

Internationalisation of Higher Education Policy: Implications on international student withdrawals from Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper aims to present and briefly discuss policy documents focusing on the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia and their implication on international student withdrawals. Numerous policies and guidelines have been developed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia to propel Malaysia as education hub in this region. However, the current statistic does not seem to support national goal to increase international student enrolment to 200,000 by 2020 or be an education hub of excellence. Existing literature indicates that there has never been any research that studies in detail on the issue of international student withdrawals from pursuing higher education in Malaysian education institutions. Therefore, an in-depth study is needed to investigate the current policy development process and their implication on the phenomenon of international student withdrawals from Malaysian higher institutions.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia has been consistently set as one of the key agendas by the government of Malaysia, a high priority in the past three decades. The agenda was also a policy measure to reduce foreign exchange outflows by increasing exports of this sector (Tham et al., 2013). Key policy documents such as the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP, 2007)*, *Internationalisation of Higher Education Policy (2011)*, *Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015-2025 (2015)* and the *Way Forward for Private Higher Education Institutions: Education as an Industry (2020)*, clearly state the national intention and strategy. The documents declare the national various strategic policies to transform Malaysia into a regional hub for higher education. The transformation is vital as the education sector has one of the highest multipliers. Every ringgit invested in education generates income from the sector and other sectors it supports, inclusive of the exponential intangible impact (MoHE, 2015).

Furthermore, through MoHE, the government sustained high levels of investment, of which 7.7% of Malaysia's annual budget is spent on higher education (MoHE, 2015). As a result, according to the UNESCO benchmarking, Malaysia stands the highest among its peers, developed Asian economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Japan), ASEAN neighbours (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore), and countries with comparable GDP per capita (Chile, Mexico) (MoHE, 2015). Efforts have also been made to improve the world ranking of Malaysian universities. Research universities were set up to ensure that Malaysian universities are in the top world ranking (<http://www.ukm.my/news>). Consequently, the national policy changes resulted in sharp increases in international student enrolments, mostly from the Middle East, China and Indonesia (Sirat, 2008).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Two hundred sixty documents were retrieved from the websites of MoHE, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), Malaysian Quality Assurance (MQA), the Prime Minister Office (PMO), Immigration of Malaysia, various higher institutions, and the Parliament of the Malaysian Government website. Hard copies of policy documents were obtained from the MoHE through personal visits to the Ministry. As such, a computer software, Mendeley was used to collect, manage, identify, and categorise policy documents referred to in this study. Mendeley is a reference management software that can manage citations to articles, books, government documents, book chapters, or websites. It can also search for articles or documents related to certain topics, using relevant keywords or phrases. It was a suitable tool for computer-aided content analysis when large data sets are concerned, and research trends need to be captured over time. Keywords such as international students, *pelajar antarabangsa*, and visa were used to screen issues pertaining to international student matters.

3.0 Policy Documents

In a conference organised by the Malaysian Business Council in 1991, the then Prime Minister, the Honourable Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad presented a paper entitled *Malaysian: The Way Forward* (Vision 2020, 1990). He put forward some thoughts on the future course of the nation and outlined some measures how to attain national objective of developing Malaysia into an industrialised country. The measures encapsulate several short-term plans and strategies so that the foundations can be laid for the long journey towards that ultimate objective. The desired ultimate objective is the formation of a Malaysian nation that truly developed nation by 2020, henceforth Vision 2020. The progress not limited to the economic field alone but will include all aspects of life: economic, political, social, spiritual, psychological and cultural (Nur Azura & Normi Azura, 2014). Four key policy documents that emerged from the Vision 2020 clearly announced the Malaysian government's intention to be a higher education hub. The key documents provide guidelines for the Malaysian higher education development from 1991 to 2025 (MoHE, 2007). They state the plans and recommendations for strengthening Malaysia position as an international global education hub. In general, policies were predominantly formulated to encourage higher institutions to increase international student enrolments. Each document is briefly described as the followings:

3.1 National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2020 (NHESP, 2007)

In August 2007, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) launched the *Pelan Strategik Pengajian Tinggi Negara - Perletakan Asas Melangkaui 2020 (PSPTN)* or *National Higher Education Strategic Plan – Laying the Foundation Beyond 2020 (NHESP)* (MoHE, 2007). The NHESP (2007) was the major shift and blueprint for higher education development in Malaysia. The Strategic Plan outlined seven strategic thrusts: *i. Widening access and enhancing quality, ii. Improving the quality of teaching and learning, iii. Enhancing research and innovation, iv. Strengthening institution of higher education, v. Intensifying internationalisation, vi. Enculturation of lifelong learning, and vii. Reinforcing Higher Education Ministry's delivery system.*

The fifth key thrust is specific to the intensification of internationalisation efforts in higher education, with the quintessential goal of transforming Malaysia into an education hub of excellence with international recognition. This landmark document shapes the focus and direction of the higher education system; to propel the education system forward and produce a first-class human capital mindset. The four phases of the NHESP 2020 (2007) are shown in Figure 1.

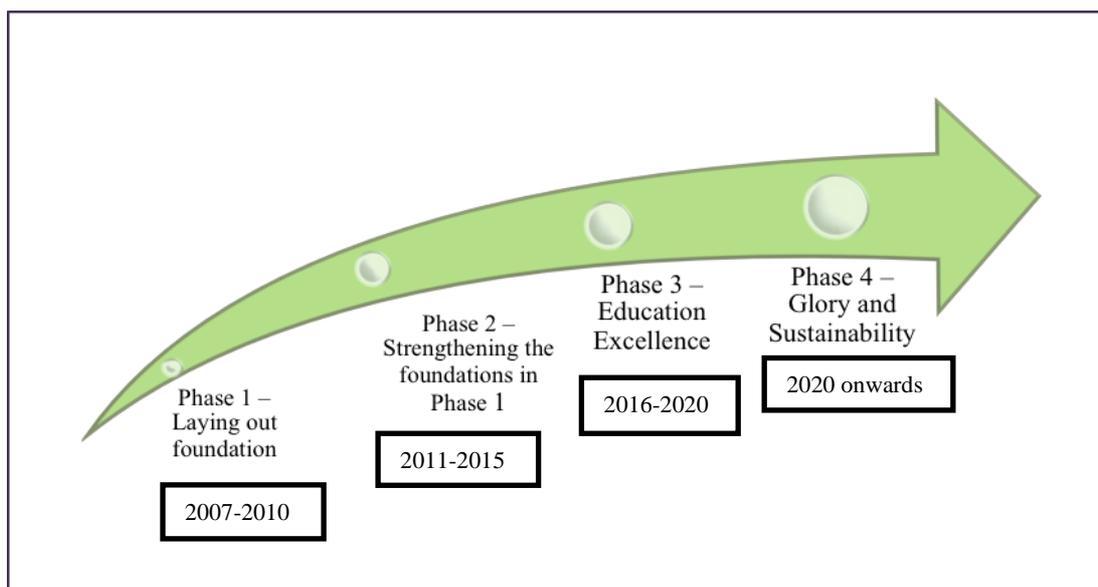


Figure 1- National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2020, NHESP (2007)

The fourth phase of NHESP would have been in place, but the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) replaced it in 2015.

3.2 Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education Malaysia (2011)

The main objective of the Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education in Malaysia was to accelerate the inflow of international students to 150,000 by 2015 and 200,000 by 2020 (p.7). The policy was formulated based on six critical sectors of internationalisation, namely, student mobility, staff mobility, academic programmes, research and development, governance and autonomy, and social integration and community engagement. In addition, they aim to

ensure a positive projection of internationalisation activities in the country in order to position Malaysian higher education as a strategic export service. Furthermore, they also focus on increasing quality and admission capacity, education provisions, and international student retention (upon completion of studies). The **objectives of the policy** are as follows:

- i Identifying the critical components of internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia that require immediate action,
- ii Enabling current practices of internationalisation to be improvised and improved, based on the best interest of all involved, and
- iii Aligning and ensuring the current momentum in internationalisation activities is heading towards national aims.

In order to achieve the policy objectives, proposed activities, responsible agencies, variables representing measurable benchmarks, and follow-up on measurable benchmarks were identified in the three areas of expected outcomes. Table 1 shows the details.

Table 1: Policy Statements - Objectives and Outcomes
Source: Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE, 2011. Pp8-16)

SECTOR	PROPOSED ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	MEASURABLE	FOLLOW-UP ON MEASURABLE
Policy Statement 1 In ensuring steady growth of international students in higher education institutions, the following should be undertaken.				
1 International marketing	i. Position all international promotions with the Education Malaysia brand	JPT MoHE Public and private HEIs	i. All HEI's international promotions to be aligned with the Education Malaysia brand YES/NO ii. No. of HEIs participating in international promotions under the Education Malaysia brand	2011: JPT to disseminate information on Education Malaysia and international marketing activities consistently to HEIs
	ii. Intensify current recruitment emerging and potential markets globally	JPT MoHE Public and private HEIs	i. % of international students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes from the targeted emerging and potential markets	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: Jumlah pelajar antarabangsa
	iii. Ensure recruitments agencies representing Malaysian higher education are competent, well informed, reputable and will act at all times in the best interest of students and the Malaysian higher education	MoHE	i. List of international recruitment agents recognised available to HEIs (YES/NO)	
2 International student admission	Improve admission procedures into respective institutions at all levels	Public HEIs	i. Letter of offer sent out upon completed documentation after 14 days (YES/NO) ii. Provide information on accommodation (YES/NO) iii. Provide orientation programme upon arrival (YES/NO) iv. Provide advice on HEI academic system and programme (YES/NO)	Operational framework on international student management (Model on managing students' recruitment and arrival)
	Simplify and improve admission procedures at all levels, involving visa application, immigration policies as well as procedure into the country	MoHA	i. Immigration procedures to be reviewed as recommended by NKEA Lab by 2011 (YES/NO)	Operational framework on international student management (Model or initiatives to simplify visa application, e.g. green lane for students or one-off student visa)
	Provide scholarships for outstanding international students admitted into the country	Relevant ministries and HEIs	i. Number of scholarships given to international students	2011: Listing of all available scholarships to international students to be disseminated to HEIs RU to start initiatives on providing scholarships to outstanding international students
3 Academic programmes	Provide common foundation programme for international students	Public and private HEIs MoE	i. Common foundation programmes for international students (YES/NO)	
	Ensure the use of English as a medium of instruction in the management and academic aspects of higher education	Public HEIs	i. Course materials and assessments in English (YES/NO)	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: satisfaction index pelajar antarabangsa

	involving international students		ii. Documents related to academic programmes delivered to international students in English (YES/NO)	
	Allow international academic transfer of any academic related activities	Public HEIs	i. Number of academic programmes that allow international credit transfer for students	2011: Listing of all academic programmes allowing international credit transfer to be disseminated to students.
4 Research and development	Promote R&D capacity of higher education institutions and research institutes through initiatives with international counterparts.	MoHE, Public and private HEIs	i. Number of synergistic groupings of experts formed ii. Number of international awards for R&D products iii. Number of outbound Malaysian experts invited as visiting professor vi. Number of research projects funded by international funding bodies iv. MoHE to house links of database from various HEIs under one system (e.g. website / resource center) by 2011 v. Number of internationally joint research projects vii. Number of staff being trained abroad with regards to research	
	Attract, recruit and engage quality foreign researchers through international networks to enhance research profile and collaborative research programmes	MoHE Public and private HEIs	i. Number of international expert involved in R&D activities at HEIs ii. Number of international expert involved in sharing of international expertise among HEIs iii. Number of international meetings held in collaboration with local and foreign HEIs iv. Number of international experts holding leading positions in HEIs	
5. Management and Administration	Enabling all internationalisation activities through a coordinating unit institutionally	Public and private HEIs	i. Set up operational office or unit for HEIs accepting international students (YES/NO)	
	Ensure the international students' security and welfare is provided	MoHE	i. International Students Charter / Code of Practice at HEIs (YES/NO)	2011: Setting up International Students Charter / Code of Practice
	Ensure the international students' service is provided and regulated.	MoHE	i. Forming a regulatory framework on international student service at the centralised level.	2011: Regulatory framework for international student centre
	Ensure the use of English as a common medium of communication involving international students.	Public and private HEIs	i. Availability of administrative forms (e.g. hostel application, subject registration, academic audit etc) available in English (YES/NO) ii. Availability of communication medium (e.g. emails, signboards, announcement etc) available in English (YES/NO) iii. Satisfaction level of international students accessing communication mediums (e.g. emails, signboards, announcement	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: satisfaction index pelajar antarabangsa

			etc) through international outlook review (RESULT OF SURVEY, BASED ON LIKERT SCALE)	
	Conduct professional development and training for academic and non-development and training academic staff in adapting to internationalisation, such as language support programmes, cultural understanding and international mindset.	Public and private HEIs	i. Number of training programmes conducted for academic and non-academic staff ii. Number of academic and non-academic staff who has undergone training iii. Satisfaction level of international students on handling a class of students with diversified nationalities (through international outlook review, including language proficiency of staff) iv. Satisfaction level of international students on customer service (through international outlook review, including language proficiency of staff) (SURVEY – Likert scale)	Training modules on international student management to academic and non-academic staff CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: satisfactory index pelajar antarabangsa
POLICY STATEMENT 2				
In ensuring steady growth of both inbound and outbound international mobility of students and staff, the following should be undertaken				
1. International network	i. Establish international institutional linkages to allow exchanges, study abroad opportunities, international collaborations as well as international internships and attachments	Public and private HEIs	i. Number of international institutional linkages ii. Number of inbound international student in international mobility programmes by Malaysian HEIs	
2. Students' international mindset development	i. Provide international exposure activities in scholarships, internships and attachments, as well as extension of study loans to include international mobility programmes for local students.	Public and private HEIs	i. Number of outbound Malaysian student in international mobility programmes ii. Number of scholarships with international exposure opportunities iii. PTPTN /JPA /other funding agencies provide loan extension for international student mobility programmes. (YES/NO) iv. 20% local students going abroad for international mobility programmes by 2015	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: Jumlah pelajar yang terlibat dalam program mobiliti 'outbound'.
3 International development for staff.	Provide attractive career promotion opportunities and mobility opportunities for academic and non-academic staff.	Public and private HEIs	i. National guideline of merit-based recognition for international staff by 2011 ii. Number of academic staff mobilised internationally iii. Number of non-academic staff mobilised internationally.	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: jumlah 'outbound' staf akademik.
POLICY STATEMENT 3				
To ensure international students' positive study and living experiences in the country, the following should be undertaken				
1 Media coverage	Provide positive media coverage on the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia and its benefits to the	MoHE, MoICC, MoTour, HEIs	i. One communication plan (promotion, marketing and branding) on internationalisation of HEI in Malaysia and its benefits to the country	

	country		ii. Number of local and foreign media coverage on dealing with internationalisation / international students	
2 International students' social and community engagement	Encourage two-way interaction among the local community as well as the international students' community through a. Activities organised by international offices b. Community engagement activities and university social programmes responsibility c. Activities organised by international students d. Cross-cultural integration programmes between i. Local students and international students ii. Local community and international students iii. Among international students' community	Public and private HEIs	i. Number of local communities participating in activities organised by international offices involving international students. ii. Number and type of social and cultural integration programmes iii. Participation of international students in university social responsibility programmes iv. Number of cross-cultural integration programmes	CAP Pengantarabangsaan SO: meningkatkan pengalaman positif pelajar antarabangsa
3 International students' service support	Provide language support programmes and other fundamental means of support e.g. education, healthcare for both international students as well as their spouses and family members	Public and private HEIs	i. No of language support programmes offered to international student ii. Availability of national language courses or cultural programmes to international student spouses or family members (YES/NO)	CAP Pengantarabangsaan KPI: satisfaction index pelajar antarabangsa

In essence, the **expected outcomes** of the policy are as follows:

- i Increased growth of international students and staff in the country,
- ii Increased inbound and outbound international mobility among students and staff, and
- iii Increased positive experience of international students in the country.

It is evident that the internationalisation policy primary objective was to increase the number of international students enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions. Nonetheless, while the policy addresses the issue of international students' retention upon completion of their studies, it ignores the issue of international student withdrawals.

3.3 Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (MEB, 2015)

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 re-emphasised the Malaysian government's commitment to put the country's higher education system at par with world-ranking education providers. The document outlines the strategies, plans, key performance indicators, responsible departments, institutions and agencies within several legal frameworks. The MEB (2015) announced ten major shifts. Under the *Global Prominence* thrust, the government reaffirmed its vision to be an 'international education hub,' continuing the NHESP (2007). The government aspires that Malaysia is recognised internationally, especially by international students, for its balance of quality and affordability, good quality of life, and rich cultural experiences (MoHE, 2015). The number of international student enrolments is projected to expand to 250,000 by 2025 (MoHE, 2015). However, this target also includes international students studying in international schools who are not part of higher education and not consistent with national aspiration, as stated in the NHESP 2007.

In addition, the MEB (2015) outlined the six attributes that each child should have to be globally competitive; *Knowledge, Thinking Skills, Language Proficiency, National Identity, Leadership Skills and Ethics & Spirituality*. It is expected that the presence of international students on campus may foster and help local students to be global citizens and prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century. The internationalisation of classrooms and campus settings would benefit local students from the sociocultural elements. The internationalised settings would serve as an introduction of education for global citizenship, which may focus on the intercultural competencies of students and, therefore, their employability as future global citizens (Mueller, 2014).

3.4 Way Forward for Private Higher Education Institutions: Education as an Industry (2020 - 2025), [Way Forward (2020)]

This policy document, *Way Forward* (2020), focuses on the private higher education sector. It highlights the five key areas of higher education as an industry; *agile governance, transformed delivery, institutional sustainability, innovation & teaching excellence and internationalisation*. The first three are policy enablers, and the other two are the outcomes. It also discusses the issue of governance and examines the rules and regulations that shape the governance of the higher education industry in Malaysia. The document listed some issues and challenges confronting the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia, as illustrated in Figure.

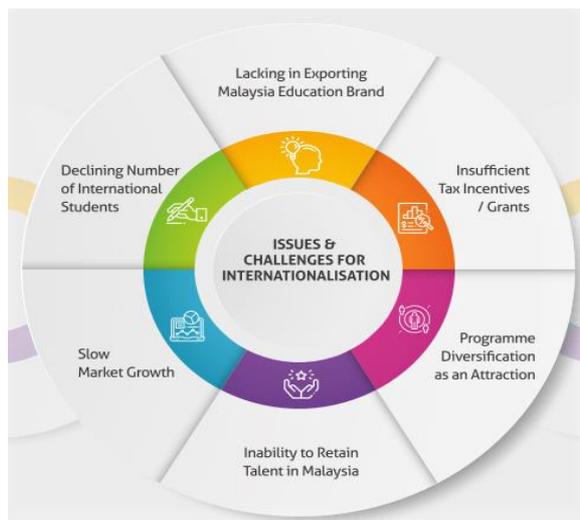
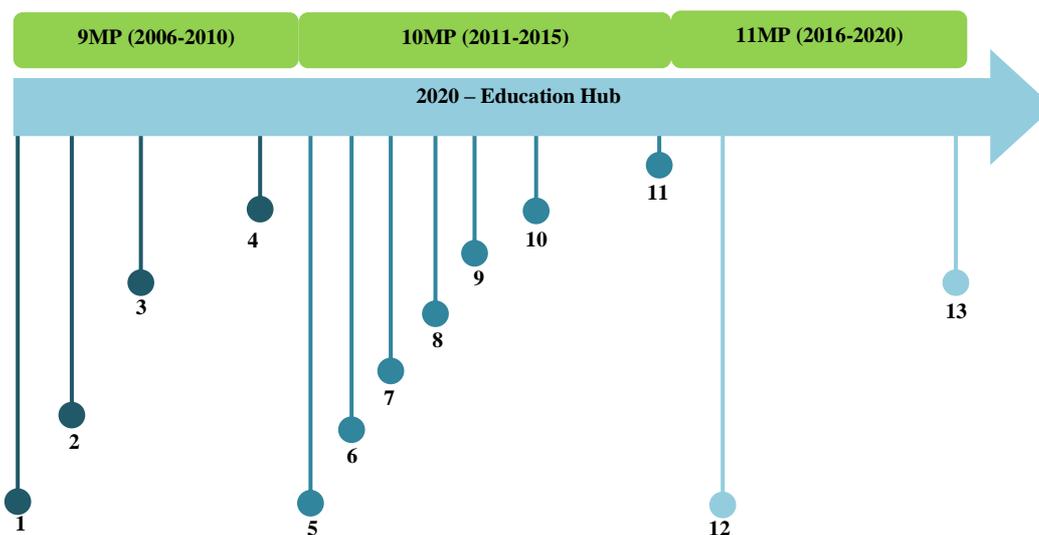


Figure 2: Issues and challenges for internationalisation of higher education in Malaysian (MoHE, 2020.p117)

On the other hand, there are additional 13 policy documents governing the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysian institutions since 2006, which are crucial as points of reference for an investigation of international student withdrawals, as shown in Figure 3.



1. National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) - Laying the foundation beyond 2020 (2006)
2. Strategic Marketing Plan for International Higher Education Malaysia 2006-2010 (2007)
3. Guidebook for International Students Studying in Malaysia (2010)
4. National Higher Education Action Plan (NHESP) Phase 2 (2010)
5. Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education (2011)
6. Operational Framework for International Student Management (2013)
7. Guidelines and Standards for International Student Recruitment in Private Higher Institutions (2013)
8. Guidelines to Good Practices: Student Assessment (2013)
9. Guidelines to Good Practices: Academic Staff (2014)
10. Guidelines to Good Practices: Monitoring, Reviewing & Continually Improving Institutional Quality (2014)
11. Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015)
12. Enhancing academic productivity and cost efficiency - University Transformation Programme, Silver Book (2017)
13. Way Forward for Private Education Institutions: Education as an Industry (2020)

Figure 3: Additional policy documents governing internationalisation policy.

4.0 Attractive Factors as Higher Education Destination

The increasing influx of international students requires Malaysia to have robust infrastructure, exposure to local culture, and higher education institutions' employees and the local community in accepting the students. Based on a UNESCO study in 2014, the MEB (2015), outlined five major factors influencing international students' decisions to study in Malaysia. **First**, in terms of cultural comfort, Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures that provides a welcoming environment, particularly for Muslim students. **Second**, Malaysia provides a high quality of life and is widely regarded as comfortable living and studying. **Third**, undergraduate and graduate degree programmes are reasonably priced. **Fourth**, the high quality of higher education is regarded as good value for money. **Finally**, English is widely used as a language of instruction.

Nonetheless, the UNESCO's findings are similar to an earlier study which found that international students chose Malaysia due to the international recognition of its education system, reasonable cost of livings and tuition fees compared to their home countries, fast and convenient travelling, having friends or family members currently studying in Malaysia, efficient network of information technology, safety, political stability, English language is commonly used, an Islamic country, less requirement for financial proof, tourism opportunity, variety of foods, weather, and proactive efforts by institutions to attract international students (IPPTN, 2009). Equally, various studies have also identified similar factors attracting international students in choosing Malaysia as a destination choice (Awang et al., 2012; IPPTN, 2009; Padlee et al., 2010). The factors include international recognition, competitive fees, opportunity to make international contact and network, excellent education quality, and English as a medium of instruction. Later studies found that the reputation of the institution and the job prospects of future graduates were the two most important determining factors. (Abdul & Ismail, 2011; Cheng et al., 2013; Hasan & Masri, 2015). The program offered, tuition fee, facilities offered and academic staff prominence were the top four factors that attracted post graduate international students to study in Malaysia (Zainurin & Muhamad, 2011). The study also discovered that,

even with a scholarship and a good physical appearance, a student would still prefer programmes with prominent academic staff as their first choice.

Likewise, Malaysia became an attractive study destination for students from the Middle East and Central Asia regions. A positive image, seen as a moderate, successful and peaceful Muslim nation among Muslim countries, contributed to the steady inflow of students from these regions to Malaysia. It is also seen as economically and politically stable (Akiba, 2008). Furthermore, the tragedy of September 11, 2001, changed the pattern of student mobility across the globe. The number of students from Middle Eastern countries to the United States (US) decreased due to the US government-mandated changes in the admissions process. As a result, Malaysia has emerged as an important destination for students from the Middle East (Sirat, 2008). By the end of 2009, the top ten Middle East countries with the highest international student enrolment in Malaysia were Iran, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Palestinian territory, Oman, Turkey, Syrian Arab territory and Egypt (MoHE, 2013).

On the other hand, some external factors might also affect the decision to study abroad, such as political and economic conditions of the targeted country or region, geographical location of the targeted institution, student fees, scholarship opportunities, medium of instruction and the accreditation of diploma that is received from these institutions. These factors are best described by the “pull and push factors” proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Furthermore, according to Grönroos (1997), a student is not only selecting the education service when choosing a country to study, but also secondary services related to the core service. Secondary services are related to living in the host country, such as safety, security, cultural activities, international background, university environment, quality of life, and visa and entry requirements. Thus, the secondary services also influence the international students’ decision-making process (Cubillo et al., 2006). Moreover, both core and secondary services influence a country image which subsequently affects the final decision of a prospective student.

In conclusion, the factors that influence students’ decision to study in Malaysia are crucial and should be closely monitored. Practitioners and policymakers should be aware of the global pattern of student mobility and any significant changes from various viewpoints. Additionally, they should also understand the students’ countries of origin, their needs, culture, beliefs, and values. Finally, at all times, all higher institutions in Malaysia should strive to provide world-class facilities and high-quality programmes.

5.0 Governing Authority

The industry is governed by various Acts, Statutory Regulations, Circulars and Guidelines (MoHE, 2020). Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555) is the main legislation to regulate the establishment, registration, management and control of education quality provided by private higher educational institutions. The governing authorities that play a direct role in internationalising the higher education sector in Malaysia are the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). The MoHE was established in 2004 to improve standards in higher education institutions. It was the turning point where various education reforms were introduced to encourage and facilitate the entry of international students into higher education institutions in Malaysia. According to the Ministry’s organisational chart, seven agencies were established under the ministry: the Department of Higher Education, EMGS, MQA, AKEPT, JPPKK, PTPTN and 20 public universities (www.mohe.gov.my). In the framework of internationalisation policy, three agencies from MoHE and one from the MoHA will be briefly described below.

i. *Department of Higher Education*; the department manages and oversees both public and private higher education in Malaysia. It ensures that the higher institutions are of international standing while also involves in the marketing of Malaysian higher education internationally. The department is also responsible for the welfare of international students studying in Malaysia.

ii. *Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS)*; the EMGS is a company limited by guarantee and approved by the Malaysian parliament, was incorporated on April 13, 2012 under the purview of the then higher education ministry. Subsequently, the Ministry awarded a contract to a public listed company Scicom (MSC) Bhd to provide EMGS with a software e-service solution. Some of the key modules and applications within the Student Application and Registration System (STARS) provided by the e-service solution include an international student application and registration system, student web portal and student tracking system, medical screening and processing system, business intelligence and analytics system, passport tracking system through wireless devices, biometric system and insurance processing system (Wong, 2019). In addition, for each new and renewal application, Scicom would vet, process, and maintain their records for EMGs before the application is sent to Immigration for SP sticker.

According to its website (<https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/about-us/>), EMGS is also responsible for promoting Malaysia as the international education hub of choice and positioning the country as the top 10 education destinations. In addition, it organises marketing and promotional activities for Malaysian education institutions and products overseas. The tagline shown in its website claims ‘*Together, Education Malaysia and EMGS offer the best of world-class Malaysian education to the global community*’ (accessed 14th August 2020).

iii. *Malaysia Quality Assurance (MQA)*; the MQA was established in November 2007, and is responsible for developing, monitoring and overseeing the quality assurance practices and accreditation of national higher education for both the public and private sectors. It is also to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) as a basis for quality assurance of higher education and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications (www.mqa.gov.my).

iv. *Department of Immigration Malaysia*; the Department of Immigration Malaysia, henceforth Immigration, is under the Ministry of Home Affairs since 1964. According to its policy document, *Pelan Strategik 2015-2020*, the four functions of the department are **a)** to issue passport or travel documents to Malaysian citizens and its permanent residents, **b)** to issue visa, pass and permit to foreign citizens, **c)** border control, and **d)** to enforce Immigration Act 1959/63, Rules 1963, Passport Act 1966, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2007/2010 (JIM, 2015). The EMGS operates in close collaboration with the Immigration and provides a one-stop student services centre for all matters related to Student Pass and Visa.

6.0 Policy Cycle

One of the models used to explain the complex process of public policy development is the stages model. The various stages model varies from five to seven stages and is also sometimes known as policy cycle, linear model, sequential model, or heuristic model (Benoit, 2013). Benoit wrote that although it was initially thought a linear activity, it is now acknowledged that the process is cyclical, simultaneous, not necessarily sequential, or even distinct. The relationships between the stages are flexible and dynamic. In view of this study's third objective, the five stages of the policy cycle, proposed by Howlett and Ramesh (2003), are referred to and summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 The policy stages in public policymaking (Benoit, 2013; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003)

Stage	Description of activity	Function
Agenda setting	A process of how a policy and the problem it is intended to address is acknowledged to be of public interest.	To recognise and alignment of problems.
Formulation	Policymakers (actors/stakeholders) examine the various policy options for possible solutions. It is at this stage that power relationships crystallise, determining the direction a policy will take.	To find key questions and propose solutions.
Adoption (decision making)	The stage during which decisions are made at the governmental level, resulting in a decision favouring one or more approaches to addressing a given problem.	To accept a particular solution to the problem.
Implementation	The application of the policy to administrative machinery of the government, and the establishment of policy parameters that may affect the eventual outcome of the policy.	To put the solutions into effect.
Evaluation (monitoring and review)	Policy evaluation stage to verify whether its implementation and its effects are aligned with the objectives that were explicitly or implicitly set out. This evaluation can be carried out by the government apparatus, by consultants or by civil society.	To assess impacts on meeting policy objectives.

7.0 Summary

Although various policies related to the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia have existed since 1996, the underlying philosophy was always for monetary gain or income generation. Phase 2 of NHESP (2006) states that one of the strategies for attracting international students is by enriching students' learning experiences. However, rather than formulating an action plan focusing on international students' learning experience, the focus was on local students (MoHE, 2010). It overlooked the need to enrich the international students' experience in Malaysian higher institutions. The NHESP also asserted extensive efforts to attract quality international students, although no specific definition of 'quality' was provided. The *Operational Framework (2013)* provided the standards and aspects to be considered by higher institutions to protect and support international students in their educational pursuits in Malaysia.

The lack of attention to detail and foresight in policy formulation and adoption stages might have caused loosely interpreted policy implementation. Furthermore, the perceived lack of integrated and real commitment among

stakeholders and agencies in overseeing the international students' welfare suggests that the internationalisation of higher education issues goes beyond national policies. It has complex sociological and political connotations, which push the falling number of international student recruitment into Malaysia's higher institutions into more repelling grounds. As such, it is crucial to investigate the phenomenon of international student withdrawals and its possible association with the falling number of enrolments in recent years, before the SAR-Cov2 pandemic.

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