

Choosing an Offshore International Program:
A Study of Transnational Higher Education
in Hong Kong

By

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Certification

I certify that the work in this thesis titled “*Choosing an Offshore International Program: a study of transnational higher education in Hong Kong*” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201200418 on 19 July 2012.

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Abstract

The demand for international higher education is increasing at an unprecedented rate, and transnational education makes up a significant proportion of the international higher education sector. With the expansion of the transnational market, a deeper understanding of students' behaviour in choosing a transnational institution, and in choosing a program, is important to ensure that student needs are met and to improve the capability of transnational education providers to offer relevant and valued education.

The main purpose of this research was to study the university choice process and to identify the factors that influence students in the process of choosing an offshore international program. The context was the transnational higher education sector in Hong Kong.

This research adopted as its theoretical framework the concepts of Hossler and Gallagher's school choice model and the push-pull model of international education. Using a mixed-methods approach, survey questionnaires were collected from 496 offshore international students enrolled in 12 programs from five universities, and qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 20 students.

Findings showed that the university choice of offshore international students is a multi-dimensional decision process which combines a variety of factors at different stages. Unlike most previous studies, the country effect was found to be less significant for offshore than for onshore international students. The local partner institution played

an important role in the transnational university choice process. The Modified Transnational University Choice model developed here reflects the interaction of the program effect, the transnational push and pull effect, and the influences of the university and local partner institutions.

The discussion, recommendations and conclusions from this research are relevant for administrators and policy makers of transnational education providers, and contribute to the management practice and the current body of knowledge on international education.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The demand for international higher education is increasing at an unprecedented rate, and transnational education (TNE) makes up a significant proportion of the international higher education sector. TNE occurs when the students are in a different country (typically referred to as the partner or host country) from where the institution providing their education is based (typically referred to as the provider country or home country) (GATE, 1997).

This chapter provides an introduction to this study of TNE. Section 1.1 explains the background and rationale of the research. Sections 1.2–1.4 describe the research problem, the researcher’s specific motivating factors, and the aims of the study. Section 1.5 outlines the contribution of the study. Sections 1.6–1.8 outline the conceptual framework, the research questions and the methodology. Section 1.9 provides an overview of the remaining chapters. Finally, Section 1.10 provides a summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background

The European Center for Higher Education, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-CEPES, 1999, p.2) defines transnational education as:

[a]ll types of higher education study programs, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programs may belong to the education system of a State different

from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.

The International Development Program (IDP) Education Pty Ltd, Australia's leading international enrolment service, has estimated that student numbers globally will increase from 1.8 million in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2025 (Bohm et al., 2002). Cross-border education, or TNE, is an important global trend with strong implications for the development of international education around the world.

TNE is characterized by its borderless feature. It carries political, economic and cultural implications. The importing and exporting countries achieve their specific policy objectives in different ways, such as “generating economic revenue, boosting capacity building, developing human resources and promoting international understanding” (Gu, 2009, p.624).

In Hong Kong, TNE was established more than 50 years ago when the University of London started to offer its external programs (Forestier et al., 2013). A large number of graduate professionals moved to Hong Kong in the early 1990s, and the number of full-time places available in local tertiary institutions was insufficient to meet the professionals' demand. In the late 1990s, one of the effects of the economic downturn was that workers needed to acquire new skills and qualifications in order to compete for jobs. There remains a high demand for adults to be re-trained and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. In the last decade the Hong Kong Government has further expanded the TNE sector to meet the demand for greater educational

opportunities and to increase human capital, aiming to shift to a knowledge-based economy to gain a competitive edge in the global market.

The rapid expansion of TNE provision in Hong Kong is also in response to increasing aspirations by people to be better qualified to succeed in a changing and knowledge-based economy. However, local institutions have a limited capacity to meet such demand, and many overseas universities have stepped in to deliver the transnational programs.

In 1997 Hong Kong launched the Non-Local Education Ordinance, marking the formal regulating of “globalization” of TNE provision. Hong Kong is aiming to develop into an education hub with transnational programs offered from a variety of countries.

These transnational programs include distance education, twinning programs, articulation programs, branch campuses and franchising arrangements. The programs in Hong Kong can be offered in different ways, from co-operation with local universities, government-funded higher education institutions’ self-financed continuing education arms and publicly funded vocational training institutions, to private providers who establish their own branch campuses.

In 2012, 37,900 students were enrolled in the non-local higher education and professional courses in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong SAR, 2013). In September 2014, 1,186 non-local courses were available in Hong Kong under registration with the Non-Local Courses Registry. The United Kingdom (UK) is the leading provider of transnational programs in Hong Kong, followed by

Australia. In 2014, the UK was providing 60.7% of registered and 80.0% of exempted courses, with Australia providing 17.2% and 11.4%, respectively (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014a). According to the 2012/13 student enrolment data, Hong Kong ranked as the fifth highest provider offering UK transnational programs, with 29,905 students studying UK higher education programs offered in Hong Kong (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014).

1.2 Research Problem

Successful marketing of Hong Kong to enhance its image as an “education hub” will attract more international universities to offer their transnational programs in Hong Kong. The enrolment of offshore international students provides benefits to both the home institution and the host institution. The transnational programs promote human development and provide a new source of income, which is vital because many countries have reduced their education funding. Institutions must expand their higher education provision locally and internationally to remain sustainable. By offering transnational programs, universities expand their overseas markets and can increase their student numbers, which in turn contribute to the local partner institutions’ solvency. The sustainability and productivity of both home and host institutions are at least partially supported by the students undertaking the transnational study.

The various TNE stakeholders at government, institution and individual levels influence how TNE is provided. Students are a key stakeholder and play an important role in the provision of TNE at the individual level. While TNE administrators and policy makers are aware of the keen competition of the higher education market in Hong Kong, few

explore in depth why students choose transnational study and favour one transnational program over another.

With the expansion of the transnational market, a deeper understanding of students' behaviour in choosing a transnational institution and program is important to ensure that student needs are met and to improve the capability of transnational education providers to offer relevant and valued education. It would be valuable to understand their university choice decision making process and the factors and variables that influence the decision.

The current research faced two specific challenges. First, while many researchers have focused on onshore students, both domestic and international, few studies have investigated offshore students. Studies of onshore school choice factors have noted the importance of students' individual characteristics, the "significant others" effect, institutional characteristics, program characteristics, cost and financial aid. This study aimed to determine whether these issues are also applicable to offshore students.

Second, there is a lack of theoretical frameworks for the decision-making process of choosing a transnational program. The current university choice models on onshore international students may not fully illustrate the process and choice factors of offshore international students. A theoretical framework for the university choice process of international offshore students is vital.

1.3 Researcher's Specific Motivating Factors

I have studied my Masters degree and am now pursuing my Doctor of Business Administration through TNE. I belong to the growing group of transnational students in Hong Kong who I discuss in this study. Like many other students in the transnational program, I do not have time to go abroad to spend on campus immersing myself in foreign academia as a full-time student. Yet a transnational program offers the opportunity to develop a global mindset with a more international outlook, while the program fits into my current lifestyle with minimal disruption to family responsibilities and career. At the personal level, I have always been curious to explore whether other offshore international students share my point of view.

Professionally, I also lead the Degree Programs Department of a local institution delivering numerous transnational programs from a number of universities and countries. As a professional in the transnational education industry with over 20 years of experience, I have a stake in gaining more information and a better understanding of transnational students' school choice process and the factors which influence them to enrol in a transnational institution. Moreover, I feel a leadership obligation to understand students' needs, goals and comments and see how the universities and the local partner institution can support those needs and goals.

1.4 Aims of the Study

This research for the Doctor of Business Administration degree aims to contribute to management practice of the transnational higher education industry.

The large number of TNE programs gives students in Hong Kong many options to further their studies. Students have become customers for which higher education institutions must compete. Meeting students' needs is becoming ever more important and will soon be a key to survival for many institutions that offer transnational programs in the Hong Kong higher education market.

This research serves two main purposes. The first objective was to identify the factors that influence offshore international students to choose higher education through transnational study in Hong Kong and to gain insight and in-depth understanding of the relative importance of these factors.

The second objective was to study the decision-making process on “university choice” and gather information about this process. The context of the study was the TNE sector in Hong Kong.

A close examination of the student choice process will enable administrators to develop more effective enrolment management strategies. The findings from this research are targeted for the use of the numerous TNE stakeholders: policy makers and educational administrators, institutional faculty and staff, local partner institutional administrators and students who consider pursuing transnational programs. Administrators and policy makers who understand the decision-making process utilized by offshore international students can highlight their institutions' features in order to better match the interests and abilities of different students. They can customize their marketing strategy to enhance or at least maintain their competitiveness, thereby helping to manage their enrolment numbers. Through the findings and recommendations from this research, they

can also review their strategies and policies to see how best to meet the needs and requirements of offshore international students.

1.5 Contribution of the Study

1.5.1 Contribution to the Theoretical Framework

This study developed a conceptual Transnational University Choice Model that acts as the lens to situate the study. This study was guided by various bodies of knowledge: college choice theory, college choice model, push-pull model of international education and various influences on university choice which include economic, social, human and cultural capital.

The Transnational University Choice Model was based on school choice models and push-pull factors of international education, and was tested with the qualitative and quantitative results from the study. The modified model is a contribution to the theoretical framework for studying international education in the context of transnational delivery.

1.5.2 Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

The school choice process and the choice factors of international offshore students are important for studying the internationalization of education. University-choice research has traditionally been dominated by quantitative analysis, although qualitative approaches are becoming increasingly popular (Perna, 2006). This study combined the strengths of both approaches. Its findings will increase our understanding of the

offshore international student segment, which plays a significant role in the future development of international higher education.

The issues of international offshore students have been less widely studied than those of onshore international students. Given TNE's importance and uniqueness, the results of this research add to the body of knowledge on international offshore education.

1.5.3 Contribution to Management Practice

With the significance of transnational education in the higher education market in Hong Kong, the outcome of this study can be used by the universities offering transnational programs and their local partner institutions. The insights gained from the perspective of offshore international students are based on the students' own experiences in motivating, searching and choosing their transnational institution and program. The students' needs and their decision-making process are relevant to the management of the transnational provision in Hong Kong.

Results and discussions from this research expand the body of knowledge regarding transnational program admissions. It is hoped that by developing a better awareness of the reasons that offshore international students choose to attend transnational institutions, this study serves as a reference for admission professionals and policy makers in their recruitment and marketing efforts, as well as a catalyst for further development of theoretical models of school choice. The results of this study can help to provide better service to offshore international students throughout their transnational study period so that their learning experience can be enhanced. Furthermore, it will help

to identify how offshore international students' backgrounds influence their choices, so that admission professionals can allocate their resources to achieve the optimum result. This study may also assist the policy makers of transnational program providers to identify the specific concerns of students in different countries.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Three major types of conceptual model could potentially be used to investigate the student university choice: an econometric model, a sociological model and a combined model. The econometric model is based mainly on cost-benefit analysis, rate of return and future earning probabilities. The sociological model specifies socioeconomic status, the influence of significant others and academic performance. The combined model focuses on the process of university choice and describes economic and social factors that affect decision-making from a policy analysis perspective. Since the combined models are more useful for school policy analysts and provide course administrators with more opportunities for intervention, this study applied the combined models in developing its conceptual framework.

Throughout the processes of university choice, students are influenced by the nature of human, financial, social and culture capital at different stages (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 1990). This research adopted the concepts of Hossler and Gallagher's school choice model and Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) "push-pull" model as its theoretical framework.

The Hossler and Gallagher multi-stage model (1987) takes into account the interaction of individual and organizational factors on different stages of the school choice. The decision-making process of offshore international study involves three phases. In Phase 1, called predisposition, students decide to undertake further study. It is the stage at which societal, economic and familial factors all combine to generate their interest in school enrolment. In Phase 2, the search phase, it is assumed that students either decide to study through the transnational mode before choosing the institution, or consider directly searching for an institution using the factors associated with transnational study. In the third phase, the choice stage, students evaluate their choice set and narrow it down to make the enrolment decision.

Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model has been used by many scholars since the mid-1990s as a starting point, whether to expand or test a particular phase or use as a foundation in developing new models.

The concept of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) push-pull effect has also been applied to explain the factors of international students. Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull model has been adopted by a number of researchers examining the criteria used by international onshore students to select countries and institutions (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007). In this study, the push factors were those influences that exerted an outbound effect from Hong Kong, while the pull factors exerted an inbound force that attracts the students to pursue transnational study.

1.7 Research Questions

The main purpose of this research was to study the university choice process and to identify the factors which influence students in the process of choosing an offshore international institution in the transnational higher education context in Hong Kong. This study investigated four research questions:

1. What decision-making process do students go through in choosing a transnational institution in Hong Kong?
2. To what extent do individual and institution characteristics influence the decision to pursue further education?
3. To what extent do the following variables influence a student in choosing transnational study in Hong Kong?
 - the presence of “significant others”
 - push forces from Hong Kong
 - pull factors about the transnational study
4. To what extent do the following characteristics affect the choice of an institution?
 - student-related issues
 - institutional characteristics

1.8 Research Methodology

This study was based upon previous school choice models that have been used to describe undergraduate, postgraduate and international students. The survey instrument incorporated the choice variables identified in previous research. This research aimed to

build on previous findings and extend the limited knowledge of the student decision-making process in the context of transnational program.

This study applied a mixed-methods technique, considered the most appropriate methodology given the research objectives. The quantitative research method was useful for testing and confirming the theoretical propositions about university choice for transnational students. It was used to identify the factors and to measure their significance in influencing the students' decisions. The qualitative approach was useful for understanding the university choice process and the ways in which the process played out for individual respondents. It was used to provide a deeper and richer understanding on the school choice decision-making process through detailed description and story-telling. The mixed-methods analysis produced a consistent picture of the processes, relationship and concepts, and strengthened the credibility and justification of the analysis and findings. Multiple sources of information ensured the study's validity and reliability.

Survey questionnaires were collected from 496 students who were studying the transnational education programs in Hong Kong. The students enrolled in 12 different programs from five universities: Macquarie University, The University of Greenwich, The University of Huddersfield, The University of Wales and The Victoria University. The research sample consisted of students from the top two transnational program providers in Hong Kong, the UK and Australia. The programs from the five universities were organized by two top local partner institutions in Hong Kong. The Victoria University program was run by the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, The

Chinese University of Hong Kong while the remaining four universities' programs were run by The Hong Kong Management Association.

Different statistical tests were used to analyze the data from the survey questionnaire – descriptive analysis, chi-square test, factor analysis and independent sample t-test and ANOVA. The data were analyzed using the SPSS software package.

Qualitative data were collected from in-depth interviews with 20 students. With the use of NVivo, the researcher transcribed the interviews, organized the data and built up the tree and child nodes. The questions were analyzed using content analysis. The relationship found between different variables identified from the interview was further explored by cross tabulating through qualitative analysis.

1.9 Overview of the Remainder of this Thesis

Chapter 2 presents the internationalization of higher education and the current higher education system in Hong Kong. It reviews the literature on student school choice models, different study modes and the variables related to school choice. A conceptual framework of Transnational University Choice Model is discussed and proposed.

Chapter 3 draws on the literature to develop a series of hypotheses. It outlines the data collection instruments, research methods, the measures taken to ensure validity and reliability, and the sample, and describes the statistical techniques used to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the survey questionnaire collected from 496 offshore international students.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews administered to 20 offshore international students.

Chapter 6 combines and discusses the findings of the questionnaires and interviews to answer the four research questions. It presents a modified Transnational University Choice Model, based on the findings.

Chapter 7 discusses TNE provision in the context of comments collected from the offshore international students throughout the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. The chapter discusses 12 recommendations for transnational higher education provision in Hong Kong.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions, identifies the research limitations and suggests areas for further research.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Table 1.1 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter reviews the major literatures on the study of transnational education.

Table 1.1 Chapter 1: summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To introduce the background of the research	Section 1.1 gives an overview of the background of this study. It outlines the transnational education market and the development of the transnational higher education in Hong Kong.
To outline the motivation of conducting the study	Section 1.2 identifies two challenges on the research topic. First, many studies have focused on onshore students, but little research has examined offshore international students. Second, there is lack of theoretical frameworks concerning the decision-making process of choosing a transnational program. The current university choice models for onshore students may not fully illustrate the process and choice factors of offshore international students. Section 1.3 explains the specific motivating factors of the researcher for the study.
To explain the aims of the study	Section 1.4 identifies the objectives of the research. These objectives aim to increase understanding of why and how offshore international students choose a transnational program in Hong Kong.
To identify the contribution of the study	Section 1.5 identifies the contribution of the study as relevant to theoretical framework, body of knowledge and management practice in the future development of international higher education programs.
To outline the conceptual framework and the research questions	Section 1.6 outlines the conceptual framework of the study, based on the combination of Hossler and Gallagher's multi-stage model and the push and pull effect of transnational study. Section 1.7 lists the four research questions.
To outline the research instrument	Section 1.8 identifies the research instrument and describes the mixed-methods approach. The quantitative method was used to identify the factors while the qualitative method is used to validate and provide richer understand of the school choice process.
To overview the remainder of the thesis	Section 1.9 gives an overview of the structure and contents of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on the study of transnational education. Section 2.1 provides an overview of internationalization of higher education and the development and approaches to transnational education. Section 2.2 reviews the higher education market in Hong Kong. Section 2.3 examines the most common school choice models. Sections 2.4–2.5 review the major studies of university choice and identify the variables related to school choice. Section 2.6 presents a proposed conceptual Transnational University Choice model, based on the choice model, choice variables and previous research on transnational education. Finally, Section 2.7 provides a summary of the chapter.

2.1 Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization is a key influence and challenge for the higher education sector across the globe (Knight, 2006), with effects at institutional, national and international levels. The terms “internationalization” and “globalization”, both widely used, are not identical (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290):

Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even individuals – to cope with the global academic environment.

International education can be delivered in various ways. Traditionally, students have moved from their country of origin to study in a host country. Other major options emerged towards the end of the 20th century, involving information and communications technologies and the establishment of offshore teaching programs by host country institutions in source countries, a form of forward integration (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

With “offshore education”, international students do not live in the country where their education services are provided (Davis et al., 2000). Offshore programs offer competitive advantage to a host institution in the international market. The theory of competitive advantage suggests that the placement of strategically located outlets is a key decision for service enterprises seeking to gain an edge in the market (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). To integrate into existing export channels, many educational institutions have established offshore programs through coalitions or strategic alliances with a local partner institution. Such service enterprises can overcome the difficulties of separating production from usage, and the “perishability” of the services (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

Higher education makes a large contribution to the increasing globalization of the trade in services (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001). The International Development Program (IDP) Education Pty Ltd, Australia’s leading international enrolment service, has estimated that global student numbers will increase from 1.8 million in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2025 (Bohm et al., 2002). McBurnie and Ziguras (2001) have applied the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) fourfold typology of modes of international service delivery to higher education:

1. Consumption abroad, where the consumer travels to the country where the supplier is located. This has been the most common arrangement for international education, where students travel to live and study in another country.
2. Cross-border delivery, where the provider and recipient of a service remain in their own countries and the service is provided through communications technologies. The international distance learning mode of delivery belongs to this format.
3. Commercial presence, where services are provided in the consumer's country by a foreign provider. In the context of international education, this typically involves an offshore program that is taught in the student's country, through either a local campus of an overseas university or a private institution that acts as a local partner.
4. The movement of natural persons, the ability of people to move across national borders to deliver services. In international education, the movement of natural persons would be a subset of the service provided through a commercial presence.

Countries, institutions and individuals have different motivations for internationalizing higher education. These motivations include expanding commercial coverage; increasing the international, global and cross cultural capacities of teaching and learning, research and knowledge; and fostering of language ability (Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2006). The internationalization of education involves the concept of “transnational” education.

2.1.1 Definition of Transnational Education

Transnational education is a generic term that encompasses different terminologies, such as offshore international programs or on-campus at offshore. The European Center for Higher Education, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-CEPES, 1999, p.2), defines transnational education as:

[a]ll types of higher education study programs, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programs may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.

The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE, 1997, p.1) gives a similar definition:

Transnational education ... denotes any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the host country) so that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country). This situation requires that national boundaries are crossed by information about the education, and by staff and/or educational materials.

The term “transnational education” is usually from the perspective of education recipients while the term “offshore education” is often from the perspective of education providers (Yang, 2006). In this thesis the terms “transnational education” and “offshore education” are used interchangeably. Transnational education can be conducted in a variety of formats. These include distance education, twinning programs, articulation programs, branch campuses and franchising arrangements (McBurnie & Pollock, 1998).

2.1.2 Characteristics of Transnational Education

TNE is an important global trend with strong implications for the development of higher education. TNE carries economic, political and cultural implications. The importing and exporting countries use different methods to achieve specific policy objectives, such as “generating economic revenue, boosting capacity building, developing human resources and promoting international understanding” (Gu, 2009, p.624). Different forces drive the transnational education at government, institutional and individual levels. Push factors are forces generated within the country that initiates the transnational education, while pull factors are forces from other countries that attract the transnational operations. Table 2.1 summarizes the push and pull factors identified by Gu (2009) at different levels.

TNE is attractive to both educational providers and educational recipients. Educational providers seek ways to expand their overseas markets, and transnational arrangements can secure a regular supply of prospective students from overseas institutions. For educational recipients, TNE offer ways to gain a foreign qualification without leaving their country of residence (McBurnie & Pollock, 1998). “Twinning” provides them with easily accessible overseas qualifications at a lower cost, where international offshore students can complete their qualification from foreign institutions in their own country (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006a).

Table 2.1 The push and pull factors in transnational education

Factors level	Push factors	Pull factors
Government level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generate economic revenue to supplement insufficient government funding - Absorb human resources - Redirect educational surplus - Improve the status and profile of national higher education globally - Advocate national culture and values - Promote international understanding and the internationalization of higher education - Challenge traditional education and improve quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compensate for insufficient government funding, and generate economic revenue - Widen access and develop human resources - Diversify educational supply and construct a system of lifelong learning - Encourage input of capital and equipment, construct new infrastructure - Introduce quality resources, and make domestic education more competitive - Avoid talent and capital gain - Promote international exchange, and spread multiculturalism
Institutional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generate income - Increase pool of potential students and alumni - Increase faculty and student exchange opportunities - Develop new and international curriculum - Develop resource bases overseas - Enhance the academic exchange network - Enhance institutional capacity through international extension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generate income - Acquire advanced international curriculum at a low cost - Improve school infrastructure - Expand enrolment - Import faculty, curriculum and experience in management to promote educational and instructional reform for better quality - Provide unique education - Advance international exchange and cooperation
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High threshold for entering domestic institutions due to limited enrolments - Discriminatory enrolment policies - Inferior academic qualities of local institutions - Limited choices of study areas - Lack of flexibility in delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for studying abroad - Relevance and quality of program/curriculum, and flexibility of program operation - Lower cost than studying abroad, more possibilities of being enrolled - Better recognized and foreign qualifications, and more career opportunities - Cultural experience

Source: Adapted from Gu, 2009, p.632

Alongside these opportunities and economic benefits, TNE provision also poses a number of challenges. TNE challenges higher education's quality assurance and accreditation framework. A major concern of transnational delivery is maintaining the

quality of educational services (Gu, 2009). Local staff may not have the same qualifications as the home university's own faculty. The course content and teaching materials may not be of equivalent standard to the "home" institution. In order to overcome these concerns, some "home" institutions prefer to have their own staff teach the offshore programs so as to ensure greater control over the program delivery.

With the opening of the international education market, TNE may also weaken the educational sovereignty of importing countries. The receiver developing countries are subject to an international academic marketplace and risk being overwhelmed by overseas institutions and programs whose sole aim is to make a profit with no interest in contributing to national development (Gu, 2009). The public nature of education may be undermined since TNE has become a kind of trade in educational services. Furthermore, different education models and social value systems of exporting countries may also threaten the cultural security in importing countries.

2.2 The Hong Kong Higher Education System

The Hong Kong higher education system comprises four levels of study: (i) Associate Degree and Higher Diploma; (ii) Bachelor's Degree; (iii) Master's Degree; and (iv) Doctorate. Higher education institutions are government funded through the University Grant Committee (UGC), with UGC-funded institutions forming the mainstream sector of the higher education system.

Hong Kong has 19 degree-awarding higher education institutions (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014b). Eight are publicly funded through the UGC:

- City University of Hong Kong
- Hong Kong Baptist University
- Lingnan University
- The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- The Hong Kong Institute of Education
- The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- The University of Hong Kong.

Ten are self-financing institutions:

- Caritas Institute of Higher Education
- Centennial College
- Chu Hai College of Higher Education
- Hang Seng Management College
- HKCT Institute of Higher Education
- Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education
- Hong Kong Shue Yan University
- Tung Wah College
- Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong, Vocational Training Council
- The Open University of Hong Kong.

Finally, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts is one other non-UGC publicly-funded institution that offers degrees.

2.2.1 The Higher Education in Hong Kong

Realizing the importance of higher education for sustaining human capital in a highly competitive world, governments worldwide have put much effort into supporting the development of human resources. Hong Kong, being a knowledge- and service-based economy, has a great need for well-educated people with international perspectives, in order to maintain its position in a competitive marketplace.

In keeping with many developed countries, education is a highly valued commodity in Hong Kong, and the government describes education as a “top priority”. Cross (1981, p. xxi) describes this approach: “Lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right, it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change – in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the world-wide society”. Continuing education plays a key role in meeting the challenges and aspirations of a changing population. In 1999, the Hong Kong Education Commission announced that the “age of lifelong learning has dawned”.

The Hong Kong Government encourages continuing education and life-long learning as being critical to career advancement, and it supports TNE. In 2001, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong outlined the goal of doubling the number of senior secondary school leavers with access to postsecondary education, from 30% to 60%. To achieve this goal, the government increased the number of both private and public higher education providers. With limited resources due to its low-tax policy, and particularly after the Asian crisis, the Hong Kong Government has had to rely more on non-state financial sources and service providers such as overseas academic institutions to provide for the

further development of higher education (Mok & Yu, 2011). Indeed, many universities seek to provide access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

However, widespread financial constraints have seen governments worldwide cutting back on University funding. Hong Kong is no exception, and publicly funded higher education institutions have had to develop more self-financing programs or offer joint programs with overseas institutions in order to bridge the funding gap (Chan & Ng, 2008; Yang, 2006). Following the global financial crisis in 2009, the Hong Kong Government applied the recommendations of the Task Force on Economic Challenges to identify “educational” services as one potential sector that could support Hong Kong’s economy.

Hong Kong offers very good market conditions for transnational higher education, especially with its geographical proximity to mainland China, and overseas institutions have become increasingly proactive in setting up their academic programs in Hong Kong (Yang, 2006). Hong Kong is developing into an education hub with course providers from a variety of countries. Although Hong Kong, Singapore, China and Malaysia have become the top four hosts of transnational higher education programs in the world (Corbeil, 2006), Hong Kong is still lagging in building an education hub compared with other Asian countries. Unlike other Asian countries, whose major strategy to enhance the global competitiveness of their higher education sector is encouraging overseas universities to offer international education programs that attract students within the region and beyond (Mok & Yu, 2011), TNE in Hong Kong consists mainly of twinning programs, distance learning and joint programs. The Hong Kong

Government initially viewed transnational higher education as a supplement to the local needs of higher education, rather than other more aggressive strategies (Chan & Lo, 2007). To date, Hong Kong has confirmed that only one overseas university, The University of Chicago Booth School of Business, will establish a permanent branch campus in Hong Kong, by relocating its offshore campus from Singapore. In comparison, Singapore was host country to 16 leading foreign tertiary institutions and 44 pre-tertiary schools offering international curricula in 2009 (Economic Development Board, Singapore Government, 2009 cited by Mok & Yu, 2011). Included in these foreign tertiary institutions with a Singapore campus are the reputable INSEAD (Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires), which established its Singapore campus in 2000, S.P. Jain Center of Management (2006), New York University's Tisch School of the Arts (2007), and DigiPen Institute of Technology (2008), delivering programs in business, management, arts, media, hospitality, information technology, biomedical sciences and engineering programs (Mok & Yu, 2011).

2.2.2 Regulation of Transnational Higher Education in Hong Kong

The major stakeholders in TNE are now very much aware of the importance of quality assurance associated with trade in cross-border education. Not only students and the local education system of the receiving country, but also the reputation of the providing institution and the entire nation's higher education system must be protected (Corbeil, 2006). In 1986, the Hong Kong Education Commission expressed concern about the propagation of transnational courses in Hong Kong. These concerns led to the implementation of the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, which came into force in December 1997. The aim of the Ordinance was not

to hinder free trade in education services in Hong Kong, but to safeguard Hong Kong consumers from “cowboy” operations and “diploma mills” by protecting against the marketing of substandard transnational programs offered in Hong Kong (Yang, 2006).

Before a transnational program can be offered in Hong Kong, it must obtain accreditation or other formal permission from the Hong Kong Education Bureau. This process varies, ranging from compulsory registration to formal assessment of academic criteria. Under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance Cap. 493 (the Ordinance), all courses conducted in Hong Kong leading to the award of non-local higher academic qualifications (i.e. sub-degree, degree, postgraduate or other post-secondary qualifications) or professional qualifications must be properly registered or be exempted from registration, with major criteria including (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014f):

- (a) In the case of a course leading to the award of non-local higher academic qualification by a non-local institution,
 - the institution must be a recognized non-local institution;
 - effective measures must be in place to ensure that the standard of the course offered are maintained at a level comparable to a course leading to the same qualification conducted in its home country; and
 - this comparability in standard must be recognized by the institution, the academic community and the relevant accreditation authority (if any) of the home country.
- (b) As for a course leading to the award of non-local professional qualification by a non-local professional body,

- the professional body must itself recognize the course for the purpose of awarding the qualification or for the purpose of preparing students for the sitting of the relevant professional examinations; and
 - the professional body must also be generally recognized in its home country as an authoritative and representative professional body in the relevant profession.
- (c) Satisfactory arrangements for payment and refund of the fee charged for the course.
- All the fees as well as the arrangements for payment and refund of fees and charges approved by the Registrar should be stated clearly in the contract with students.

However, the registration requirement does not apply to three types of courses (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014f):

- (a) courses conducted in collaboration with specified local institutions of higher education. These local institutions include City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Lingnan University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Open University of Hong Kong, and University of Hong Kong;
- (b) “purely distance learning courses” conducted solely through the delivery of mail, transmission of information by means of telecommunication (e.g. TV, radio or computer network), or sale of materials in commercial outlets, etc., but without the institutions, professional bodies or their agents being physically present in Hong Kong to deliver any lectures, tutorials or examinations, etc.; and

(c) courses conducted solely by local registered schools or local institutions of higher education.

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications is an assessment body which provides independent professional advice on whether the program has met the criteria for registration or whether it can be exempted from registration.

Unlike other national governments with stronger role in developing transnational program, the Hong Kong Government uses a more free-market and consumer-oriented approach. The Hong Kong Government does not intend to directly regulate the quality of transnational higher education, nor does it try to control the content, level or cost of courses offered by non-local providers. The government leaves these decisions to the market, and their role is confined to making sure that all participants in the market have given information that they could make their informed choices (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001).

2.2.3 Current Picture of Transnational Education in Hong Kong

The launching of the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance marked the formal regulation of the higher education sector's "internationalization" in Hong Kong. The competition between local and overseas universities and institutions is particular fierce.

In the 2013/14 academic year, Hong Kong had 28 post-secondary educational and training institutions (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014c). Government expenditure on higher education was HK\$76,856 million in 2013/14, accounting for 17.6% of total government expenditure and 3.6% of gross domestic product (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014d). In 2013/14, 330,400 provisional full-time and part-time students attended universities and colleges providing post-secondary courses at the levels of certificate/diploma, associate degree, higher diploma, professional diploma or equivalent, and bachelor degree or above (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014e). In September 2014, a total of 1,186 non-local courses were available in Hong Kong under registration with the Non-Local Courses Registry, with 466 (39%) registered courses and 720 (61%) exempted courses. The UK and Australia were the two top providers; the UK provided 60.7% of registered and 80.0% of exempted courses, and Australia 17.2% and 11.4%, respectively (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014a). As an international finance centre, Hong Kong emphasises business and management as important fields. Over 50% of the non-local programs offered in Hong Kong are in the business, commerce and management disciplines. The remaining areas are in law, engineering, health, education and design. Among the transnational models emerging in the UK, the top-up model is increasingly perceived as a favoured model of transnational program in both Hong Kong and China (Tang & Nollent, 2007).

The rise in the number of transnational programs provides substantial access to overseas qualifications in Hong Kong. The major investment for the expansion of the post-secondary education marketplace in Hong Kong has shifted to the students who pay for the local and overseas providers. Billions of dollars have also been granted to the universities to expand their self-financed programs. Means-tested and

non-means-tested student loans have been offered, reflecting a shift in subsidizing the course provider to finance the students. This also offers more flexibility and allows students to shop around for programs that fit their interests, suit their needs and meet their career goals (Chan & Ng, 2008; Yang, 2006). Higher education students in Hong Kong have ever more options to further their studies. It is, therefore, important for home university and local partner institutions to understand the needs of this particular segment of international students. Students have become customers for which the higher education institutions have to compete. Meeting students' needs has become more important and will become a key to survival for many TNE providers in the Hong Kong higher education market. Those who develop and manage effective enrolment strategies require a good understanding of the student choice process.

Many studies have examined the motivations and selection criteria of students undertaking onshore programs, but little has been published on offshore program evaluation (Li, 2008). Even less research has focused on the choice processes by students studying transnational programs, whose needs, wants, selection criteria and decision-making processes may well be different from those of onshore students.

2.3 Theoretical Underpinnings

2.3.1 Student Choice Model

Hamrick and Hossler (1996, p.179) have pointed out that “in many respects research on the process of postsecondary educational decision-making or student college choice is still in its infancy”. The reasons why students choose to enrol at one university or college rather than others is ever more important to higher education administrators as

competition for student enrolment increases. In this thesis, for the purposes of common application in Hong Kong and other regions, the terms “college” and “university” are used interchangeably to refer to higher education institutions.

Administrators’ ability to manage enrolment is closely linked to an effective understanding of students’ school choice criteria (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). In order to succeed, an educational institution must deal effectively with its many stakeholders and generate a high level of satisfaction. An educational institution has to understand how current and prospective students arrive at their decisions. These include what factors they consider, how they rate the relative importance of these factors, the process by which they make their decisions, and the influences that affect that process. By understanding these measures of decision making and choice, the educational institution can be more effective in developing its marketing strategies and positioning (Kolter & Fox, 1995).

Different conceptual approaches can be used to investigate students’ choice of institution. Models that can illustrate the factors affecting institution choices, as well as their relationship, include econometric, sociological and combined models. These models offer different perspectives and conceptual foundations in studying students’ school choice behaviour, and provide a framework for studying how students choose an offshore international program.

Econometric Model

Economists view the decision of school choice as a form of investment-like decision-making behaviour. Two types of econometric model of college choice are

based on nation and institution or on the individual student. As the student was the unit of study in the current study, the school choice process of an individual student is the major focus in this literature review.

Econometric models of school choice assume that students can identify the advantages and disadvantages of each college, evaluate its attributes, make sensible assumptions about the results from one decision over another, and then choose a college rationally (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). Econometric models are based on the idea that “a student maximizes a utility (such as low cost and high quality) most often using cost-benefit analysis” (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999, p.142).

Choice processes made by individual students are modelled in two ways: “college-going models” describe the choice of going to college versus pursuing a non-college alternative, while “college-choice models” describe choices of alternative higher education institutes. First, a student weighs the costs against the perceived benefit to decide whether to go to college, then the student selects which institution to attend.

The econometric model states that “students first exclude and then evaluate alternatives, the exclusion criteria being largely a product of geographic, economic and academic factors. The evaluation criteria are a function of students’ family backgrounds, social contexts and academic experiences. Economists are interested in the relationship between the attributes of goods (e.g. college and job characteristics) and individual choices, and these interests lead to models that emphasize the interaction between preferences, largely a function of aspiration, and constraints” (Jackson, 1982, p.238).

Factors common to the “college-going models” (Bishop, 1977; Fuller, Manski & Wise, 1982; Kohn, Mansk & Mundel, 1976) include expected costs; expected future earnings; student and family background characteristics such as parents’ educational level and income, number of siblings and parental occupation; high school characteristics; aspirations of neighbourhood peers; and college characteristics. Factors common to the “college-choice models” (Chapman, 1979; Radner & Miller, 1970) include costs; perceived benefits; ratio of college costs to parental income; college characteristics; academic reputation and admission selectively; and student background characteristics.

While many factors used in econometric models are sociologically based, they are generally related to academic ability and parents’ income (Radner & Miller, 1970) and educational levels (Kohn, Mansk & Mundel, 1976). Econometric models emphasize the importance of variables for individuals with different characteristics such as gender, ability and parental socioeconomic status. The focus is on the decision-making process and how students rate and use college attributes in making their decisions (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

The different econometric models can be grouped under three main categories: human-capital, income and employment. The human-capital model is based on the rational decision-making process of cost-benefit analysis; the income model specifies the rate of return; and the employment model refers to future earnings and employment probabilities.

Sociological Model

Another approach to investigate student school choice is from the perspective of sociology. Sociologists view the college attendance decision as part of the general status attainment process. They believe that status attainment deals with one's aspirations for college to gain social status. Sociological models describe how school choice factors are identified and how they interact. These factors influence the aspiration for colleges which are required elements in the status attainment process. The sociological models study the relationship between sociological factors and the decision-making process of school choice.

Status attainment models emphasize how socialization processes, family background, peer interactions and school environment influence students' school choice (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). A basic model of status attainment found that two factors, family socioeconomic background and student academic ability, have a positive effect on students' aspiration for college (Blau & Duncan, 1967). Sewell and Shah (1968) found that socioeconomic status, academic ability and parental encouragement all have impacts on students' educational aspirations. Subsequently, the model was further extended to include factors on the influence of significant others and high school academic performance (Sewell, Haller & Portes, 1969), both of which act as intermediate variables that link status attainment with socioeconomic status. Significant others include parents, teachers and friends who influence student's aspirations for college.

The studies by Sewell and Shah (1968) and Sewell Haller and Portes (1969) focused on the careers affected by socioeconomic status which lead to status attainment. In contrast,

Boyle (1966) and Alwin and Otto (1977) provided another perspective on the interaction of personal and family characteristics with the social and academic environment of high school and the effect on student decisions about educational aspirations. Both these studies included between- and within-school factors on the aspirations for college education.

In Boyle's model, college aspirations are affected by students' academic ability and motivation. High school academic standards, preparation and motivation largely determine a student's academic ability. The academic standard of a school is influenced by the makeup of the student body and the autonomy of local school districts. The student body composition affects the subculture of peer groups, which can motivate a student for college education.

The Alwin and Otto (1977) model consists of two stages. The first stage comprises gender, socioeconomic level, academic ability and school context, which directly affect college aspirations. The second stage involves academic certification and its influence on the expectation of significant others in developing plans for college attendance.

Both the Boyle and the Alwin and Otto models include significant others and academic ability as variables in their decision to develop the plan of college education.

Yet another sociological model is that of Chapman (1981), with three parts: student background, general expectation and choice. Student background consists of the variables of students' characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and academic performance, and external influences, for example the influence of significant persons

such as friends, parents and high school personnel, the influence of fixed college characteristics such as cost (financial aid), location and availability, and the institution's marketing strategies such as its own efforts to communicate with prospective students like written information, campus visits and admission/recruitment. The model studies the interactions of student characteristics and external influences. These interactions influence the expectations and perceptions of school life, which, in turn, lead to college enrolment based on a match between the student's choice of college and the college's choice of students. The model provides a framework and identifies major factors that influence college choice. However, the model tends to be institution based rather than student based, which limits its ability to explain the college choice from the student's point of view (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

Combined Model

Econometric and sociological models focus on the choice of college, rather than explaining the decision-making process. In order to better understand the student's decision-making process, a conceptual framework that combines both models attempts to identify those factors that affect the decision-making process from a policy analysis perspective (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). These combined models describe the economic and social forces and constraints that affect students' decisions, helping researchers and policy makers identify opportunities for intervening in the process of students' choice of college to achieve the desired results (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). The combined models are more useful for institution policy analysts and course administrators, and therefore they are more useful for this study.

Combined models fall into two general categories: the three-stage model and the multistage model (Chapman, 1986; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982). Models in both categories are similar and illustrate the developmental process of decision making. In fact, “the three-stage model can be treated as a simplified, collapsed version of the other” (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989, p.241). The rest of this section describes the six major combined models.

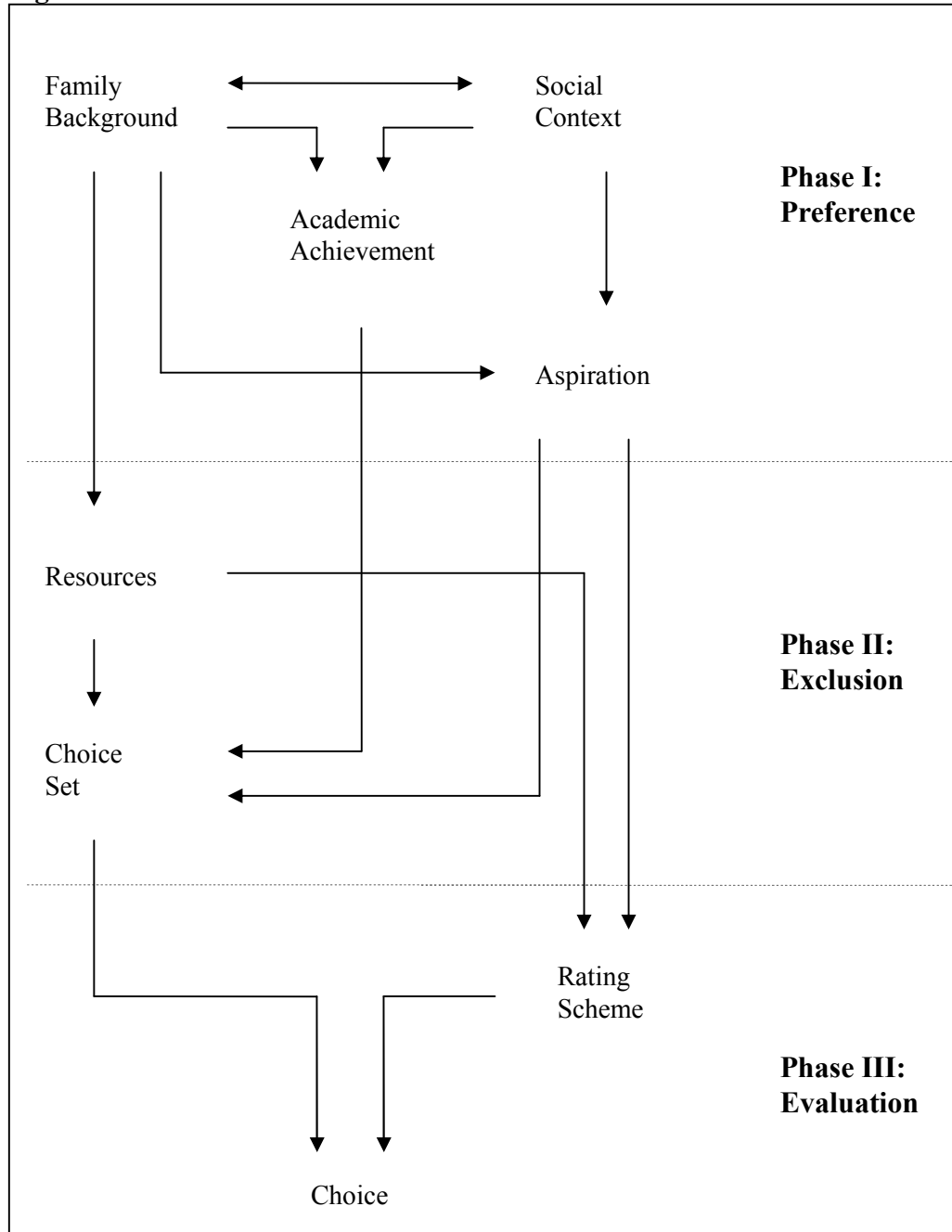
1. The Jackson Model (1982)

Jackson’s (1982) combined model identifies three phases: preference, exclusion and evaluation (see Figure 2.1). Preference is the aspiration to enrol in college. Jackson found that school aspiration was highly correlated with academic achievement, family background and social context. In the exclusion stage, students consider different options by excluding some unfeasible colleges and gathering information about others. The student’s choice set depends on the exclusion factors, which include the resources which focus on the college information, location, cost and academic quality. In the final stage, evaluation, students transform their preferences into a rating scheme and rate each alternative in the choice set. They then evaluate their choice sets and select an institution to attend based on these ratings.

Jackson rated the importance of the various factors in the combined model of college choice. Family background, academic experience, location and costs have strong effects on school choice. Information, college attributes and job attributes have moderate effects, while social context has only a weak effect. By exploring the strength of the

relationship, Jackson presented a generalized model, with the aim of identifying the most effective areas of intervention for institutional policy makers.

Figure 2.1 The Jackson Combined Model



Source: Adapted from Jackson, 1982, p.239

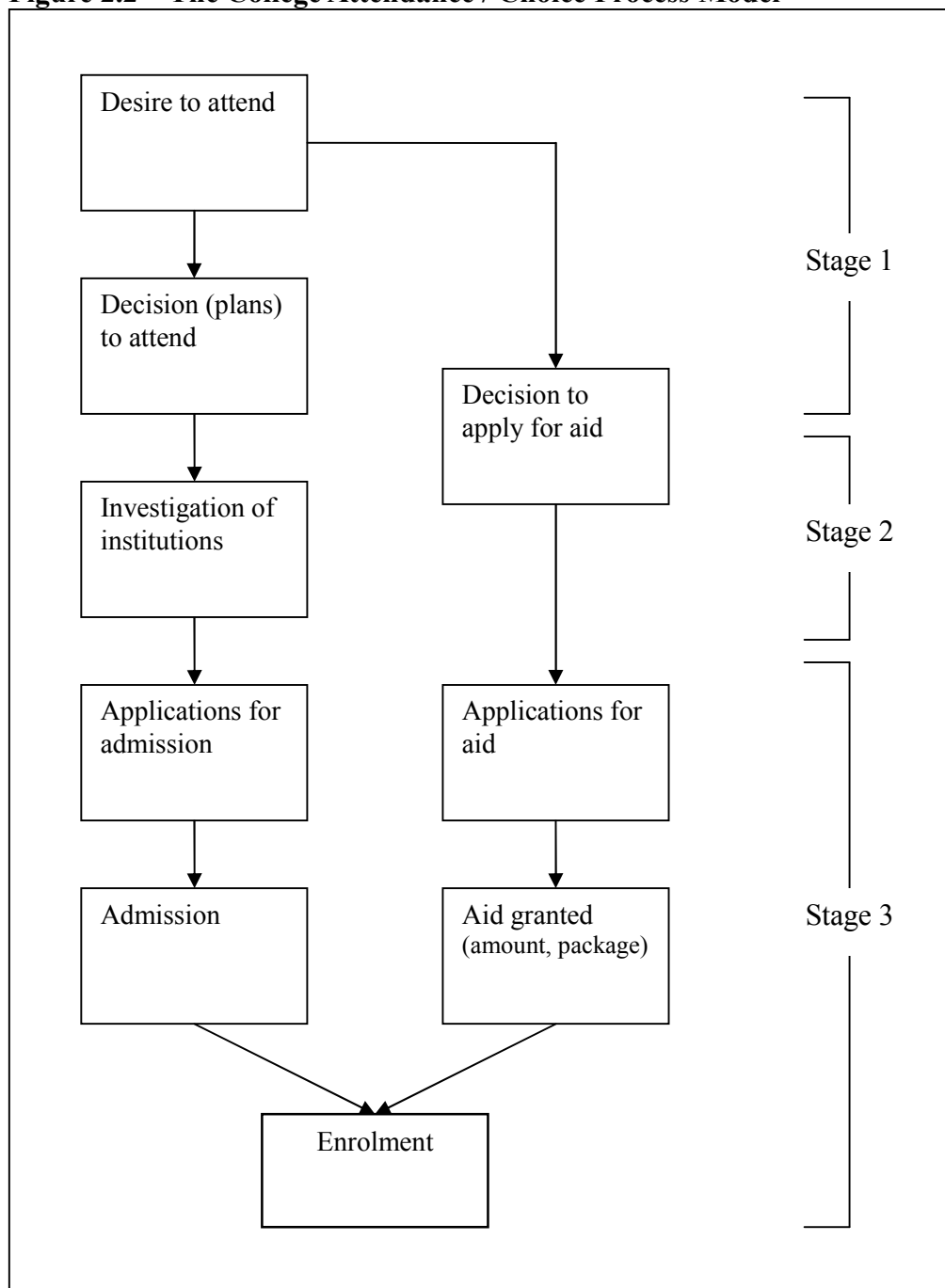
2. The Hanson and Litten Model (1982)

Hanson and Litten's (1982) college attendance and choice process model was developed to study gender differences in college attendance, selection and admission processes. With the importance of financial considerations in college choice, the model adds a separate but parallel process of financial aid application and decision process interrelated with the college applications (see Figure 2.2). The model consists of six steps that can be grouped into three stages. In Stage 1, students decide to continue with college education. They start with the aspiration to attend a college and then decided to attend. At the same time, they look for financial aid information and decide whether to apply for funding. Stage 2 is the exploratory stage, when students gather information about different institutions and develop their own choice set. Stage 3 is the Application/Matriculation Stage, where students submit their funding application if they have decided to apply for financial assistance, apply to the college and receive their admission notice, and finally enrol.

3. The Litten Model (1982)

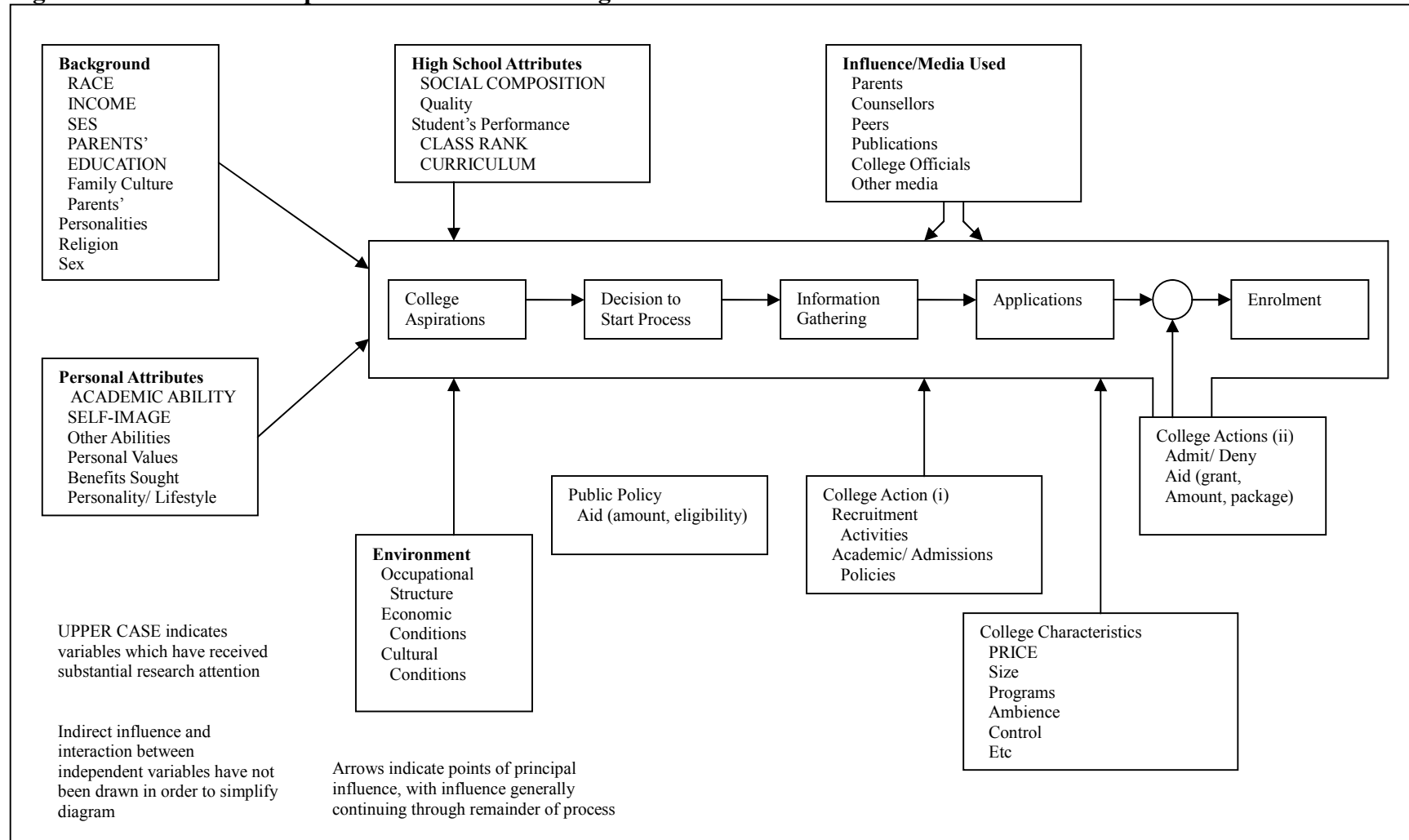
Litten (1982) expanded the college selection process model by adding different attributes (see Figure 2.3) based on an econometric, sociological and marketing framework. College aspirations are affected by the student's sociological background and personal attributes, their high school's attributes and environmental factors. Public policy influences their decision to start the college selection process. Then the influence/media used and the college's actions, such as recruitment activities and academic/admissions policies, affect the information gathering. The college's characteristics influence the application and the final enrolment may be affected by the college's actions towards any funding granted.

Figure 2.2 The College Attendance / Choice Process Model



Source: Adapted from Hanson & Litten, 1982, p.75

Figure 2.3 The Litten Expanded Model of the College Selection Process

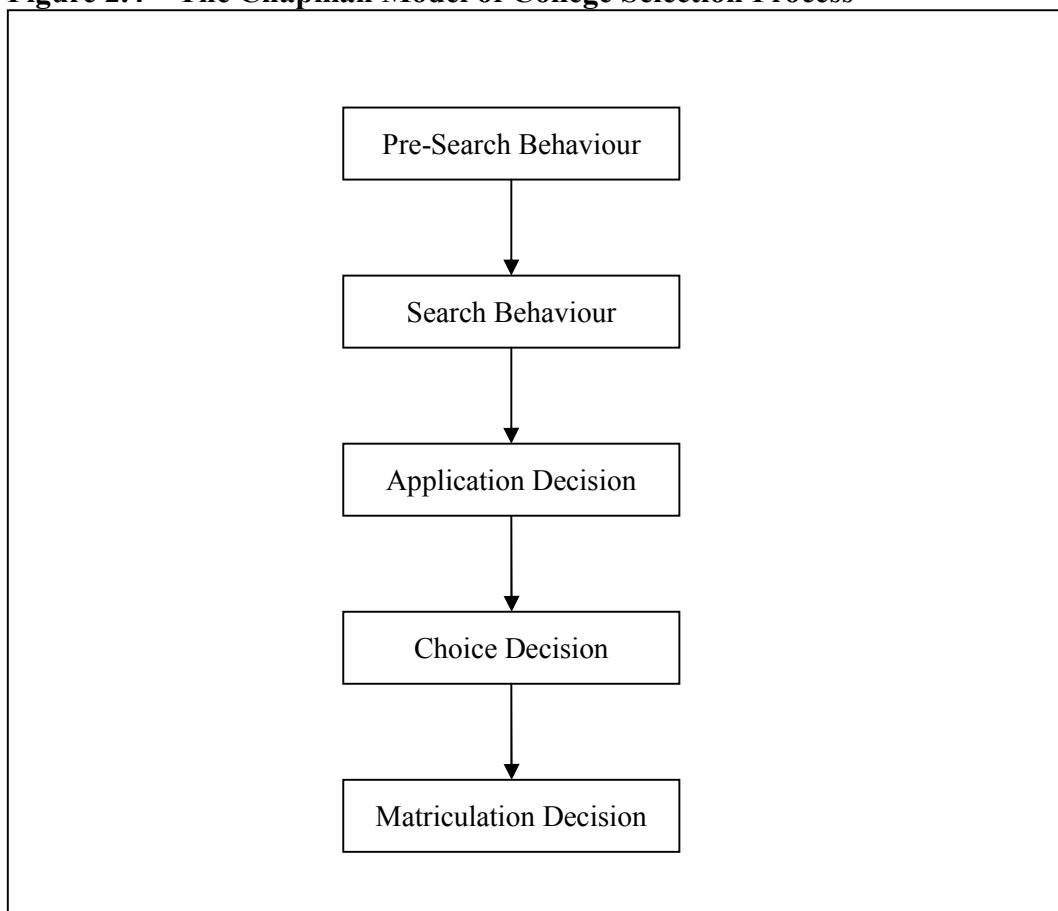


Source: Adapted from Litten, 1982, p.388

4. The Chapman Model (1986)

Chapman (1986) proposed a behavioural model of the college selection process which integrated aspects of search and choice. The five stages of the college selection process are pre-search behaviour, search behaviour, application decision, choice decision and matriculation decision. Students move along the path towards the ultimate selection of a college (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 The Chapman Model of College Selection Process



Source: Adapted from Chapman, 1986, p.246

During the pre-search behaviour stage, a student begins to recognize the possible need for a college education. Students in the search behaviour stage have already decided to go to college, and they actively and extensively acquire information about different colleges. Students are interested in knowing about the costs and benefits of the college's

academic dimensions, quality of life, future career prospects and opportunities upon graduation. The search behaviour stage ends when the student identifies a college set to which to submit applications. However, during the application stage, many students still have insufficient information about financial aid. In the choice decision stage, the student has relatively complete information on college attributes and available funding. The choice decision stage usually ends with the choice of a college to attend. The final stage of matriculation in Chapman's model is the actual enrolment in a college.

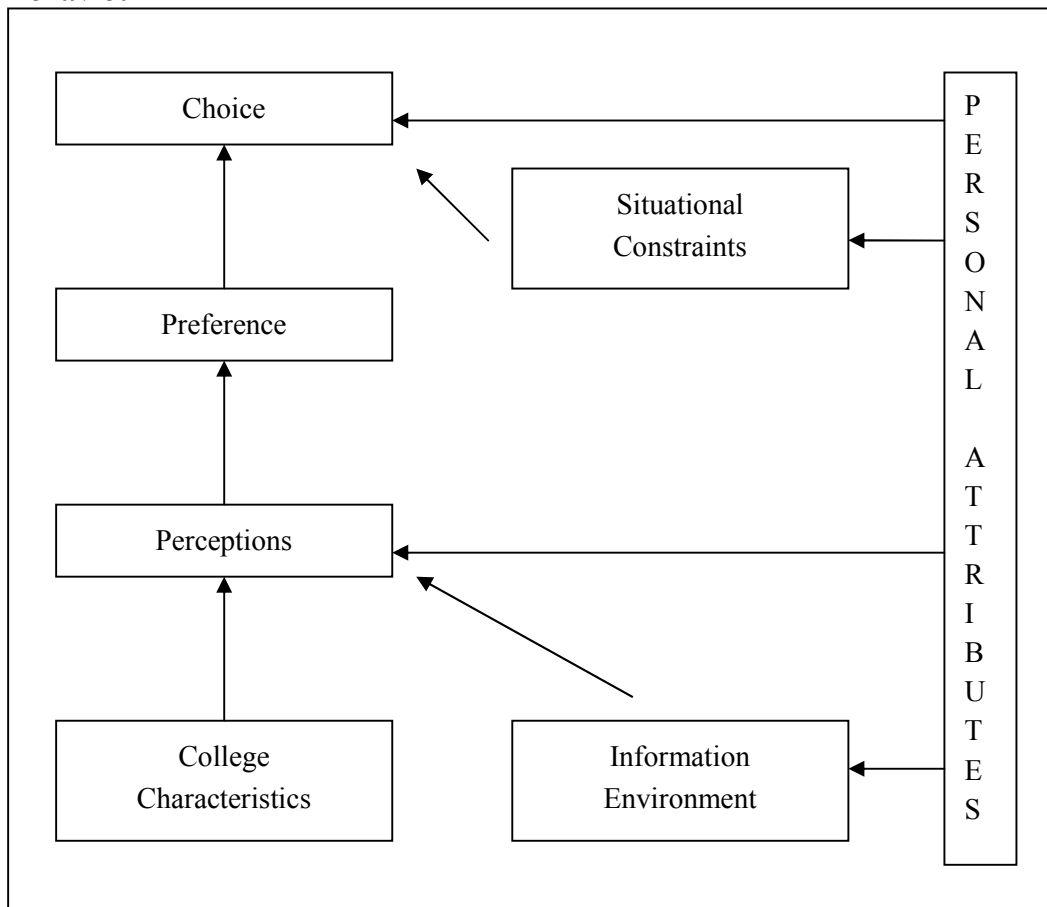
The rigidity of Chapman's model is that assumes all students go through the specified stages in a stepwise top-down manner, while in practice not every student will follow through the five proposed stages.

5. The Chapman and Jackson Model (1987)

Chapman and Jackson's (1987) multistage model of college choice behaviour was "an extension of a well-established model of buyer behaviour in marketing, the perception-preference-choice model" (p. 11). Chapman and Jackson divided the college choice process into three interrelated stages: perception judgment formation, preference judgment formation and choice (see Figure 2.5).

The formation of perception judgment stage depends on the physical characteristics of a college such as size; the objectively verifiable interactions between students and the college, such as parents' educational backgrounds and distance; and the college-specific effects like brand name and breadth of course offerings. A student's information about the source and content of courses also makes an important contribution to their perception of the college and their formation of a judgment.

Figure 2.5 The Chapman and Jackson Multistage Model of College Choice Behaviour



Source: Adapted from Chapman and Jackson, 1987, p.13

The preference judgment formation stage refers to students' evaluation of college alternatives. College preference is assumed to depend on interactions between the individual and the institution, and college-specific influences. Special familiarity effect includes parental influences and distance from a student's residence to a college campus, which are significant elements of the interaction between individuals and an institution. The variables for choice behaviour include preferences, financial considerations, situational constraints and post-admissions contacts. Situational constraints include financial considerations.

The model indicates that the primary determinant of college choice is perceived college quality. While monetary considerations are important, their influence is still relatively modest compared with other variables.

6. The Hossler & Gallagher Model (1987)

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) built on the work of Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982) to develop a three-stage developmental model of school choice (see Figure 2.6). The model is primarily sociological and the three stages are predisposition, search and choice. The model does not focus only on the attributes of students. Hossler and Gallagher (1987, p. 209) described it as “an interactive model which takes into account the nature of higher education options and some of the organizational factors at both the pre-college and the college level”. At each stage of the process, the outcome is affected by the interaction between the individual and organizational factors. These outcomes in turn influence the school choice process.

Figure 2.6 The Hossler & Gallagher Three Phase Model of College Choice

Model Dimensions	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
Predisposition (Phase 1)	- Student Characteristics - Significant Others - Educational Activities	- School Characteristics	Search for: a. College Options b. Other Options
Search (Phase 2)	- Student Preliminary college values - Student search activities	- College and University search activities (search for students)	a. Choice Set b. Other Options
Choice (Phase 3)	- Choice Set	- College and University courtship activities	Choice

Source: Adapted from Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p.208

In Phase 1, the predisposition stage, students decide to go to college. This stage combines the societal, economic and familial factors to arouse the interest in enrolling at a college. Individual factors at this phase include attending high-quality high schools, a

positive attitude towards education, academic ability, attitudes of parents and peers, educational activities, early information on financial aid and institutional costs. Organizational factors such as school characteristics also influence college choice, although to a lesser extent. In this phase, individual universities have little direct impact on student college choice.

In Phase 2, the search stage, the interaction between students and college increases. Individual factors include students' preliminary college values and students' search activities, while organizational factors include university and college search activities. At this stage, students are searching for institutions and institutions are simultaneously looking for students. The outcome of this stage is each student generating their choice set or other options. A choice set is "the group of institutions to which students will actually apply" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1982, p. 209). Students use their financial and academic capabilities to evaluate the relative choice set. In this phase, individual universities may be able to exert a modest influence on students' choice process by using a proactive search for students.

In the third phase, the choice stage, students evaluate their choice set and narrow it to make the enrolment decision. At this stage, the impact of policy and college makers is not as important on the decision process; outcomes are more likely to be influenced by candidates' preferences, the college attributes and the college marketing activities.

The Hossler and Gallagher three-stage model can be viewed as a "collapsed" version of the earlier multistage models (Pooch & Love, 2001). The difference between Hossler and Gallagher's model and the models with several stages "lie in the description of the

intervening variables and in how they define constraining and institution activity” (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 241).

Hossler and Gallagher identified influential factors at each of the three stages. Their model explains the sequencing of a student’s college choice and has been applied in research to understand the process of choice of studies in undergraduate and postgraduate programs (Chen, 2007; Delaney, 1999; Pooch & Love, 2001; Waters, 1992).

2.4 Review of Major Studies

This section discusses previous studies of student college choice, first in a domestic context and then for international students. A large number of studies were applicable to the current research, and are referred to throughout this thesis.

2.4.1 Domestic Mode of Studies

Many studies of domestic student college choice used the theoretical frameworks reviewed in previous sections. One of the most commonly used model is that of Hossler and Gallagher (Chen, 2007; Delaney, 1999; Pooch & Love, 2001; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Waters, 1992), which provides three stages for conceptualizing students’ decision-making and choice processes. This review of the domestic mode of studies is structured according to the three stages of the Hossler and Gallagher model: predisposition, search and choice.

Predisposition

In the predisposition stage, the focus of the study is the student's aspirations and motivation to attend a higher educational institution. Students' different needs at different stages of their life influence their educational goals. The studies reviewed here focused on traditional and adult students' reasons for pursuing further education.

To explore the reasons why students undertook graduate studies, Baird (1976) conducted a US-wide survey of 21,000 college seniors from 94 colleges. He found that important factors were attaining desired positions and earnings, a commitment to the academic way of life and a strong interest in a particular field. Malaney (1987) also surveyed 1,073 newly enrolled graduate students at a large public research university in the midwest. Students were motivated by better job prospects and the necessity of an advanced degree in their field, while, from an academic perspective, students hoped to learn more about their speciality and desired the advanced degree for personal satisfaction. At the same time, the New Matriculates Survey gathered data on 2,053 first-year students at 91 US graduate schools of business and management, and again found that career entry and mobility were the two main reasons for pursuing an MBA degree (Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987).

Research into students' university choice process has been ongoing. Delaney's (1999) mail survey response from 228 students accepted for an MBA program found that the students' three key motivators were career advancement, personal fulfilment and career change. A qualitative study of Japanese female students' perceptions of colleges highlighted that the students hoped a college education would enhance their

professional, economic and social success, and that a college education was seen as an accepted life path in Japan (Anzai & Paik, 2012).

In addition to the traditional group of students, Bers and Kerry (1987) found from focus group interviews that mature-age students returned to university to prepare for a new career or because they needed additional training to manage changes at work. In Hong Kong, Chiu (1999) identified that Hong Kong managers undertook a distance learning MBA program to improve their prospects of future career development, retain an edge in the competitive market and for a sense of self-achievement. Broekemier (2002) concluded that adult students attended college in order to gain a better job, obtain general knowledge or enhance their self-esteem.

Other researchers have found that important influences for students pursuing further studies include academic ability, student background characteristics, institution characteristics and influence from significant others, gender and type of university (Ethington & Smart, 1986; Lang, 1984; Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza, 2012; Wagner & Fard, 2009). These studies are further reviewed in the next section on variables related to university choice.

In conclusion, the motivations for deciding to attend university for both traditional and adult students focus on academic satisfaction, career development and intellectual fulfilment. Academically, students are eager to acquire knowledge and ability (Bers & Smith, 1987; Broekemier, 2002; Malaney, 1987; Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987). On a practical note, students are concerned about their career mobility, development and opportunities (Bers & Smith, 1987; Broekemier, 2002; Chiu, 1999; Malaney, 1987;

Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987), earning power (Anzai & Paik, 2012; Baird, 1976; Chiu, 1999) and professionalism in their respective field of work (Anzai & Paik, 2012; Baird, 1976; Malaney, 1987). Intellectually, students seek to enhance their self-esteem (Broekemier, 2002), self-satisfaction (Chiu, 1999; Malaney, 1987) and social success (Anzai & Paik, 2012).

Search

The search stage combines students' activities when searching for information about potential universities, and universities' activities in seeking potential students. Students first seek individual factors concerning university values, and it is expected that the outcome of the search stage will be a choice set for each student. However, the sequential choice processes are sometimes rather indistinct in that students do not always separate the search and choice stages. Stolzenberg and Giarrusso (1987) noted that 60% of students applied to only one university, which was the one they therefore chose, reflecting that students may carry the same preliminary university values in the search stage through to the choice stage.

Students' opinions can change during the search stage of the university choice process, with students eventually enrolling in a different university from the one they initially considered (Olson, 1992). Significant influences on students' intention to study at a higher educational institution can be related to the institution itself – such as availability of program (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995), cost of education (Olson, 1992; Schuster, Costantino & Klein, 1989; Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987; Wagner & Fard, 2009), location (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Olson, 1992; Schuster, Costantino & Klein, 1989) physical aspects and facilities (Wagner & Fard, 2009) – or to academic factors such as

quality, reputation, prestige of the university (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Erdmann, 1983; Olson, 1992; Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987) and value of education (Wagner & Fard, 2009).

Information-searching activities are an important theme in the search stage. The key channels were advice from significant people and different types of media such as university program prospectuses, handbooks, campus visits, exhibitions, education fairs and online searching (Connor et al., 1999; Gagnon & Cocolas, 1988; Olson & King, 1985; Sevier, 1987; Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza, 2012; Wagner & Fard, 2009).

Connor et al. (1999) identified that the most helpful sources of information and advice for students when searching for university information were the prospectus, visits, handbook, career advisors and current students. These sources of information provide different perspectives about the university and the study programs. A similar survey by Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza (2012) found that students search for university and program information mainly through the internet, brochures and handbooks, friends' recommendations, educational fairs, campus visits and rankings.

Personal contact was identified as a highly influential during the decision process (Olson & King, 1985). Students tend to consider an institution that is user friendly (Olson, 1992) and with high faculty–student interaction (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995). Communication with university personnel is a determining factor in students' initial decision to apply.

The significance of the variable on the advice from significant others is discussed in detail in the next section on variables related to university choice.

Choice

At the choice stage, students evaluate their choice set and make the decision to enrol. A vast volume of literature addresses this final stage of university choice, and so this literature review separates the discussion into, first, high school graduates matriculating into undergraduate programs and, second, university undergraduates progressing to postgraduate programs.

High school graduates seeking undergraduate programs

Studies of high school graduates' choice of university have adopted different perspectives, including those of students and parents, different universities and students with different demographics.

Bowers and Pugh (1972) surveyed 4,841 freshmen and their parents choosing a university. Both students and parents ranked the academic reputation of the university and the specific department as the most important reasons for selecting a university. A Malaysian study of 402 prospective students, their parents and first-year university students found that all three groups identified the same four important attributes: availability of the required program, the university's academic reputation, the quality of the faculty and the availability of financial assistance (bin Yusof et al., 2008).

Other studies have focused on particular segment of students. Anderson (1976) surveyed students who took the National Merit Scholarship Exam and examined which

institutional characteristics attracted the students. Again, the faculty's reputation was important. Keller and McKeown (1984) studied National Merit and National Achievement Semi-finalists in Maryland. The 143 survey respondents were asked to indicate the importance of 22 factors on their university choice. The factors most frequently cited were again the overall school reputation and program attractiveness, as well as graduates' success at finding a job or getting into a professional school and the quality of the student body. Soutar and Turner (2002) investigated the determinants of university preference for 259 final-year high-school students, and identified that the four most important factors were course availability, academic reputation, job prospects and teaching quality.

To study how high-school students allocate preferences among different universities, Maguire and Lay (1981) surveyed 2,500 applicants accepted at Boston College on how they compared Boston College and its competitors. They found that financial aid was the most important influence, while other important factors were parents' preference, specific academic programs, school size, campus location, athletic facilities and social activities. Briggs (2006) conducted a similar study at six contrasting universities in Scotland. Although there was variation across universities, disciplines and genders, the top three factors were found to be academic reputation, distance from home and location.

Research has also focused on general aspects of an institution. Parker, Pettijohn and Pettijohn (1990) surveyed 152 high-school students at five schools in southwest Missouri participating in the Distributive Education Clubs of America, and found that academic quality and location were two important factors in the students' choice of a

business school. Clinton (1990) found that students placed most importance on recommendation by parents, degree programs in their chosen career, quality education, recommendation of friends and low-cost tuition, while Joseph and Joseph's (2000) survey of 110 students in central Indonesia found that students were most influenced by academic resources, physical facilities, course and entry requirements, location and general influences when choosing an educational institution.

In conclusion, this review of 10 studies of high school graduates has found that academic reputation (faculty, school, program) is of prime importance to the majority of high school students and their parents. Financial aid, cost of tuition, recommendations of parents and friends, quality of education, program offerings and the student body are also important factors in university choice.

University graduates seeking postgraduate programs

This section of the review covers university graduates aiming to take a masters or doctoral degree. Talbot (1996) studied 70 students who had considered or decided to pursue a doctoral degree. Their choice of doctoral program was influenced most by academic factors such as reputation of program, institution and faculty; structural considerations such as core philosophy and type of degree; and practical issues such as location, assistance or fellowship opportunities and flexibility. Olson and King (1985) first surveyed doctoral and masters students at a large US midwestern state university and identified that the decision to enrol was influenced by positive interaction or contact with faculty, personal reasons and previous undergraduate attendance. Seven years later, Olson (1992) conducted a similar survey and found that positive interaction with university personnel during decision process remained one of the major determinants in

enrolling at a university, with other important factors including reputation of program, reputation of faculty, cost, perceived marketability and speed of acceptance.

To compare the choices of graduate students from different universities, Webb (1993) surveyed 1,499 business graduate students from seven universities in north-eastern Ohio. She found that university selection was influenced by the fixed characteristics of academic reputation and accreditation, the program characteristics, such as availability of evening classes and the makeup of the program itself, and the potential marketability of the degree.

Researchers have also used different methods to explore school choice factors. Kumar and Sachan (2006) used discrete choice analysis to model students' choice processes in order to understand their choice of management institution. They found that attributes such as reputation, placements, international collaboration, faculty strength and infrastructure and facilities positively affected the probability of joining that institution. The most perceived attribute was placements, followed by fee. Snyder et al. (2009) studied the selection process used by adult graduate students when choosing to pursue and attain an advanced business degree. The four highest priorities were the schedule, job advancement, previous study experience and the program having a religious perspective. A qualitative study by Blackburn (2011) of students selecting a MBA program identified five themes: reputation, syllabus, quality, facilities and career, with the university's reputation being the key factor.

This review of 17 studies on students' choice of universities has shown that both undergraduate and postgraduate students undertake similar choice stages, considering

factors such as academic resources, reputation (academic), quality (academic), financial aid, cost, location, student body, recommendation of others, campus atmosphere and facilities. However, postgraduate students look at the application process, curriculum, duration of program, schedule, marketability and previous attendance experience. Table 2.2 summarizes the factors and previous studies reviewed above, grouping them under institutional characteristics and student and institution pulling forces. Those factors that identified only from postgraduate students are highlighted in the table.

Table 2.2 Summary of the factors influencing the choice stage of school choice identified from previous studies

Factor	Previous studies
Institutional characteristics	
Academic resources	Joseph and Joseph (2000)
<i>Application process</i>	<i>Olson (1992)</i>
Campus atmosphere and facilities	Maguire and Lay (1981); Joseph and Joseph (2000) <i>Kumar and Sachan (2006); Blackburn (2011)</i>
Program characteristics	Keller and McKeown (1984) <i>Webb (1993)</i>
Program offerings	Maguire and Lay (1981); Clinton (1990); Soutar and Turner (2002); bin Yusof et al. (2008) <i>Talbot (1996); Webb (1993)</i>
Social emphasis	Maguire and Lay (1981)
Student and institution pulling forces	
Advice of others	Clinton (1990)
Cost/tuition	Clinton (1990) <i>Olson (1992); Kumar and Sachan (2006)</i>
Entry requirements	Joseph and Joseph (2000)
<i>Fellowship opportunities</i>	<i>Talbot (1996)</i>
Financial aid	Maguire and Lay (1981); bin Yusof et al. (2008)
<i>Fitting of schedule</i>	<i>Webb (1993); Snyder et al. (2009)</i>
<i>Interaction with institution</i>	<i>Olson and King (1985); Olson (1992)</i>
<i>International collaboration</i>	<i>Kumar and Sachan (2006)</i>
Job prospects	Keller and McKeown (1984) ; Soutar and Turner (2002) <i>Snyder et al. (2009); Blackburn (2011)</i>
Location	Maguire and Lay (1981); Parker, Pettijohn and Pettijohn (1990); Joseph and Joseph (2000); Briggs (2006) <i>Talbot (1996)</i>

Table 2.2 (continued)

Factor	Previous studies
<i>Marketability</i>	<i>Olson (1992); Webb (1993)</i>
<i>Placements</i>	<i>Kumar and Sachan (2006)</i>
<i>Previous attendance experience</i>	<i>Olson and King (1985); Snyder et al. (2009)</i>
Quality (academic)	Parker, Pettijohn and Pettijohn (1990); Clinton (1990); Soutar and Turner (2002); bin Yusof et al. (2008) <i>Blackburn (2011)</i>
<i>Religious perspective</i>	<i>Snyder et al. (2009)</i>
Recommendation of friends	Clinton (1990)
Recommendation of parents	Maguire and Lay (1981); Clinton (1990)
Reputation (academic)	Bower and Pugh (1972); Anderson (1976); Keller and McKeown (1984); Soutar and Turner (2002); Briggs (2006); bin Yusof et al. (2008) <i>Olson (1992); Webb (1993); Talbot (1996); Kumar and Sachan (2006); Blackburn (2011)</i>
Size of schools	Maguire and Lay (1981)
Student body	Keller and McKeown (1984)
<i>Syllabus</i>	<i>Blackburn (2011)</i>

2.4.2 International Mode of Studies

Most studies of international students have involved onshore students, with little research investigating those offshore. Both international and domestic students use similar criteria for choosing a school, such as resource availability, reputation and quality, and career opportunity. International students tend to focus more on safety, a clean environment and the actual country of study (Joseph & Joseph, 2000).

A substantial body of literature explores the motivations and criteria of international students' selection of country and institution. The push-pull model was developed to explain the factors of international education.

Push-Pull Model of International Education

In the push-pull model, the “push” factors operate within the student’s home country and initiate a student’s decision to study abroad. “Pull” factors are factors from the other country that attract a student (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Students are “pushed” from their home nations by different forces such as easier entry into institutions abroad, and social and political forces such as discriminatory admissions (Altbach, 2004). The major components of the pull factor are “the economic links between home and host countries, the availability of scholarships from host nations, and political and cultural links between home and host countries” (Abubakar, Shanka & Muuka, 2010, p.53).

McMahon’s (1992) pioneering studies of international students’ decision making proposed the concepts of push and pull factors, using two models to study the flow of international students from 18 developing nations. The first was an outbound or “push” model which focused on factors in source or home countries such as wealth, level of involvement in the world economy, educational opportunities and the government’s priority on education. The second was an inbound or “pull” model concerned with the economic links and relative sizes of the home and host countries, the political interests via foreign assistance or cultural links and support through scholarships, or other assistance by the host country in the home country. However, McMahon’s analysis of transnational studies was at the national rather than the institutional or individual level.

McMahon’s “push-pull” framework has subsequently been applied to virtually all studies of the motivation and decision factors of international students. One of the most cited studies is that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), which adopted the push-pull model to examine the factors used by students from four countries – Indonesia, Taiwan, China

and India – to select a host country and a host institution. Mazzarol and Soutar identified similar “push” factors to those of McMahon (1992), and a number of additional “pull” factors. These included the importance of students’ knowledge and awareness of the host country, the importance of recommendations and referrals from friends, relatives and parents prior to making the final choice, the cost of fees, living expenses, travelling costs and social costs, the importance of the physical learning environment, the geographic proximity of students’ study destination choice and home country, and social links such as relatives or friends previously living or studying in the destination country.

Onshore International Students

A number of studies of international students in the last two decades have used the push-pull model for examining onshore international students. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) investigated 62 international students’ perception of pursuing their education in the UK. The factors influencing the students’ selection of host country included academic recognition, quality, ease of admission, employment during and after the course, cost of living and the duration of the program.

Pimpa (2005) examined Thai students’ perceptions of applying to Australian universities from two Australian education fairs in Bangkok, Thailand. Research findings revealed that it was very important to safeguard the perceived quality of an institution, as the perceived quality of both the academic programs and the teaching quality are major factors influencing Thai applicants in choosing an international program. Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006) also studied the reasons students choose an Australian university, and identified similar factors to those of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002):

proximity to home, educational quality and variety, cost of living, tuition fees, recommendations of family, proximity to where friends study, and safety.

Gatfield and Chen (2006) examined the reasons students choose to study in the USA, UK and Australia, finding that students were influenced by recommendations from family members, friends, agents and alumni, study costs, employment prospects, quality and reputation of the institutions, cost of living and course fees.

Chinese students studying in Hong Kong are a special hybrid status between fully domestic and fully international. Li and Bray (2007) examined the distinctive case of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau, and found that the motivating factors included academic ability, social and cultural experience, economic income, social status, financial support and scholarship and geographic proximity. To continue the study in China, Bodycott (2009) examined the Chinese parents of students considering studying abroad. He applied the concept of the push-pull factors and features identified from previous studies, and found that the most important factors from students' point of view that affect their choice of a study destination abroad included accommodation, range of programs available, English-speaking environment, facilities, language and academic support services, international education experiences during courses and range of programs available. The findings also highlight the importance of cultural values when recruiting students from Confucian societies.

Chen (2008) further discussed the concepts of internationalization and international marketing of higher education. The research showed that the applicability of internationalization and higher education marketing are determined by the market

segmentation. The key factors that influence the choice by an international student are a safe place and environment, cultural aspects, quality of life, employability, how much the degree is valued in the home country, visa processing, reputation and quality of the institution and programs.

Albubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010) identified and analyzed factors that influence international students' selection of a higher education destination country, state or institution. They surveyed two conveniently selected universities from the east coast and the west coast of Australia with large numbers of onshore international students. They found that quality of education, cost of living, proximity to home countries, quality of courses, quality of lecturers, access to facilities, safety aspects, range of courses, employment opportunities, social activities, and immigration issues were important influential factors.

Offshore International Students

Limited research has focused on offshore programs. Chapman and Pyvis (2006a) examined the impact of the internationalization of higher education and found that the main rationale for choosing an offshore program in Hong Kong was to gain an international qualification. Other factors included reputation of the university, cost of the program, familiarity with the institution and mode of study. Li (2008) studied the effects of country and higher education images on high school students' enrolment intentions towards offshore programs. In contrast to previous studies, Li found that country image and higher education image did not play a significant role in offshore program enrolment; rather, the image of the local partner institution had a significant impact on enrolment intention. One implication was that Chinese students are

unfamiliar with a foreign country and they relied heavily on the local institution to evaluate a transnational program.

Another study on the offshore students was conducted by Wilkins and Huisnan (2011). The study identified the factors influencing international students' decision to study in the UK and investigated their attitudes towards studying at an international branch campus. They identified similar factors as for onshore international studies: quality of education, university/department rankings, employment prospects, reputation of university, program contents, quality of program, improve English and experience different culture were highly influential.

The push and pull factors for choosing an international study are summarized in Table 2.3. Some factors, such as those related to the institutions, have a similar effect in attracting students to either international or domestic programs.

Table 2.3 Summary of the push and pull factors for choosing an international study

Factor	Previous studies
Push factors	
Academic ability	Li & Bray (2007)
Educational opportunities	McMahan (1992); Altbach (2004)
Programs discriminatory admission	Altbach (2004)
Pull factors	
Academic recognition	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)
Academic support service	Bodycott (2009)
Cost of livings	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Gratfield and Chen (2006); Albubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Course fees	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Chapman and Pyvis (2006a); Gratfield and Chen (2006)
Cultural links	Chen (2008); McMahon (1992)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Factor	Previous studies
Degree value in home country	Chen (2008)
Duration	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)
Ease of admission	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)
Employment prospects	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Gratfield and Chen (2006); Chen (2008); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010); Wilkins and Huisnan (2011)
English speaking environment	Bodycott (2009); Wilkins and Huisnan (2011)
Experience different culture	Wilkins and Huisnan (2011)
Facilities	Bodycott (2009); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Financial aid/ scholarship	McMahon (1992); Li and Bray (2007)
Geographic location	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Li and Bray (2007); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
International qualification	Chapman and Pyvis (2006a)
Learning experience	Bodycott (2009)
Local partner institution	Li (2008)
Perceived quality of a program	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Pimpa (2005); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Chen (2008); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010); Wilkins and Huisnan (2011)
Perceived quality of an institution	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Pimpa (2005); Gratfield and Chen (2006); Chen (2008)
Perceived quality of teaching	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Pimpa (2005); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Programs offered	Bodycott (2009); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Reputation of an institution	Chapman and Pyvis (2006a); Gratfield and Chen (2006); Chen (2008); Wilkins and Huisnan (2011)
Safe environment	Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Chen (2008); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Significant others	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006); Gratfield and Chen (2006)
Social links	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Visa application/ immigration issues	Chen (2008); Alubaker, Shanka and Muuka (2010)

2.5 Variables Related to School Choice

The previous sections have reviewed factors that are influential at different stages of the university choice process. These variables operate at both the individual and the organizational level, and include a student's individual characteristics, significant others,

institutional and program characteristics, cost and financial aid. Some variables are more specific to offshore international students engaging in a transnational program, such as country image, local partner institution image and offshore push-pull factors. However, offshore programs are a relatively new and little-researched development in international education (Li, 2008). This study, therefore, is based mainly on the more prolific research of onshore students, using variables derived mainly from the relatively large body of literature on choice and pre-purchase information search processes. These variables are discussed below.

2.5.1 Variables at the Individual Level

Students' Individual Characteristics

On an individual level, a student's socioeconomic status is a strong indicator of college attendance (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990). Students from a high socioeconomic background are more likely to go on to college than students from a low socioeconomic background (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Race, gender, academic ability, achievement, attitudes and parents' educational levels are all influencing factors (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990). In fact, most studies have focused on how students' family background and aptitudes are related to school choice.

Much European research has investigated the reasons why people participate in formal learning activities. Classic studies, including those by Houle (1961) and Johnstone and Rivera (1965), have described participants' socioeconomic characteristics and motivation, and have developed various models of adult learners in the west. Houle (1961) identified a typology with three learner types – goal-oriented, activity-oriented

and learning-oriented – while Johnstone and Rivera (1965) and Cross (1979) identified the relationships between demographic variables and enrolling in some kind of organized learning experience for adult participants.

Students are more likely to attend a graduate school with a high socioeconomic ranking (Baird, 1976); indeed, Lang (1984) found that achievement at undergraduate level was the strongest predictor of the rank of postgraduate institution attended. Ethington and Smart (1986) also found that the students' background strongly influences the initial choice of undergraduate institution, while the social and academic integration of the undergraduate institution affects attendance at postgraduate school.

Family income and socioeconomic background also influence students' school choices. Family income is positively associated with plans to undertake postsecondary education (Bishop, 1977), while a family's socioeconomic background influences the choice of institution (Waters, 1992). Parents' educational level affects a student's educational plans (Stage & Hossler, 1989) and is an important factor in determining preferences for education (MacDermott, 1987).

Males and females engage in the university choice process differently. Females are more likely to consult with parents, friends and classmates while males rely more on coaches; and females are more concerned about accommodation issues while males focus more on the success of graduates (Galotti & Mark, 1994; Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza, 2012). Females also place more significance on factors such as admission processes, off-campus study programs, academic calendar, ethnic diversity, student body, quality of residential halls, diversity of residential options, social atmosphere, location, in terms of

distance from family home, and on-campus cultural events (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Connor et al. (1999) found that female students are more likely to consider higher education.

Other studies have examined application behaviour. Stolzenberg and Giarrusso (1987) found that over half of the first-year students in the study applied only to the school they were attending, possibly because many students submit a formal application only to their favourite school among those they thought would probably admit them. This finding implies that, for most students, submitting an application is the end of the admission process rather than the beginning. This then draws the attention of the recruitment administrator, as these students do not really experience the process of school choice.

The current study examined students' characteristics in terms of academic ability, socioeconomic background, family background, gender and application behaviour.

Significant Others

Significant others are spouse, relatives, parents, friends, teachers, employers and alumni who influence a student's school choice process.

Family and friends are a major influence on students' choice of institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990), more so for domestic than international students (Gagnon & Cocolas, 1988). Sevier (1987) found that over 63% of the respondents in his survey attended the same college as a parent, sibling, other relative or close friend.

Parental encouragement has a direct effect on college attendance, while professors are the prime recruiters of postgraduate students (Gagnon & Cocolas, 1988).

For international students, significant others can influence the decision to continue to study, to study onshore or offshore, and the choice of the institution and the program. Olson (1992) identified that positive interactions with university personnel during the school choice decision process greatly influence the final decision to enrol at a university. Olson also found that the influence of family members has a different level of impact on postgraduate students and undergraduate students.

The current study explored the degree of influence by significant others on different stages of the university choice decision.

2.5.2 Organizational Level

Institutional Characteristics and Pull Factors

Some characteristics of the institution – such as its size and its history – remain unchanged, while other characteristics can vary according to the demand and perceived value of the recipients, such as program offerings, curriculum, study mode, reputation, cost and financial aid.

Many studies have identified prestige and high standards as the key variable to students' choice of a university (Bowers & Pugh, 1972; Conard & Conard, 2000; Erdmann, 1983; Kallio, 1995; Kealy & Rockel, 1987; Sevier, 1987; Vaughn, Pitlik & Hansotia, 1978). An institution's academic reputation can be predicted by curriculum rigor,

social/cultural activities and individualized faculty attention (Conard & Conard, 2000). Several studies have confirmed the primary importance of an institution's reputation when students are deciding where to undertake their studies, with other important factors including the institution's location and size (Erdmann, 1983), student/faculty ratio, access to faculty, campus visits, number of students, appearance of campus, availability of specific majors, location, job and graduate school placement records, correspondence from the institution (Sevier, 1987), quality of education and quality of faculty (Vaughn, Pitlik & Hansotia, 1978). Kealy and Rockel (1987) noted that quality applies to four dimensions: academic, social, athletic and spatial.

However, reputation and quality are difficult to study. To some extent they are the result of perception, and education itself is an intangible concept that is not easily measured. Choosing a university could be uncertain and risky. In order to reduce the risk of investing in education, students seek an objective measurement of education by rating. The popularity and accessibility of ranking American colleges, universities and departments increased significantly through the 1980s and 1990s (Stuart, 1995). There is also much debate about the criteria, validity and methodologies of ranking (Webster, 1992). Perceptions of an institution may also be the result of previous experience with that institution, either personal experience or that of family or friends, which might explain the pattern described by Sevier (1987), where around two-thirds of the respondents attended the same college as a parent, sibling, other relative or close friend, as discussed above.

While many studies emphasize the importance of quality in students' decision making, Chiu (1999) found that academic quality was less critical than institutional status,

program status and practical issues for a sample of offshore MBA students (Chiu, 1999). Chiu suggested that the Hong Kong employees did not yet regard an academic institution's faculty as an indicator in evaluating the quality of advanced qualification, research outputs and scholarly achievements, or perhaps the majority of the students choosing a distance learning MBA program believed that they could not get into a regular program offered by local institutions, which usually perceive to have better teaching staff and quality control mechanisms.

Program Characteristics, Cost and Financial Aid

The number and variety of programs is also a major influence on students' choice of institution (Schuster, Costantino & Klein, 1989; Vaughn, Pitlik & Hansotia, 1978). Joseph and Joseph (1998) found that academic and program issues – including program flexibility and length – rated alongside cost of education, location and recreation facilities and peer and family influences as factors that influence students' choice of tertiary institution. Bin Yusof et al. (2008) identified as “the very important attributes” the availability of the required program, academic reputation of the university, quality of the faculty and financial assistance, while Vaughn, Pitlik and Hansotia (1978) added the basic cost of attending a university to the list of important criteria.

A wide range of variables influence business students' selection of business school and program (Parker, Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 1990; Powers, 1988; Webb & Allen, 1994). Most important are program-related issues like its flexibility and length, and issues related to reputation and prestige.

The current study explored the influence of institutional characteristics, program characteristics and financial aid on the choice of offshore programs.

2.5.3 Transnational Level

Country Image of Transnational Program

Li (2008) describes country image as consumer's perception about a country which plays an important role in international students' evaluation. A number of studies have focused on onshore international students who choose an onshore program (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Altbach, 2004; Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2007; Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Morrish & Lee, 2011). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that an international student considered three stages in selecting a study destination: deciding to study abroad, selecting a host country and selecting a foreign institution. Chen (2007) made similar findings, and both studies concur with other research into onshore international education that country image is one of the most important variables.

Given the importance of country image on onshore programs in the literature, country image would also be expected to influence offshore programs, and therefore it was examined in the current study.

Local Partner Institution Image

Li (2008) investigated Chinese high school students' intention to enrol in an offshore program, and found that the image of the local partner institution had a significant effect on enrolment intention, possibly because the Chinese students were unfamiliar with a

foreign country and so relied heavily on the local institution to evaluate an offshore program.

The current study extends Li's work by exploring the local partner institution effect on the choice of a transnational institution in Hong Kong.

Offshore Push-Pull Factors

The previous section has identified the traditional push-pull factors that apply to onshore international program. Although this study is based on a theoretical framework of the traditional push-pull model of the international student, it also incorporates the factors which emphasize the delivery of offshore international program. Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2012) identified two distinct sets of push and pull factors, one applicable to home campuses and one to international branch campuses, as summarized in Figure 2.7 overleaf.

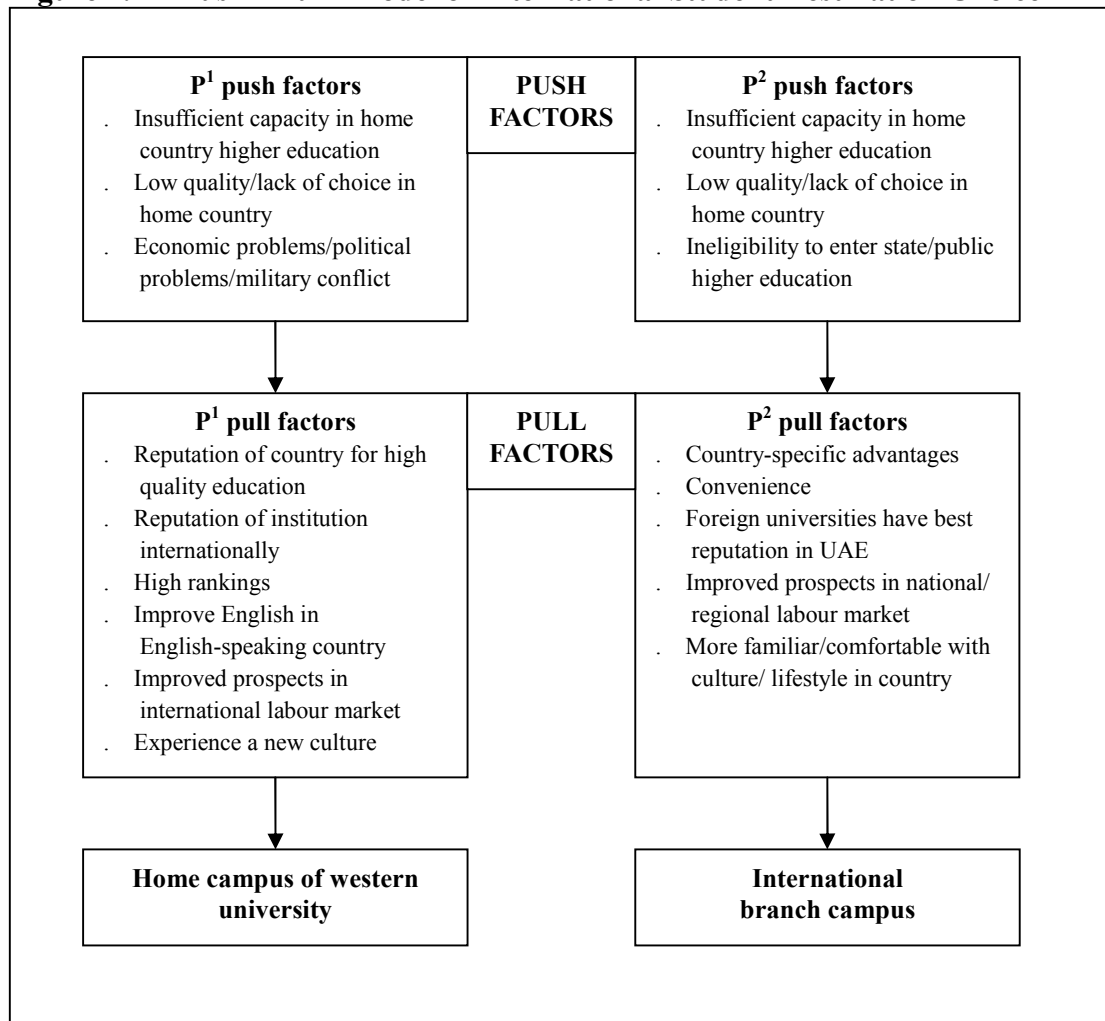
2.6 The Proposed Transnational University Choice Model

This chapter has reviewed the emergence of transnational study in the context of Hong Kong's higher education market.

Hossler and Gallagher's multi-stage model takes into account the interaction of individual and organizational factors on different stages of the college choice. Hossler and Gallagher's three-step model is a simplified version of the other models. It describes the intervening variables and the way the institution activity is defined. The model also explains the university choice process from both sociological and

econometric views (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). Since the late 1980s, Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model has been used by many scholars as the starting point to expand or test a particular phase or as a foundation for developing new models (e.g. Waters, 1992; Poock, 2001; Chen, 2007).

Figure 2.7 Push²- Pull² Model of International Student Destination Choice



Source: Adapted from Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman, 2012, p.428

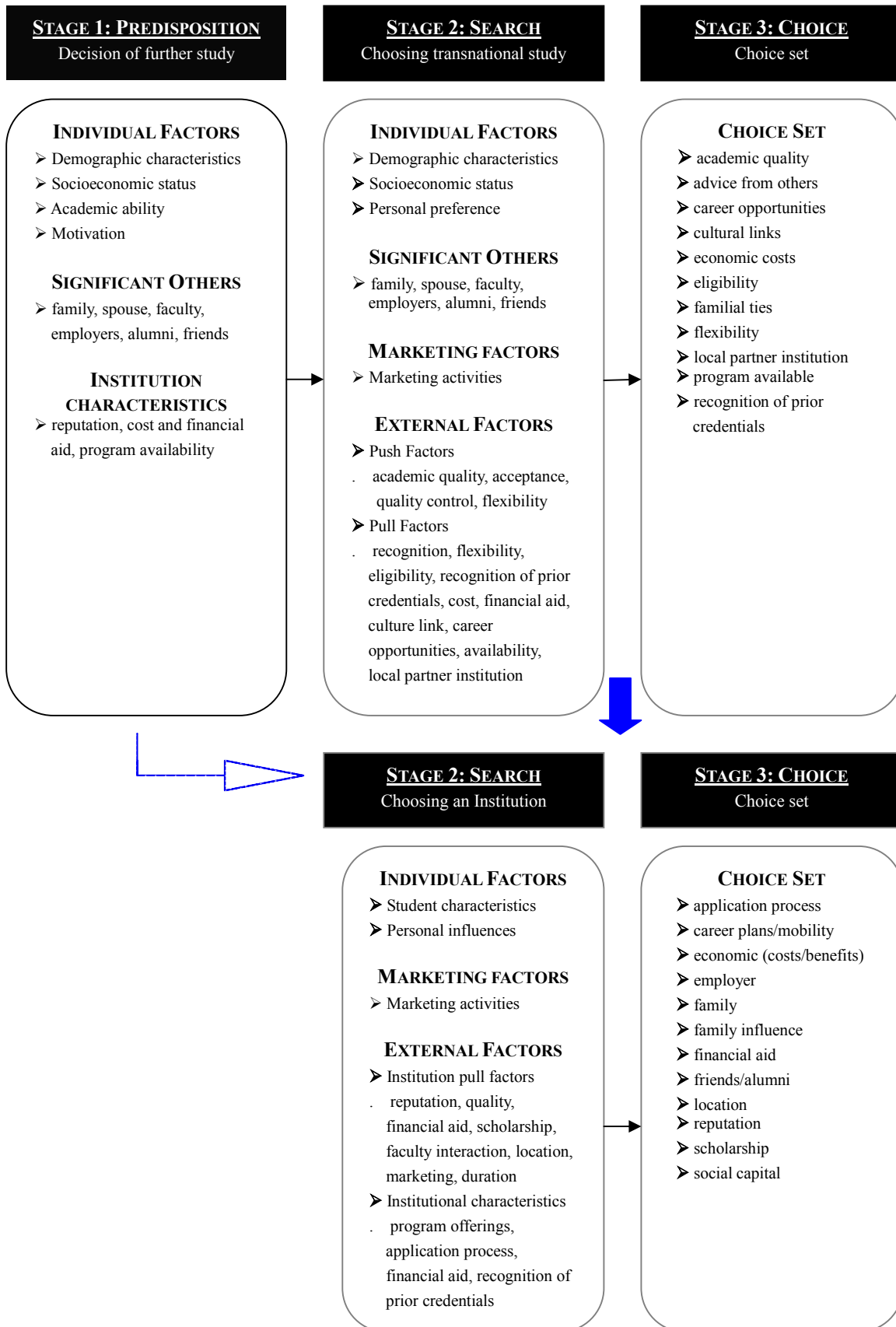
Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) push-pull model was developed to explain factors relevant to international students, and it has also been adopted by several researchers examining the criteria international students use to select countries and institutions (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007).

Whether choosing to study overseas or at a transnational university, the decision must incorporate a number of important variables and factors at different stages of the decision-making process. Some important variables, such as offshore push-pull factors, country effect and local partner institution effect, are more specific to an offshore program. This study developed transnational university choice model, therefore, to synthesize the complexity of the choice process for transnational study programs.

The proposed combined Transnational University Choice Model (Figure 2.8) incorporates the concepts of the different college choice model, the effect of push-pull factors and important variables identified from the onshore program. The model attempts to describe various economic and social forces that influence the decision process in order to find appropriate opportunities for policy makers and administrators to intervene.

The decision to undertake offshore international study involves three stages. In Stage 1, called predisposition, students decide to engage in further study. At this stage societal, economic and familial factors all combine to generate their interest in school enrolment. The factors that must be considered include student characteristics such as academic ability, demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status and personal motivation; influences from significant others such as encouragement from family, spouse, teacher, faculty, employers, alumni and friends; and the organizational characteristics of the school.

Figure 2.8 Conceptual Transnational University Choice Model



After deciding to undertake further study, students must choose to study in Hong Kong for their transnational study and then choose the institution. Each decision involves a two-stage process – Stage 2 is search and Stage 3 is choice. In some situations it is assumed that students decide to consider first the country and the effect of being an onshore international student before choosing the institution. However, students may also bypass any transnational or country concerns and directly search for and choose an institution.

In choosing undertake their transnational study in Hong Kong, students go through Stage 2 (search) and Stage 3 (choice). The search stage involves seeking information on transnational study, based on different selection criteria. These criteria include the students' socioeconomic background, experiences when taking up the transnational study and their own preferences, information or guidance from significant others such as direct family or spouse, teachers or faculty, social links like alumni, other students or friends or work colleagues, and push and pull factors. The pull factors are from the source and host country; the push factors are from Hong Kong. The set of push and pull factors is specific for transnational study with Hong Kong as the country of delivery.

The choice stage involves consideration of factors related to the institution, such as academic quality, eligibility, recognition of prior credential, flexibility, economic factors, familiarities, significant others, culture ties, career opportunities, local partner institutions and program availability.

Students also go through the search and the choice stage when selecting an institution. At the search stage, students gather information based on academic ability and

achievement. Students will also consider their personal push factors such as cost and benefit analysis, social capital, cultural capital and future career considerations. Significant others play an important role at this stage. External factors related to the institution, the pull factors, include reputation, academic quality, financial aid/scholarship, faculty interaction, alumni/friends, location and marketing, and institutional characteristics such as program offerings, application process, financial considerations and recognition of prior credential. Following the search stage, students will form a set of possible institutions and narrow from which they make the final enrolment decision.

The current study examined the three stages of the proposed model for transnational student university choice and tested the validity of factors from previous studies.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Table 2.4 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter outlines the research methods – data collection, measures to ensure validity and reliability, the sample and the statistical techniques used to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data.

Table 2.4 Chapter 2: summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To outline the development of transnational higher education in the world market	Section 2.1 outlines the importance of the internationalization of higher education in the world education market: (i) definition of transnational education; (ii) characteristics of transnational education.
To review the Hong Kong education system	Section 2.2 looks at the development of the transnational higher education in Hong Kong. It describes the regulation and current picture of transnational education in the Hong Kong higher education market.
To review the various university choice models that might explain the choice process of students	Section 2.3 looks at the theoretical underpinnings of this research. It presents the development of conceptual approaches: (i) econometric model; (ii) sociology model; (ii) combined model and explains the relationship of different models.
To review the major studies of student institution choice	Section 2.4 summarizes the literature on domestic and international modes of studies. It reviews how different factors influence the stages of the university choice process.
To outline the university choice variables.	Section 2.5 identifies variables related to university choice and reviews the factors at the individual and organizational levels.
To propose a Transnational University Choice Model	Section 2.6 proposes a Transnational University Choice Model for this research. This model is based on the review of different conceptual approaches and major studies of university choice variables, as reviewed in the previous section.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology. Section 3.1 justifies the use of a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Section 3.2 describes the quantitative part data collection process: validity and reliability, the pilot study, the focus group, development of the survey instrument and first stage of the data analysis. Section 3.3 discusses the qualitative methodology employed: validity and reliability, semi-structured interviews, and the related data coding and analysis. Section 3.4 provides a summary of the chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A mixed-methods design has also been employed in previous studies of students' university choice (Chen, 2007; Waters, 1992; Webb, 1993).

Bryman (2008, p.697) outlined the characteristics of the two kinds of methodology: “qualitative research usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data”. It is an inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist research strategy. On the other hand, “quantitative research usually emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data”, and so is a deductivist and objectivist strategy. Cook and Reichardt (1979) listed the potential benefits of using qualitative and quantitative methods together:

- The two methods can support multiple purposes with a variety of needs.

- The two methods can build upon each other to offer insights not possible with either method used individually.
- Multiple techniques allow the researcher to triangulate the data and so reduce any biases of individual methods.

This research first used quantitative research methods to identify the factors and to measure their significance in influencing the decision of students in choosing a transnational university and program in Hong Kong. These quantitative methods were a pilot study, a focus group discussion and survey questionnaire. Qualitative research methods were then used to provide a deeper and richer understanding of the decision-making process of choosing a university through detailed description or storytelling, in the context of semi-structured interviews. Using interviews enhances the study's internal validity by verifying the findings from the quantitative analysis of the results, and also provides supplementary insights into the findings. A major strength of qualitative research is understanding the processes that led to the outcomes (Maxwell, 2005). Through the mixed-methods analysis, a mutually consistent picture of the process, relationship and concepts could be developed, the credibility and justification of the analysis and findings could be strengthened.

Data from the quantitative questionnaire and the themes and sub-themes developed from the qualitative interview were integrated and analyzed, with the aim of understanding the university choice process and factors influencing that process.

Secondary data for each program of study were also collected by reviewing each institution's program documents, such as program brochures, websites, marketing

activities, leaflets, newspaper supplement and press releases. These secondary data gave the researcher a better understanding of each program.

An ethical review protocol was completed and approved by Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). This protocol specified the processes of data collection and how the confidentiality of the data could be ensured.

3.2 Quantitative Research Procedures

3.2.1 Validity and Reliability

The design for the quantitative part of the study included measures to ensure validity and reliability of the data. Validity is “the assessment of how well a survey or index measures what it is intended to measure” (Litwin, 1995, p.85). The validity of a survey questionnaire can be ensured by face validity and content validity (Litwin, 1995). In this study, face validity was achieved by two colleagues of the researcher, with extensive experience in program administration and research, reviewing the survey items and commenting on their appropriateness. Content validity of the study was achieved by conducting a pilot study.

Reliability, “the reproducibility or stability of data or observations” (Litwin, 1995, p.84), was achieved in this study through test-retest of the survey questionnaire, conducted two weeks apart.

3.2.2 Pilot Study

The preliminary survey questionnaire was based on a review of the literature. Three offshore international students, selected by convenience sampling, were invited to participate in a pilot study, completing and then commenting on the questionnaire. Their input was valuable in identifying problems, commenting on the wording and layout, and clarifying the primary influence and factors. The questionnaire was modified as suggested by these participants.

3.2.3 Focus Group

Two weeks after the pilot test, a small focus group discussion was organized to test the validity and reliability of the survey. The three offshore international students reviewed the modified version of the questionnaire and discussed their suggestions and concerns. These students had studied or were studying an offshore international program. The discussion provided valuable feedback on the logical flow of the questions and the repetition of some questions. The survey questionnaire was further revised to present a clearer arrangement of the research questions.

The final questionnaire was based on constructive feedback from the pilot study and the focus group discussion, together with comments from the research supervisor and administrators with extensive experience in research and offshore program administration experience. The final questionnaire was also approved by Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee before conducting the survey.

3.2.4 Development of the Survey Instrument

A survey questionnaire (see Appendix D) was the primary component of the quantitative part of this study. The questions were designed to obtain information following the conceptual Transnational University Choice Model. The format and design of the questionnaire resembled that developed by Chen (2007) to study the similar topic on international onshore students. Participants used a five-point Likert scale, from “1 – not important” to “5 – very important”, with an option of “N/A – not applicable” in response to questions that were designed specifically for the study, based on previous questionnaires and findings by Chen (2007), Chiu (1999), Gagnon and Cocolas (1988), Gu (2009), Li (2008), Olson (1992), Poock (2001) and Webb (1993). The items were also identified during informal discussions throughout the survey and discussions associated with the researcher’s work as the administrator of the transnational program for 20 years.

The following discussion describes and discusses a rationale for the four sections of the questionnaire: Student Background Information, Decision to Pursue Further Education, Choosing a Transnational Study in Hong Kong and Choosing to Study at an Institution.

Section 1 – Student Background Information

Items in this section were designed to gather information about students’ background. This section focused on fewer variables than some previous studies, with the aim of encouraging participation by avoiding extraneous personal information. It tried to capture some unique attributes of offshore international students. Fifteen questions were categorized under six major areas:

1. Basic demographic information – degree in which currently enrolled, university and program of study, gender, country of citizenship, and whether the university was in their home country. This information was used as a basis for the analysis of the significant differences between different groups of respondents on the university choice factors.
2. Application pattern – whether respondents had considered choosing other places to study the current transnational program, their choice decision and the time they decided to enrol in the current program.
3. Significant others – the influence of family members for choosing the current university. Questions about the experience of studying previously at either the same university or outside Hong Kong were used to investigate how these factors would affect a student's choice of university.
4. Academic performance – whether the acknowledged strong correlation between a student's academic ability and school attendance (Baird, 1976; Chen, 2007; Lang, 1984) also applies to the international offshore students.
5. Socioeconomic factors –whether there is a relationship between the level of parental education, student's income and the transnational study decision.
6. Financial aid – whether respondents were receiving any financial aid.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 made up the major portion of the questionnaire and were designed to understand the factors affecting university choice for different stages based on the proposed model. Factors studied at the different stages incorporated the push-pull factors, significant others and individual- and organization-level characteristics.

Section 2 – Decision to Pursue Further Education

This section consisted of 16 questions in three categories: (i) the influence from significant others to encourage pursuit of further education; (ii) the degree of importance of different motivators on one's further study decision; and (iii) student characteristics and institution characteristics. Having studied the factors in each part, the extent of the factors was also compared to understand what exerts most influence on students in pursuing further education.

At the end of this section, respondents were asked to rank the order of university, program, local partner, host country and others when they determine where and what to study. The purpose of Section 2 was to study the decision process when a student chooses the transnational program and gain insights about the importance of transnational program factors such as local partner institution and country effect, as identified in previous studies.

Section 3 – Choosing a Transnational Study in Hong Kong

This section consisted of 25 questions in three categories: (i) the influence of personal affiliations like family, teachers, employers, alumni and friends; (ii) the push factors associated with the transnational study in Hong Kong, such as the driving force from Hong Kong on academic quality, flexibility and quality control factors; and (iii) the pull

factors associated with the transnational study in Hong Kong or the influences that attract students for transnational study, such as recognition, flexibility, eligibility, culture link, financial aid, career opportunities, program availability and local partner institution.

At the end of Section 3, respondents were asked to rank the three most important factors in their selection of the transnational program, chosen from the factors listed or any other factors. The aims were to identify any missing factors and also to explore the most common factors that were important in choosing to study transnationally.

These questions were very important for this research since they hold the key to exploring the major reasons for choosing a transnational study in Hong Kong. The findings will help institutions and administrators strengthen their marketing efforts to attract more offshore international students to further their studies.

Section 4 – Choosing to Study at an Institution

This section gathered information on respondents' decision to choose to study at a particular institution, and questions incorporated individual factors, marketing factors and external factors. Thirty questions fell into two categories: personal influences, and institutional and program characteristics.

The first part on personal influences included the student push factors related to work and future career, social capital factors and the internal driving forces. Recommendations from significant others were again identified. The second part on institutional and program characteristics focused on pull factors from the institution,

such as reputation, academic quality, financial aid, faculty interaction, alumni/friends, location and marketing, and the institution/program characteristics such as program offerings, application process, financial considerations and recognition of prior credentials.

At the end of Section 4, respondents were again asked to rank the three most important factors in their selection of an institution. As with Section 3, the main purposes were to identify the important factors in choosing to study an institution and to explore the most common factors which were important in their decision.

Answers to these questions offer an opportunity for an institution to fully understand students' needs by developing strategies to strengthen their core competencies in order to attract more international offshore students.

3.2.5 Sample

The researcher made contact through an invitation letter (see Appendix B) with the transnational program director/designated person of six identified universities offering transnational programs in Hong Kong. Five of the six institutions gave their consent for students to participate in questionnaire survey.

Participants were chosen by convenience sampling of students with a wide range of backgrounds enrolled in transnational undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered by two Australian and three UK institutions. The Australian institutions were Macquarie University and Victoria University, and the UK institutions were University of

Greenwich, University of Huddersfield and University of Wales. The five programs were organized by two top local partner institutions in Hong Kong. The program at Victoria University was run by the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, while programs at the other four universities were run by The Hong Kong Management Association. The participants were studying business and management related topics in part-time study mode.

3.2.6 Data Collection

For reasons of confidentiality, the student databases were not available to the researcher. The students were invited to volunteer for the survey, and volunteers had the option to not answer some should they not willing to provide the answers (see Appendix C). At the end of the survey questionnaire, respondents were invited to provide their contact information if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview and/or if they requested a copy of the research results.

The survey questionnaires were completed in class, supervised by the faculty/administrators, between November 2012 and April 2013. This period was extended by some of the universities not holding classes during the Christmas and New Year holiday breaks. A total of 496 usable questionnaires were received for data analysis. The questionnaires were stored in the researcher's home, which was kept locked at all times.

3.2.7 Data Analysis

Statistical tests used to analyze the data from the questionnaire included descriptive analysis, chi-square test, factors analysis, and independent sample t-test and ANOVA. The data were analyzed using the SPSS software package, following visual inspection of data entry and coding to ensure integrity and accuracy. The “frequency” command of the SPSS package was also applied to clean all the data before doing the data analyses.

Descriptive analysis was used to calculate the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation in order to gain an overview of offshore international students’ background information and preferences.

Significant difference was examined using Chi-square tests. For descriptive comparison, five independent variables were selected and compared: level of study, gender, citizenship, non-local course study experience and university enrolled.

Factor analysis was used to identify factors that statistically explain the variation and covariation among measures (Green & Neil, 2003). The varimax rotational method was applied in this study.

Independent sample t-test was used to evaluate the difference between the means of two independent groups. The test was run on two independent groups of the four independent variables: level of study, gender, citizenship and non-local course study experience.

ANOVA was conducted to test for differences among three or more groups, evaluating the difference between the means among students from different universities and, for each university, observing the mean difference in pursuit of further education, choice of transnational study in Hong Kong and choice of an institution.

The questions measured the importance of each factor on the three stages of offshore program choice. Five main hypotheses were then developed and tested:

H1: There is no difference in the importance of each factor on the three stages of university choice by students studying undergraduate transnational program, compared with those studying postgraduate transnational program.

H2: There is no difference in the importance of each factor on the three stages of university choice by students with different gender.

H3: There is no difference in the importance of each factor on the three stages of university choice by local citizens and non-local citizens.

H4: There is no difference in the importance of each factor on the three stages of university choice by students with and without non-local study experience.

H5: There is no difference in the importance of each factor on the three stages of university choice by students from different transnational universities.

3.3 Qualitative Research Procedure

3.3.1 Validity and Reliability

The traditional concepts of reliability and validity of research can be difficult to achieve in qualitative research because studies take place in a natural setting that is hard to replicate (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). One way to increase internal reliability is by videotaping (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The interviews in this study were recorded so the researcher could re-analyze the data to increase the internal reliability.

Validity of qualitative research for the most part is established on a logical basis, and providing an argument for validity requires well-documented research and a comprehensive description (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Internal validity can be enhanced by verifying results and conclusions from two or more sources or perspectives (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). This study used triangulation, comparing the qualitative and quantitative findings to help explain and verify the consistency of the results. This procedure provides a deeper understanding of the reasons and beliefs underpinning answers to the quantitative questions. The content analysis methodology allowed the researcher to identify thematic issues identified from the open-ended questions and to carry out more systematic analysis of respondents' views of their decision-making process when choosing an offshore international program.

3.3.2 Development of Interview Questions

Interviewing is “a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education”

(Seidman, 1998, p.7) that “also allows us to put behaviour in context and provides access to understanding their action” (Seidman, 1998, p.4). This study used semi-structured interviews to capture the factors and processes of the students in their decision of choosing an offshore international program in Hong Kong.

Six questions (see Appendix F) were designed to provide opportunities to talk about the stories and the issues of choosing an offshore international program. Closed, open and exploring questions were used, allowing the researcher to gather special information, clarify responses to the questionnaire and gain further insights into the students’ university choice process. The semi-structured interviews also allowed students an opportunity to provide comments and recommendations on the transnational provision in Hong Kong so that students’ experiences could be enhanced and their needs could be better met in the future.

3.3.3 Pilot Study

The use of pilot studies in qualitative research helps to develop an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the participants (Maxwell, 2005). A pilot study was conducted in May 2013 with two students. This had the advantage of allowing the researcher to practise interview techniques and receive feedback and suggestions about the method used. Following the pilot test, the researcher revised the interview guide and also re-phrased some questions more clearly and succinctly.

3.3.4 Sample

The most common form of qualitative sampling is purposeful, where it is assumed that the researcher wants to discover, understand and gain insight (Merriam, 1998).

Purposeful sampling was used in this study for the qualitative interview. As described above, respondents to the questionnaires were invited to participate in the in-depth interview by filling out their contact details. Sixty-five names were collected this way, and the researcher emailed an invitation to each respondent and followed up with a telephone call to schedule a suitable time and venue for the interviews. The survey questionnaires were collected in April, and the meetings were arranged in late May. As a sample of 15 is recommended as the smallest acceptable size for all qualitative research (BERTAUX, cited by Guest, Brunce & Johnson (2006)), this study included 20 interviews. Interviewees were selected who were representative of the sample from different institutions, level of study, citizenship and gender.

3.3.5 Data Collection and Recording

Interviews with students were arranged in a classroom or in a meeting room of The Hong Kong Management Association. The locations were quiet, private and suitable for conducting the interviews. International offshore students were given the approval and consent letters (see Appendix E), which described the procedures and outlined the order of the questions before the interview. The researcher conducted 13 one-on-one interviews and three group interviews of two to three students. The interviews lasted for

45 to 120 minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews using a digital voice recorder with prior approval obtained from the interviewees, as stated on the consent letter.

Given that the researcher was also the Program Administrator, there was initial concern about interviewees feeling apprehensive or not being completely honest and open in answering the questions. To overcome this concern, the researcher clearly explained the research objectives, hoping to encourage interviewees to feel comfortable in sharing their perspectives. All interviewees indicated that they were frank and honest in sharing their views.

3.3.6 Data Organizing and Coding

Data analysis is “a process of categorization, description and synthesis. Data reduction is necessary for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.207). The qualitative data in this research were analyzed using the NVivo (QSR International) software program. NVivo expedites content analyses and is useful for researching, retrieving, manipulating, arranging and rearranging description data. Content analysis is suitable for systematically analyzing the symbolic content of different forms of recorded communications (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). The researcher personally transcribed all interview recordings. Direct transcription was done in NVivo and data were cleaned before analyzing. The data were backed up and stored as hard copy. The interview was coded with no individual interviewees identified.

3.3.7 Identification of Emerging Themes and Patterns

The researcher used the thematic coding process to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews, reading through the transcripts and coding at the question level as the initial stage of coding. Initial themes were identified from the answers to the interview questions. Then the research reviewed the initial themes and the transcripts again in order to check for any further theme relationships. The “Tree Node” with relationship to another category and its “Child Node” were identified. The researcher identified quotes that justified the themes and sub-themes that developed during this process.

3.4 Chapter Summary

Table 3.1 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter presents the results of the survey questionnaires.

Table 3.1 Chapter 3: summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To outline the research design	Section 3.1 outlines the research design. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Triangulation of data enhances the validity of the research findings.
To detail the research procedure	Sections 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate the research procedure for both the quantitative and qualitative methods. For each research method, the development and design of the instruments and questions, the sample selection, the overall purpose of the instrument itself, data collection and data analysis are described. The validity and reliability of both research methods are also discussed.
To explain the research techniques used	Data analysis for quantitative research method is outlined in Section 3.2.7. Several statistical tests were used to analyze the data from the quantitative survey, including descriptive analysis, chi-square test, factor analysis and independent sample t-test and ANOVA. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Data analysis for qualitative research method is outlined in Section 3.3.6. The qualitative data were analysed using NVivo. Content analysis systematically evaluated the symbolic content of interview transcriptions. The findings of both methods were integrated and analyzed.

Chapter 4 Findings of the Survey Questionnaires

This chapter presents the findings and data analysis from the survey questionnaire, which consisted of three main parts.

Section 4.1 presents data from the first part of the questionnaire, Student Background Information, as descriptive statistics to provide a demographic overview of the transnational student respondents. These data were used as a foundation for interpreting the results of the statistical analysis, including chi-square to test for combinations of categorical data and factor analysis to identify groups of factors at different stages of the decision-making process.

Section 4.2 discusses the remaining three parts of the questionnaire, which covered the process undertaken by students when choosing a transnational university program: Decision to Pursue Further Education, Choosing a Transnational Study in Hong Kong and Choosing to Study at an Institution. In these parts of the survey, respondents were asked to rank the elements in order of importance. Statistical analyses included factor analysis, independent sample t-tests and ANOVA.

Finally, Section 4.3 provides a summary of the chapter.

4.1 Part 1 – Respondents’ Background Information

The first part of the questionnaire covered five main areas: (i) respondents’ demographic information, (ii) their application background, which included influence of their

significant others, (iii) their academic background, (iv) socioeconomic factors and (v) financial aid.

4.1.1 Demographic Information

Questionnaires were sent to 869 students at five universities, as described in the previous chapter, and 496 usable questionnaires were returned (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Number of questionnaires distributed and returned

Institution (country)	Program	Sent	Returned and usable (%)
Macquarie University (Australia)	Doctor of Business Administration Master of Business Administration Master of Management Postgraduate Diploma in Management Postgraduate Certificate in Management	196	135 (68.9%)
Victoria University (Australia)	Bachelor of Business (Computer System Management)	50	26 (52.0%)
The University of Greenwich (UK)	Bachelor of Arts(Hons) Business Studies	278	154 (55.4%)
The University of Huddersfield (UK)	Bachelor of Arts(Hons) Global Business and Logistics Management Bachelor of Arts(Hons) Human Resources Management Bachelor of Arts(Hons) International Business Bachelor of Arts(Hons) Marketing Management	203	142 (70.0%)
The University of Wales (UK)	Master of Business Administration	142	39 (27.5%)
	Total	869	496

Table 4.2 presents the respondents' profiles in terms of gender, level of study, their institutions' country of affiliation, length of time studying that program, and country of citizenship. Of the 496 respondents, 198 (39.9%) identified themselves as male and 298 (60.1%) as female (Table 4.2). Almost two-thirds (322; 64.9%) studied at undergraduate level and 174 (35.1%) at postgraduate level. Approximately one-third of respondents (161; 32.5%) studied at the two Australia-based universities, and the others (335; 67.5%)

were at the three UK-based universities. Over three-quarters of the respondents (383; 77.2%) had been studying their transnational program for less than one year. Finally, respondents were citizens of 12 different countries; however, the majority (454; 91.5%) were local citizens.

Table 4.2 Respondents' demographic profiles

Item		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	198	39.9%
	Female	298	60.1%
Level of study	Undergraduate	322	64.9%
	Postgraduate	174	35.1%
Institution's country	Australia	161	32.5%
	UK	335	67.5%
Length of time in program	< 12 months	383	77.2%
	> 12 months	113	22.8%
Citizenship	Local	454	91.5%
	Non-local	42	8.5%
	Total	496	100.0%

4.1.2 Application Background

One-third of the respondents (165; 33.3%) had qualifications obtained outside Hong Kong, while for two-thirds of the respondents (331; 66.7%) the current transnational program was their first non-local qualification. When respondents were asked if they would consider studying the current non-local qualification outside Hong Kong, 304 (61.3%) stated they would not (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Prevalence and likelihood of non-local qualifications

Item		Number	Percentage
Non-local qualifications	Yes	165	33.3%
	No	331	66.7%
Consider study outside HK	Yes	192	38.7%
	No	304	61.3%
	Total	496	100.0%

A comparison of respondents' non-local qualification background and their preference of study location showed a significant association, in which those with previous qualifications outside Hong Kong were more likely to consider further study outside Hong Kong (Pearson significant = 0.00039, significant at 0.05 level) (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Cross-tabulation of qualifications outside Hong Kong by study outside Hong Kong

Count Row Percent Column Percent	Study outside Hong Kong/ Yes	Study outside Hong Kong/ No	Row Total
Qualification outside Hong Kong /Yes	82 49.7 42.7	83 50.3 27.3	165 33.3
Qualification outside Hong Kong /No	110 33.2 57.3	221 66.8 72.7	331 66.7
Column Total	192 38.7	304 61.3	496 100

Pearson significant = 0.00039 significant at .05 level

The vast majority of the respondents (422; 85.1%) reported that their program of study was either their first or only choice, which indicated they had strongly intended to join the transnational program in which they were currently enrolled (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Number and percentages of choice order

Choice order	Number	Percentage
Only Choice	126	25.4%
First Choice	296	59.7%
Second or Lower Choice	74	14.9%
Total	496	100.0%

The vast majority of respondents (451; 90.9%) did not have family member(s) studying at the same university, suggesting no family ties with their current study institution (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Number and percentage of family members studying at the same university

Family member(s) studying at same university	Number	Percentage
Yes	45	9.1%
No	451	90.9%
Total	496	100.0%

4.1.3 Academic Background

Fifty-seven (11.5%) of the respondents were in the top 5% in their previous program of study, with an additional 133 (26.8%) in the top 10% and a further 118 (23.8%) reported in the top 15% (Table 4.7). The research sample generally reported that they had good academic ability. However, analysis of the academic ability of undergraduate and postgraduate respondents showed no significant association between those with higher academic achievement and the likelihood of pursuing a higher level of education (Pearson significant = 0.119, significant at 0.05 level) (Table 4.8).

Table 4.7 Number and percentage of past academic performance

Past academic performance	Number	Percentage
Among top 5%	57	11.5%
Among top 10%	133	26.8%
Among top 15%	118	23.8%
Other	181	36.5%
Missing	7	1.4%
Total	496	100.0%

Table 4.8 Cross-tabulation of level of study by academic qualification

Count Row Per cent Column Per cent	Undergraduate Level	Postgraduate Level	Row Total
Previous qualification among top 15%	207 67.2 65.5	101 32.8 58.4	308 63.0
Other	109 60.2 34.5	72 39.8 41.6	181 37.0
Column Total	316 64.6	173 35.4	489 100

Pearson significant = 0.119 significant at .05 level

Fifty-three (10.7%) of the respondents had previously studied at the same university, either the onshore program in the institution's home country or the offshore program (Table 4.9). This indicates the previous association with the same university may have a certain effect on the school choice decision.

Table 4.9 Number and percentage of study at the same university

Study at same university	Number	Percentage
Yes	53	10.7%
No	443	89.3%
Total	496	100.0%

4.1.4 Socioeconomic Background

Parents' education level varied greatly (Table 4.10). Around 3% of respondents did not give this information for one or other parent. The majority of parents had no university qualifications. This suggests the aspiration to pursue university or graduate studies seems not associated with the parental education background.

Table 4.10 Number and percentage of parents' education level

Education level	Father		Mother	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Postgraduate degree	22	4.4%	14	2.8%
Some postgraduate study	11	2.2%	11	2.2%
Undergraduate degree	42	8.5%	28	5.6%
Some university study	9	1.8%	6	1.2%
College/vocational graduate	47	9.5%	50	10.1%
Some college/vocational	33	6.7%	29	5.9%
High school graduate	84	16.9%	91	18.3%
High school or less	233	47.0%	251	50.6%
Missing	15	3.0%	16	3.2%
Total	496	100.0%	496	*99.9%

* The total is not 100.0% because figures were rounded up.

Annual income was related to level of study and place of citizenship. Postgraduate respondents reported a higher annual income than undergraduates (Table 4.11), and non-local respondents reported a higher annual income than locals (Table 4.12).

Table 4.11 Number and percentage of annual income by level of study

Annual income (HK\$)	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
\$1,000,000 or more	15	4.7%	18	10.3%
\$800,000–\$999,999	2	0.6%	9	5.2%
\$600,000–\$799,999	12	3.7%	34	19.5%
\$400,000–\$599,999	26	8.1%	41	23.6%
\$200,000–\$399,999	149	46.3%	52	29.9%
Less than \$200,000	110	34.2%	15	8.6%
Missing	8	2.5%	5	2.9%
Total	322	*100.1%	174	100.0%

* The total is not 100.0% because figures were rounded up.

Table 4.12 Number and percentage of annual income by citizenship

Annual income (HK\$)	Local		Non-Local	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
\$1,000,000 or more	21	4.6%	12	28.6%
\$800,000–\$999,999	9	2.0%	2	4.8%
\$600,000–\$799,999	38	8.4%	8	19.0%
\$400,000–\$599,999	60	13.2%	7	16.7%
\$200,000–\$399,999	193	42.5%	8	19.0%
Less than \$200,000	122	26.9%	3	7.1%
Missing	11	2.4%	2	4.8%
Total	454	100.0%	42	100.0%

4.1.5 Financial Aid

Over three-quarters of respondents (378; 76.2%) received no financial aid for their studies (Table 4.13). Fifty-five (11.1%) received financial assistance from the government while 52 (10.5%) were funded by the private sector. The remaining respondents (11; 2.2%) received financial assistance from family, banks or other loans. These figures indicate that the majority of students paid the course fee themselves.

Analysis showed a significant association between respondents' level of study and their use of financial aid (Pearson significant = 0.034, significant at 0.05 level) (Table 4.14).

Table 4.13 Number and percentage of financial aid

Financial aid	Number	Percentage
Government aid	55	11.1%
Corporate sponsorship	52	10.5%
Others	11	2.2%
None	378	76.2%
Total	496	100.0%

Table 4.14 Cross-tabulation of level of study by use of financial aid

Count Row Percent Column Percent	Undergraduate Level	Postgraduate Level	Row Total
Financial Aid /Yes	67 56.8 20.8	51 43.2 29.3	118 23.8
Financial Aid /No	255 67.5 79.2	123 32.5 70.7	378 76.2
Column Total	322 64.9	174 35.1	496 100

Pearson significant = 0.034 significant at .05 level

4.2 Part 2 – Transnational University Choice Process

This section discusses the factor analysis of the variables in each stage of the transnational university choice process, and the results of the descriptive statistical analysis and independent sample t-test to test the significant difference among different independent variables – level of study, gender, country of citizen and non-local course study experience – at the 95% significance level.

The results of descriptive statistical analysis and independent sample t-test and ANOVA are presented in a summary table at the end of each subsection. In these summary tables:

- “U” represents undergraduate students and “P” represents postgraduate students in the study level column;
- “M” represents male and “F” represents female in the gender column;
- “HK” represents local citizens and “Non-HK” represents non-local citizens in the citizenship column;
- “Y” represents respondents with previous non-local qualifications and “N” represents respondents without previous non-local qualifications;
- “YES” indicates significant difference among independent variables of the university at which the student is enrolled.

4.2.1 Factors that Influence Offshore International Students

Factor analyses were conducted on all variables, but were restricted to separate *a priori* categories to identify combinations of variables related to offshore international students’ choice (Table 4.15). Those categories included variables that had been identified by past research.

Table 4.15 Listing of all variables by a priori category

DECISION TO PURSUE FURTHER EDUCATION	
Category 1: Significant others	
-	Family/Spouse
-	Teachers/Faculty
-	Employers/Colleagues
-	Alumni/Other Students
-	Friends

Table 4.15 (continued)

DECISION TO PURSUE FURTHER EDUCATION
Category 2: Motivation of pursuing further education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It meets my long-term career objectives - It improves the chance of receiving higher income - It improves the chance of promotion opportunities - It meets my personal satisfaction - A higher degree is a status symbol - A higher degree helps me to compete in the job market - A higher degree helps my career change
Category 3: Institutional Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reputation of the institution/ university - Course fees - Financial aid - Program availability
DECISION TO CHOOSE TRANSNATIONAL STUDY IN HONG KONG
Category 1: Factors related to significant others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family/Spouse - Teachers/Faculty - Employers/Colleagues - Alumni/Other Students - Friends
Category 2: Factors about the transnational study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The education ordinance of non-local program in Hong Kong ensures the quality of the qualification - High threshold for admission into local institutions due to limited enrolments - Limited choices of study areas in local institutions - Perceived inferior academic qualities of local institutions - Lack of flexibility in delivery of the local programs - Recognition of my previous credentials - Opportunities for studying partly in the host country - Flexibility of program operation - Lower cost than studying abroad - Financial aid - Ease of entrance - Relevance of program - The opportunities to experience other culture - Better recognition of foreign qualifications - Foreign language skill are desirable - Social network - Cultural link between my home country and the host country of the program - The transnational program degree provides greater mobility for my future career - Information on study the transnational program is easily obtained - Reputation of the local partner of the transnational program

Table 4.15 (continued)

DECISION TO STUDY AT AN INSTITUTION
Category 1: Personal influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recommendation from my family/spouse - Recommendation from my teacher/faculty - Recommendation from my employers/colleagues - Recommendation from alumni/other students - Recommendation from friends - My family members have studied or are studying at this institution - My friends have studied or are studying at this institution - I have studied at this institution before - The degree from this institution is well known - The degree from this institution improves my future career and job prospects
Category 2: Institutional and program characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reputation of the institution/university - Reputation of the program - Reputation of the faculty - Quality of the institution/university - Quality of the program - Quality of the faculty - Quality of the students - Ranking of the program - Ranking of the institution/university - Affordable course fees - Schedule of classes - Location of classes - Facilities - Curriculum of the program - Duration of the program - Positive relationship with local partner - Positive relationship with university personnel - Speed of the application process - Marketing information from the institution/ university - Information obtained from the study guide book

This study used principal components analysis with the rotation method of Varimax with Kaiser normalization. One criterion to retain all factors in factor analysis is having eigenvalues greater than 1 (Green & Neil, 2003). Using a minimum eigenvalue of 1 as an indicator of statistical stability, the significant factors were identified and the resultant factors are reported here. It is at best arbitrary to identify a minimum factor loading to be included into a factor; however, by convention “a loading factor of 0.5 or higher is typically considered highly related to the variables with which it is being compared and thus is a component of the factor” (Waters, 1992, p.111). Four variables

had a loading factor below 0.5, indicating they did not belong to a component of any factor.

4.2.2 Decision to Pursue Further Education

Within the *a priori* category of “significant others-related factors” and “institutional characteristics”, the “Significant Others” and “Institutional Characteristics” were identified in these two categories. For the *a priori* category “Motivation to pursue further education”, two factors “Safety Motivation” and “Esteem Motivation” were recognized. Table 4.16 show the resultant factors for stage on decision to pursue further education.

The eigenvalue and percentage of variance for the major factors identified in the stage of deciding to pursue further education are shown in Table 4.17. The Significant Others Factor had an eigenvalue of 2.442 and accounted for 48.8% of the variances of the five variables.

The first factor for Category 2, “Safety Motivation”, had an eigenvalue of 3.676 and accounted for 43.9% of the variances of the seven variables. The factor that comprised the first factor included “improve chance of receiving higher income”, “improve chance of promotion opportunities”, “meet long-term career objectives”, “higher degree helps to compete in job market” and “higher degree helps my career change”. These are the factors that motivated an offshore international student to pursue their education in order to find safety and security in their job. Students are equipped with knowledge that enables them to compete for and sustain a job in the job market.

Table 4.16 Resultant factors for stage on decision to pursue further education**Category 1: Significant others**

	Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Significant Others		
	Encouragement from alumni/other students	.813
	Encouragement from teachers/faculty	.751
	Encouragement from friends	.728
	Encouragement from employers/colleagues	.594
	Encouragement from family/spouse	.578

Category 2: Motivation to pursue further education

	Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Safety Motivation		
	Improve chance of receiving higher income	.910
	Improve chance of promotion opportunities	.879
	Meet long-term career objectives	.768
	Higher degree helps to compete in job market	.693
	Higher degree helps my career change	.598
Factor 2: Esteem Motivation		
	Meet personal satisfaction	.806
	Higher degree is a status symbol	.773

Category 3: Institutional characteristics

	Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Institutional Characteristics		
	Course fees	.760
	Program availability	.737
	Reputation of institution/university	.657
	Financial aid	.630

The second factor for Category 2, “Esteem Motivation”, accounted for 23.9% of the total items variance. This factor is close to the cut-off with an eigenvalue of 1.074. The offshore students in the sample were affected by “meet personal satisfaction” and “higher degree is a status symbol”. Esteem presents the typical human desire to be recognized and valued by others. The qualification obtained from pursuing further education give a student a sense of contribution and value to meet their personal satisfaction.

The Institutional Characteristics Factor had an eigenvalue of 1.951 and accounted for 48.7% of the variances of the four variables.

Table 4.17 Major factors identified in categories for stage of deciding to pursue further education

Category 1: Significant others		
Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1. Significant Others	2.442	48.8
Category 2: Motivation to pursue further education		
Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1: Safety Motivation	3.676	43.9
2: Esteem Motivation	1.074	23.9
Category 3: Institutional characteristics		
Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1: Institutional Characteristics	1.951	48.7

Table 4.18 summarizes the reasons in descending order among various sub-groups. Among the three categories of factors affecting whether offshore international students pursue further education, the decision was influenced most by the two factors identified in the motivation category (Safety Motivation and Esteem Motivation). This was followed by Institutional Characteristics and then Significant Others. These three categories are discussed in more detail below. Six out of 16 reasons were also found to have significant differences among variables of university enrolled.

1. Motivation Category

Individual motivation was the most important reason for pursuing further education. The **Safety Motivation Factor** had higher means than the other factors. The top three reasons for one to pursue further education were “meet long-term career objectives”, “improve chance of promotion opportunities” and “improve chance of receiving higher income”. Following the Safety Motivation Factor, the **Esteem Motivation Factor**, with the reason of “meet personal satisfaction”, was considered important.

Table 4.18 Summary of reasons to pursue further education

Reasons	Mean	SD	University	Study Level	Gender	Citizenship	Non-local previous qual.
SMot_Meet long-term career objectives	4.21	0.85		P			
SMot_Improve chance of promotion opportunities	4.13	0.91					
SMot_Improve chance of receiving higher income	4.11	0.90					
EMot_Meet personal satisfaction	4.07	0.89	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	Y*
Inst_Program availability	4.04	0.77	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
Inst_Reputation of institution/university	4.02	0.77	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
SMot_Higher degree helps in career change	4.01	0.88	YES*	U*	F*		
SMot_Higher degree helps to compete in job market	4.01	0.81			F*		
Inst_Course fees	4.00	0.84					
EMot_Higher degree is a status symbol	3.65	0.99					
SO_Encouragement from family/spouse	3.47	1.24					
SO_Encouragement from employers/colleagues	3.46	1.10	YES*	U*		HK*	
Inst_Financial aid	3.38	1.11		U*		HK*	Y*
SO_Encouragement from teachers/faculty	3.26	1.21					
SO_Encouragement from friends	3.08	1.10					N*
SO_Encouragement from alumni/other students	2.91	1.06	YES*	U*			

*p<.05

SMot: Safety Motivation Factor

EMot: Esteem Motivation Factor

Inst: Institutional Characteristics Factor

SO: Significant Others Factor

- “YES” - significant difference among independent variable of university enrolled
- (undergraduate (U)/ postgraduate (P)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (male (M)/ female (F)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (local citizen (HK)/ non-Local citizen (Non-HK) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (yes (Y)/ no (N)) with non-local previous study experience considered the reason as having greater importance

The various motivation reasons were weighted differently by different groups of respondents. The postgraduate students considered the variables of “meeting long-term career objectives and “meeting personal satisfaction” to be more important than did the undergraduate students, who thought that “higher degree helps in career change” was more important.

In terms of gender, female respondents considered the reasons “higher degree helps in career change” and “higher degree helps to compete in job market” to be more important than did male respondents.

2. Individual Significant Others Category

Factors related to individual significant others had little influence on whether one pursues further education. The **Significant Others Factor** was lower than the two categories on motivation and institutional characteristics.

Among significant others, the most influential group identified was family/spouse. This was followed by employers/colleagues, teachers/faculty, friends and alumni/other students. Undergraduate students were more encouraged by employers/colleagues and alumni/other students.

3. Institutional Characteristics Category

Factors related to institution exerted a moderate to strong influence on whether one pursues further education. The **Institutional Characteristics Factor** on “program availability” and “reputation of institution/university” were weighted higher than other institutional variables. Postgraduate students considered these items more important than did undergraduate students.

In terms of nationality, non-local students weighted “program availability” and “reputation of institution/university” more heavily than did local students, who considered financial aid to be more important.

In summary, the decision to pursue further education was driven most strongly by an individual's motivation, especially the Safety Motivation Factor. It was also affected by the Institutional Characteristics Factor with variables "availability of the program" and "reputation of institution/ university". The Significant Others Factor showed the least important influence.

Process of Pursuing Transnational Study in Hong Kong

One of the objectives of this research was to study students' decision-making process when choosing transnational study in Hong Kong. Students were asked to rank the temporal order of the factors on university, program, local partner institution and host country in considering where and what to study. Students were asked to provide any other factors that they would consider. Five students reported that fees were considered in their process of further study, and a small number of students reported taking into consideration the job market (1), financial aid (1), recognition (1), location (1) and timing (1).

Table 4.19 illustrates the importance of the process order with the response frequency for each factor, showing the number of counts for each factor in chronological order that respondents ranked on the questionnaire. In order to take into consideration the relevant importance of the order, the four factors were weighted, with 4, 3, 2 and 1 assigned to the first, second, third and fourth order of consideration. The number in the parentheses illustrates the counts that were weighted.

Table 4.19 Process of pursuing further offshore education in Hong Kong

Factors	First	Second	Third	Fourth	TOTAL
Program	209(836)	115(345)	62(124)	24(24)	410(1329)
University	168(672)	172(516)	60(120)	18(18)	418(1326)
Host Country	41(164)	66(198)	120(240)	153(153)	380(755)
Partner	14(56)	43(129)	140(280)	187(187)	384(652)

The number in parentheses represents the counts that were weighted.

The weighted counts indicate that the program was the first item considered when pursuing further offshore education in Hong Kong, followed closely by the university. The other two factors, host country and partner, had about half the weighted counts of university and program when students were deciding where and what to study. These findings were further explored and discussed in the in-depth interviews with offshore international students.

4.2.3 Decision to Choose Transnational Study in Hong Kong

This section examines the factors considered by students when choosing transnational study in Hong Kong. These include the individual significant others factors as well as the push and pull factors related to transnational study in Hong Kong.

Within the *a priori* category of “significant others related factors”, again only one Significant Others Factor was identified. For the *a priori* category “factors about the TNE study”, four factors emerged: Pull TNE Study Values, Push Hong Kong Force, Pull TNE Study Characteristics and Pull TNE Study Cost. Table 4.20 shows the resultant factors for stage of deciding to choose transnational study in Hong Kong.

Table 4.20 Resultant factors for stage of deciding to choose transnational study in Hong Kong

Category 1: Significant others related factors

	Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Significant Others		
	Encouragement from alumni/other students	.840
	Encouragement from teachers/faculty	.828
	Encouragement from friends	.803
	Encouragement from employers/colleagues	.757
	Encouragement from family/spouse	.696

Category 2: Factors about the TNE study

	Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Pull TNE Study Values		
	Social network	.777
	Culture link between my home country and host country of program	.773
	Foreign language skill is desirable	.721
	Opportunities to experience other culture	.720
	Transnational program provides greater mobility for career	.626
	Better recognition of foreign qualifications	.624
	Information on transnational program is easily obtained	.555
Factor 2: Push Hong Kong Force		
	Perceived inferior local institutions academic quality	.789
	Limited study areas choices in local institutions	.768
	High threshold for local institution admission	.700
	Hong Kong education ordinance ensure quality	.669
	Lack of local programs delivery flexibility	.656
Factor 3: Pull TNE Study Characteristics		
	Flexibility of program operation	.811
	Relevance of program	.682
Factor 4: Pull TNE Study Cost		
	Lower cost than studying abroad	.714
	Financial aid	.683
	Ease of entrance	.650

Variables with factor loading below 0.5:

	Reputation of the local partner	.428
	Recognition of previous credentials	.426
	Opportunities for studying partly in host country	.346

The eigenvalue and percentage of variance for the major factors identified in the stage of deciding to choose a transnational study in Hong Kong are shown in Table 4.21. The Significant Others Factor for Category 1 on “significant others-related factors” had an eigenvalue of 3.091 and accounted for 61.8% of the variance.

The first factor for Category 2 on “factors about the TNE study”, entitled Pull TNE Study Values, had the highest eigenvalue of 8.525 and accounted for 20.6% of total variance of the 20 variables. The variables that comprised the first factor included “social network”, “culture link between my home country and host country of program”, “foreign language skill is desirable”, “opportunities to experience other culture”, “transnational program provides greater mobility for career”, “better recognition of foreign qualifications” and “information on transnational program is easily obtained”.

The second factor, Push Hong Kong Force, accounted for 17.9% of the variance and included the following variables: “perceived inferior local institutions academic quality”, “limited study areas choices in local institutions”, “high threshold for local institution admission”, “Hong Kong education ordinance ensure quality”, “lack of local programs delivery flexibility”. Although the 1.432 eigenvalue for this factor is well below the 8.525 of the first factor in this category, this second factor is still considered to be important factor for students choosing transnational study in Hong Kong.

The third factor, Pull TNE Study Characteristics, consisted of two variables: “flexibility of program operation” and “relevance of program”. This factor had an eigenvalue of 1.396 and accounted for 13.1% of the variance.

The fourth factor, Pull TNE Study Cost, accounted for 10.8% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.107. This factor included three variables: “lower cost than studying abroad”, “financial aid” and “ease of entrance”.

In addition, three variables had a factor loading below 0.5.

Table 4.21 Major factors identified in categories for stage of deciding to choose TNE study in Hong Kong

Category 1: Significant others related factors

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1: Significant Others	3.091	61.8

Category 2: Factors about the TNE study

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1: Pull TNE Study Values	8.525	20.6
2: Push Hong Kong Force	1.432	17.9
3: Pull TNE Study Characteristics	1.396	13.1
4: Pull TNE Study Cost	1.107	10.8

Table 4.22 summarizes the reasons influencing choice of transnational study in Hong Kong in descending order among various sub-groups.

Table 4.22 Summary of reasons influencing choice of transnational study

Reasons	Mean	SD	University	Study Level	Gender	Citizenship	Non-local previous qual.
Pull_Char_Flexibility of program operation	3.91	0.83	YES*	U*			Non-HK*
Pull_Char_Relevance of program	3.84	0.84	YES*	U*			Non-HK*
Pull_Cost_Lower cost than studying abroad	3.82	0.97					
Recognition of previous credentials	3.75	0.86			F*		
Push_HK education ordinance ensure quality	3.70	0.95	YES*	U*	F*		
Pull_Value_Better recognition of foreign qualifications	3.69	0.95					
Pull_Value_Transnational program provides greater mobility for career	3.60	0.94			F*		Y*
Pull_Value_Foreign language skill is desirable	3.59	0.96			F*		
Push_Lack of local programs delivery flexibility	3.56	0.93			F*		
Reputation of the local partner	3.52	0.90		U*			
Pull_Cost_Ease of entrance	3.50	0.89					
Pull_Value_Opportunities to experience other culture	3.50	1.01					
Pull_Value_Information on transnational program is easily obtained	3.49	0.86			F*		
Pull_Value_Social network	3.49	1.00					
Push_High threshold for local institution admission	3.47	0.94	YES*	U*	F*		HK*
Opportunities for studying partly in host country	3.45	0.96					
Push_Limited study areas choices in local institutions	3.42	0.94	YES*	U*	F*		
Push_Perceived inferior local institutions' academic quality	3.40	0.92	YES*	U*	F*		
SO_Encouragement from family/spouse	3.34	1.25					
SO_Encouragement from employers/colleagues	3.28	1.13		U*	F*		HK*
Pull_Cost_Financial aid	3.27	1.07	YES*	U*			HK*
Pull_Value_Culture link between my home country and host country of program	3.26	1.02	YES*	U*			
SO_Encouragement from teachers/faculty	3.24	1.16					
SO_Encouragement from friends	3.00	1.16		U*			
SO_Encouragement from alumni/other students	2.92	1.11	YES*	U*			HK*

*p<.05

Pull_Char: Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor

Pull_Cost: Pull TNE Study Cost Factor

Pull_Value: Pull TNE Study Values Factor

Push: Push Hong Kong Force Factor

SO: Significant Others Factor

- "YES" - significant difference among independent variable of university enrolled
- (undergraduate (U)/ postgraduate (P)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (male (M)/ female (F)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (local citizen (HK) /non-Local citizen (Non-HK) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (yes (Y)/ no (N)) with non-local previous study experience considered the reason as having greater importance

1. Individual Significant Others Category

Similar to the decision of pursuing further education, the **Significant Others Factor** was also the least important factor related to the decision to choose transnational study. The mean scores of the majority of significant others variables were around a mid-point of 3 with “encouragement from friends” and “encouragement from alumni/other students” with a mean of 3 or below. Undergraduate and postgraduate students showed differences in three of the five significant others’ variables. Undergraduate students weighted the variables of “encouragement from employers/colleagues”, “encouragement from friends” and “encouragement from alumni/other students” as being more important than did the postgraduate students.

Female respondents considered “encouragement from employers/colleagues” to be more important than did male respondents. Finally, local students weighted “encouragement from employers/colleagues” and “encouragement from alumni/other students” to be more important than did non-local students.

2. Factors for Choosing Transnational Study

Push factor from Hong Kong

The **Push Hong Kong Force Factor** exerted a moderate influence on the decision to choose transnational study. The students considered the factor “Hong Kong education ordinance ensures quality” to be fairly important in choosing a transnational program, suggesting that the governance of transnational provision is very important in a student’s mind.

The positive push variables such as “Hong Kong education ordinance ensure quality” had greater influence than the negative push factors such as “lack of local programs delivery flexibility”, “high threshold for local institution admission”, “limited study areas choices in local institutions” and “perceived inferior local institutions academic quality”. It is worth noting that four of these items were considered to be more important for undergraduate students than for postgraduate students. Female respondents also considered these items to be more important than did male respondents.

Local students put significantly greater weight on the item “high threshold for local institution admission” than did students from other nationalities.

Pull Factors about the offshore program

The analysis showed that factors related to the pull factors about the transnational study could be grouped into three pull factors– Pull TNE Study Values Factor, Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor and Pull TNE Study Cost Factor.

The top two reasons for choosing to study transnationally lay in the **Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor**. For offshore international students, the “flexibility of program operation” and “relevance of program” were considered very important variables. Undergraduate students ranked the importance of flexibility and relevance of program as more significant than did postgraduate students. Non-local students ranked the two variables as more important than local students. There was also difference among the respondents from different universities on the two variables, with further analysis

showing that students from Macquarie University weighted the two variables more heavily than did other students.

Following the Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor, the **Pull TNE Study Values** – such as “better recognition of foreign qualification”, “transnational program provides greater mobility for career” and “foreign language skills is desirable” – were highly influential on the decision to choose a transnational study program. These were followed in the order of importance by “opportunities to experience other culture”, “information on transnational program is easily obtained”, “social network” and “culture link between my home country and host country of program”. Respondents with non-local previous qualifications weighted the mobility of career in studying TNE program as more important than those without non-local study experience, and is a likely reason for the former to continue choosing transnational study.

Females rated the variables on “transnational program provides greater mobility for career”, “foreign language skill is desirable” and “information on transnational program is easily obtain” more highly than did male respondents.

Some variables of the **Pull TNE Study Cost Factor** were more important than others. The variable of lower cost than studying abroad was considered to be very important while the financial aid was considered less important. Undergraduates and local residents placed more importance on financial aid, possibly as a result of the different levels of income identified for these two groups. The students from different universities also showed significant difference for the variable of financial aid, with further analysis

showing that students from Victoria University and the University of Wales weighted financial aid as being more important than did other students.

In summary, variables affecting the choice of transnational study did not show very strong effects. Factors related to individual significant others were not a strong influence in pulling students towards choose transnational study. Factors related to the push effect of Hong Kong and pull effect of the offshore program varied. The importance of the top pull factors varied according to university in which the student is enrolled, study level of students, gender and citizenship.

Important Factors in Choosing Transnational Study

In the questionnaire, students were asked to list the three most important factors in their selection of the transnational study program. As shown earlier in Table 4.22, university, level of study, gender and citizenship showed significant differences on weighting the importance of factors when choosing transnational study in Hong Kong. Differences in the three most important factors among the different groups of students were explored in more detail.

Tables 4.23–4.34 summarize the reasons in descending order on the importance and by count that influenced offshore international students in choosing transnational study.

Table 4.23 shows the survey by all respondents. It was found that “course fees” had the highest total count of reasons in choosing TNE study, followed by “program flexibility”, “program relevance” and “overseas qualification recognition”. For displaying the count of reasons, three was chosen as a cut-off point and therefore the list is not exhaustive.

Table 4.23 Count by reasons of importance (all students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (all students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	39	46	35	120
Program flexibility	43	29	33	105
Program relevance	32	39	19	90
Recognition of overseas qualification	22	31	15	68
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	28	18	21	67
Recognition of previous credentials	26	11	16	53
Career mobility	8	7	25	40
Ease of entrance	10	7	9	26
Reputation (local partner)	5	8	13	26
Financial aid	8	9	7	24
Social network	6	9	9	24
Foreign language skill is desirable	4	12	7	23
Opportunities to experience other culture	4	10	8	22
Program duration	10	6	6	22
Studying in program country opportunity	6	4	5	15
Program delivery (schedule, lecture, study mode)	5	8	2	15
Career enhancement (degree from transnational program)	3	4	6	13
Quality Hong Kong education system	9	2	0	11
Availability of transnational program information	3	2	5	10
Faculty	2	4	4	10
Encouragement from family/ spouse	5	2	2	9
Program curriculum	3	2	4	9
Ease of entrance	5	1	2	8
Class location	2	1	5	8
Program availability	4	1	1	6
Cultural link	1	3	2	6
Perceived lower local academic qualities	0	2	3	5
Quality	2	0	3	5
Encouragement from teachers/ faculty	1	2	1	4
Encouragement from employers/ colleagues	3	0	0	3

Tables 4.24 and 4.25 summarize the top ten reasons by level of study. The top three reasons – “course fees”, “program flexibility” and “program relevance” – were the same for both groups.

Table 4.24 Count by reasons of importance (undergraduate students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (undergraduate students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	28	30	19	77
Program flexibility	17	14	17	48
Program relevance	16	23	8	47
Recognition of overseas qualification	14	21	12	47
Recognition of previous credentials	18	8	9	35
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	12	6	8	26
Career mobility	3	4	15	22
Financial aid	7	7	5	19
Program duration	9	5	5	19
Foreign language skill is desirable	2	11	5	18

Table 4.25 Count by reasons of importance (postgraduate students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (postgraduate students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Program flexibility	26	15	16	57
Course fees	11	16	16	43
Program relevance	16	16	11	43
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	16	12	13	41
Recognition of overseas qualification	8	10	3	21
Recognition of previous credentials	8	3	7	18
Career mobility	5	3	10	18
Social network	3	8	5	16
Opportunities to experience other culture	1	5	4	10
Studying in program country opportunity	2	3	4	9
Ease of entrance	5	1	3	9
Reputation (local partner)	0	5	4	9
Program delivery (schedule, lecture, study mode)	2	5	2	9

The last four reasons had the same counts

Tables 4.26 and 4.27 summarize the top ten reasons by citizenship. “Course fees”, ranked first by local students, ranked only fourth in the non-local group. The top five reasons by these two groups show clear differences.

Table 4.26 Count by reasons of importance (local students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (local students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	38	43	33	114
Program flexibility	37	24	28	89
Program relevance	26	35	15	76
Recognition of overseas qualification	20	31	13	64
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	27	15	18	60
Recognition of previous credentials	24	10	14	48
Career mobility	6	6	23	35
Reputation (local partner)	5	8	13	26
Ease of entrance	10	6	9	25
Foreign language skill is desirable	4	12	7	23

Table 4.27 Count by reasons of importance (non-local students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (non-local students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Program flexibility	6	5	5	16
Program relevance	6	4	4	14
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	1	3	3	7
Course fees	1	3	2	6
Recognition of previous credentials	2	1	2	5
Career mobility	2	1	2	5
Recognition of overseas qualification	2	0	2	4
Studying in host country opportunity	1	1	1	3
Program delivery (schedule, lecture, study mode)	0	3	0	3
Career enhancement (degree from transnational program)	1	0	1	2
Financial aid	1	0	1	2
Social network	1	1	0	2
Quality	1	0	1	2

The last four reasons had the same counts

Tables 4.28 and 4.29 summarize the top ten reasons by gender. The positions of the reasons “recognition of overseas qualification” and “program relevance” were slightly different in the two groups.

Table 4.28 Count by reasons of importance (female students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (female students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	20	25	23	68
Program flexibility	27	18	19	64
Recognition of overseas qualification	17	22	12	51
Program relevance	14	22	13	49
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	17	12	12	41
Career enhancement with international qualification	8	5	14	27
Recognition of previous credentials	16	6	4	26
Ease of entrance	7	6	6	19
Foreign language skill is desirable	2	9	6	17
Program duration	7	2	4	13

Table 4.29 Count by reasons of importance (male students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (male students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	19	21	12	52
Program flexibility	16	11	14	41
Program relevance	18	17	6	41
Recognition of previous credentials	10	5	12	27
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	11	6	9	26
Recognition of overseas qualification	5	9	3	17
Reputation (local partner)	1	7	9	17
Financial aid	5	4	4	13
Social network	5	5	3	13
Career enhancement with international qualification	0	2	11	13

Tables 4.30–4.34 summarize the top ten reasons for each of the five universities. Although there were variations across universities on the ranking in choosing transnational study, it was evident that “course fees” and “recognition of overseas qualification” were among the top common reasons for respondents from different universities.

Table 4.30 Count by reasons of importance (Macquarie University students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (Macquarie University students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Program flexibility	26	13	12	51
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	15	11	13	39
Program relevance	14	15	10	39
Course fees	5	14	12	31
Recognition of overseas qualification	7	6	2	15
Recognition of previous credentials	7	2	5	14
Career mobility	4	2	8	14
Social network	2	7	4	13
Opportunities to experience other culture	1	5	3	9
Program delivery (schedule, lecture, study mode)	2	5	2	9

Table 4.31 Count by reasons of importance (University of Greenwich students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (University of Greenwich students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	16	11	9	36
Program flexibility	8	8	8	24
Recognition of overseas qualification	7	9	7	23
Recognition of previous credentials	6	5	5	16
Program relevance	6	7	2	15
Ease of entrance	4	4	5	13
Financial aid	4	5	3	12
Foreign language skill is desirable	0	10	0	10
Career mobility	2	1	7	10
Program duration	6	2	2	10

Table 4.32 Count by reasons of importance (University of Huddersfield students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (University of Huddersfield students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	9	14	10	33
Program relevance	10	14	6	30
Program flexibility	9	6	8	23
Recognition of overseas qualification	7	11	3	21
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	8	4	7	19
Recognition of previous credentials	8	3	3	14
Career mobility	1	3	8	12
Foreign language skill is desirable	2	1	5	8
Program duration	3	3	2	8
Opportunities to experience other culture	1	4	1	6
Reputation (local partner)	2	1	3	6

The last two reasons had the same counts

Table 4.33 Count by reasons of importance (University of Wales students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (University of Wales students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	6	2	4	12
Program flexibility	0	2	4	6
Recognition of overseas qualification	1	4	1	6
Recognition of previous credentials	1	1	2	4
Financial aid	1	2	1	4
Program relevance	2	1	1	4
Career mobility	1	1	2	4
Studying in program country opportunity	1	1	1	3
Social network	1	1	1	3
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	1	1	0	2
Encouragement from employers/ colleagues	2	0	0	2
Quality Hong Kong education system	1	1	0	2
Ease of entrance	1	0	1	2
Foreign language skill is desirable	1	1	0	2

The last five reasons had the same counts

Table 4.34 Count by reasons of importance (Victoria University students) – choosing transnational study

Reasons for choosing transnational study (Victoria University students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Course fees	3	5	0	8
Recognition of previous credentials	4	0	1	5
Financial aid	1	1	1	3
Recognition of overseas qualification	0	1	2	3
Reputation (local partner)	0	1	2	3
Career enhancement with degree from international program	1	0	1	2
Reputation (university, program, faculty)	2	0	0	2
Program relevance	0	2	0	2
Cultural link	1	1	0	2
Ease of entrance	1	1	0	2

4.2.4 Decision to Study at an Institution

The final part of the questionnaire dealt with choice of institution, and aimed to identify which variables exert the most influence in choosing to study in a particular institution and program. The survey questionnaire was designed to test two main dimensions of

“personal influences” and “institution and program characteristics”. “Personal influences” consists of reasons related to significant others and personal preference. “Institution and program characteristics” consists of reasons about the institution support and the pulling force of institution.

Within *a priori* category of “personal influences”, two factors emerged: Personal Affiliation Factor and Personal Belief Factor. Table 4.35 show the resultant factors for stage of deciding to study at an institution.

The eigenvalue and percentage of variance for the major factors identified in the stage of deciding to study at an institution are shown in Table 4.36. The first factor, “Personal Affiliation”, accounted for 41.3% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 5.432. The variables comprised “recommendation from friends”, “recommendation from alumni/other students”, “recommendation from teachers/ faculty”, “recommendation from employees/colleagues”, “recommendation from family/spouse”, “friends studied/studying at same institution” and “family members studied/ studying at same institution”.

The second factor identified in the category was “Personal Belief” which accounted for 23.7% of the variances and had an eigenvalue of 1.064. It consisted of three variables: “degree from this institution improves my future career and prospects”, “degree from this institution is well known” and “I studied/am studying at same institution”.

Table 4.35 Resultant factors for stage of deciding to study at an institution

Category 1: Personal influences	
Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Personal Affiliation	
Recommendation from friends	.821
Recommendation from alumni/other students	.816
Recommendation from teachers/faculty	.774
Recommendation from employees/colleagues	.746
Recommendation from family/spouse	.734
Friends studied/studying at same institution	.662
Family members studied/studying at same institution	.636
Factor 2: Personal Belief	
Degree from this institution improves my future career and prospects	.822
Degree from this institution is well known	.816
I studied/am studying at same institution	.613
Category 2: Institution and program characteristics	
Variables:	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Pull Institution Academic Force	
Reputation of institution	.832
Reputation of program	.818
Quality of institution	.816
Quality of program	.792
Reputation of faculty	.772
Quality of faculty	.754
Ranking of program	.738
Ranking of institution	.664
Quality of students	.604
Factor 2: Pull Institution Administrative Support	
Positive relationship with university personnel	.797
Marketing information	.791
Positive relationship with local partner	.784
Application process speed	.759
Information from study guide book	.754
Facilities	.587
Factor 3: Pull Institutional Characteristics	
Schedule of class	.769
Duration of the program	.660
Affordable course fees	.659
Location of classes held	.616
Variables with factor loading below 0.5:	
Curriculum of the program	.469

Within the *a priori* category “Institution and Program Characteristics”, three factors emerged: Pull Institution Academic Force Factor, Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor and Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor (see Table 4.36).

Table 4.36 Major factors identified in categories for stage of deciding to study at an institution

Category 1: Personal Influences

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1. Personal Affiliation	5.432	41.3
2: Personal Belief	1.064	23.7

Category 2: Institution and Program Characteristics

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1: Pull Institution Academic Force	8.912	28.9
2: Pull Institution Administrative Support	2.325	21.0
3: Pull Institutional Characteristics	1.309	12.9

As shown in Table 4.36, the first factor, Pull Institution Academic Force Factor, had a very high eigenvalue of 8.912 and accounted for 28.9% of total item variance. The variables that made up this factor included “reputation of institution”, “reputation of program”, “quality of institution”, “quality of program”, “reputation of faculty”, “quality of faculty”, “ranking of program”, “ranking of institution” and “quality of students”.

The second factor, Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor accounted for 21% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 2.325. This factor consisted of the following variables: “positive relationship with university personnel”, “marketing information”, “positive relationship with local partner”, “application process speed”, “information from study guide book” and “facilities”.

The third factor identified within the category was that of Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor. This factor accounted for 12.9% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.309. The students in the sample were influenced by the institutional characteristics “schedule of class”, “duration of the program”, “affordable course fees” and “location of classes held”.

Table 4.37 summarizes the reasons influencing choice of study at an institution in descending order among various sub-groups.

Table 4.37 Summary of reasons influencing choice of an institution

Reasons	Mean	SD	University	Study Level	Gender	Citizenship	Non-local previous qual.
PIAF_Quality of program	4.05	0.78	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PIC_Affordable Course fees	4.00	0.90					
PIAF_Quality of institution	3.99	0.81	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PIAF_Reputation of institution	3.98	0.84	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PIC_Schedule of class	3.98	0.86	YES*	P*			
PIC_Duration	3.97	0.82			F*	Non-HK*	
PIAF_Reputation of program	3.95	0.85	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PIAF_Ranking of institution	3.95	0.84	YES*	P*	F*	Non-HK*	
PIAF_Ranking of program	3.93	0.78	YES*	P*	F*	Non-HK*	
PIC_Location	3.90	2.02					
PIAF_Quality of faculty	3.86	0.80	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PB_Degree from this institution improves my future career & prospects	3.83	0.99			F*		
Curriculum	3.77	0.77	YES*	P*	F*	Non-HK*	Y*
PIAF_Reputation of faculty	3.77	0.87	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PIAF_Quality of students	3.69	0.89	YES*	P*		Non-HK*	
PB_Degree from this institution is well known	3.68	0.97	YES*	P*			
PIAS_Application process speed	3.64	0.92					
PIAS_Relationship with local partner	3.62	0.94					
PIAS_Relationship with university personnel	3.57	0.92					
PIAS_Facilities	3.57	0.89			F*		
PIAS_Information from study guide book	3.55	0.92			F*		

Table 4.37 (continued)

Reasons	Mean	SD	University	Study Level	Gender	Citizenship	Non-local previous qual.
PIAS_Marketing information	3.52	0.90			F*		
PA_Recommendation from employees/colleagues	3.34	1.10					
PA_Recommendation from friends	3.22	1.05					
PA_Recommendation from family /spouse	3.18	1.19					
PA_Friends studied/ studying at same institution	3.15	1.18					
PB_I studied/ am studying at same institution	3.12	1.23	YES*	U*	F*		N*
PA_Recommendation from teachers/faculty	3.09	1.11	YES*	U*			
PA_Recommendation from alumni/other students	3.06	1.06		U*			
PA_Family members studied/studying at same institution	2.95	1.24		U*		HK*	

*p<.05

PIAF: Pull Institution Academic Force Factor**PIAS: Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor****PIC: Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor****PA: Personal Affiliation Factor****PB: Personal Belief Factor**

- “YES” - significant difference among independent variable of university enrolled
- (undergraduate (U)/ postgraduate (P)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (male (M)/ female (F)) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (local citizen (HK)/ non-Local citizen (Non-HK) considered the reason as having greater importance
- (yes (Y)/ no (N)) with non-local previous study experience considered the reason as having greater importance

1. Personal Influence Category

Reasons related to personal influence category exerted a moderate to low influence on whether one chooses an institution. Among the two factors identified in the personnel influence category, **Personal Belief Factor** (belief in the value and return on investing in the qualification) was more important than the significant others reasons. Postgraduate students considered the reason “degree from this institution is well known” to be more important than did undergraduate students, who were more concerned about the experience they gained while studying at the institution.

Female respondents placed more importance on “degree from this institution improve my future career and prospects” and “experience of studying at same institution” than did male respondents.

The **Personal Affiliation Factor** comprised variables related to the advice from significant others. Again it had least importance of all the variables in choosing an institution. However, reasons such as “recommendation from teacher/ faculty” and “recommendation from alumni/ other students” were more important for undergraduate than for postgraduate students. In addition, a family member’s study experience at the same institution also had greater weight for local respondents.

2. Institution and Program Characteristics Category

Variables related to institution and program characteristics were highly influential when choosing an institution. The important pulling factors in relation to choosing an institution were **Pull Institution Academic Force Factor**, **Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor** and **Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor**. The quality of the program was the top reason to choose an institution, followed by affordable course fees. This finding concurred with the reason “lower cost to study locally” being considered important by students when choosing a transnational study program, as outlined in the previous section.

The subgroups of citizenship, study level and university showed differences in the **Pull Institution Academic Force Factor**. Non-local students placed more importance on an institution’s reputation, quality and ranking of university and program than did local students. Similarly, postgraduate students weighted these reasons more heavily than did

undergraduate students. Respondents from different universities ranked the reasons in a different order, with further analysis showing that students from Macquarie University considered these reasons more important than did other students. Female respondents placed more importance on the ranking of institution and program than did male respondents.

Several variables of the **Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor**, such as “course fee”, “schedule of class”, “duration” and “location”, were reported to be somewhat important in choosing an institution. Non-local students considered “duration” more important than did local students, while postgraduate students ranked “schedule of class” as more important than did the undergraduate students.

The variables among the **Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor** such as “application process speed”, “relationship with local partner” and “relationship with university personnel”, “facilities”, “information from study guide”, “marketing information” are with the modest importance in choosing an institution. There were no significant different among different groups of respondents except gender. The female respondents gave greater weight on the facilities and the two reasons related to marketing.

A number of reasons – such as Personal Belief Factor, Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor, Pull Institution Administrative Support and Pull Institution Academic Force Factors – were rated more highly by females than by males. One reason may be a reflection of gender role based on social perception of women, as reported in World Bank Report (2002, p.9): “despite their [women’s] strong presence in the labor market,

women were often seen as secondary workers, unable to commit themselves fully to jobs and careers because of the demands of their other role as the main providers of care for their households” (Paci, 2002). With this general perception of women, those women who do have the opportunity to study are more conscious of their study decision. The respondents in this study believed that further education could lead to better career development and success. This attitude is also reflected in the greater significance women placed on the motivation of further education to help in career change and compete in the job market.

It is worth noting that students considered the relationship with a local partner more important than the relationship with university personnel. This is possibly because local partner institutions provide the direct administration support in transnational programs in Hong Kong, where the local personnel have more interaction with the offshore international students than the university personnel.

In summary, the findings showed that institution and program characteristics had great pulling force for students choosing an institution. The most influential factors were the Pull Institution Academic Force Factor, with variables of reputation, quality and ranking, and the Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor. The Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor and the Personal Belief Factor had only modest influence, and the Personal Affiliation Factor had the least effect.

Important Factors in Choosing an Institution

In the questionnaire, students were asked to rank the three most important factors in choosing an institution. Table 4.38 summarizes the reasons, in order of importance, that

influenced international students when choosing an institution. Again, three chosen as the cut-off point, so it is not an exhaustive list of the reasons given. The reason given most frequently was “affordable course fee”, followed by “reputation of institution” and “quality of program”.

Significant differences occurred among university, level of study and citizenship when weighing the important factors in choosing an institution. Differences in the most important factors among the different groups of offshore international students were explored in more detail, as summarized in tables 4.39–4.49.

Table 4.38 Count of reasons by importance (all students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (all students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	38	46	46	130
Reputation of institution	80	27	19	126
Quality of program	32	34	18	84
Schedule of classes	18	33	33	84
Reputation of program	25	36	17	78
Duration	24	16	30	70
Quality of institution	20	17	17	54
Ranking of institution	17	20	9	46
Ranking of program	7	15	17	39
Location of classes	4	8	14	26
Curriculum	5	9	6	20
Quality of faculty	2	4	9	15
Quality of students	4	2	7	13
Reputation of faculty	3	3	6	12
Degree improve my future career	3	2	6	11
Relationship with local partner	2	2	6	10
Facilities	1	5	3	9
Quality	1	1	3	5
Application process speed	2	2	0	4
Marketing information	1	2	1	4
Information from study guide book	0	2	2	4
Program	2	2	0	4
Recognition	2	1	1	4
University	1	2	1	4
Friends studied/ studying at same institution	2	1	0	3
Degree from this institution is well known	2	1	0	3

Tables 4.39 and 4.40 summarize the reasons by level of study. It was found that both undergraduate and postgraduate level students are concerned about affordable course fees and reputation of institution, as both groups ranked these reasons in the top three.

Table 4.39 Count of reasons by importance (undergraduate students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (undergraduate students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	27	32	30	89
Reputation of institution	36	17	12	65
Duration	20	11	21	52
Schedule of classes	12	17	18	47
Quality of program	16	19	10	45
Reputation of program	13	15	7	35
Quality of institution	16	8	10	34
Ranking of institution	7	9	5	21
Location of classes	3	7	11	21
Ranking of program	4	8	6	18

Table 4.40 Count of reasons by importance (postgraduate students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (postgraduate students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Reputation of institution	44	10	7	61
Reputation of program	12	21	10	43
Affordable course fees	11	14	16	41
Quality of program	16	15	8	39
Schedule of classes	6	16	15	37
Ranking of institution	10	11	4	25
Ranking of program	3	7	11	21
Quality of institution	4	9	7	20
Duration	4	5	9	18
Curriculum	1	5	4	10

Tables 4.41 and 4.42 summarize the reasons according to citizenship. Both local and non-local students ranked the same reasons in the top five – “affordable course fee”, “quality of program”, “reputation of institution”, “reputation of program” and “schedule of classes” – although the order was slightly different. Local students were more

concerned about course fees while non-local students were influenced more by reputation of the institution.

Table 4.41 Count of reasons by importance (local students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (local students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	36	42	43	121
Reputation of institution	70	25	19	114
Schedule of classes	16	30	31	77
Quality of program	29	31	15	75
Reputation of program	23	31	16	70
Duration	22	15	28	65
Quality of institution	20	14	16	50
Ranking of institution	17	19	9	45
Ranking of program	7	14	12	33
Location of classes	3	8	14	25

Table 4.42 Count of reasons by importance (non-local students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (non-local students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Reputation of institution	10	2	0	12
Quality of program	3	3	3	9
Affordable course fees	2	4	3	9
Reputation of program	2	5	1	8
Schedule of classes	2	3	2	7
Ranking of program	0	1	5	6
Duration	2	1	2	5
Quality of institution	0	3	1	4
Curriculum	1	0	2	3
Marketing information	1	2	0	3

Tables 4.43 and 4.44 summarize reasons according to gender. The top three reasons were slightly different for male and female respondents; male respondents were most influenced by affordable course fees while female respondents were more concerned with institution's reputation.

Table 4.43 Count of reasons by importance (male students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (male students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	17	21	15	53
Reputation of institution	28	9	8	45
Schedule of classes	8	12	15	35
Quality of program	16	11	3	30
Duration	11	6	13	30
Reputation of program	8	11	9	28
Quality of institution	6	10	4	20
Ranking of institution	9	6	2	17
Ranking of program	2	6	7	15
Curriculum	4	6	3	13

Table 4.44 Count of reasons by importance (female students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (female students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Reputation of institution	52	18	11	81
Affordable course fees	21	25	31	77
Quality of program	16	23	15	54
Reputation of program	17	25	8	50
Schedule of classes	10	21	18	49
Duration	13	10	17	40
Quality of institution	14	7	13	34
Ranking of institution	8	14	7	29
Ranking of program	5	9	10	24
Location of classes	2	6	8	16

Tables 4.45–4.49 summarize the reasons by university. Although there were variations across universities in reasons for choosing an institution, the three most common reasons were “affordable course fees”, “reputation of institution” and “schedule of classes”.

Table 4.45 Count of reasons by importance (Macquarie University students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (Macquarie University students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Reputation of institution	40	8	6	54
Reputation of program	11	20	9	40
Quality of program	11	13	8	32
Affordable course fees	6	12	14	32
Schedule of classes	6	13	11	30
Ranking of institution	9	9	4	22
Ranking of program	2	7	11	20
Quality of institution	3	7	5	15
Duration	4	3	6	13
Curriculum	1	3	4	8

Table 4.46 Count of reasons by importance (University of Greenwich students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (University of Greenwich students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	17	14	12	43
Duration	6	9	12	27
Reputation of institution	10	9	4	23
Quality of program	11	9	3	23
Schedule of classes	6	9	8	23
Reputation of program	8	7	5	20
Quality of institution	10	4	5	19
Location of classes	1	4	5	10
Ranking of program	1	3	3	7
Ranking of institution	0	3	3	6

Table 4.47 Count of reasons by importance (University of Huddersfield students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (University of Huddersfield students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Reputation of institution	25	8	6	39
Affordable course fees	5	16	18	39
Duration	13	1	8	22
Schedule of classes	6	7	7	20
Quality of program	3	9	7	19
Reputation of program	5	8	2	15
Ranking of institution	6	6	2	14
Quality of institution	6	2	5	13
Location of classes	2	3	6	11
Ranking of program	3	5	2	10

Table 4.48 Count of reasons by importance (University of Wales students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (University of Wales students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	5	2	2	9
Reputation of institution	4	2	1	7
Quality of program	5	2	0	7
Schedule of classes	0	3	4	7
Quality of institution	1	2	2	5
Duration	0	2	3	5
Reputation of program	1	1	1	3
Ranking of institution	1	2	0	3
Recommendation from alumni/other students	1	0	1	2
Quality of students	1	0	1	2
Location of classes	0	0	2	2
Curriculum	0	2	0	2

The last four reasons had the same count

Table 4.49 Count of reasons by importance (Victoria University students) – choice of an institution

Reasons for choosing an institution (Victoria University students)	Count by Reasons			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Affordable course fees	5	2	0	7
Schedule of classes	0	1	3	4
Reputation of institution	1	0	2	3
Quality of program	2	1	0	3
Duration	1	1	1	3
Quality of institution	0	2	0	2
Quality of faculty	0	1	1	2
Degree from this institution is well known	1	0	0	1
Degree improve my future career	0	1	0	1
Quality of students	1	0	0	1

4.3 Chapter Summary

Table 4.50 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter presents the second part of the research finding, from the qualitative interview.

Table 4.50 Chapter 4 summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To outline the findings of survey questionnaires	Section 4.1 outlines the findings of the quantitative survey. The four main sections cover “Student Background Information”, “Decision to Pursue Further Education”, “Decision to Choose Transnational Study in Hong Kong” and “Decision to Study at an Institution”.
To present the descriptive statistics for the data set of the quantitative part of the research	Section 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics for the survey which covers the demographic information, application background, academic background, socioeconomic background and financial aid.
To detail the results of the survey questionnaire	<p>Section 4.3 presents the findings of the factor analysis on different stages of transnational university choice decision.</p> <p>For the stage on Decision to Pursue Further Education, three categories of four factors were identified: Significant Others Factor, Safety Motivation Factor, Esteem Motivation Factor and Institutional Characteristics Factor.</p> <p>For the stage on Decision to Choose Transnational Study in Hong Kong, two categories of five factors were identified: Significant Others Factor, Pull TNE Study Values Factor, Push Hong Kong Force Factor, Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor and Pull TNE Study Cost Factor.</p> <p>For the stage on Decision to Study at an Institution, two categories of five factors were identified: Personal Affiliation Factor, Personal Belief Factor, Pull Institution Academic Force Factor, Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor and Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor.</p> <p>Looking into the process order with the response frequency on program, university, host country and partner institution, it was found that program was the first item in pursuing further study in Hong Kong, followed closely by the university. The country and local partner effect were in third and fourth position, with similar response frequencies.</p> <p>The top three reasons respondents gave for choosing a transnational study in Hong Kong were “course fees”, “program flexibility” and “program relevance”.</p> <p>The top three reasons respondents gave for choosing to study at an institution were “affordable course fee”, “reputation of institution” and “quality of program”.</p>

Chapter 5 Findings of the Semi-structured Interviews

The previous chapter discussed the findings from the survey, and this chapter describes the findings from the qualitative part of the study, the semi-structured interviews. The results are presented in the same order as the university choice process and the actual interview questions.

Section 5.1 presents the demographic data for the 20 interview participants. Section 5.2 then discusses the three stages of choosing an offshore program: predisposition, search and choice. Tree nodes, child nodes and the coded references were built around the various stages. The analysis is supported by NVivo software. Section 5.3 presents findings of the qualitative analysis from associations and patterns among the data. Section 5.4 draws some conclusions from the interviews. Finally, Section 5.5 provides a summary of the chapter.

5.1 Participants' Demographic Information

Twenty offshore international students participated in the semi-structured interviews. Table 5.1 summarizes their demographic backgrounds.

Table 5.1 Demographic information of the 20 interview participants

Student	Sex	Level of Study	University Enrolled	Citizenship	Non-local Study Experience
S1	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Local	Yes
S2	Female	Undergraduate	University of Greenwich	Local	No
S3	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Local	Yes
S4	Female	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Non-Local	Yes
S5	Male	Postgraduate	University of Wales	Local	No
S6	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Local	No
S7	Male	Postgraduate	University of Wales	Local	No
S8	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Non-Local	Yes
S9	Female	Undergraduate	University of Huddersfield	Local	Yes
S10	Female	Undergraduate	University of Huddersfield	Local	No
S11	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Non-Local	Yes
S12	Female	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Non-Local	No
S13	Female	Undergraduate	University of Huddersfield	Local	No
S14	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Local	No
S15	Male	Undergraduate	University of Huddersfield	Local	No
S16	Male	Undergraduate	University of Huddersfield	Local	No
S17	Male	Postgraduate	Macquarie University	Non-Local	Yes
S18	Male	Undergraduate	Victoria University	Local	Yes
S19	Male	Undergraduate	Victoria University	Local	No
S20	Male	Undergraduate	University of Greenwich	Local	No

5.2 Stages in Choosing an Offshore Program

The findings from the interview are presented here following the three stages of school choice process proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987): predisposition, search and choice. Using the three-stage model as a framework is effective as it also indicates the flow between subsequent stages of the university choice decision process. As participants talked, it was found that the events overlapped among the three stages. This

is possibly because participants were describing past events during the interview or because for certain events students were involved in different stages at the same time, in particular the search and choice stages. Many participants had no experience with the choice stage as they applied for and enrolled in only one institution. The search and choice stages were therefore combined and coded under the tree node of Search and Choice Process.

In this study, students were asked questions about when they first considered pursuing their further education, the reasons for choosing transnational study in Hong Kong and what or who were the major influences in their school choice process. Students were also asked the number of universities they applied for and the number of universities that made them an offer. Table 5.2 shows the final set of tree nodes and number of coded references.

Table 5.2 Final set of child node and number of coded references on university choice process

STAGE -PREDISPOSITION Tree Node	Child Node	Reference Coded
Pursuing Further Studies - timing	Graduate for several years	3
	Graduate immediately	9
	Work became stable	6
	Work required the knowledge	6
Pursuing Further Studies - drivers	Institutional drivers	(4)
	- course fee	1
	- local partner	1
	- program availability	2
	Personal drivers	(21)
	- academic related	4
	- career related	14
	- intellectual satisfaction	3
	Significant others drivers	(10)
	- alumni & students	1
	- employers & colleagues	2
	- faculty members	1
	- local partners	3
	- parents & spouse	3

Table 5.2 (continued)

STAGE –SEARCH & CHOICE Tree Node	Child Node	Reference Coded
Search Process - source of information	Searching activities - education fair - information session - internet (online email, website, search engine) - printed materials (school brochures, leaflet, newspaper) - word-of-mouth	(43) 1 9 15 8 10
	Significant others - colleagues - employers - family members - friends - local partners - counsellors and professors	(16) 3 1 3 2 6 1
Search and Choice Process - considerations (offshore delivery)	Country effect - academic quality - education system - inflexibility - high local admission - study choice	(9) 1 1 1 4 2
	Transnational program delivery - academic prior recognition - ease of entrance - finance - flexibility - local partner support	(33) 5 4 3 9 12
	Transnational program value - career mobility - culture - education system - faculty - opportunity cost - program context - social network	(24) 1 4 3 8 4 3 1
Search and Choice Process - considerations (institution & program)	Facilities - local campus - location - resources	(4) 1 1 2
	Finance	7
	Quality - lecturer - program - student services	(9) 6 1 2
	Recognition	4
	Reputation - faculty - institution - local partner	(9) 2 5 2

Table 5.2 (continued)

STAGE –SEARCH & CHOICE Tree Node	Child Node	Reference Coded
	Syllabus - curriculum - duration - schedule	(24) 11 6 7
Choice Process - number of applications	One university	(6)
	- confidence	1
	- follow the pathway	2
	- limited choice	2
	- most suitable	1
	Two universities	(5)
	- efficient admission offer	1
	- face to face teaching	1
	- no additional requirement	2
	- personal touch with school	1
	Three universities	(6)
	- convenient location	1
	- direct admission	1
	- lower cost	1
	- program flexibility	1
	- recognition of prior learning	1
	- reputation	1

5.2.1 Predisposition

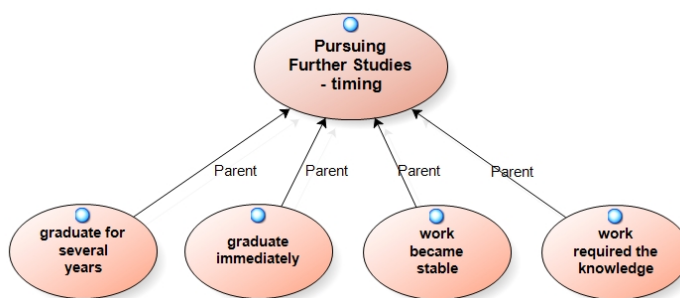
The students' motivation to pursue further education, and the timing of the decision to do so, were explored, with the aim of understanding their process of choosing a transnational university.

Pursuing Further Studies - Timing

Q: When did you begin to consider pursuing your studies?

During the interview, students were asked when they first considered pursuing their studies. NVivo was used to build tree nodes and a number of coded references around "Pursuing Further Studies - timing". Figure 5.1 shows the relationship of the parent and child nodes.

Figure 5.1 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Pursuing Further Studies – timing”



The students had no significant patterns regarding when they decided to continue studying. The timing varied from when they graduated and started to work, to when they were about to retire. Some students took many years to make up their mind to apply for higher education. By this time they had a clearer picture of their career plan:

I think this (decision to continue studies) started when I had just graduated with my Bachelors degree. I started to think what and when should I further my studies ... many of my classmates would go straight to the Masters course or undertake just a few years' work experience and then proceed to the Masters course. But in my mind I needed to think which course is most beneficial to me ... I observed and thought for more than ten years. After I had worked for quite a long time, I could understand my career goal and I chose the general management course and went and studied. After twelve years' work I decided to proceed with my studies (S14).

Some students also noted that they thought about pursuing further education only when their job became stable:

I think it was when I worked for my previous employer for about four years, which was quite steady and, you know, I could afford it and mapped out a long-term plan (S11).

As the working hours for my current job are quite stable, from 9am to around 5.30pm, five days week, I decided to continue my study (S15).

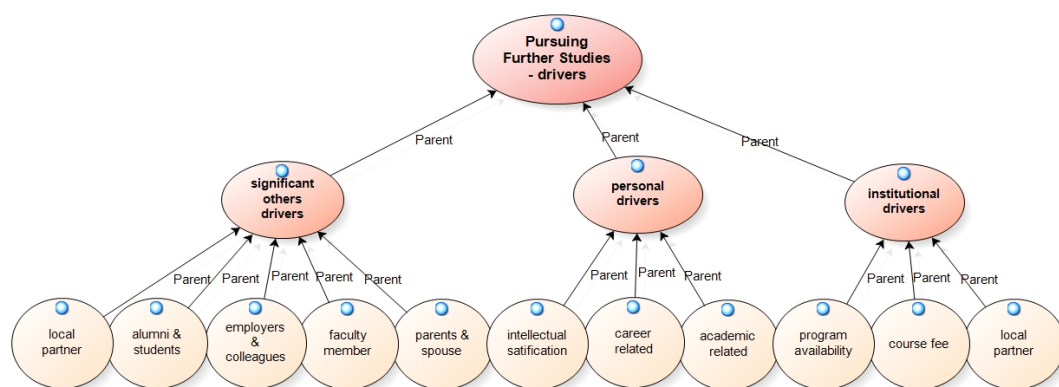
Although students had in mind that they should continue to study in their earlier life, regardless of affordability, time is still a limit for most participants. Students probably found that once they could meet their basic living needs through a stable work environment, they would start to follow their aspirations to study. However, needing the extra knowledge to secure their job would result in their studying at an earlier stage of life. This is reflected in the drivers that motivated them to study, as discussed in the next section.

Pursuing Further Studies - Drivers

Q: Why did you want to pursue your studies?

The students were asked about the reasons for pursuing their studies, and tree nodes and the coded references were built around “Drivers of Pursuing Further Studies”. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the relationship of the parent and child nodes through a flowchart on “Pursuing Further Studies - drivers” which was built using NVivo.

Figure 5.2 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Pursuing Further Studies – drivers”



Three themes were identified as the drivers in motivating students to pursue further studies: significant others drivers, personal drivers and institution drivers.

Personal Drivers

As shown in Table 5.2, the highest coded child node that emerged from the reason to pursue further studies was “personal drivers”. The three themes related to this driver were academic reasons, career-related reasons and intellectual satisfaction.

Academic reasons included participants’ wish to enrich their knowledge in a specific field or to improve their skills in their own industry. Participants wanted to improve their professional and personal effectiveness:

I want to study an MBA to further educate myself and also to give myself some business knowledge (S12).

I decided shortly after I graduated with my Masters degree and the reason is that I want to further enhance my knowledge in the finance and management field, so I decided to take this DBA program (S17).

My job application was not considered by them so I needed to get another qualification in computer field. I needed to get a second degree before I joined the Master in Computer Science in the University of Hong Kong (S19).

Most career-related factors centred around students wanting to be more competitive in the job market and advance their careers. Some wanted to expand their career path:

The reason is I need it if I want to get some promotion to be a professional or management level to have the degree to support (S20).

Other respondents found themselves ill-equipped to stay in their job:

I asked for the salary increase but found that my academic and working experience isn’t really sufficient for promotion, because they quoted the example that our Senior Managers all have a Masters degree (S3).

The qualification helps me to crystallize my skills set and my experience of being in senior management, but if I do go to a different company how can I transfer these skills easily? I need to use my MBA – from my standpoint this is a good foundation for my career, to say these are my milestones and what I have achieved for my company and personally for myself as with the MBA I move to other company. It was a strategic decision more from a career standpoint rather than a decision to get just the MBA qualification (S8).

In terms of intellectual satisfaction factors, some participants were looking to fulfil not only their basic and physical needs but also their aspirations and esteem through continuing education:

It's been my life's dream to earn a formal degree even though I am going to retire soon; I still want to do that (S1).

I like studying and I believe this is part of my personal aspiration to be on the route of life-long learning (S4).

Significant Others Drivers

The second theme that emerged from the interviews was the “significant others driver”. Students who pursue further studies were influenced by various groups of people such as alumni, students, employers, colleagues, faculty members as well as parents and spouse. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have found advice from significant people is a key factor influencing one to pursue further studies (Gagnon & Cocolas, 1988; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990). Some students were highly influenced by the local partner institution in their study decision:

I have contacted The HKMA (the local partner institution) directly to get advice on my choice of further education (S2).

Because my target is so focused I just know I want to look for the marketing major. In Hong Kong I just know two centres doing this. A good reputable one is HKU Space and HKMA (both local partner institutions) (S13).

This reflects that the participant had already built up in their mind the belief that the local partner institutions could advise them on their university choice decision.

Institutional Drivers

The third theme that emerged from the interviews was “institutional drivers”, which refers to the forces emanating from the institution that influence a student in his/her study decision. Participants believed that the course fee, the availability of the program and the local partner institution all influenced them in their study aspirations. One participant said that the affordable course fee of the institution drove him to consider pursuing his studies. Another participant said that his decision was driven by the specific program offered by the institution:

It was the program that finally drove me to study the MBA (S12).

The local partner institution is related to the offering of the transnational partnership by acting as the local agent. One participant noted that:

In the past two years after I completed my higher diploma, I have looked for some programs in the market ... I contacted The HKMA (the local partner institution) and found that they had already offered the current program for two intakes. Therefore I applied for this program (S2).

5.2.2 Search and Choice

At the search stage, students start to look at various institutions, focusing on the transnational delivery study format they want to consider and seeking specific

information on it. The students would form their choice set at the end of the search stage and then proceed to the choice stage. Some students may separate the transnational effect of studying in Hong Kong before they select the institution, while others may make both decisions simultaneously. At the choice stage, students evaluate their choice set they developed during the search stage.

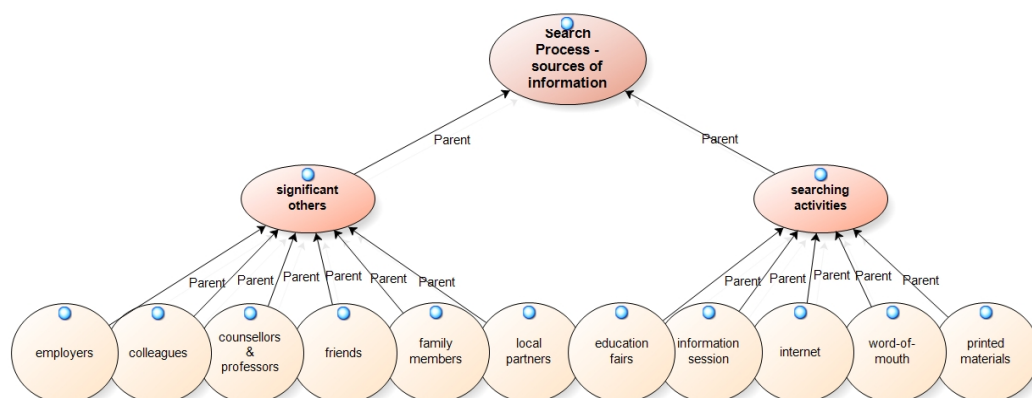
To explore the search and choice stage, students were asked questions on their sources of information, describing their criteria in selection, application and choice of choosing a transnational program.

Sources of Information

Q: How did you obtain information to study the offshore program?

The tree nodes and a number of coded references were built around “Search Process – source of information”. Figure 5.3 shows the relationship of the parent and child nodes through a flowchart on “Search Process – source of information” which was built using NVivo.

Figure 5.3 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Search Process – source of information”



Searching Activities

Most participants used several ways of searching for university information. The internet was described as the most useful, common, convenient way to search for the transnational study information. Since there was no physical campus for most transnational institutions in Hong Kong, online searches provided most of the information they needed:

I am a child of the internet age and everything was through internet research. It was like elimination through internet (S8).

I got the information through the internet, which is good, and you can get all information for the offshore programs (S20).

Word-of-mouth was the second-highest coded theme for gathering information. Participants gathered information from people with whom they interacted, such as family members, friends, colleagues, employers, local partner institutions, counsellors and professors. When participants were asked about the resources to gather the course information, one participant replied that it was his colleagues who suggested the institution:

I also heard that from my colleagues, who told me that this university has good reputation and also they had a good experience with this university when they studied either first graduate or postgraduate studies, so I took their advice, and I also saw this program in an advertisement (S17).

Another participant described her experience, receiving advice from friends and family:

Because some of my friends have also studied in offshore international program and they highly recommend it as the fastest way to get a degree. Also my brother suggested that it might be good for me (S13).

Many participants joined the pre-enrolment information sessions to gather more details about the program. As shown in Table 5.2, these sessions coded as the third most popular activity in searching for program information. Participants found that meeting the university representative reinforced their confidence to join the program. They thought that the presence of the school representative at the pre-enrolment information session is an affirmation of the home university's affiliation with the local partner institution. The pre-enrolment information sessions enabled them to filter out unsuitable programs. Two students commented specially on the usefulness of joining the information sessions:

I found that sometimes it's difficult to compare because different websites have different layout and you don't know what the contents mean here in a shorter sense. It is comparing apples with oranges. Whereas I attend the information sessions, it became more standard because they presented the program, the methodology, the teaching models. You can get some common criteria (S1).

So towards the end I came to the information session and everything was very smooth at Macquarie. For the other institution, they invited me to lunch but there were no other students. I think they have just moved to a new building and they have no permanent location. They seem very structured and the lunch seemed a bit strange as there was very little talk about the degree. I had a lot of questions but I didn't feel my questions were being answered. So when I left the lunch, I felt like I didn't know if this is the degree for me. But when I came to the information session at Macquarie, I was given information. I still had questions so I went to the professor and then I got the answers. I need the program to be structured and organized so there was my immediate gut feeling; I think I always pay lots of attention to gut feelings (S12).

Participants also found it very helpful to retrieve course information from printed material such as school brochures, leaflets and newspapers. Their focus with these

promotion materials was on program details such as curriculum, ranking, reputation and delivery format.

Significant Others

Following the searching activities, the advice of significant person was another coded source of information in the searching process. Advice from others can be both direct and indirect. One respondent described how the information he received from colleagues gave him indirect insight into the kind of offshore university he had chosen:

MGSM buy a lot of our stuff; they're one of our biggest customers in Australia. As a background, I am a publisher who sells publications to universities. So with that background, I have no hesitation in choosing MGSM because obviously the library is willing to invest and that means the school is healthy, the school is investing in all the right resources (S1).

Another respondent described how sharing the study experience with his wife gave him direct insight when searching for a transnational program:

My wife also studied in Hong Kong and she then went to Australia to further her studies. After she came back to Hong Kong, we had a lot of discussion about Australian life and Masters study life. My focus is on an Australian program. So my wife was a big influence for me. The information was mainly from my wife. After that, I also searched for information on other Australia institutions. I checked on the web and in magazines (S14).

The advice from significant others can sometimes come from a proactive type of influence:

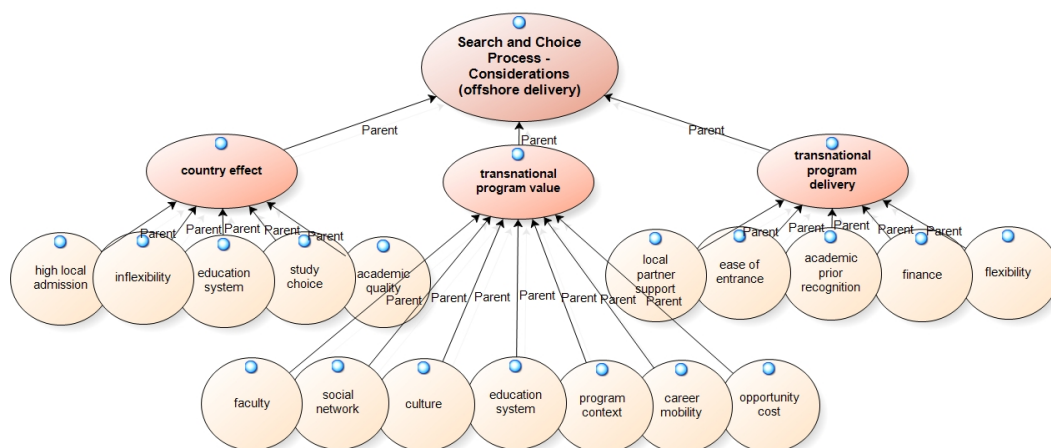
Actually I got the MGSM information because when I came back to HK; I did once apply to the HKMA DMS and joined a class once but dropped out. Since then I've frequently received information from the HKMA, and MGSM is included in the information I receive, and then after that I just searched on the web about the Macquarie course, and also other universities that have information online (S3).

Consideration (Offshore Delivery)

Q: What were the criteria in selection and application?

In the selection process, the students had many criteria to consider before submitting their application. Some factors were related to the transnational mode of delivery while others were institution- and program-related. Therefore the tree nodes were built around “Search and Choice Process – considerations (offshore delivery)” and “Search and Choice Process – considerations (institution and program)”. Figure 5.4 shows the relationship of the parent and child nodes through a flowchart on “Search and Choice Process – considerations (offshore delivery)” which was built using NVivo.

Figure 5.4 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Search and Choice Process – consideration (offshore delivery)”



Transnational Program Delivery

The interview transcripts demonstrate that the offshore program effect was an important consideration for students in their selection process, as the majority of participants indicated that the transnational program delivery influenced their choice of further study.

Since the transnational program was delivered outside of the home country, participants thought first point of contact was the local partner institution, rather than the university staff. One participant noted how well the local partner “manage(s) and support(s) the day-to-day activities” (S17). Another participant’s experience with the local partner institution influenced his decision:

The reason I chose Greenwich was because it was held by the HKMA. I have started the HKMA diploma so that I know the classroom, the tutor and what I can get from them. This is one of the main points (S20).

Participants had the perception that the transnational program is more flexible in its operation and location:

The local university would not have so much flexibility in offering the program (S9).

I agree that firstly flexibility is the key that we can have an international program; in addition to that we don’t need to fly all over to Australia to study (S4).

Other important themes about transnational program delivery emerged from the interview. These included the recognition of prior academic study, greater ease of entrance into an overseas university and the advantages of the program’s financial arrangements:

The initial deposit [for the local program] is about half of the fees upfront and that wouldn’t be possible for me at that stage (S12).

I found out that the cost of this offshore program is much cheaper for some reasons than some local universities which I don’t know why. But that’s the fact. That is also the added advantage to the student, the adult student (S4).

Transnational Program Value

The second most popular factor formed the theme “transnational program value”, related to high career mobility, different culture, overseas education system, home program faculty, opportunity cost to stay in Hong Kong, international program context and social network.

The participants generally hoped that the transnational program could increase their career mobility. They commented about the advantages of learning about other cultures, and having the home program faculty member to come to Hong Kong to teach them the international program without the need to leave their job. The transnational program also offered offshore students an opportunity to network with different people such as students, alumni, expatriates and faculty members. Students commented on the value of transnational study in terms of education system, social network, culture, overseas faculty and the cost of having the opportunity to stay in Hong Kong to study:

Because it is interesting and as I just explained my primary, secondary school and college, they are all in Hong Kong and so the methodology, the way of teaching and the contents are very local. So that’s why I like to take some offshore universities where hopefully they have a different view, which proved to be true. All the lecturers in the Macquarie program are from Australia, where they are very international. The difference is a global mindset, they think not only Hong Kong, they think Australia, they think China, and they think the Middle East (S1).

For me, coming from a business background and being engaged in international business all these years, having frequent interaction with Australian faculty members would have added advantages because this also help me to broaden my horizons and also to keep up to date with classmates outside of my home country and city. I think this is beneficial (S3).

The students from overseas, expatriates to Hong Kong, local students, locals who live overseas or vice versa, etc which were more fruitful experience for me (S8).

I also came to the information session and know more about bringing the lecturers out here gaining that experience. Then you have your Hong Kong classmates and also international classmates as well. And then you have prominent Australian lecturers or international lecturers. It just brings in the whole dynamic of different kinds of people (S12).

Also the reason to take this foreign study is because I didn't need to travel to Australia to take this course (S17).

Country Effect

The third theme that emerged from the interviews, “country effect”, expresses a push force from Hong Kong. Participants had the perception that the local programs still applied a passive teaching and learning format:

So I would say even at this moment in Hong Kong like University or Master degree or whatever it still gives me the concept that they have to memorize rather than engage in active learning (S3).

The high threshold of admission to local institutions also hindered some participants who had considered joining some local programs:

Since my HKCEE results were not as good, they told me I was not qualified for their (local) programs (S2).

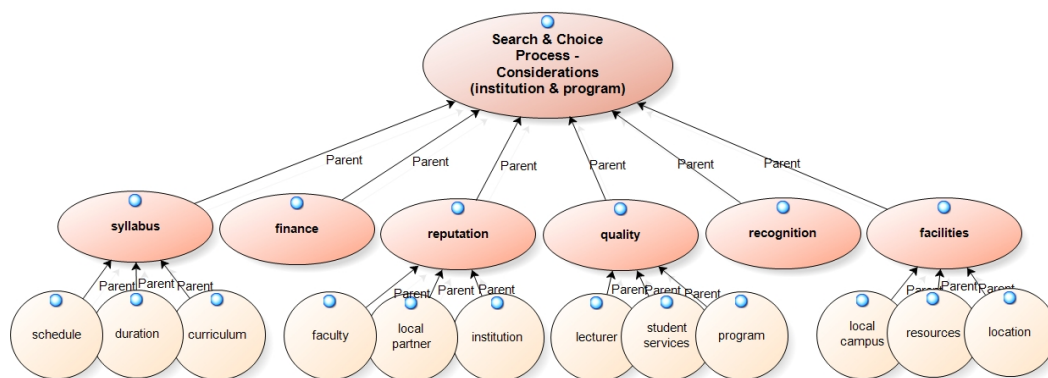
In addition, the study choice of some programs also pushed participants to consider studying the offshore delivery mode:

Actually I also wanted to apply to the local university but they don't offer part-time (S13).

Consideration (Institution and Program)

Another key consideration for students in their selection process was the institution and program effect. Figure 5.5 shows the relationship of the parent and child nodes through a flowchart on “Search and Choice Process – considerations (institution and program)”, which was built using NVivo.

Figure 5.5 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Search & Choice Process – consideration (institution and program)”



Six key themes were identified as major influences: syllabus, finance, reputation, quality, recognition and facilities.

Syllabus

Syllabus was the most important theme from the interviews. It was interpreted as the curriculum of the program, duration of study and the class delivery schedule.

Participants were very concerned about the program’s curriculum:

The contexts of the program were the most important (S9).

There are a few financial subjects. I think it's quite comprehensive and suits my requirement so I chose it. My criterion is on the course content (S6).

The duration of study is a significant factor for many participants:

The program criteria I think of very important is the timeframe, the duration of the program because it is not the shorter the better but I think you need a reasonable timeframe to achieve the knowledge (S17).

The duration also relates to the recognition of prior academic studies:

I was concerned about the number of exemptions that I could get. This affects my study duration (S19).

For many participants, the class schedule was another factor they considered. The weekend delivery block study mode was popular with some participants:

I saw the scheduling and the fees and just having lectures on the weekend is so much better for me personally. In Hong Kong to get away from work before seven is almost impossible (S12).

They arranged it on weekends, there were no other course arrangements from Monday to Thursday. So I think it fits to my job requirement (S6).

Quality

Quality and reputation were the next most popular themes from the interviews. The quality theme concerned the lecturer, program and student services.

Lecturer and program quality were of significant importance to participants. They were concerned about the practicability of teaching, and many participants favoured lecturers from the home institution as this gave them confidence in the quality of teaching:

I needed to have an institution bring their own lecturers to HK ... For me because I chose a management course I would like to have more exposure to different views, so I would choose overseas lecturers (S14).

I had to make sure the university got their foreign lecturers to Hong Kong to teach – that really influenced my decision to choose the university (S3).

Participants believed that flying in faculty to teach the offshore program was an indicator of how serious the source university took the program delivery and quality.

Quality student support was also highly valued by students in their search process:

I also think that throughout my experience with Macquarie I have been able to email and get a response within 24 hours from anybody, and I think that I made the right decision (S12).

Reputation

The next emerging theme was the reputation of the institution, program and faculty in the community and business society. Participants believed that the reputation of the faculty, institution and local partner institution were important factors in their selection and choice processes. During their search process they carefully considered the university's background and academic standards and the rankings of the faculty members and the university. Participants thought that a reputable institution would be guaranteed to provide academically well experienced teaching staff. The faculty should have the experience, skills and knowledge to teach and lead the program. One participant searched for information about his institution from his friends and from the internet and forums:

... experience I guess so as I speak to friends, reputation in terms of from past students. I have heard stories from friends or from the internet or from forums or sort of comment on plagiarism that reputable institutions treated (S8).

Participants also believed that a university's reputation includes its track record:

The reputation not just come with names but comes with all the experience and track record and how many successful records are brought by the institution (S17).

Participants highlighted the importance of the local partner institution's reputation. The local partner institution contributed to confidence in the university:

... that would be an important criterion - that I feel that if the HKMA is the local secretariat that must be a well-managed university, plus of course there are quite a lot of competitors (S1).

Facilities

Facilities, another deciding factor in the search process, consisted of students' opinions about the campus, the location and the resources. Participants wanted the university to have a local campus in delivering the offshore program in Hong Kong:

I think in our case having the Hong Kong campus, the presence in Hong Kong, I felt that there was an advantage so as to get the international flavour by having the local campus as such (S8).

Although location appeared not to be a major deciding factor for participants, one student said that he did include it his searching process:

Location ... was actually quite important. For example, with Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the travel time just adds more hours, even the University of Hong Kong from my end, and I assume the main campus – that was quite a tick for me (S11).

Participants commented on resources, particularly the library facilities:

I had no hesitation in choosing Macquarie because obviously the library is willing to invest, and that means the school is healthy, the school is investing all the right resources. When you have money and manage it well, of course the university must be good (S1).

In terms of institution, the support resources are things like the library. The internet library, so that you don't need to use the physical library to support your degree. Also whether the institution is well resourced (S17).

Finance

The next theme, finance, was another important consideration in the search process.

Participants were very aware of cost when searching for a program:

In view of the extra cost of the other programs, I immediately applied for the HKMA program after I realized it (S2).

The recognition of prior learning also influenced the finance issue:

This one gave me the most exemption. So I can save money and time (S19).

Recognition

The final emerging theme was recognition, the qualification being recognized by others.

This was fairly important in participants' minds as they believe a well-known and well-recognized qualification reinforces their motivation in enrolling in the transnational program, which in turn also helps in their future development:

As I know from my friends' friend who completed this program, and they worked in a world-wide company that also recognized this qualification (S15).

Number of Applications

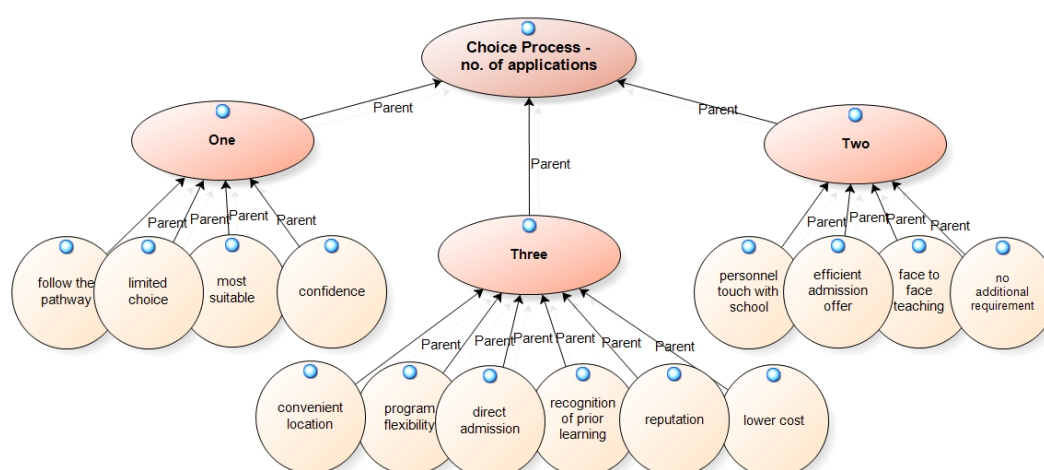
To explore the students' experience during the choice stage, participants were asked questions on the number of universities they applied for and the number of universities that made them an offer. Participants were also asked about how they eliminated choices and made their final decision.

Q: How many universities did you apply for? How many offers did you receive?

Tree nodes were built around “Choice Process – number of university applied for”. Eleven participants applied to only one university, six participants applied to two universities and three participants applied to three universities.

The participants were asked about the process of their school choice decision and Figure 5.6 shows the final set of child node on tree node “Choice Process – number of applications”.

Figure 5.6 Final set of child nodes on tree node “Choice Process – number of applications”



The 11 interviewees who applied to only their current institution did not actually experience the process of university choice. When participants were asked the reason for applying to only one institution, they replied that they believed the current institution and the program offered was the most suitable, taking into account all their selection criteria; therefore they applied just to the one that suited them most.

Confidence in being accepted was one reason that some participants applied for only one program. They perceived that it was easier to be admitted into the non-local program:

I just applied this one ... I hate the feeling of being rejected so I made sure that could satisfy the criteria I could satisfy. Otherwise I don't see the point of applying. I would say if I satisfy the criteria I couldn't see the point that the institution would say "no you cannot study for it" because I think the offshore program doesn't have that many people applying for it. I would say once you can satisfy the criteria, you should then get into it (S3).

Other participants noted that they applied to only one institution because they had limited choice, given the high admission threshold for the local institution. Some of them just followed the study pathway offered by the local partner, as this gave them the confidence to be admitted.

The nine students who experienced the choice process submitted either two or three applications. These students wanted to increase their options in the event that some programs did not offer them a place.

Seven of the nine students who applied to more than one university were given full offers while two students received only conditional offers from two institutions. These

two students needed to meet additional admission requirements after they submitted their application. They didn't respond to these additional requirements because they had received an offer from another institution without any conditions.

In the choice stage, students who applied to more than one institution considered many criteria in their choice set. For the majority of them, their choice was the same as in the selection stage. However, the major factors that influenced their final choice were the additional admission requirements, the efficiency of the admission offer and the economics of the study.

The efficiency of the admission offer was a critical factor for one participant, who felt ambivalent about the two universities to which he had applied:

I think both MGSM or the City University are OK. But fortunately MGSM replied to my application first. So I took this (S6).

Some participants noted that the economics of study was one of the deciding factors. Two students commented that with the recognition of their prior studies from their current institutions, they could study fewer modules, which reduced the tuition fee. Indeed, this also shortened the study duration and for both students this was another critical reason in helping them make their final decision:

This one (university) gave me the most exemption. So I can save money and time (S19).

Search and Choice Process

Q: What process did you go through in searching and making up your mind of school choice?

Interviewees were asked to describe the process by which they identified the program and universities and the importance of the transnational delivery, the local partner institution and the country factor in their choice. The results of both the questionnaires and the interviews indicated that all participants showed great concern for the specific academic field of study in their university choice process. Most interviewees searched for a specific program based on their strong desire to study in a particular field. In other words, students' university choice process is program oriented. Participants searched only for universities or offshore ways of study that provided the specific program they wanted. Country and local partner institution effects were not the main determinant, although participants considered them at a later stage of the decision-making process:

I want to study the MBA program and then just follow the study path and then decide the institution (S5).

I don't have special interest in any country as I haven't got any ideas about it. For financial courses, I think the US, Britain or Australia are almost the same. I am interested in financial areas. So I searched for a university that offers a finance program. I remember in addition to MGSM and City University, I also searched for a British university which had advertised in Hong Kong (S6).

For me it was course first, it was why I want to do further education; the MBA was the main goal. I was interested in Master or postgraduate. Based on that program, I guess if Hong Kong has that course ... So it was program first and then what were the facilities, what was the kind of institution offering locally. So as to narrow it down to the one that I want. Country is not necessarily a factor. It was more school first if they happen to have presence in Hong Kong or had some arrangement that allows being in Hong Kong. So this for me is the shortlist. For me, it was always course first and then school but then can come down to structure (S8).

I searched based on the topic and then the university; I didn't really consider any country in particular. Basically in Hong Kong we have offshore programs from the UK, Australia, the US and Canada. My wife commented that the UK is OK. The UK program is commonly recognized in Hong Kong. As far as I remember the three programs in my search results were all from the UK. The country of origin is not a critical factor for my searching. Neither is the operator a critical factor but it reinforced my final decision (S16).

I think I would put the program in the first place, so I decided whether the program is suitable for my job, for my education and then probably the university, so whether the university can provide the education I want and whether it is a very strong active university with other features like the library, and academic support and other resources. And then it comes next I think to the local administrator, whether they can help and liaise with the school on day-to-day administration work. Probably the country will come at the final decision (S17).

I've known HKMA for a long time. I joined their program twenty, thirty years ago on that shipping program. At that point in time they were not offering a degree program, they were offering more skills-related programs like shorter ones, certificates or something like that. I think I did attend a few and I found that very practical. So that would be an important criterion – that I feel that if the HKMA is the local secretariat that must be a well-managed university, plus of course there are quite a lot of competitors. They are more individual company-based and, yeah, that's also an important factor. I will put the operator quite early I think if you ask me. When I chose between the University of Wales and Macquarie one of the reasons was that these two universities are managed locally by the HKMA. A very important factor, I think (S1).

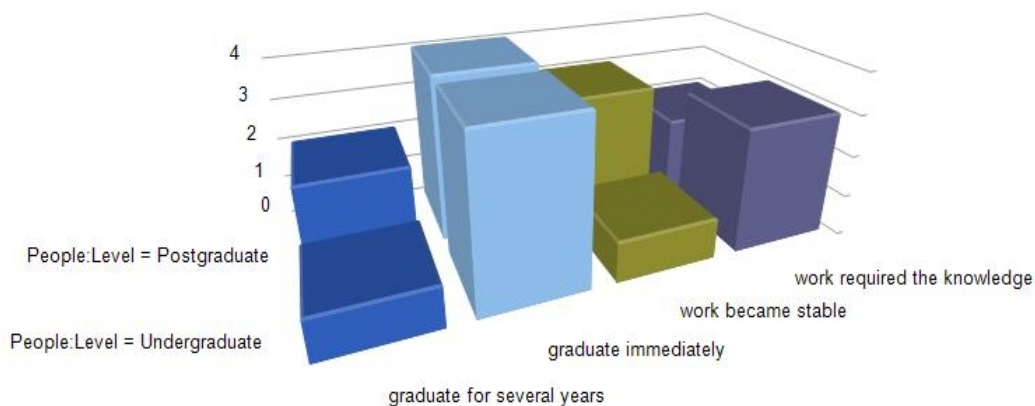
5.3 Findings from Associations and Patterns among Data

With the relationship identified between the participant's level of study and citizenship, the association was further examined through qualitative analysis by cross tabulating the attributes with the theme identified.

Timing count by participants under postgraduate versus undergraduate level of study

In order to explore the relationship of the timing with the coded text by the level of study, the matrix table of NVivo was used. Figure 5.7 shows the coded text on timing count by participant under postgraduate and undergraduate level of study.

Figure 5.7 Coded text on timing count by participants of different level of study



It was found that both groups of students had high aspirations for further education after they graduated. Many postgraduate participants also considered continuing to study at the time their job became stable. In contrast, for undergraduates the required knowledge for their work seemed to be more significant than pursuing their studies:

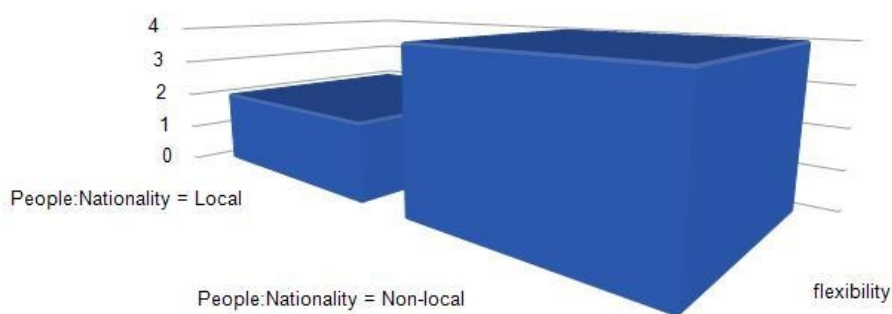
I am studying how to further study because I studied 20 years ago that I graduated in Form 7. I was a delivery clerk and now a so-called manager. I think I am OK but I think I lack strategy. I chose to study further because I want to better understand strategy and tactical issues (S15)

This difference in the timing for postgraduates and undergraduates reflected the findings from the survey, where the undergraduate group considered the variable of further study helping in a career change to be more significant than did the postgraduate group.

Flexibility count by participant under local versus non-local citizenship

While both local and non-local students put high importance on the program's flexibility, there were differences in the coding reference counts from these two groups. Figure 5.8 shows the coded reference count by people with different nationality. This finding is consistent with the survey results, where the non-local students put greater weight on the criterion of "flexibility".

Figure 5.8 Coded text on flexibility count by participants of different nationality



Non-local students expressed great concern for flexible teaching contexts and an education system based on their international experience of study:

Perhaps the education system I am familiar with, so you know I kind of took those into consideration (S11).

Although flexibility was weighted as very important for all students, the non-local students with their non-local learning experience had greater concern about program flexibility:

Having experienced western culture, eastern culture and the EU culture, I know the importance of understanding others. Looking at the HKU, CU and Polytechnic University, I know academically no doubt they were very good ... I found an international program really was more suitable for me because of my work experience overseas – it takes both the international side and the experience in addition to local ... Infrastructure of universities is always the same but sometimes you have to struggle a lot. I know a lot of the western schools expect our course to fit our life rather than the other way around. While a lot of the local schools are offering courses that you should follow without much flexibility (S8).

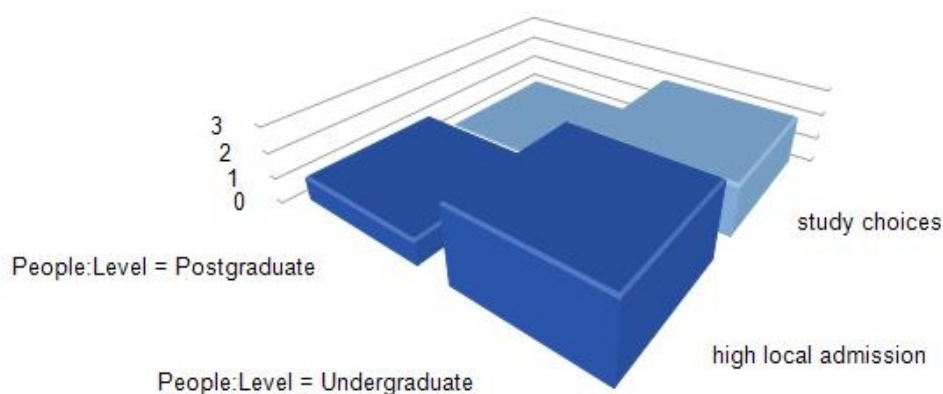
The interview also revealed some reasons why the non-local students placed significantly greater weight on the institution academic factor, as had been found from responses to the questionnaire. Furthermore, as non-local students are not permanent residents in Hong Kong and they may stay only for a certain period of time, the flexibility of transnational study also gave them confidence in the flexibility and mobility of their qualifications:

The reputation and the country of origin of the university were quite important, although I don't know exactly how important. Coming from South Africa, a lot of my perceptions are from South Africa as the country is quite unstable. So we try to become well qualified, and to have international experience or a reputable degree from a country like Australia is very helpful and sound for us, so as to make us feel a little more secure. So many of my friends at home continue to say: wow you study a degree overseas. Perhaps, I don't know, but perhaps it will help you one day if you have an option to live abroad and it will be worth getting a good qualification in order to live in a country like Australia for the short or long term. So definitely it does have some influence for my future; it was always in the back of my mind (S12).

High local admission and study choices by participant under undergraduate versus postgraduate level of study

From the quantitative survey results, undergraduate students gave significant greater weight on the reasons “high threshold for local institution admission” and “limited study areas choices”. From the interview responses, the coding references count for the two groups of level of study also showed some differences and revealed some reasons, as illustrated in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9 Coded text on high local admission and study choices by participants of different levels of study



The undergraduate students thought that it would be difficult for them to be admitted into the local undergraduate program. The participants in this study were all non-traditional students, in that they pursued a transnational study mode. Transnational programs help to meet the increasing demand for higher education in Hong Kong. In other words, the transnational study mode offers some undergraduate students more choices and opportunities to continue their studies. This group of offshore students may not have the opportunity to continue their studies at local higher institutions, for several reasons:

Since my HKCEE results were not as good, they told me I was not qualified for their programs (S2).

At first I wanted to take local university degree but it was too difficult. I just can't get in. The entry barrier was too high so I have to look for this kind of degree (S18).

5.4 Conclusion

The results of the in-depth interviews indicate that the university choice process for offshore international students differs to some extent different from that of onshore international students as described in the literature. Although the country effect exists, it is not a key factor in the process of choosing a transnational program in Hong Kong. The local partner institutions also play a role at different stages during the transnational university choice decision-making process. Participants noted that their experience with the home country of the transnational program had little influence on their decision.

The value and characteristics of the transnational program play a more crucial role in the decision process, and students have incorporated these elements into the selection and choice stages of the process. The interviews revealed that some non-local students were more concerned with flexibility and course context.

At different phases of the choice process, participants emphasized the importance of the program's characteristics. The sample of transnational students in this study worked full time while studying part-time, and the transnational programs offered them more opportunity to further their study after work. The participants expected more in-depth teaching in a practical context from a specific field of academic program that gears more to the applicability to their workplace.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Table 5.3 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter discusses the findings of the quantitative survey and the qualitative interview.

Table 5.3 Chapter 5 summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To describe the background information of the subjects	Section 5.1 presents the demographic information of the 20 offshore international students to conduct the interview.
To detail the results of the in-depth interview	<p>The findings are discussed in Section 5.2. Tree nodes, child nodes and a number of coded references were built around various stages of university choice process, including the timing and drivers related to pursuing further education, the searching activities, consideration about choosing the transnational study in Hong Kong and the criteria in applying the offshore program in Hong Kong.</p> <p>Section 5.3 presents some findings of qualitative analysis by cross tabulating the level of study and nationality with the theme identified.</p> <p>Section 5.4 draws some conclusions from the interviews, that the specific field of the academic program dominated the whole university choice process of the sample of offshore international students. In addition, the country effect was found to be less significant than for the onshore international students. The differences between local and non-local students' transnational school choice process are discussed.</p>

Chapter 6 Discussion of the Findings

This study explored how offshore international students navigate the university choice process, collecting data from 496 respondents to a survey and 20 semi-structured interviews. This combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches strengthens the credibility of the analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 reported and briefly discussed the findings. The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the findings from all the data and thereby answer the four research questions.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques used in this study strengthened the validity of the findings, with similar university choice factors identified in both quantitative and qualitative data sets. In addition, the quantitative analysis highlighted significant differences in certain sub-groups – citizenship, level of study, gender – as described below. Sections 6.1–6.4 discuss the findings in the context of each of the four research questions. Section 6.5 provides a summary of the chapter.

6.1 Research Question 1

What decision-making process do students go through in choosing a transnational institution in Hong Kong?

The findings showed that offshore international students went through a number of stages as they made the decision to undertake transnational study in Hong Kong. The findings support the stages described in the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. This study found that the offshore international students' preference for a specific academic program persisted throughout all the different stages of their university decision-making

process. The country effect was less important for offshore international students than for onshore international students, although the push and pull forces of transnational study interacted during the decision-making process. The local partner institution played an important role at different stages during the transnational university choice decision-making process.

6.1.1 Predisposition Stage

At the predisposition stage, students first become interested in further study. This study found that individual students pursue further education at different stages of their lives: some participants considered pursuing higher education when they graduated with a lower qualification, while others took over 10 years to start their search and choice process, deciding to pursue further study only when they needed to acquire extra knowledge for their job or when they had the necessary spare time. The students believed that pursuing further education would lead to better job security, career advancement and intellectual fulfilment.

However, this study found that individual schools had little direct influence on students' school choice at the predisposition stage, thereby confirming this aspect of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. Students' self-motivation was the strongest influence on pursuing further education, with the influence from significant others and demographic characteristics exerting less influence on the students' choice process.

6.1.2 Search Stage

During the search stage, the participants' behaviour again confirmed the Hossler and Gallagher model. Students started to seek information about specific institutions, their attributes and values, and their transnational mode of delivery.

The offshore international students used the internet as the major source of information. They found this the most convenient and informative method of seeking information, given that most universities offering transnational programs have no physical campus in Hong Kong. Word-of-mouth was the second most important way offshore international students found information during the search stage. Since over half of the sample respondents had no experience of overseas study, word-of-mouth and direct advice from significant persons such as family, spouse, colleagues, friends, alumni and faculty gave them confidence to make an informed decision about a transnational program. Such word-of-mouth also reinforced the desirability of obtaining widely recognized overseas qualifications, identified in this study as one of the top reasons for choosing a transnational study program.

Onshore and offshore international students undertake the search stage of their university choice process in different ways. International onshore students usually consider, first, studying abroad, then they choose a host country and finally an institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In contrast, this study found that for many of the offshore international students the first step in their school choice process was deciding on a specific academic program. The chosen academic program guided them through different phases of their university choice process, from the time they aspired to

continue study, to the time they searched for information and made their final choice. Regardless of the university in which they enrolled, the level of study or the country, they already had the clear objective of a specific academic program when they started the university choice process.

Unlike students in onshore international programs, the offshore international students were not heavily influenced by the image of the country in which they planned to study. The quantitative survey showed that the country effect was less important than program and university effects in the choice process. In the interviews, the offshore students commented that they might consider various countries but they did not have a preference for any particular country and they tended to consider the country and the university image simultaneously. In fact, the survey data indicated that the reasons influencing the decision to undertake transnational study in Hong Kong had a lower rating than the reasons for choosing an institution. Although previous research has found that potential students are likely to consider every aspect of a foreign country, since they need to stay for a long time (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985), the findings from this study were different. One possible reason is that offshore programs are different from onshore programs, because as students do not need to physically go to a foreign country; therefore, the country factors may play a less significant role in a student's university choice.

However, it is worth noting that both the survey and the interviews showed differences in the university decision-making process between local and non-local citizens. During the search stage, local Hong Kong students could clearly differentiate between transnational and local study. These local respondents had clear views of the differences

in education system, delivery mode, teaching faculty, facilities and learning environment in the two modes of study. It was evident that some push and pull factors of the transnational program, such as high threshold for local institution admission and cost of study, had a more prominent effect on the local respondents

However, the non-local students did not seem to distinguish transnational programs from local programs in their decision-making process. This group of non-local students were more concerned about flexibility, quality and reputation. The possible explanation is that this group of non-local students treated Hong Kong as a temporary working place rather than a permanent home. The mobility of the qualification is more important for them in furthering their education.

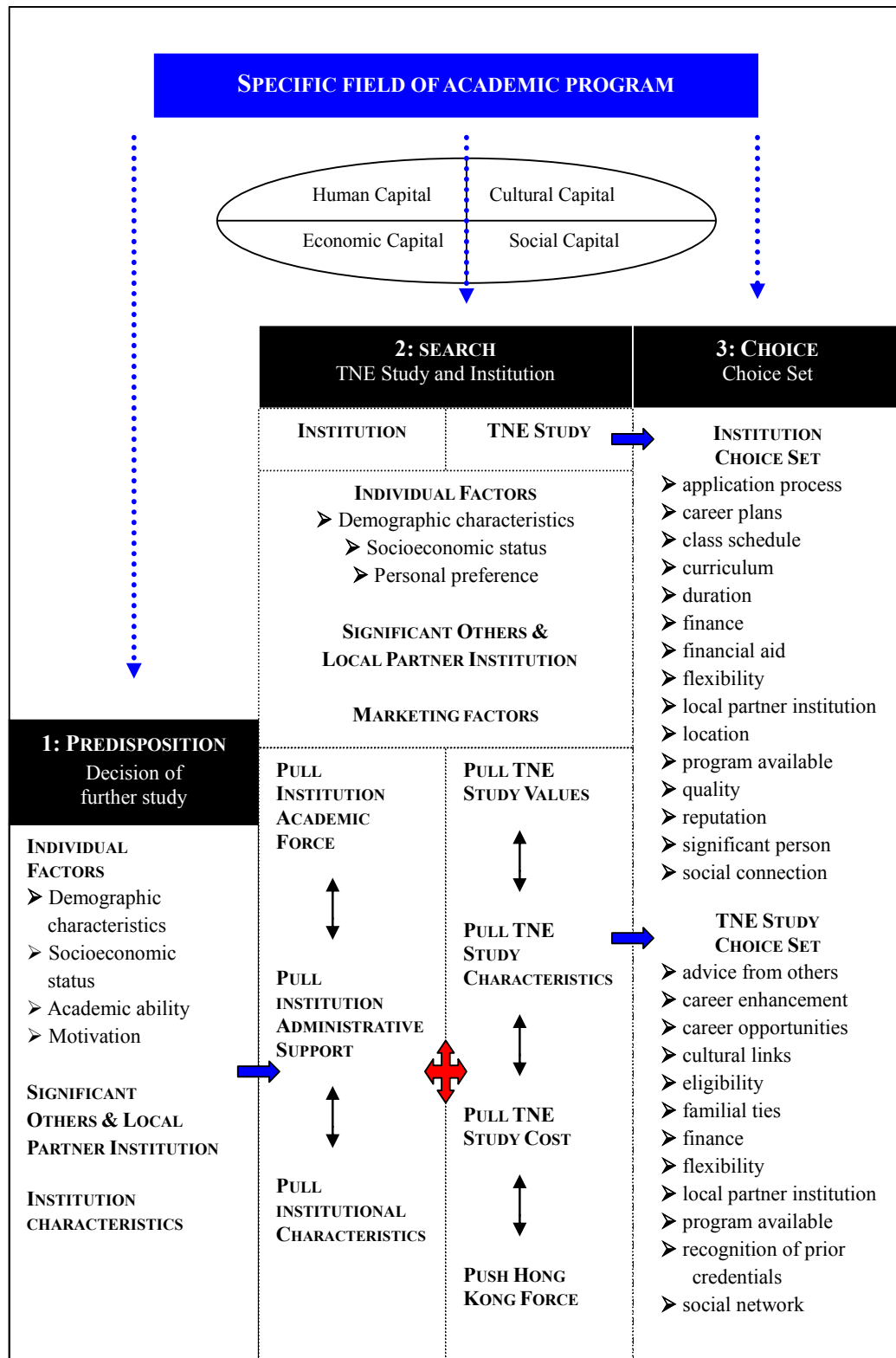
6.1.3 Choice Stage

During the final stage of Hossler and Gallagher model, the choice stage, students decide at which institution they will enrol. Students evaluate the pros and cons, based on discussions with others and their own personal beliefs. This includes evaluating the academic strengths and weaknesses of different institutions, such as reputation, quality and ranking, and the local partner institution. They also consider institution characteristics such as class schedules, duration, course fees and location, and support factors such as facilities, application process speed, institution information and interaction with personnel. These interactive forces at the evaluation process concur with the findings from previous research (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Erdmann, 1983; Olson, 1992; Olson & King, 1985; Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987; Wagner & Fard, 2009).

However, this study found that many offshore international students combine the search and choice stage. Over one-quarter of respondents in the survey and over half of the interview participants revealed that they did not experience the choice process, because they applied for only one institution. Some students were inclined to apply for fewer institutions and they tended to accept the only offer they received and enrol in that program. This finding differs from past research on school choice stages of onshore international students but is more in line with the behaviour of domestic students as identified by Stolzenberg and Giarrusso (Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987). This may be because the participants were confident of being accepted by the overseas universities and they had a strong desire to join the offshore program, as described by some interviewees. This shows that the factors which affect students in the search stage are also relevant to the choice stage, and admission officers should bear this in mind.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data, a Modified Transnational University Choice Model was developed (Figure 6.1). In this model, the specific field of academic program dominated the transnational university choice process. It influences the predisposition, search and choice stages. The assessments of the costs and benefits in the model are shaped not only by the pull and push effects of transnational study, but also by pull and push effects of the institution. These forces are inter-related and influence each other.

Figure 6.1 Modified Transnational University Choice Model



The transnational university choice process is shaped by a student's characteristics, family, school and society. This process encompasses a range of decisions on cost affordability, cultural adaptability, intellectual satisfaction and academic accessibility. The factors involved shape the social, cultural, human and economic capital accumulated by offshore international students as they embark on their transnational study.

When offshore international students decide to pursue further education, they use a cost-benefit analysis to compare the expected cost and benefits of study, weighing up the economic capital elements of direct and indirect costs, income and opportunity cost. Based on a student's academic ability, career and intellectual aspirations, and the perceived potential of transnational study, students build up their human capital to meet their goal of study. In choosing a transnational program, the student must be able to adjust to the cultural context of the transnational program. The belief, values and attitudes that the offshore international students derive from their family, friends and colleagues influence their university choice decision. Students utilize their social and cultural capital in their transnational study choice decision. These include the availability of course information, advice from significant others, language ability, perceived value of transnational education and family constraints.

The Modified Transnational University Choice Model generates a comprehensive understanding of how students with various types and levels of capital go about choosing an offshore international program. The model also incorporates the possible effect of different major stakeholders in the transnational university choice process: family, spouse, colleagues, employers, alumni, friends, local partner institutions and

students. The integrated model explicitly recognizes the multiple pull and push forces that influence a student's transnational university choice decisions and so it is particularly useful for understanding the needs of the different target groups identified in this study. It contributes to the theoretical framework for studying international education in the context of transnational delivery.

6.2 Research Question 2

To what extent do individual and institution characteristics influence the decision to pursue further education?

As discussed in the previous section, the decision to pursue further education is the first stage in the university choice process, and both individual factors and institution characteristics interplay to influence the decision. The following discussion of the level of influence is based on the mean scores from the survey, which used a 5-point Likert scale. For the purposes of this discussion, those variables with a mean score of more than 3.8 are classified as strong, those with a mean of 3–3.8 are classified as moderate and those with a mean of less than 3 are classified as weak.

Individual factors consist of personal motivation and influence from significant others. The strongest factor in the decision process was the **Safety Motivation Factor**. Respondents considered the reasons “meet long-term career objectives”, “improve chance of promotion opportunities”, “improve chance of receiving higher income”, “higher degree helps in career change” and “higher degree helps to compete in job market” to be highly influential on their decision to pursue further education. A similar sub-theme of “academic and career related personal drivers” emerged from the

interviews. These findings are consistent with previous research that identified the career mobility, career opportunities and increased earning power as key factors (Baird, 1976; Broekemier, 2002; Chiu, 1999; Delaney, 1999; Malaney, 1987; Stolzenberg & Giarrusso, 1987). Table 6.1 illustrates the findings of the factor analysis and qualitative themes on motivation effect.

Table 6.1 Findings of factor analysis and qualitative themes on motivation effect

Resultant Factors	Qualitative Themes
* Safety Motivation Factor * Esteem Motivation Factor	* Personal Driver - academic related - career related - intellectual satisfaction

Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that students considered the motivations of high rate of return, future earnings and employment probabilities as their reasons for pursuing further education. These findings support the income model and the employment model as derived from the econometric model.

The next most important factor influencing the decision to pursue higher education was the **Esteem Motivation Factor**. Respondents considered the importance of personal satisfaction and the status of having a higher qualification, identified as “intellectual satisfaction” from the interviews. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have noted that increased personal satisfaction and enhanced self-esteem also influence students’ motivation (Broekemier, 2002; Chiu, 1999; Delaney, 1999; Malaney, 1987). It is also consistent with the sociological model of school choice whereby the decision to undertake further study is a means of gaining social status.

However, in contrast to findings from previous research on domestic students, in this study family, employers, teachers, alumni and friends exerted only a low to moderate influence. Analysis of the sub-group “level of study” showed that the influence from “significant others” was more important for undergraduate students than for postgraduates, especially the influence from employers/colleagues and alumni/other students. This may be explained by the sample undergraduate students all being non-traditional students who had finished their previous studies some years before, and they consequently had less experience pursuing higher education than did the postgraduate students. Because “a college degree continues to be viewed as the most critical path to personal fulfillment and economic success, and the decisions students make about their postsecondary educational plans have a lasting impact upon their lives” (Hossler & Palmer, 2008, p.42), the advice from experienced colleagues would usually be considered creditable and trustworthy. Some undergraduate participants described at the interviews how their decision to pursue further education relied heavily on advice from peers and employers.

The interviews also identified that positive interactions with the local partner institution exerted significant influence in the decision-making process. The local partner institution seems to act as another pushing force at the predisposition stage of school choice. The transnational program is delivered in cooperation with the local partner institution, and the local partner institution not only provides administrative support but acts as a local university representative. In students’ minds, the local partner institution filled the important role of counsellor in giving practical and useful advice. A number of interviewees had already established a trusting relationship with the local partner institutions, giving even greater importance to the role.

For the **Institutional Characteristics Factor**, the influence of the variable “program availability” was identified as high, ranking as the next most important to some motivation variables. Many offshore international students emphasized in the interviews that they decided to pursue further education only once they had identified a suitable program. The availability of the specific program was important, as many participants said that this directly related to their career plan and also echoed their reasons for safety motivation in pursuing further education.

Financial assistance was identified as only a moderate influence on the choice for further education. This finding is different from previous research on traditional domestic students, possibly because the respondents in this study were all working adults. The objectives and benefits in pursuing further education were far more important to them than financial assistance. In addition, all transnational programs in Hong Kong are self-funded, and so the costs are not comparable with some local programs. Offshore international students already understood this arrangement when they considered pursuing further education through this pathway in Hong Kong. The interview discussion confirmed that the course fee was not a critical deciding factor for the participants’ pursuit of further education.

In summary, during the first step, the predisposition stage, motivation was the most important factor that influences a student to pursue further education. Next in importance was the institution factor, with the significant others factor having least influence. This finding about significant others was not consistent with previous research, but this can possibly be explained by the current study’s focus on offshore

students, a non-traditional group with different life experiences from the more traditional university students.

6.3 Research Question 3

To what extent do the following variables influence a student in choosing the transnational study in Hong Kong?

- **the presence of “significant others”**
- **push forces from Hong Kong**
- **pull factors from the transnational study**

The factor analysis from the quantitative survey identified five factors that influence students’ choice of transnational study in Hong Kong, and four qualitative themes also emerged from the interview (Table 6.2). Most of these factors had a mean score of less than 3.8, and so exerted only a moderate effect.

Table 6.2 Findings of quantitative factor analysis and qualitative themes on choosing a TNE study in Hong Kong

Resultant Factors	Qualitative Themes
* Pull TNE Study Characteristics	* Country Effect
* Pull TNE Study Cost	* Significant Others
* Pull TNE Study Values	* Transnational Program Delivery
* Push Hong Kong Force	* Transnational Program Value
* Significant Others	

Among all the variables of the **Pull TNE Study Characteristics Factor**, the variables of “flexibility of program operation” and “relevance of program” showed the strongest influence. The interview participants appreciated the flexible class schedule, financial arrangements and study timetables of the transnational delivery, indicating the importance of flexibility from several perspectives.

“Relevance of program” was identified from the survey as the first process in students’ university choice, while interviewees noted that their first step was deciding on a specific area of study when choosing a transnational program.

On the **Pull TNE Study Cost Factor**, the next most important variable after flexibility and relevance was “lower cost than studying abroad”, which had high influence, and “ease of entrance”, which had a moderate effect. As discussed in the previous section on the funding policy of the non-government program in Hong Kong, the issue of financial assistance had a relatively low influence on students’ decisions about transnational study. Findings from the interview showed the related sub-themes of finance and ease of entry were merged under the theme of transnational program delivery.

The **Pull TNE Study Values Factor** can be categorized into several variables under cultural, economic, academic and information themes. The cultural variables of “foreign language skill”, “opportunities to experience other culture” and “social network” had a moderate influence in the decision to choose a transnational study, as did the majority of the other reasons. These findings were reinforced in the interviews. Interviewees pointed out that having classmates from overseas or expatriates from Hong Kong was a more fruitful experience for an offshore international student, with some finding that the transnational program fostered their language ability or built up their cultural capital.

Academic variables such as “better recognition of foreign qualification” and economic variables like “transnational program provides greater mobility for career” exerted some pulling force on the transnational study decision, as confirmed in the interviews. Some non-local participants noted that the recognition of an Australian qualification can

increase their career mobility, and most agreed that a foreign qualification is more widely recognized and could facilitate moving successfully to another country in the future.

The **Push Hong Kong Force Factor** exerted less influence on the students. The variables “high threshold for local institution admission”, “limited study areas choices in local institutions” and “perceived inferior local institutions’ academic quality” had lower mean scores than most of the pull factors. This finding may due to over 60% of the respondents being among the top 15% in their previous qualification, and therefore having numerous options in Hong Kong for pursuing further education. In Hong Kong, the local UGC-funded universities and institutions offer a large number of reputable and high-quality programs.

The **Significant Others Factor** had the weakest effect among all the factors influencing one to choose transnational study. Unlike previous research reported in the literature, this study found that family did not exert a great influence on one’s university choice decision; indeed, over 90% of the survey respondents reported that they had no family ties with their current transnational study institution. Consequently, it was hard for family members to offer any suggestions or advice on non-local study. Furthermore, although transnational enrolment numbers are increasing in Hong Kong, there are still fewer people with experience in transnational education than in traditional local education. This will continue to limit the advice that can be offered about further study using transnational delivery.

Despite the limited advice from family, participants still found that the information on transnational program was easy to obtain. Most universities offering transnational programs have detailed information on the internet, which has become the major source of information for offshore international students. The internet provides up-to-date, efficient and ample information. Interviewees also received concise and detailed information and instant feedback from pre-enrolment information sessions, which helped them compare institutions and consolidate their choices.

In summary, a majority of the factors influencing the choice of transnational study exerted a moderate effect. Students placed greater weight on the pulling effect of the transnational study value, characteristics and cost than on the pushing country effect of Hong Kong. Transnational programs offer an alternative option for students to study in Hong Kong. The findings also revealed that the influence of the pulling and pushing effects are different for offshore international students and onshore international students, possibly because offshore students can remain where they live and work and they therefore have different concerns from onshore international students.

This study adds an important finding to the current body of knowledge on transnational students. It shows that the sample group of offshore international students made their university choice decision by themselves, rather than relying as heavily on significant others, as shown by previous research on domestic students. This could be a result of the limited ties of local people with transnational delivery and the change of habit of the new generation. Interviewees classified themselves as the “internet” generation, familiar with the internet and different kinds of social media keeping offshore international students aware and informed of different university choices. In addition, they also use

multiple sources when searching for course information, such as pre-enrolment information sessions, printed promotion materials, education fairs and consultation with local partner institutions.

The study revealed that local students who live and grow up in Hong Kong have limited resources and receive little advice about the positive pulling factors of transnational education. Consequently, the marketing tools and promotional messages for transnational programs should highlight key positive factors tailored to appeal to and target different segments. For example, sharing the experiences of alumni and students at pre-enrolment information sessions could reinforce the pulling forces from significant others.

6.4 Research Question 4

To what extent do the following characteristics affect the choice of an institution?

- **student-related issues**
- **institutional characteristics**

Five set of factors were identified in the factor analysis from the survey: student-related issues Personal Affiliation Factor and Personal Belief Factor, and institutional characteristics Pull Institution Academic Force Factor, Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor and Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor. Six qualitative themes emerged from the interviews when participants were asked about the factors that influence them to choose an institution (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Findings of quantitative factor analysis and qualitative themes on the decision to choose a particular institution

Resultant Factors	Qualitative Themes
* Personal Affiliation	* Facilities
* Personal Belief	* Finance
* Pull Institution Academic Force	* Quality
* Pull Institution Administrative Support	* Recognition
* Pull Institutional Characteristics	* Reputation
	* Syllabus

Quantitative results from the survey found that the variables from the institutional characteristics exerted a much stronger influence than student-related issues on the decision to choose an institution. For the **Pull Institution Academic Force Factor**, reasons related to the quality, reputation and ranking in the area of the program, institution and faculty had a moderate to strong effect in the choice of an institution. Quality exerted the greatest influence. Findings from the interviews showed that the themes on quality and reputation were also important. It should be noted that the sub-theme of quality from the interview incorporated both quality of student service and quality of program and faculty, reflecting the importance of student support for offshore international students in Hong Kong. One possible explanation for this finding is that participants were studying the program offshore in part-time mode, and so they highly valued the quality of student services. They believed that programs with good student services reflect the quality of the operation at the home campus, which in turn could facilitate their study in Hong Kong.

The strong influence of the variables on “quality” and “reputation” in this study is consistent with previous research that positions these as key factors for international students (Abubakar, Shanka & Muuka, 2010; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chapman & Pyvis, 2006a; Chen, 2008; Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Pimpa, 2005; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2006; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). However, as discussed in Chapter 2,

reputation and quality are to some extent intangible and the result of perception. It can be hard to measure reputation and quality in education, and therefore these issues require extra investigation.

Given the importance of quality and reputation factors, it is important to try to transfer the message to candidates through various marketing activities. The pre-enrolment information session with alumni is one such way. In addition, potential candidates may be invited to sit in on some classes to experience the perceived quality of the program. Giving an objective measurement of education by rating or ranking programs in promotion materials is another possible way of transmitting the message to potential candidates.

Several reasons under the **Pull Institutional Characteristics Factor** were also ranked highly: “affordable course fees”, “schedule of class”, “duration” and “location”. In the interview, these were coded under the theme facilities, finance and syllabus.

Findings from the quantitative survey showed that the variable “affordable course fees” had very high influence on deciding on an institution. As discussed in the previous section, financial aid for transnational programs is not common in Hong Kong. The offshore international students understand that most of the transnational programs are self-funded, and so affordable course fees greatly influence their choice of a particular institution and program. Many of the students in the sample were middle-class, and the undergraduate group had lower salaries than the postgraduates. Respondents were working adults, mostly self-funded and unlikely to ask parents for financial support for their studies. Affordable course fees were a big concern for them.

Competition in the higher education market in Hong Kong has intensified in recent years. This finding that shows a strong influence of affordable course fees should suggest to transnational course providers that they adopt a more cautious pricing strategy. New non-local course providers in Hong Kong should fully investigate their target students' financial position before launching their programs in Hong Kong. Transnational universities should not simply adapt their home program course fee without considering the local element in their pricing strategy.

The findings of this study concurred with previous research in regard to the importance of other institution characteristics such as class schedule, location and duration (Briggs, 2006; Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Erdmann, 1983; Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Schuster, Costantino & Klein, 1989). Interviewees also noted the advantages of intensive class arrangements in increasing the overall flexibility of the program.

Some participants commented that the duration of the program was critical to them. In some cases this was associated with the recognition of previous credentials, as recognition of prior learning usually leads to a shorter study program.

The **Pull Institution Administrative Support Factor** was ranked as a moderate influence in choosing an institution. Top reasons identified under this factor were variables on application process speed and good relationship with local partner institution and university. One interviewee pointed out that the determinant for him to choose his current institution was the efficiency of acceptance from the university. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative parts of this study confirm previous research that shows the importance of speed of acceptance (Olson, 1992).

A good relationship with the university has been identified as a strong pulling force in past research (Hayes, 1989; Olson, 1992; Olson & King, 1985). The findings from the survey also showed that positive interaction with the local partner institution and university personnel have a moderate effect on choosing a particular institution. This study found the local partner institution's support, recommendation and encouragement throughout the delivery of the transnational program were all important factors at different stages of the university decision process.

The **Personal Affiliation Factor**, related to the significant others effect, exerted only a weak influence, which is similar to the findings in other stages of university choice process. Recommendations from employees, colleagues and friends were found to be stronger than from family, spouse, teacher and alumni. This finding has been discussed in detail in previous sections.

For the **Personal Belief Factor**, the variables such as “degree from this institution improves my future career and prospects” and “degree from this institution is well known” exerted a moderate influence on the choice of an institution. If students have already considered these reasons when they start looking into higher education, these factors become less important later in the process when they are more interested in comparing other institution-related variables.

In summary, the factors influencing the choice of institution exerted a moderate to high effect. The results of both survey and interviews clearly indicated that a strong influence was exerted by the pulling institution academic effect such as quality, reputation and

ranking, and institutional administration issues such as course fees, schedule of class, duration and location.

The effect from significant others was less important in influencing students' choice of an institution. This finding differs from past research, possibly because the sample respondents were non-traditional mature-age students with a clear mindset about their further education. Advice from others was useful, but not as significant as for traditional students.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Table 6.4 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter discusses the transnational education provision in Hong Kong and makes recommendations and implications for the offering.

Table 6.4 Chapter 6 summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To integrate and discuss the mixed-methods findings	<p>Section 6.1 (Research Question 1) discusses the process of transnational university choice in Hong Kong. The findings show that offshore international students went through the three stages – predisposition, search and choice – as described in Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model. Students’ preference for a particular academic program extended throughout the three stages of their institution decision-making process. The country effect was not as significant as for onshore international students. The local partner institution had significant influence on different stages of the choice process. A Modified Transnational University Choice Model is presented in Figure 6.1.</p> <p>Section 6.2 (Research Question 2) discusses the factors influencing the decision to undertake further education. During the first step, the predisposition stage, the motivation factor was the most important influence, followed by the institution factor. The significance factor had least influence. These findings differ from previous research, possibly because the current study focused on non-traditional offshore students with different life experiences from traditional school students.</p> <p>Section 6.3 (Research Question 3) discusses the factors influencing the choice of the transnational study. These factors exerted a moderate effect. The pulling effect of the transnational study values, characteristics and cost had greater influence than the pushing country effect of Hong Kong on offshore international students.</p> <p>Section 6.4 (Research Question 4) discusses the factors related to choice of an institution. These factors exerted a moderate to high effect. Of greatest influence were the pulling institution academic variables of quality, reputation and ranking, and institutional characteristics variables such as course fees, schedule of class, duration and location. The effect from significant others was again identified as not a major influence on students’ choice of an institution.</p>

Chapter 7 TNE Provision in Hong Kong

The discussion in the previous chapter focused on the process of transnational study undertaken by offshore international students and the factors influencing their choice at different stages of their decision-making process. During the interviews, students also provided feedback on more personal aspects of their transnational studies. Section 7.1 discusses their comments on university, faculty, curriculum, program delivery, fellow students, student support and, most importantly, the personal benefits they gained from their transnational higher education. Section 7.2 proposes the recommendations and implications for the provision of TNE in Hong Kong. Section 7.3 provides a summary of the chapter.

7.1 Students' Comments about Offshore International Studies

Interviewees' responses were coded as either "Explicit Issues" or "Implicit Issues". Tree nodes and child nodes were then developed for each group of issues.

7.1.1 Explicit Issues

The explicit issues were coded under operational and institutional levels, as shown in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1 Final set of child node and number of coded references on tree node
“Comments on Offshore Studies – Explicit Issues”**

Child Node	Reference Coded
Operational Level	
Academic Matters	(35)
- academic support	7
- curriculum & program content	18
- faculty	7
- learning experience	3
Campus Facilities	4
Program Administration Matters	(19)
- program administrative support	8
- program delivery	11
Personal Benefits	(12)
- integration of family, work and study	6
- multicultural study environment	4
- strengthening of language abilities	2
Institutional Level	
Institutional Policy Issues	(11)
- tighten quality control	2
- well resourced for offshore delivery	9
Transnational Policy Issues	(2)
- host country potential	1
- renowned partner institution	1

Operational Level

Four themes from the interview focused on the operational level of transnational offshore studies: academic matters, campus facilities, program administration matters and personal benefits.

Academic Matters

Participants commented about curriculum and program content, faculty, learning experience and academic support.

Curriculum and Program Content. This was the sub-theme most frequently mentioned at the interviews. Participants studied business and management, the top discipline of non-local programs currently offered in Hong Kong. They found the transnational

programs' focus on international case studies added value to their study program, whereas the local programs tended to lack an international element:

One of the key points in comparison with the local program is that the local program lacked foreign examples and was not globalized enough. The local programs mainly covered the local culture, local examples and local environment. I remember the third diploma that I completed, called Logistic Operations, which left a deep impression on me. The lecturer worked in a large logistics company and he told us much about his company, but still local issues (S16).

As found from both survey and interviews, the main driver for students throughout the university choice process was the field of academic program. The appropriate curriculum and program were regarded highly by participants as adding value to the transnational program.

Faculty. Participants commented that the home institution or the local adjunct faculty were generally very professional and had good qualifications. The local adjunct faculty members seemed more experienced with the local market and included more local elements in their teaching materials. Participants felt the university faculty brought more international perspectives and knowledge, which added to the benefit of the transnational program. Participants also appreciated the home faculty visits and valued the importance of quality assurance with university lecturers flying in to deliver the offshore program:

If employing local lecturers, you cannot really control what they are saying. For the university lecturer, the whole program is written by them and they deliver it themselves, maybe they organize the exam. So they know exactly what they want you to know and this ensures the quality of the program. So this is the major competitive advantage in term of the quality of the lecturer (S3).

Participants also shared their experience of local versus non-local teaching, thinking that overseas lecturers were generally more open-minded and encouraged students to express their opinions during class discussions:

The study environment is different. Because local teachers just tell you what is right and wrong but foreign lecturers will open-mindedly ask your opinion. Nothing is right or wrong as different people have different mindsets. So I think this is the difference between local and overseas (S10).

As I know, the local university is a one-way learning method, while for this class it is two-way communication between the students and the lecturers. This is a better way to understand the topic. The lecturers are so friendly to the students, which make it easier to understand the topic and acquire the knowledge (S15).

Learning Experience. Participants' comments about the learning experience of transnational study included concerns about the scarcity of practical knowledge sharing in their program, which they thought should be included in higher education. They suggested the university invite local practitioners and professionals to share their industry experience, thereby enhancing the practicability of studying the transnational program:

I believe that if they can line up some local corporation here to share real-life examples that would be better, because imagine if we are studying in Australia ourselves, I believe there are lots of opportunities when they would invite leading people to share in class and vice versa. I'd hope that inviting industry people to share particular experiences would be a good way (S4).

Academic Support. Some participants suggested that academic support should be increased for the transnational program. Participants commented on limited academic links with the home institution, as some programs were delivered in intensive mode.

They wanted more real-time discussion with faculty members after the classes in Hong Kong. One undergraduate participant commented on the difficulty of having university lecturers teach intensive classes over two weeks on each unit with limited face-to-face interaction:

My difficulty is when they were here during these two weeks I had no question, but after I do my assignment or exam I have questions. I need to send emails. When I studied at the local institution, when I had problems after the week maybe I could see them [the local faculty] again easily after school. But when they [overseas faculty] finish and all go back, I need to send an email (S13).

Two doctoral students commented particularly on the need for technical and training support in their higher degree research program. One was required to fly to the home institution to undertake training courses, which was time consuming and expensive.

Campus Facilities

Participants had different views on the virtual campus facilities. Their discussions focused mainly on the library facilities. One participant found it hard to study effectively without the support of the university library, and the local partner institution provided only limited access to an electronic library. However, those students who could access the home university's online library facilities generally found it very useful:

You don't need to go to the library now because the virtual library is set up and I can access the Pearson database ... I can go to iLearn which is no different from sitting in Sydney hitting the university in Sydney, whereas I am sitting here hitting the university in Sydney the same way (S1).

However, one postgraduate participant commented that having access only to a virtual library was not enough, and doctoral students need a physical library for their research. She viewed this as a weakness in her current higher degree research program:

The limited library support is a major weakness in this program, although nowadays lots of online materials are available. But not all books are being made as e-books, so this is one of the major weaknesses in support particular for higher degree research students, probably not so much for undergraduate or whatever (S4).

Higher degree research students possibly need different types of library support than non-research based program students. In view of these different needs of students, the transnational course administrators need to address the special concerns of different groups of offshore students.

Program Administration Matters

In terms of administration, participants commented about the program administrative support and program delivery.

Program Administrative Support. Participants thought that in general the local and university administrative support were very good. Some of them found that going first to the administrator of the local partner institution was ideal, as this avoided the problem of time difference between the program's home country and Hong Kong. They thought that having an experienced local partner institution to provide quality administrative support provided a competitive edge to a transnational program:

Administrative support, I think that goes with the local partner because administrative support not necessarily backed by the home university. Administrative support in my opinion happens more regularly; there are lots of administrative issues that need to be dealt with, that rely on the local partner to support. I think the strength is if the school can find a local partner that has the experience to provide this kind of support. That does refer more to the strength. If the university chooses a good partnership, even if it is delivered out of Australia it could still provide a good support. A good partnership is also one of the key factors (S17).

However, some participants perceived particular administrative problems were geared only towards offshore students, such as retrieving an updated timetable, reading past examination papers and ordering textbooks. Participants thought that onshore students would not have these problems.

While participants appreciated assistance from the local program administrator, some commented on the limited opportunity to have direct interaction with the university. Some found that contact only through the local administrator was not enough for certain issues. Participants were keen to receive updated information and news about the university, and would like the university to increase the transparency of disclosing any program changes to offshore students.

Program Delivery. Participants generally commented positively that the offering of the transnational program gave them an opportunity to study in Hong Kong without giving up their job:

The first day, when I signed up this course because it is a foreign education program, I decided to participate in this course. It's probably not possible for me to travel to study in Australia (S17).

The intensive delivery mode of study was popular with some participants, particularly those who need to travel frequently for work:

I will still choose the intensive schedule since I need to travel a lot. It's hard but you will get used to it after the first or second lesson. You will get used to it and you just need to adjust yourself. I think it's OK and I will still choose the offshore (S10).

However, other participants were less enthusiastic about the intensive delivery format. One participant found that she didn't have enough time to understand what she learnt in class. She blamed this on the offshore delivery mode of the program:

For the offshore program, you have to develop and study basically by yourself as it is so rushed that you may not absorb everything. Students don't have much time to digest the contexts (S9).

Personal Benefits

Despite some particular concerns and issues raised during the interviews, all participants commented that they had personally benefited from the transnational program. They found that the transnational program strengthened their language ability, offered an opportunity to integrate their family, study and work, and immersed them in a multicultural study environment.

Strengthening of Language Abilities. Participants highly appreciated that the transnational study strengthened their language ability and broadened their mindset:

I think the benefit of offshore study is that you go for something unconventional instead of taking one style of education, I think an offshore program can offer you different perspectives that can broaden one's mindset, how they can receive different education from other countries, like culture (S17).

At least my listening skill has improved (S13).

Integration of Family, Work and Study. Participants were pleased that they could maintain their job and continue to study an international program in Hong Kong. Juggling work, family and study required very good organizational skills (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006b):

I think I have personally benefited for this kind of offshore delivery. Actually my parents have suggested I quit my job and also study anywhere I like. However, my industry is quite narrow so if I were to quit my job, I am not sure I could get back the same position and job. Therefore I took the offshore option. The offshore program gives me an opportunity to keep my job and also continue my studies. I think at certain stage in your career, it may not be easy to quit your job and start again (S9).

To send me to Australia for a long time study, I think the overall expenses and tutorial fees are something different. These are my considerations. And to quit my job, I don't want to do it (S6).

Multicultural Study Environment. The third major theme that emerged for personal benefit was the opportunity to immerse in a multicultural study environment. Offshore students highly valued the experience of mixing with people from different cultural groups (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006b). Generally, offshore students in this study had very positive comments on the mixed student composition. They found that their classmates from various countries brought different cultures with them. The interaction and participation of people from different nationalities also created a different learning atmosphere:

I guess from my view offshore international study is a benefit or opportunity to mix both the local eastern culture, which is Hong Kong students, and overseas faculty and students (S8).

It was an amazing way to learn about the culture, an amazing way to make friends and to socialize, even in the classroom. And also a way to learn about the Hong Kong way of life. It was just the British, Australians and people from all over Europe doing the program as well (S12).

Institutional Level

Two institution-level themes emerged from the interviews: institutional policy issues and transnational policy issues.

Institutional Policy Issues

Tighten Quality Control. Participants commented on quality and support. As the non-local programs are all self-funded by students, participants thought that if an institution allocated their resources to developing their offshore programs, then the offshore students' learning experience would be affected. Participants noted that some institutions employed local adjunct faculty to minimize costs, and so it was important to closely monitor teaching quality as some lecturers focus on examinations and assignments without teaching much about the subject:

I think the main thing is if the university can put their priority on teaching, provided they are well resourced. It is not up to the students, whether they receive this learning experience but whether the school can provide the quality ... Resources don't come from students, they come from the school. As for students, not all of them have the ability to support for the heavy school fees, and without paying the fees they cannot receive that kind of quality education. If the students studied as local citizens, they could probably receive the same quality of education (S17).

Well Resourced for Offshore Delivery. Some participants commented on the remote alumni activities and the support by the home institution. They thought that the home university should allocate resources and support for offshore students' alumni activities at a level comparable to that for the local students. Participants suggested that the university should set up an offshore alumni chapter in the host country to co-ordinate all alumni activities for offshore students. The alumni chapter could increase the cohesive force of students and alumni, which in turn helps sustain their presence:

In my current program well I think what's more beneficial is having more alumni events, because feeling a part of the student body usually takes effort for students to do so and it does come to you ... I think that needs the students to be proactive in reaching out of forming the body themselves for that community (S11).

Transnational Policy Issues

Host Country Potential. Some participants commented on the importance of the host country. They were pleased that such a cosmopolitan city as Hong Kong provides the transnational mode of study program, since they considered the background and experience of the host country affect the policy and practice in successfully delivering the program.

Renowned Partner Institution. Participants stressed the importance of the local partner institution at each stage of their university choice process. They found that the local partner institution was their first point of contact for administrative issues. They thought the local partner institution should also closely monitor the teaching quality delivered by adjunct faculty members. A responsible and renowned local partner institution greatly facilitates a student studying the offshore program, which in turn affects the reputation of the home institution:

I would say the local partner is trying to create a different culture that the feeling is totally different (S3).

They [local partner institution staff] are just very attentive and they notice small things as well (S12).

7.1.2 Implicit Issues

The implicit issues expressed by interviewees centred on their feelings and concerns about their transnational study. Three child nodes emerged from the analysis: “Resistance to Change”, “Sense of Belonging” and “Trust” (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Final set of child node and number of coded references on tree node “Comments on Offshore Studies – Implicit Issues”

Child Node	Reference Coded
Resistance to change	7
Sense of belonging	6
Trust	8

Resistance to Change

Interviewees’ reasons for choosing transnational study included having the opportunity to study under a non-local education system, and the openness and willingness of the home country faculty. However, some respondents still had reservations about transnational study at their “Search” stage. This was particularly the case for local students, who had grown up, been educated and trained under the conventional local education system. In the conventional way of teaching and learning in Hong Kong, students display almost unquestioning acceptance of their teachers’ and lecturers’ knowledge, and they are taught to emphasize strict discipline and proper behaviour (Murphy, 1987). Students showed some resistance to transforming from the conventional local teaching and learning format to the more open and unconventional teaching style they encountered in their transnational education:

I am afraid I might not be able to manage if it was conducted by overseas lecturers (S2).

Factors such as the teaching style, language, culture and experience of overseas faculty members contributed to participants' barriers to considering the non-local program. One problem was studying the transnational program in a second language:

One thing that did concern me but is now resolved was whether the lecturers would adjust to the language ability of the local students. But it appears that they would adjust to our need (S16).

Sense of Belonging

Many offshore international students commented on their limited direct communication with the university, finding it hard to feel part of the university and identify a sense of belonging. They felt that physically they were enrolled at the home university but mentally they had a very weak sense of belonging. Some felt a greater sense of community with the local partner institution than with the university. They considered the interaction with the university and alumni, and the level of resources, were not enough for the offshore international students:

Student identity, although we are proud of the university, basically the network and the alumni is not very strong here (S4).

I don't feel very strongly part of the university. Maybe university can send out newsletters about the university and share with us what they do there in the university (S9).

I think in order to increase the identity of the students, the university needs to communicate more with the students (S16).

From my experience, I think we need to have more direct communication with the overseas instructor. Here I don't feel I am a UV student at all (S18).

Trust

A student's behaviour cannot be understood except in terms of the social context in which the behaviour occurs. Trust is built up partly from the social context. The survey results showed that only a low proportion of students' family members had ties with their current study institution. Parents as well as peers may transmit necessary social capital. In a school context, students acquire information about university from their interaction with peers (Hossler & Stage, 1992). As the transnational program was delivered away from the home campus, students found it difficult to discuss issues with anyone who had an affiliation with their chosen institution:

I was very interested in the financial management. I searched for information from the website and also asked for information from colleagues and friends. But it seems no one knew my institution (S6).

It was hard for offshore international students to develop any trust in the transnational institution through their social affiliations. This may also explain the low influence of significant others throughout the transnational institution choice process, in contrast to higher influence identified in previous studies of students in domestic programs.

Participants also perceived that offshore international students in Hong Kong received inferior treatment, compared with onshore students, which contributed to a lack of trust with the home university:

Because imagine if we are studying in Australia ourselves, I believe there are lots of opportunities when they would invite leading people to share in class vice versa (S4).

Students had already concluded, without any evidence, that there were differences between local and overseas class arrangements.

7.2 Recommendations for Provision of TNE in Hong Kong

This study provided statistical evidence and in-depth exploration of how offshore international students choose a transnational institution. The analysis provided 12 specific recommendations for universities and local partner institutions to optimize their provision of TNE in Hong Kong.

1. Educational quality is significant component of TNE provision

Hong Kong's higher education market is complex and volatile, with many local and non-local institutions. Hong Kong students are street-wise in their search for a qualification at an affordable price. Students know what they want and consider the costs and benefits before making a decision. Students place high value on an institution's established reputation, which can be established by combining educational quality with outstanding service. Potential students evaluate service quality in education based on content and structure of degree (Joseph & Joseph, 1998).

This study focused on offshore international student transnational university choice decision making. Findings highlighted that universities and policy makers can increase the value of their transnational programs by providing quality academic programs and support services, respecting local cultures and thoughtfully allocating resources to offshore students.

2. Reputable local partner institution strengthens TNE provision

The local partner institution plays a significant role in the university choice decision-making process for offshore international students. Li (2008) also found that

the image of partner institutions has a significant effect on offshore students' enrolment intentions. For universities planning to deliver the TNE program in Hong Kong, partnering with a reputable local partner institution is an important strategy. The local partner institution has a synergistic effect in offering the TNE program in Hong Kong. However, universities need to choose partner institutions carefully; the partner institutions' track record can indicate their worth and expertise (Murphy, 1987).

3. Confucian ethics of filial piety in Chinese students

Before universities engage in transnational delivery, they need to look into globalized curricula and remove any location-specific content. Universities providing transnational education in Hong Kong should understand the type of learners there. Local Chinese students adopt the Confucian ethics of filial piety and tend to emphasize strict discipline and proper behaviour, rather than the expression of opinion, independence, self-mastery and creativity (Murphy, 1987). That Hong Kong students accept the teacher's authority, follow the teacher's instructions and are used to more structured learning environments has been identified as one of the implicit "barriers" for Hong Kong students joining a transnational program. Universities planning to successfully join the Hong Kong transnational higher education market should take these aspects of local culture into consideration.

4. Enhance financial aid for TNE provision

Financial aid has an impact on international students' school choice decision (Altbach, 2004; Li & Bray, 2007; Waters, 1992). However, less than a quarter of respondents in this study received financial aid. Interviewees were concerned that not all students can pay high school fees and financial aid for transnational study in Hong Kong is limited.

In Hong Kong, only local citizens are eligible for government funding and grants such as the continuing education fund and non-means tested loans. Some non-local universities also offer funding only to onshore students.

In view of the importance of affordability as identified in this study, institutions and policy makers should consider generating or channelling some private scholarships or funding to provide for all students. Universities should extend their scholarships to offshore students, which would not only help the needy but also enhance a sense of belonging for offshore international students who currently feel disadvantaged by unequal treatment from the university. Local partner institutions could help by co-ordinating with local financial institutions to offer loan facilities to all students, regardless of their citizenship.

5. Importance of quality, reputation and ranking

Academic quality and reputation have been identified as a significant effect on the enrolment decision in this study. These findings are consistent with previous studies of university choice by international students (Abubakar, Shanka & Muuka, 2010; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chapman & Pyvis, 2006a; Chen, 2008; Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Pimpa, 2005; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2006; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Chen (2007) found that East Asian students perceived the reputation, quality and ranking of university and program had a direct correlation with future benefits such as higher earnings and social status. However, students cannot easily make a clear judgment of quality or reputation, as education is an intangible service. The quality of teaching cannot be clearly judged unless one has previously experienced the service (Li, 2008). With this constraint, students often turn to extrinsic cues, such as ranking, to help assess

an institution's quality. Students can use the well-known world-wide rankings such as the Complete University Guide, the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings and Financial Times MBA Rankings to assess a university's reputation. It is, therefore, important for universities to invest in education to maintain and improve the positive image of high quality, reputation and rankings.

6. Important of public relations materials for the TNE choice process

With the difficulties in representing quality and reputation, universities could consider providing testimonials from successful alumni and corporations. Outstanding students and alumni are an important channel for providing word-of-mouth advice about an institution's quality and reputation to potential students, particularly given the limited numbers of family members with previous offshore study experience in Hong Kong. The affiliation of transnational programs with large corporations can increase the creditability and confidence for offshore international students enrolling in the non-local programs:

If the school can communicate with the employer so that the employer can communicate and support the employees (S17).

Support from the corporation can act as another pushing force for students to study a transnational program.

7. Enhance learning experience for transnational delivery

Participants commented that offshore curricula often contain scarce local knowledge, and suggested that students' learning experiences could be enhanced by sharing with local professionals. Local universities could be approached to organize joint forums or

seminars to enrich the context of transnational provision, and local industry practitioners could be invited through the local partner institution's network.

In order to enhance academic links with the home institution, the university could incorporate a "home course study scheme". Although the transnational program is designed to be delivered wholly out of the home country, the university could support students to study some units in the home country. Through interaction with the university faculty, onshore students and alumni, this experience could enhance an offshore international student's sense of belonging to the home institution.

8. Market segmentation for TNE provision

This study identified the key dimensions underlying the push and pull factors of transnational university choice that are particularly significant for offshore students. At the practical level of universities' marketing and recruitment strategies, the difference in choice patterns between onshore and offshore international students implies that the offshore branches will not cannibalize the demand for places in home market. An important insight from this study is that universities should tailor their recruitment and marketing strategies to their offshore market.

Another important finding is the significant effects of level of study, gender and nationality on the university choice criteria. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which also found differences in undergraduate and postgraduate and/or males and females and/or students in different countries (Lu, Mavondo & Qiu, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2006; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

In response to the perceived benefit of a multicultural study environment, universities should try to recruit students from different nationalities by diversifying their recruitment strategies. Institutions that use market segmentation can target those segments that support the strategic objectives of the organization (Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman, 2012). This research found that students of different citizenship have different motivations and initiatives that affect their university choice decision making. Recruitment officers should consider targeting students from specific countries, catering for their specific concerns and needs. This should also improve student satisfaction and word-of-mouth recommendations, and so improve student retention.

9. Sustain the admission team's personal and quality services

Respondents were very positive about the professional services offered by the local partner institutions' admission team, such as promptness of reply to requests, timely admission notices and individual caring. These services should be sustained. Previous studies have also found that students value personal contact and interaction with the institution (Hayes, 1989; Olson, 1992; Olson & King, 1985). Increased communication across universities and local partner institutions can enhance the knowledge base of all recruitment and administration officers, enabling them to give more efficient and professional advice to prospective students and thereby helping to improve the university's reputation.

10. Promotion materials to highlight push and pull TNE factors

Promotional elements of TNE programs should support the marketing positioning and reflect the importance of value in TNE delivery. The push and pull TNE factors

identified in this study can be used as a blueprint for promotion. For example, many students identified that the key determinant of their choices are home faculty teaching offshore and intensive block teaching mode, and so these should be emphasized in the promotion materials. In addition, universities can consider inviting prospective students to pre-enrolment information sessions to meet the university representatives, faculty, enrolled students and alumni.

Course brochures containing relevant information presented in a persuasive manner are very effective. With students' preference for online searching activities, universities should make their school websites more user friendly and interactive. Factors identified as important reasons from the survey study – such as the program flexibility, affordable course fees and recognition of overseas qualification – could be used as a reference for key promotion items. In addition, recognizing previous credentials and course duration, as revealed in the interviews, could also be used as promotion highlights.

11. Enhance transnational teaching and learning quality

Interviewees indicated a preference for more face-to-face interaction with faculty from the home university. This finding is in line with previous studies of transnational learning activities (Chapman & Pyvis, 2005; Shanahan & McParlane, 2005). Students want more real and virtual time with their overseas lecturers. The transnational learning activities could be enhanced by incorporating a supplementary online teaching component into the transnational teaching and learning activities. Through the online platform, chat room, blackboard, iLearn, students could have more opportunities to virtually meet the overseas faculty.

Offshore international students raised some concerns about the credibility and quality of the local faculty in teaching the university program. It was suggested that closely monitoring the teaching quality by the university and local partner institution would ensure the program's quality and protect and sustain the institution's reputation.

12. Support the value of international student composition

Given the importance of pull transnational programs' value on social networks, it is recommended that universities organize more alumni events so students can meet and network with different people. Student mentoring increases opportunities for connection among alumni and students, with alumni sharing their knowledge and information. An alumnus chapter can increase the sense of belonging to the university, which in turn directly and indirectly supports the promotion of the university. These alumni events and mentoring activities can be organized with the support of the alumni association and the local partner institution.

7.3 Chapter Summary

Table 7.3 provides a summary of this chapter.

The next chapter presents the study's conclusion, outlines the limitations and proposes future research directions.

Table 7.3 Chapter 7 summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To discuss the comments from the interviews on offshore international studies.	Section 7.1 summarizes respondents' comments on transnational higher education in Hong Kong, covering both explicit and implicit views. The explicit view consists of academic matters, campus facilities, administrative matters, personal benefits, institutional issues and transnational issues. The implicit view consists of issues related to resistance to change, sense of responsibility and trust.
To discuss the recommendations of TNE provision in Hong Kong	<p>Section 7.2 summarizes the recommendations and implications for the provision of TNE in Hong Kong and proposes 12 recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Educational quality should be a significant component of TNE provision;2. A reputable local partner institution can strengthen TNE provision;3. Chinese students show Confucian ethics of filial piety;4. Financial aid should be enhanced for TNE provision;5. Quality, reputation and ranking are important;6. Public relations materials are important for the TNE choice process;7. Enhance the learning experience for transnational delivery by including local content;8. Segment the market for TNE provision;9. Sustain the admission team's personal and quality services;10. Use promotional materials to highlight push and pull TNE factors;11. Enhance transnational teaching and learning quality;12. Support the value of international student composition.

Chapter 8 Conclusions, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This chapter presents the conclusions and contributions of the study, based on the findings and discussion. It also outlines the study's limitations and proposes future research directions.

8.1 Conclusions

With the new delivery mode of international education and the importance of transnational programs in Hong Kong, it is important for institutions to understand this particular group of students. The avalanche of higher education programs gives students in Hong Kong increasing numbers of options to further their studies. Students have become customers for whom the higher education institutions have to compete. Meeting students' needs has become more important and will soon be a key to survival for many education providers in the Hong Kong higher education market. A closer examination of the student choice process can lead to more effective ways of strategic enrolment management.

This study extends earlier research on onshore international students to focus on the higher education choice of international offshore students. The main purpose of this research was to explore the process of choosing a transnational program and institution and the factors influencing that choice process. The study contributes to both theoretical knowledge and management practice of international education.

School choice is a complex process, and choosing to undertake transnational study occurs over several temporal stages. Throughout the processes of university choice, students are influenced by human, financial, social and cultural capital at different stages (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 1990). This research adopted the Hossler and Gallagher three-stage model, with its conceptual framework comprising the predisposition, search/application and choice stages. Participants were asked about their university choice process and factors influencing their choice, first in the questionnaire survey and then in a semi-structured interview.

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative methodology was useful for testing and confirming the theoretical propositions about university choice process of offshore international students, while the qualitative technique was useful for understanding the students' university choice process.

The survey data provided useful information on factors influencing further education decision, transnational study choice and choice of an institution. To identify the importance of different sets of factors, descriptive analysis, chi-square test, factors analysis and independent sample t-test and ANOVA were applied. Significant factors were identified among “level of study”, “gender”, “university enrolled” and “nationality”. These factors provide information for universities to tailor their strategies to different market segments.

It was found that offshore international students combine the search, application and choice stages in their higher education choice process. Using factor analysis, the factors were identified for choosing TNE study and a particular institution. The most common

reason for pursuing further education was motivated by career reasons under the Safety Factor. The finding that the respondents focused on career development is consistent with the research of Stolenzenberg and Giarrusso (1987), who reported that career entry or mobility was the most important reason for pursuing an MBA program.

Most offshore international students chose TNE study because of the characteristics and cost of the TNE program itself, particularly its flexibility, the relevance of the program and the lower study cost. Push Hong Kong Forces and the Pull TNE Study Values were also identified, but they were less important. The factors related to Significant Others had an even weaker influence, possibly because of few family ties with TNE study, as found from the survey. Most offshore international students chose an institution for academic reasons. They were also influenced by the cost, schedule and duration of the program offered. Again, factors related to significant others were not a prominent factor.

Following the survey questionnaire, the in-depth interviews verified the quantitative results and revealed the reasons for and process of choosing the transnational study program. Content analysis identified the themes and sub-themes from the interviews, giving deeper understanding of the reasons at each stage of the university choice process.

Based on the findings of the survey and interview, the proposed conceptual model used to examine the transnational students' university choice was modified. The Modified Transnational University Choice model reflects the interaction of the program effect, transnational push and pull effect, and the influence of university and local partner institution.

One of the major findings in this study was that offshore international students place less significance on the country than do onshore international students. This finding differs from most previous studies on onshore international studies, which have suggested that the country has significant influence in the university choice process. The push and pull factors of the country were less important than the program and institution, although offshore international students still take it into consideration in their university choice process. In fact, the specific academic program has been identified as the dominant influence that leads the transnational student along the different stages of the university choice decision-making process.

Another major finding in this study was the significant influence of the local partner institution on offshore international students' university choice process. The interviews revealed that the local partner institutions act as the school representatives, with frequent contact with offshore international students. Students develop loyalty and trust with the local partner institution and the institutions become their "significant influence" acting as a counsellor during their continuing education choice process. This finding extends the research of Li (2008) about high school students' perception of transnational programs, and verifies and supports the reasons behind Li's findings that the image of the local partner institution had a significant effect on enrolment intention. This finding suggests that it is more important to identify a well-known partner that delivers an institution's transnational program, as the local partner institutions have local expertise in marketing, and knowledge of potential students' networks and relationships. A reputable local partner institution also exerts another "pulling force" for offshore international students.

In summary, based on results of the survey and interviews, it is suggested that administrators and policy makers of TNE providers should focus attention on the factors identified in the Modified Transnational University Choice model. It is important to emphasize the development of market-driven courses, as specific fields of program dominate all stages of the university choice decision-making process. Universities should also invest in strengthening the educational quality and academic content, as these significantly influence students' choices. Moreover, they should enhance the characteristics and values of TNE in order to attract more students to join the transnational program. In addition, universities and local partner institutions should develop trust and long-lasting relationships with students and alumni, who can persuade other potential customers, particularly in light of the limited number of people with experience of TNE in Hong Kong.

The findings of this study are drivers to the management of transnational provision in Hong Kong, geared at student aspiration and institution attraction. The research specifically aims to contribute to the management practice of the higher TNE industry. It is hoped that universities can use the findings and recommendations from this study to effectively position themselves in the market by meeting the needs of offshore international students. In this way universities can increase their competitive edge in the market and differentiate themselves from other similar institutions, essential in a crowded marketplace like Hong Kong with over 1,100 transnational programs being offered.

8.2 Limitations

The higher international market changes quickly, as do students' needs and expectations. The criteria in this Modified Transnational University Choice Model are liable to change from time to time. However, the important point is to what extent the transnational institutions are able to improve their prestige, quality, status and flexibility, and hence become more attractive to the offshore market.

One major limitation to this study is the generalizability of the findings. This study selected students who were studying the transnational program in part-time delivery mode. The findings might be different for full-time students, and future studies could compare any differences in the TNE choice process of full-time and part-time students.

As students and institutions vary across countries, the findings from the study of Hong Kong TNE programs may also not be generalizable across all countries that offer transnational programs under different arrangements. The policies on transnational provision, funding, tuition, financial aid and admission vary from country to country and from university to university. In order to corroborate the findings of this study, further research is needed.

The sampling process included only transnational universities whose TNE programs were delivered through local partner institutions. One university that offers its program by home country staff in Hong Kong declined to participate in this research, with the result that all the TNE programs included in this study were operated by a local partner

institution. It would be useful to compare students' university choice process if a local partner institution was not involved.

This study explored the school choice process through the shared perspectives of offshore international students at semi-structured interviews. The findings from the qualitative interview depend on the honesty and openness of participants, and the interpretation of the findings has a subjective element, as is the case with any qualitative study.

Some participants had started their program over 12 months prior to this research. That their university choice process had occurred more than one year previously may have affected their responses to the questionnaires and at the interviews.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a basis for enhancing our understanding of the choice process of offshore international students. The description of the findings and the survey instruments offer an opportunity for readers to assess the transferability of findings to other situations.

8.3 Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study could be extended by future research in six main ways.

First, this study sampled only offshore international students who were admitted to a transnational study. It was not the focus of the research to understand why some students were admitted but decided not to enrol. Those students may have chosen other

transnational institutions or may have enrolled in a local program. Future research on these groups of students will broaden our understanding and help transnational educators to identify potential areas for improvement.

Second, this study identified the specific field of academic program as the principal issue that dominated the transnational university choice process. As the participants were all studying business or management programs, further research could identify if, and how, those factors vary across different disciplines. In this way institutions and policy makers could be more responsive to the needs of their potential students.

Third, many of the variables identified in the current Modified Transnational University Choice Model may be relevant only to adult students. However, the boarder variables of the proposed model may be useful for examining traditional students' university choice behaviour. Future research could test the usefulness of the modified model for traditional students.

Fourth, the pattern of variables influencing university choice process varied between local and non-local citizens. To gain further understanding of non-local citizens and help promote TNE in different cultures, further research could explore the choice process of offshore international students with different nationalities.

Fifth, future research could adopt a case-study approach of one university that offers both local and transnational programs. Such a study might elucidate the underlying factors and fully capture the richness of the variables involved in the university decision-making process for both onshore and offshore students. It could also eliminate

the possible influence of environmental factors when students describe their decision-making process.

Lastly, during the interview, participants commented on their satisfaction in choosing transnational study. Further research could focus on students' satisfaction and evaluation of the outcomes of their transnational study decision.

The above future research recommendations are considered important from the researcher's perspective from the study. The development of transnational education is a global trend with strong implications for the higher education sector. This study takes a fundamental step towards understanding the higher education choices of offshore international students in a TNE context. It is hoped that by developing a better awareness of the processes whereby students choose to attend transnational study, and their reasons for doing so, this study can act as a blueprint for admission professionals in their recruitment efforts. In the field of transnational education, most published studies are from the practitioner point of view. Very few are scholarly works with extensive literature reviews. It is hoped that this study can act as a catalyst for further developing the theoretical study of university choice. This research proved to be a very enriching and meaningful process, and has expanded the researcher's horizons regarding the provision of TNE. But clearly there is much more to discover.

8.4 Chapter Summary

Table 8.1 provides a summary of this chapter.

Table 8.1 Chapter 8 summary of research objectives and outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
To summarize the qualitative and quantitative studies	Section 8.1 outlines the intent, findings, recommendations and inspirations of the study.
To identify the research limitations	Section 8.2 identifies the research limitations. It discusses the applicability of the modified model and identifies factors for future use and applicability across countries. The subjective element of the researcher, the openness of participants and timing of study of the participants are also identified as limitations.
To identify directions for future research	Section 8.3 identifies directions for future research. It is recommended to extend the current study to students who were admitted but did not enrol in the transnational program, and to offshore international students at the traditional age. It is also suggested to further study offshore international students from different countries and to study the satisfaction and evaluation of the outcomes of transnational study decision.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Approval of Ethics Application

From: "Ethics Secretariat" <ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au>
To: "Dr Richard Petty" <richard.petty@mgs.m.edu.au>
Cc: "Ms Doris Ng" <chak-wah.ng@students.mq.edu.au>
Sent: Thursday, July 19, 2012 9:39 AM
Subject: Approved- Ethics application- Petty (Ref: 5201200418)

Dear Dr Petty

Re: "Choosing an offshore international program: A study of transnational higher education in Hong Kong" (Ethics Ref: 5201200418)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee and you may now commence your research.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Richard Petty
Ms Doris Ng

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 19 July 2013
Progress Report 2 Due: 19 July 2014
Progress Report 3 Due: 19 July 2015
Progress Report 4 Due: 19 July 2016
Final Report Due: 19 July 2017

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B - Sample Invitation Letter to Participating Universities



Doris C W Ng
MBA, Macquarie
Doctoral Scholar

Macquarie University
NSW 2109 Australia
Phone (852) 2774 8533
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Fax (852) 2365 1000
Email chak-wah.ng@students.mq.edu.au
www.mgsm.edu.au

26 October 2012

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am doing my Doctorate of Business Administration with Macquarie University. My research topic is Choosing an Offshore International Program in Hong Kong. The purpose of my research is to gain a better understanding of the decision-making process and the factors which influence the students in choosing an offshore international program in Hong Kong. The outcome will assist both the universities offering transnational programs and the local operators by enhancing their understanding of students' needs.

My DBA requires survey research and I plan to survey some Hong Kong-based students. Both the pilot and the main questionnaire have been approved by Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Ref: 5201200418).

I write to ask your permission as the Business School's Teaching & Learning Committee for the survey to be administered.

Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. All information or personal particulars gathered in the course of the study are confidential and no individual will be identified in any publication of the results.

It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire and it would be distributed in class in Hong Kong with the support of faculty. Students who are willing to participate in the focus group/ individual interview could put down their contact details on the questionnaire.

Please let me know if I have your support to proceed.

Many thanks and warmest regards,

Doris

Appendix C - Consent Letter for Survey



Macquarie Graduate School of Management
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109
Chief Investigator Phone: +61 (0)2 9850 9038
Chief Investigator Email: richard.petty@mgs.edu.au

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name: Professor Richard Petty
Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title: Professor in Management
Executive Director International

Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: **Choosing an Offshore International Program in Hong Kong**

You are cordially invited to participate in a study of "**Choosing an Offshore International Program in Hong Kong**". The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the decision-making process and factors when you choose an offshore international program. The outcome will assist both the universities offering transnational programs and the local operators by enhancing their understanding of students' needs and decision making processes when choosing an offshore international program in Hong Kong.

The study is being conducted by Doris Ng Chak Wah to meet the requirements of a doctorate degree in business administration of Macquarie Graduate School of Management in Australia. Doris is under the supervision of Professor Richard Petty, Professor in Management and Executive Director International of the Macquarie Graduate School of Management (MGSM), Macquarie University.

Participation to this research is voluntary. This survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Please spend 10-15 minutes of your valuable time to answer this questionnaire.

If you have any questions about the specifics of the study, please contact Doris Ng by email: chak-wah.ng@students.mq.edu.au; phone: (852) 2774 8533. You are also welcome to contact the Chief Investigator, Professor Richard Petty, by email: Richard.Petty@mgs.edu.au; phone: (612) 9850 9038.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and participation.

Disclaimer:

Confidentiality: The completion of the questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. The only people who will have access to the data will be the supervisor and the researcher named above. Data will only be published in aggregation and in summary format. There is no chance and intention to trace data back to individual persons as the data are of very general nature.

Consent of participation: No written consent for participation will be obtained. It is assumed that the completion of the questionnaire represents consent of participation. Completion of the questionnaire can be interrupted at any times and there is no coercion whatsoever to participate in the research or to complete the questionnaire once started. Any refusal to participate or withdrawal from the research will not prejudice the participant's future care, employment, or academic progress in any way.

Feedback: Upon completion of the questionnaire, you are entitled to receive a summary of the research results. Please provide your email address at the end of the questionnaire if you would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study upon completion. Note that this is optional. Your name and your email address will not be linked to your survey response in anyway.

Complaint procedures: The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome. Ms Yung Yung is available as the local contact point for participants in Hong Kong who have questions about the research. If you have any complaints about the study, you may contact Ms Yung Yung of the Hong Kong Management Association (telephone (852) 2774 8533). Ms Yung Yung would forward the complaints to the Director of Research Ethics for investigation.

Appendix D - Survey Questionnaire

A SURVEY ON CHOOSING AN OFFSHORE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM IN HONG KONG

Part I: Background Information

- 01 Degree currently enrolled: *(Please fill in your answer below)*
 1 = Bachelor 2 = Master 3 = Doctoral
- 02 University and Program of Study:
- 03 Gender:
 1 = Male 2 = Female
- 04 Country of Citizenship:
 1 = Hong Kong Chinese 2 = Other (specify)
- 05 Are you a citizen of the country of this university?
 1 = Yes 2 = No
- 06 When you applied for this university, was it your:
 1 = Only Choice 2 = First Choice 3 = Second Choice or Lower Choice
- 07 Did you consider studying the current qualification outside Hong Kong?
 1 = Yes 2 = No
- 08 How long have you started the current program of study?
 1 = less than 12 months 2 = more than 12 months
- 09 Did/Do any of your family member(s) study in this university?
 1 = Yes 2 = No
- 10 Did you earn any of your previous qualification(s) from this university?
 1 = Yes 2 = No
- 11 Did you earn any of the previous qualifications (Diploma, Bachelor or Masters qualification) outside Hong Kong?
 1 = Yes 2 = No
- 12 How do you rank your academic performance in your previous qualification?
 1 = I was among the top 5 percent
 2 = I was among the top 10 percent
 3 = I was among the top 15 percent
 4 = Other
- 13 What was the highest level of education achieved by your parents?
 1 = Graduate degree 5 = College / vocational graduate
 2 = Some graduate school 6 = Some college/ vocational
 3 = University graduate 7 = High school graduate
 4 = Some university 8 = High school or less
 Father:
 Mother:
- 14 What is the level of your current annual income in Hong Kong dollars?
 1 = \$1,000,000 or more 4 = \$400,000 - \$599,999
 2 = \$800,000 - \$999,999 5 = \$200,000 - \$399,999
 3 = \$600,000 - \$799,999 6 = Less than \$200,000

- 15 Did you use any financial aid in studying the current program?
 1 = Yes, government aid 3 = Yes, other (specify) _____
 2 = Yes, corporate sponsorship 4 = No

**Part II: Decision Processes in Choosing the Offshore International Program
in which you are Current Enrolled**

INSTRUCTIONS: The following statements ask your opinions about your decision in
PURSUING FURTHER EDUCATION.

Please circle the number that best describes the importance of each item to your decision in pursuing further education.

II.1.1 SIGNIFICANT OTHERS RELATED FACTORS

The importance of encouragement in pursuing further education from:

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
 2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
 3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

101	Family/ Spouse	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
102	Teachers/ Faculty	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
103	Employers/ Colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
104	Alumni/ Other Students	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
105	Friends	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

II.1.2 MOTIVATION OF PURSUING FURTHER EDUCATION

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
 2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
 3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

106	It meets my long-term career objectives	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
107	It improves the chance of receiving higher income	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
108	It improves the chance of promotion opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
109	It meets my personal satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
110	A higher degree is a status symbol	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
111	A higher degree helps me to compete in the job market	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
112	A higher degree helps my career change	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

II.1.3 INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
 2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
 3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

113	Reputation of the institution/ university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
114	Course fees	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
115	Financial aid	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
116	Program availability	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

In deciding to **pursue further education, in which order**, selecting from the list below, did you determine where and what to study:

_____ University
 _____ Program
 _____ Local Partner
 _____ Program Host Country
 _____ Other (please specify): _____

INSTRUCTIONS: The following statements ask your opinions about your decision in choosing to **STUDY AN OFFSHORE PROGRAM IN HONG KONG**.

Please circle the number that best describes the importance of each item to your decision in choosing to study an offshore program in Hong Kong.

II.2.1 SIGNIFICANT OTHERS RELATED FACTORS

The importance of encouragement in choosing to study an offshore program from:

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

201	Family/Spouse	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
202	Teachers Faculty	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
203	Employers/Colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
204	Alumni Other Students	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
205	Friends	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

II.2.2 PUSH FACTORS FROM HONG KONG

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

206	The education ordinance of non-local program in Hong Kong ensures the quality of the qualification	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
207	High threshold for admission into local institutions due to limited enrolments	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
208	Limited choices of study areas in local institutions	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
209	Perceived inferior academic qualities of local institutions	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
210	Lack of flexibility in delivery of the local programs	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

II.2.3 PULL FACTORS ABOUT THE OFFSHORE PROGRAM

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

211	Recognition of my previous credentials	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
212	Opportunities for studying partly in the host country	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
213	Flexibility of program operation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
214	Lower cost than studying abroad	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
215	Financial aid	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
216	Ease of entrance	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
217	Relevance of program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
218	The opportunities to experience other culture	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
219	Better recognition of foreign qualifications	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
220	Foreign language skill are desirable	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
221	Social network	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
222	Cultural link between my home country and the host country of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
223	The transnational program degree provides greater mobility for my future career	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
224	Information on study the transnational program is easily obtained	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
225	Reputation of the local partner of the transnational program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

The three most important factors in my selection of the offshore program were (1 - the most important factor):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

**You may choose from the list above with the code.*

INSTRUCTIONS: The following statements ask your opinions about your decision in choosing to **STUDY IN A PARTICULAR INSTITUTION.**

Please circle the number that best describes the importance of each item to your decision in choosing to study in a particular institution.

II.3.1 PERSONAL INFLUENCES

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

301	Recommendation from my family/spouse	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
302	Recommendation from my teacher/faculty	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
303	Recommendation from my employers colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
304	Recommendation from alumni/other students	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
305	Recommendation from friends	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
306	My family members have studied or are studying at this institution	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
307	My friends have studied or are studying at this institution	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
308	I have studied at this institution before	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
309	The degree from this institution is well known	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
310	The degree from this institution improves my future career and job prospects	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

II.3.2 INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

1 = Not Important 4 = Important
2 = Slightly Important 5 = Very Important
3 = Somewhat Important N/A = Not Applicable

311	Reputation of the institution / university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
312	Reputation of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
313	Reputation of the faculty	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
314	Quality of the institution / university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
315	Quality of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
316	Quality of the faculty	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
317	Quality of the students	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
318	Ranking of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
319	Ranking of the institution / university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
320	Affordable course fees	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
321	Schedule of classes	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
322	Location of classes	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
323	Facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
324	Curriculum of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
325	Duration of the program	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
326	Positive relationship with local partner	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
327	Positive relationship with university personnel	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
328	Speed of the application process	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
329	Marketing information from the institution/ university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
330	Information obtained from the study guide book	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

The three most important factors in my selection of the institution were (*1 - the most important factor*):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

**You may choose from the list above with the code.*

***** THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE *****

If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview and/or receive a summary of the findings of the study, please provide your contact information in the boxes below. Note that this is optional.

☐ Attend a follow-up interview ☐ Receive a summary of the findings of the study

Name: _____ Email: _____ Phone: _____

Appendix E - Consent Letter for Semi-structured Interview



Macquarie Graduate School of Management
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109
Chief Investigator Phone: +61 (0)2 9850 9038
Chief Investigator Email: richard.petty@mgsim.edu.au

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name: Professor Richard Petty
Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title: Professor in Management
Executive Director International

Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: **Choosing an Offshore International Program in Hong Kong**

You are cordially invited to participate in a study of ***“Choosing an Offshore International Program in Hong Kong”***. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the decision-making process and factors when you choose an offshore international program. The outcome will assist the universities offering transnational programs and the local operators by enhancing their understanding of students' needs and decision-making processes when choosing an offshore international program in Hong Kong.

The study is being conducted by Doris Ng Chak Wah to meet the requirements of a doctorate degree in business administration of Macquarie Graduate School of Management in Australia. Doris is under the supervision of Professor Richard Petty, Professor in Management and Executive Director International of the Macquarie Graduate School of Management (MGSM), Macquarie University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be invited to attend a focus group/ individual interview to discuss your process and decision of studying an offshore international program. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio-taped. Upon completion of the interview, you are entitled to receive a summary of the research results. Please leave your contact email on this form if you would like to obtain a summary of the results.

All information or personal particulars gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. The only people who will have access to the data will be the supervisor and the researcher named above. Data will only be published in aggregation and in summary format. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request.

If you decide to participate, kindly sign the “Information and Consent Form”. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation without having to give a reason and without any consequences. Any refusal to participate or withdrawal from the research will not prejudice the participant's future care, employment, or academic progress in any way.

I, _____ have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: _____ (block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please provide your email address if you would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study upon completion. Note that this is optional.

Email: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome. Ms Yung Yung is available as the local contact point for participants in Hong Kong who have questions about the research. If you have any complaints about the study, you may contact Ms Yung Yung of the Hong Kong Management Association (telephone (852) 2774 8533). Ms Yung Yung would forward the complaints to the Director of Research Ethics for investigation.

If you have any questions about the specifics of the study, please contact Doris Ng by email: chak-wah.ng@students.mq.edu.au; phone: (852) 2774 8533. You are also welcome to contact the Chief Investigator, Professor Richard Petty by email: Richard.Petty@mgsu.edu.au; phone: (612) 9850 9038.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and participation.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix F - Questions for Semi-structured Interview

List of Questions for Semi-structured Interviews

1. Please let me know your background on your qualification, program of studies, overseas study experiences, citizenship, etc.
2. About the decision making process of studying an offshore international program :
 - When did you begin to consider pursuing your studies? Why did you want to pursue your studies?
 - How did you obtain information to study the offshore program?
 - What were the major influences in your decision?
 - Why did you choose non-local study in Hong Kong?
 - How did you identify your current study program (the process of identifying the institution, study program, country and local partner institution)?
3. About the process of “search – selection/application – choice” of studying a transnational program:
 - What were the criteria in selection and application?
 - To how many universities did you apply? How many offers did you receive?
 - What process did you go through in searching and making up your mind about school choice?
4. Please comment on “offshore international study”, specifically on:
the quality, flexibility of operation, cost, support, ease of entrance, recognition, etc.
Have you personally benefited from the transnational higher education?
5. Do you have any recommendations to the universities in terms of enhancing the learning experience, academic assistance and student identity to offshore international students in Hong Kong?
6. Do you have any recommendations to the local operators in terms of the marketing information and services provided for offshore international students in Hong Kong?