study titled *Expatriate Students’ Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution*. Your insights and response are valuable and will help me understand this topic as well as enlighten this study which could be of benefit for future students.

If you have filled in the Demographic Questionnaire and replied me by e-mail to confirm the participation, please ignore this reminder. Otherwise, you are kindly requested and encouraged to do so at the earliest, so we can move forward to the next steps. Please be ensured that all your information will be kept confidentially.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or mobile as shown below.

Many thanks in advance for your contribution and support.

Sincerely yours,

Jin Deng
Ed. D Student, Walden University
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX
Mobile: XXX-XXXXXXX
WeChat & WhatsApp ID: XXXXXXXX

Appendix G: Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the support group (e. g. parents, peers, friends, high school counselors) you had before your university.

Follow-up question: How did your support group influence your decision to attend the institution here?

2. What are the factors that made you decide to study in Malaysia?
3. What has been your experience with your family support for staying in the university?
4. How have your educational goals impacted your decisions to stay at this institution?

Follow-up questions: What are your goals? How have your goals affected your decisions to enroll and continue at this institution?

5. Would you like to tell me about any other factors that affected your decisions to attend this institution?
6. Tell me about one positive and one negative experience of learning with faculty.
7. Tell me about one positive and one negative experience of learning with peers.
8. How important the institutional characteristics such as the institutional type, size, and quality were for you when you were considering enrollment at the institution?
9. Some students think that the higher the high school grades or TOEFL/IELTS results, the easier for them to transition to the university studies, while others have differing opinions. What is your opinion about the importance of high school grades and English language skills for university?
10. How much do you think financial consideration influence students like you?

Appendix H: Individual Follow-up Interview Questions

1. What are the areas do you think that need to be improved in terms of teaching method or modes of delivery to enhance students' learning?
2. While you are enrolled, what are the areas that are essential to improve to help better you persist and graduate at this university?
3. What are your opinions about the institution's expectations for student success at this university?
4. What are your views of classroom assessment and early-warning system?
5. What concerns or suggestions do you want the university to know to help assist your studies while sharing work or family responsibilities (if any) or both?

Appendix I: 2nd Email Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Study as a Student from Expatriate Family

Dear Student,

I would like to introduce myself as a doctoral candidate in education. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The title of my study is *Expatriate Students' Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution*. Your input is needed to help understand the perceptions about key factors that influence you to attend and persist at this institution as a student from expatriate family.

For the purpose of this study, students who meet ALL three criteria will be invited: first, you hold any one of the nonstudent passes, e.g. Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H), diplomatic pass, dependent pass, employment pass, Malaysia PR, and residence pass. Second, your age is at least 18 years old. Third, you have studied at the university between one year and above. The researcher is also inviting graduates or dropout students in any (undergraduate or graduate or professional) programs to be in the study.

I will be organizing a 60-minute individual interview and a 30-minute follow-up interview during the month of July 2016 at the mutually agreed timings and dates. The interview(s) will be done by Skype. We will be discussing experiences of students from expatriate families like you in deciding to attend and persist at this private Malaysian institution. Please be ensured that all information will be kept confidential. No one at your institution will know once you decide to participate, and your involvement will not impact your academic standing.

You will be invited to participate in an individual follow-up interview to share insights about your personal experience and opinion if I need further clarification. Afterward, you will be requested to spend less than 90-minute to review the individual interview summary and 45-minute to review the follow-up interview summary to confirm if the key points have reflected your views and give comments.

If you are interested, please fill in attached Demographic Questionnaire and e-mail me directly to XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX. Once I receive your response, I will contact you for “informed consent” and schedule the mutually agreed timing and date for Skype interview(s).

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by e-mail or mobile as shown below.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Sincerely yours,

Jin Deng
Ed. D Student, Walden University
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX
Mobile: XXX-XXXXXXX
WeChat & WhatsApp ID: XXXXXXXX

Appendix J: 3rd Email Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Study as a Student from Expatriate Family

Dear Student,

I would like to introduce myself as a doctoral candidate in education. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The title of my study is *Expatriate Students' Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Institution in Malaysia*. Your input is needed to help understand the perceptions about key factors that influence you to attend and persist at this institution as a student from expatriate family.

For the purpose of this study, students who meet *ALL* three criteria will be invited: first, you hold any one of the nonstudent passes, e.g. Malaysia My Second Home Visa (MM2H), diplomatic pass, dependent pass, employment pass, Malaysia PR, and residence pass. Second, your age is at least 18 years old. Third, you have been studying any pre-university, undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs (e.g. ACCA/ICAEW) at the university between one year and above. The researcher is also inviting graduates or dropout students in any (Pre-U, undergraduate or graduate or professional) programs to be in the study.

I will be (re)organizing a 60-minute individual interview and a 30-minute follow-up interview during the month of August 2016 at the mutually agreed timings and dates. The interview(s) will be done by Skype. We will be discussing experiences of students from expatriate families like you in deciding to attend and persist at this private Malaysian Institution. Please be ensured that all information will be kept confidential. No one at your institution will know once you decide to participate, and your involvement will not impact your academic standing.

You will be invited to participate in an individual follow-up interview to share insights about your personal experience and opinion if I need further clarification. Afterward, you will be requested to spend less than 90-minute to review the individual interview summary and 45-minute to review the follow-up interview summary to confirm if the key points have reflected your views and give comments.

Alternatively, if you are not able to Skype at a fixed time as of your professional and/or other commitments and demands, you may choose to respond the interview questions by e-mail. You will be requested to spend about 90-minute at any of your convenience to think carefully, type, and verify the responses for ten interview questions to return the student researcher *within five-seven calendar days*. After that, you will be requested to about 45-minute and use the same process to respond five follow-up interview questions and verify the responses within at your own pace to return the student researcher *within three-five calendar days*.

You may receive one e-mail (which need less than ten-minute) from the student researcher to clarify a few information.

If you are interested, please fill in attached Demographic Questionnaire and e-mail me directly to XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX. Once I receive your response, I will contact you for “informed consent” and schedule the mutually agreed timing and date for Skype interview(s) or e-mail interviewing.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by e-mail or mobile as shown below.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Sincerely yours,

Jin Deng
Ed. D Student
Walden University
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX
Mobile: XXX-XXXXXXX
WeChat & WhatsApp ID: XXXX-XXXXXXX

Appendix K: 2nd Reminder

Subject: 2nd Reminder about the Study as a Student from Expatriate Family

Dear Student,

Follow by the “Email Invitation to Potential Participants in the Study” sent to you previously, I am sending you a gentle reminder to invite you once again to be part of my study titled *Expatriate Students’ Perceptions of Attendance and Persistence at a Private Malaysian Institution*. Your insights and response are valuable and will help me understand this topic as well as enlighten this study which could be of benefit for future students.

If you have filled in the Demographic Questionnaire and replied me by e-mail to confirm the participation, please ignore this reminder. Otherwise, you are kindly requested and encouraged to do so at the earliest, so we can move forward to the next steps. Please be ensured that all your information will be kept confidentially.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or mobile as shown below.

Many thanks in advance for your contribution and support.

Sincerely yours,

Jin Deng
Ed. D Student, Walden University
Email: XXX.XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX
Mobile: XXX-XXXXXXX
WeChat & WhatsApp ID: XXXXXXXX

Appendix L: Protocol for Individual Skype Interview

Title: Individual Interview and Follow-up Interview
 Site: Any comfortable and quiet room (with a stable internet access) chosen by participant and researcher
 Timings & Dates: Various

Pre-session (30 minutes):

- Set up laptop, test recorders, and ensure a strong and stable internet connection
- Ensure recorders have enough memories for new recordings
- Ensure the following materials are ready on the (researcher's) table:
 - ✓ Pen and notepad
 - ✓ Interview question
- Review the questions and make myself ready.

Greetings & Consent (5 minutes):

- Greeting participant and introduction
- Read the consent statement, ask participant to state the acceptance, and record it.

Welcoming & Briefing the ground rules about the interview (5 minutes):

- Brief the purpose of the (possible) individual follow up interview
- Reassure participant to be in a quiet and comfortable place with no distractions
- Ensure participant have a strong and stable internet connection,
- Ensure participant feel comfortable to share the positive opinions and critical thoughts.
- Make clear to participant that the purpose of recording and taking notes is to capture accurately his or her opinions and expressions.
- Ensure participant that his or her name will be kept confidential in the study.

Questions/Discussion (30 minutes):

- Ask interview questions
- (Briefly) record field notes (expressions, impressions, and questions/answers)
- Pause and probe as needed to collect additional information

Conclusion (5 minutes):

- Briefly summary the points discussed by the participants for accuracy
- Thanks to participants

Post-session (5 minutes):

- Check if the recorder has fully recorded the whole interview session
- Type brief summary of key points/key notes immediately

Appendix M: List of Codes and Subcodes

Research question 1:

Malaysia as a destination for higher education

- Advantages of living in the multicultural setting
- Affordability
- Convenience
- Education standards
- Part-time work opportunity (for expatriate students)

MoHE as an institution

- Flexibility with the visa
- Scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students
- Supportive environment
- University degree vs. a good career prospect

Supporting group

- Parents and relatives
- High school counselors
- Friends and peers

Language ability

Past educational experiences (high school grades)

Research Question 2:

Academic integration

- Faculty behavior
- High university CGPA
- Time constrains for part-time students
- Workshop/seminar (for part-time students)

Commitment

- Goal commitment
- Institutional standards
- Program commitment

Social integration and institutional commitment

- Extracurricular activities with no additional fees
- Peer-group interactions
- Social integration

Research question 3:

College quality

- Class and institutional size
- English language
- Lack of course coordination
- Teaching method
- Warning system

Institutional type

Appendix N – Sample of Coding

Affordability

- Malaysia to be very (very) cheap... even for the living compared to my country ...Like the program offered by the academic partner institution in Europe. I have been there. I could have spent more than what I am spending here (in Malaysia). In a way, so it's quite affordable (S6P1)
- Not too expensive (S3P2)
- One of the main factor was that in Malaysia I can get a overseas degree, such as UK degree without needing to go to UK, and the course fee is much cheaper as compare to other countries (S10P4)
- Fortunately, Malaysia is also very affordable for our family. Therefore being in Malaysia does not seem much different than being back at home (S14P5)
- I doubt any foreign student ...would choose Malaysia over those places if they could afford(as of no part-time work opportunities), they (students) depend solely on their parents or guardians to fund their education in Malaysia (S14P5)

Convenience

- It's just 4-hours flight back from my country. I can go and come back any time. I just look at the convenience (S6P1)
- Convenient (S3P2)
- Was easy to get a MM2H visa to Malaysia as compared to other countries (S5P3)

Appendix O: An Example of Identified Codes and Themes

Theme	Code
Malaysia as a destination for higher education	
S6P1: Malaysia's education is quite good. It's really (really) good. It is really difficult to compete as well.	Education standard
S6P1: "I am learning about the cultures because my degree is Business Communications. I am learning a lot of things about the western cultures. Probably If I do not come to Malaysia, I would not have learnt certain things and cultures ... Malaysia is kind of mixed culture of country, that really need to understand."	Advantage of living in a multi-culture setting
S6P1: "Got quite used to Malaysia, like Malaysia culture and everything. Got quite adapted certain thing of it."	
S5P3: "I heard that the education standard is really nice here [in Malaysia] compared to [my country]" (word-of-mouth) S5P3: "...Plus the education standard is quite good. And the thing that teach the students, I would say it is quite high standard."	Education standard
S5P3: "I found Malaysia quite peaceful because there are many races here; and they are living very peacefully."	Advantage of living in a multi-culture setting
S10P4: "As a foreign student study in Malaysia, the government does not allow for student to do a part-time job (which is one of the drawback to study in Malaysia)"	Part-time work opportunities for expatriate students
S10P4: "It is a multi-ethics country... which make English is common language and widely spoken. Thus, I will be able to improve my English and Chinese language much faster as compared to Indonesia."	Advantage of living in a multi-culture setting
S14P5: "Unlike many other countries, in Malaysia students are not allowed to work part time and don't have any opportunities to support themselves financially".	Part-time work opportunities for expatriate students
MoHE as an institution	
S6P1: "For others, in MoHE University, they have lots of scholarship opportunities. If you apply for it, you surely get it. It all depends on your hard work. So you have to show your parents how hard you are working. This is how I balance myself."	Scholarships for undergraduate students
S3P2: "For the Masters, if you are very good in the degree level, you will get the scholarship. So if you are the scholarship holder, then the burden will be lesser...."	Scholarships for graduate students