

COVID'19 Influence on International Students Intention and Motivation to Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper's primary purpose is to highlight the influence of COVID'19 outbreak on intentions and motivation of International students regarding studying in Malaysia. For this purpose, the researcher designed a questionnaire on google forms and circulated it on international student platforms and groups. The research took Student personal motivation, low cost of fees, Reputation of Institutes of Malaysia, and Image of Malaysia as independent variables, whereas Covid'19 as an influencing mediator between them and student intention to study in Malaysia. The researcher uses a survey method for data collection because, due to coronavirus, almost all the countries are facing air-bans and lockdowns, so sending electronic surveys was the best possible option for the researchers at that time for data collection. The questionnaire was designed in two portions, where the first portion carries questions regarding demographics of the respondents, and the later part was about variables testing. Afterwards, SPSS was selected to interpret the data from answers given by 200 respondents, out of which 49% are from Asia, 24% from Africa, 10% from America, 5.5% from Europe, and the remaining 11.5% from other country regions. There are many limitations in this study; for instance, fewer respondents, and less supporting literature. That is why this study will contribute to theory development and give proper direction to future researchers to explore the research area further.

Keywords: *International Students, Students Intention, COVID'19, Students Motivation, Malaysian Higher Education (MOHE)*

Introduction

Globalization impacted not only other sectors but also the education one, and because of that, the education sector now opened its borders to international students worldwide. World-renowned institutions are now opening their admissions for international students as a result of emerging globalization Trends. Most public and private sector universities are now very open towards accepting international students, and they are also developing effective strategies to do so. The Department of OECD defines international students as those students who move from one country to another to attain higher education. Developed countries are now showcasing their research capabilities and powerful education system by attracting more students from abroad, which is also becoming the cause of pride for them to host such diverse background students on their campuses (Naceur, 2009: Government, 2019).

According to researchers, in today's competitive global market, there is a fight for the survival of the fittest. The role of Universities is now extended from not only grooming the National Talent but also the talented workforce for the Global market. Higher education universities now work independently from their respective governments, and they have sufficient funds to do that because of international students funding (Shaista E. Khilji, 2015).

Researches of the view that no single country can develop a global talent that the new world requires are the main reason behind competition of all the developed countries because all of them want to have the best ability to themselves. Many of the researchers highlighted this completion of attracting the best talent as a "Battle for brains" or "Global hunt" (Kapur, 2005: McHale, 2015). Moreover, many countries now relax their procedure of visa for the sake of facilitating international students. For instance, European countries and the USA Now introduced many particular visa types for assisting international students and to make them stay in their country for better future Research and development. These visa types are HIB, blue card, point-based visa process, etc. (Varghese, 2015).

Malaysian Perspective

Higher Education department of Malaysia is trying to imitate European countries' footsteps, for the sake of promoting education and specifically International Education in their country. Furthermore, international students are the primary revenue stream for the country's economy that is strengthening it. The top three countries of Asia and the Pacific, namely, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, are now fighting head-on for the title of education hub in the Asia Pacific. All three countries are doing what they are at best for promoting and developing the higher education system in their respective countries. The new strategic planning of the Education Ministry of Malaysia to become the most favourable international student destination in 2020 was announced in their diplomatic planning conference (NHESP, 2020).

Moreover, the Education Ministry of Malaysia is trying to become the 'student hub' of the coming times in the area, specifically the east Asia Pacific. Malaysian governmental agencies are looking for the right opportunities and utilizing them at the same time for the aim of becoming the new favourite destination of achieving higher education by the students; this comes with a specific type of benefits like a generation of revenue for the country's economy and also the buildup of reputation among the international community.

Hard work is paying off Malaysia because many students from other countries are getting admission to different higher educational universities in Malaysia. From a survey done by the MOHE, there is an increase of 65% in international student enrollment, with most of the students taking admission to the privately-owned universities of Malaysia. Primary reasons that students from Asian countries and even from European countries are getting attracted towards Malaysian Universities because they are offering quality education within the reasonable cost, affordable living cost is also the plus point of Malaysia. Malaysian ministry is fruitful in achieving the target of recruiting more students from the countries of Africa and the Middle East, and they targeted those countries because, after the incident of 9/11, students from these areas are having trouble in getting admissions in Europe. Most of the international students studying in Malaysia are from Iran, Saudi Arab, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (MOHE, 2014).

The Malaysian government is focusing on the strategy of collaboration and partnership with the European and other major Educational Institutes to make sure that the education that they are

providing is up to date and according to the international standards (Chan, 2013: Hashim, 2019). Education Ministry of Malaysia is doing their best to provide world-class and standard education to international students with any names that they can have. The reason behind this entire affair is that they are trying their utmost best to achieve the 2020 goal (Hashim, 2019).

COVID'19

Corona Virus is a viral disease that transmits from one individual to another if they are in the proximity or if they breathe in the same air. This virus first starts from the Wuhan city of China, and afterwards, it spread all over the world. It costs many of the victims their lives, and until today there is no vaccine a medicine designed for the disease. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it can only be prevented through care, and there is no cure for the disease. Because of this disease, there are extensive lockdowns and air travel bans in all over the globe. The researchers claim that this is not the first time that something like this has appeared, SERS and MERS were the initial diseases similar to Corona. The entire world is facing this deadly disease and that the extensive Lockdowns are aiding the losses in almost all the sectors but the two industries that had a harder fall because of this outbreak is the tourism and international education industry (A.Waris, 2020)

Literature Review

The emerging trend of getting an education from other countries to develop personal capabilities and skills based on global market demand has become the driving force behind the globalization of education. Because of the increasing popularity of getting higher education abroad, several participants want to pursue studies. Still, they cannot because of lots of constraints such as high cost of mobility and education. But regardless of all the limitations, international Students are even applying for studies to self-finance their studies by doing part-time jobs. International students are facing a lot of problems, but they are still opting for the global exposure because they know that there is a demand for those who have education background from the renowned International institutes (Varghese, 2015)

Malaysia is currently doing its level best to become a leading education provider in Middle East Asia. As a result of continuous effort and strategic planning, Malaysia has many international students, Asian and African, and European countries. Mostly, students select Malaysia as the place to study because of affordable living costs, International standard degrees, and flexible rules for the visa of international students. Most importantly, Malaysia is providing education in the medium of English, which is the primary competitive advantage of their education sector compared to other Asian Educational Institutes (Hashim, 2019).

According to the Malaysian Education Ministry's set target, they have to achieve 250,000 international students by the end of 2025. Malaysian political leaders are taking a particular interest in policymaking and promotion of the education sector because their economy relies heavily on the industry of international education. That is the primary reason behind their strategic planning of promoting their higher Educational Institutes in the global market" (Hashim, 2019).

Coronavirus has negatively impacted all the sectors of life, and the education sector is also not exempted from that impact. Because of the coronavirus, all the institutes, whether private or government, national or International, are closed, which is impacting them very negatively. UNESCO survey report shows that almost 57 Crore plus students who belong to 191 different countries are not being able to assess their institutes and quality education because of this virus

outbreak. Many researchers are now actively working on finding the actual influence of Corona Virus on the Higher sector of education plus possible solutions for resuming the studies of students. Students face depression and anxiety issues because of the vagueness of the situation (Husain, 2020). Educational Institutes and Universities are forced to go online because of the coronavirus's current condition, plus they have to deal with all the problems they are facing because of a sudden switch to online mode (QS, 2020).

H1: There is a significant relationship between students' motivation and students' intention to study in Malaysia.

According to the researchers, the word motivation refers to persons' internal stimuli that convince them to perform a specific task. The higher the confidence, the higher the person (McChelland, 1987). Several studies explain and support the relation specific between students' motivation and his or her intention to study abroad (Power, 1999). The process of making a plan or intend to explain study abroad decisions is all very much dependent on motivation. Moreover, it is suggested by the researchers that student motivation and intention to study overseas are positively related to one another (Manyu Li, 2013).

H2: There is a significant relationship between the image of Malaysia and students' intention to study in Malaysia.

Some researchers state that many factors influence students' decisions while choosing a country for their abroad destination, such as the image and reputation of the country that they are going to (Mazzarol, 2008). International students are more interested in the country's employment opportunities, economic stability, state of peace, and the number of quality education institutes recognized by international global market leaders. So, it is deduced that the image of the state is essential for making the intent of international students to get admission in a particular country (Muhammad Zeeshan, 2013).

H3: There is a significant relationship between the reputation of institutes and students' intention to study in Malaysia.

There are some publications by researchers that emphasize that students interest in getting admission in Malaysia and the reputation of Malaysian higher education institutes are significantly related to one another (Human, 2010). International students focus on the preparation of Malaysian higher education institutes because the organization's reputation is right; then, the level of education will also be useful. Thus, according to the view of international students, if the institute's status is of a worldwide scale, then the courses and instruction-level will also be the same. Many international students are coming to Malaysia for education because they believe in the reputation and standards as the English language is the medium of instruction there.

H4: There is a significant relationship between low cost of program and students' intention to study in Malaysia.

Many researchers reported that less cost of daily expenses and tuition is a significant competitive advantage for Malaysia because most of the students intended to study in Malaysia because of that fact. Students face many problems and issues while providing for their studies costs by doing part-time in foreign countries. Thus, most of the international students opt for Malaysia because it is quite inexpensive as compared to other European and Asian countries of instruction is also English; that

is, there is no compromise on the standard of education while staying on budget (Melissa W Migin, 2015).

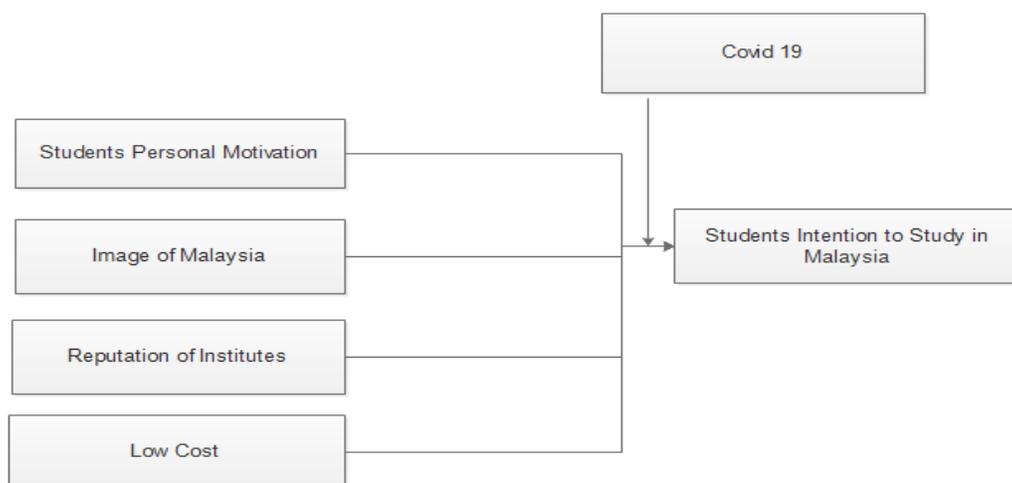
The fact that COVID'19 is influencing badly on the mindset of prospective international students is very clear from research. Moreover, institutes and students are doing their utmost to cope with the current online learning scenario instead of the physical one. But, it goes without saying that students intentions to study abroad are facing burnt because of COVID'19 outbreak (Educations.com, 2020)

According to recent surveys by different study portals, namely study portal shows that more than 36% of students are either cancelling or shifting their study abroad to the next year. Some students are not planning to travel again in their lives for study purposes, and some are just focusing on other modes of studying for the time being. Still, COVID '19 has impacted a lot on students' intention to study abroad. Even at this time, students who are still considering studying abroad are only focusing on those countries who have less Corona cases like Germany, Malaysia, Netherlands, etc. (Gutterer, 2020).

Some researchers are of the view that students are facing many psychological pressures because of all the un-surety and vagueness due to the situation of COVID'19 and switching of universities to an online platform. Many of the students are still confused about their study abroad plans. Therefore it can be said that the coronavirus is influencing greatly on the decision and mindset of prospective future students. Thus, this whole process stuck the students intended to study abroad in the dilemma of going not going (Hiep-Hung Pham, 2020).

Students are more worried about their safety and financial conditions; that is, they might not be able to afford expensive tuition and living costs. That means students' intentions are now heavily influenced by factors like country safety image, low-cost living and tuition fee, quality education providers, and personal motivation. Furthermore, now students are also concerned about institutes' hygiene measures and facilities, etc., for safety reasons (Gutterer, 2020).

Figure 1: Research Framework



Methodology

A quantitative method for research data analysis has been implemented in this study. In a quantitative study, researchers will analyze and interpret numerical data collected from respondents of survey questionnaires using SPSS, AMOS, PLS, etc. The benefit of utilizing this method is that it will almost represent the total target market even if few submit the response. Moreover, because of the COVID'19 situation, researchers are not being able to meet the respondents while filling the questionnaire personally, thus, making it very fair and unbiased.

In quantitative research, it is very convenient and easy to represent the relationship between variables. In this study, researchers identified the relationship between dependant and independent variables with the help of that. They tested the impact of country image, students' motivation, low cost, and reputation of institutes on the dependant variable: Students' choice to get admission in Malaysia and afterwards measure the effects of COVID'19 on their relationships.

The main reason for opting quantitative approach is because it was convenient for collecting data from international students while country borders were closed due to COVID'19. That is why questionnaires were distributed online via Google form to different social groups of students thinking of getting admission in a foreign country or Malaysia. It was one of the best options for the researchers because of its inexpensive nature and approach to an international student's target market. After collecting data, researchers analyzed it with the help of SPSS.

For sampling, researchers choose primary data collection through a self-designed survey. The survey was compiled in the form of Google form and sent via emails and links to different student platforms. The study population was all the students who intend to study abroad or particularly in Malaysia. However, it was not possible to collect data from all, so we received from 200 respondents who can be a deciding figure for the rest of the population. The questionnaire consists of two parts, one for collecting demographics of our respondents and others for collecting responses on our selected variables and their relationships (Sheikha M.Saidi, 2014).

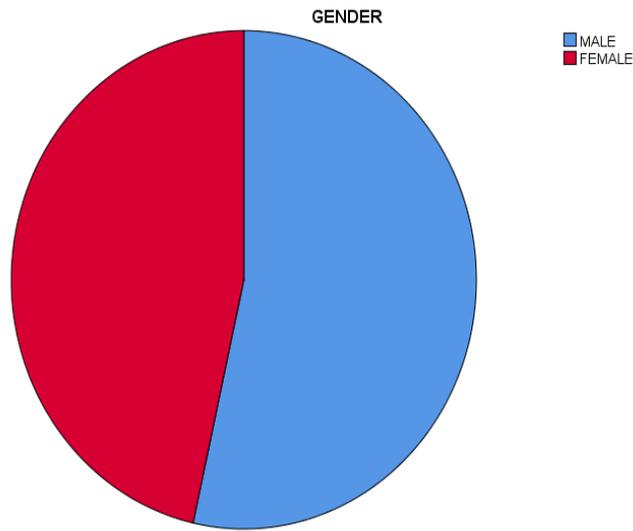
Results Analysis

According to the survey responses, most of the respondents are males compared to females, with a ratio of 53.5 % and 46.5 %, respectively. Following are the tabular and graphical presentation of the demographical question about the gender of the respondents:

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	107	53.5	53.5	53.5
	Female	93	46.5	46.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2: Respondents' Profile

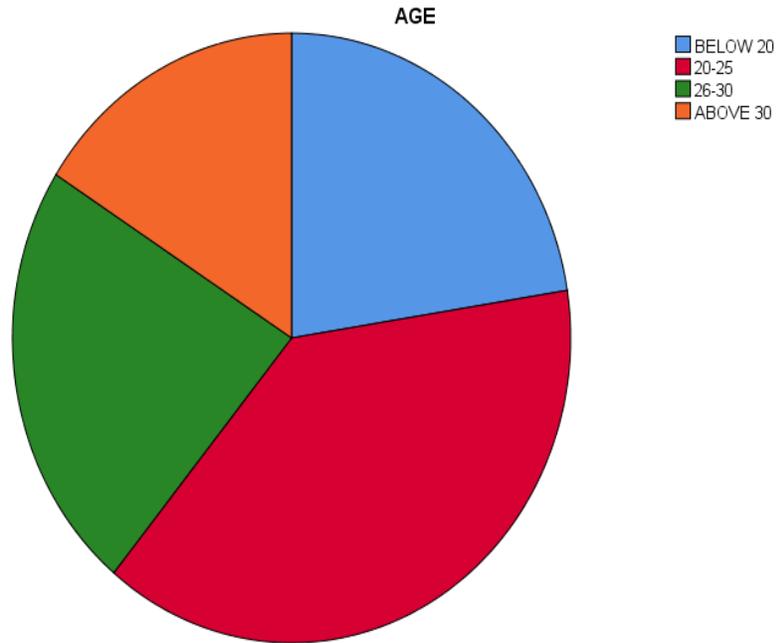


From the second question of the demographic section regarding age group of the respondents' researchers found out that 22.5% of responses are from the students below 20 years, 38.5% belongs to the age group of 20-25 years, 23% from the age group of 26-30 years and remaining 16% are above the age of 30 years. Following are the tabular and graphical representation of respondents' age group:

Table 2: Respondents' Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 20	45	22.5	22.5	22.5
	20-25	77	38.5	38.5	61.0
	26-30	46	23.0	23.0	84.0
	Above 30	32	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: Respondents' Age

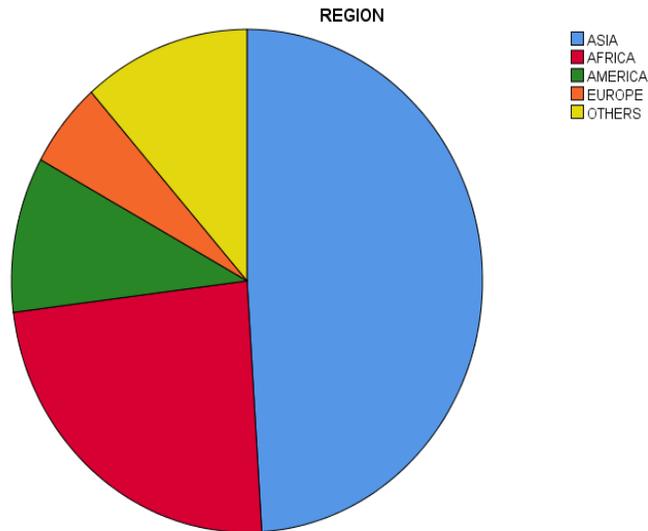


According to the survey questionnaires, 49% of the respondents are from Asian countries, 24% from African countries, 10% from the American side, 5.5 from European countries, and 11.5% of the remaining respondents are from other categories. Below is the data presented in table and graph form regarding the location of respondents:

Table 3: Respondents' Region

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asia	98	49.0	49.0	49.0
	Africa	48	24.0	24.0	73.0
	America	20	10.0	10.0	83.0
	Europe	11	5.5	5.5	88.5
	Others	23	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4: Respondents' Region

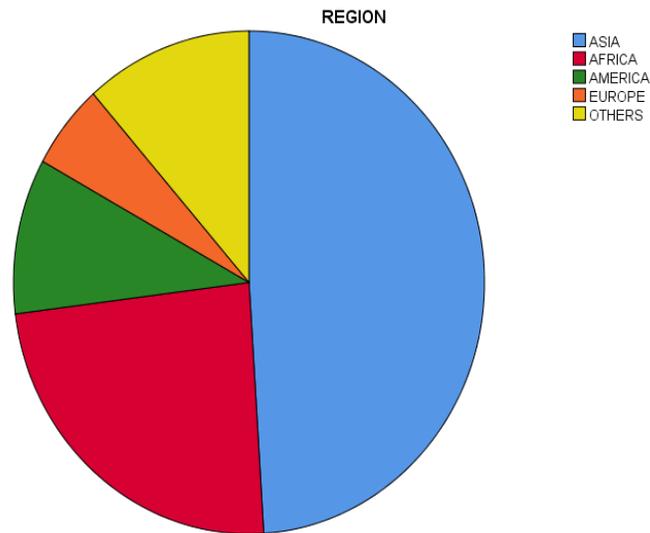


16% of the responses are from the background of Diploma or Certification, 48% from Undergraduates, 22.5% from Graduates, and the remaining 13.5% from the Postgraduates side. Undergraduates are the most among the respondents who are planning to take undergraduate courses in Malaysia, or they are planning to go for Masters. Following are the graphical presentation:

Table 4: Respondents' Level of Studies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Diploma Or Certificate	32	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Undergraduate	96	48.0	48.0	64.0
	Graduate	45	22.5	22.5	86.5
	Postgraduate	27	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5: Respondents' Level of Studies



Reliability Test

Test of Reliability using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS analysis means that researchers verify that their scale doesn't have any mistake or error. With the help of this test, researchers identify relatedness of all the variables items, and this test is known as an internal consistency test. The value of Alpha is always between zero and one. That is higher the value, higher the reliability. The reliability range should be from 0.5 to 0.89 for the result to be reliable. In the table, all of the Values are above 0.5 and below 0.89, making all the items secure for further analysis.

Table 5: Reliability Test

Variable	Number of items	Alpha
Students Personal Motivation	4	0.884
Image of Malaysia	4	0.65
Reputation of Institutes	4	0.853
Low Cost	4	0.759
COVID'19	4	0.776
Students Intention to Study in Malaysia	4	0.790

According to the analysis of the survey questionnaire, the research did the study for finding the M and SD values of items. It's interpreted that all the constructs have a significant impact on the students' decision to come to Malaysia because of higher mean and SD values.

Table 6: Constructs

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation
Students Personal Motivation	10.17	2.95
Image of Malaysia	10.47	2.93
Reputation of Institutes	9.62	4.21
Low Cost	12.14	4.52
COVID'19	9.94	4.17
Students Intention to Study in Malaysia	9.23	3.83

Pearson Correlations

Signs of negative and positive will indicate whether the correlation between variables is present or not. Pearson's correlation test is used to find out the relation between variables. The following tabular representation of associations shows that all the variables are correlated with each other, but there is a negative sign between low cost and students' motivation, Students intention to study abroad, COVID'19. That is why researchers are not sure about their correlation.

Table 7: Correlations

		SPM	IOM	ROI	LC	SISM	COVID19
SPM	Pearson Correlation	1	.151*	.215**	.054	.701**	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033	.002	.449	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
IOM	Pearson Correlation	.151*	1	.453**	.468**	.107	.465**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033		.000	.000	.133	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
ROI	Pearson Correlation	.215**	.453**	1	.058	.381**	.610**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000		.411	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
LC	Pearson Correlation	.054	.468**	.058	1	.120	.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.449	.000	.411		.091	.817
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200

SISM	Pearson Correlation	.701**	.107	.381**	.120	1	.578**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.133	.000	.091		.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
COVID19	Pearson Correlation	.715**	.465**	.610**	.016	.578**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.817	.000	
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.750 ^a	.563	.552	2.78942
a. Predictors: (Constant), COVID19, LC, ROI, IOM, SPM				

From the result, R sq value that is 0.563, represents that all the IVs (low cost, image of Malaysia, reputation of institutes, and students' motivation) justifies only 56.3% of the variance in Students decision to come to Malaysia in future. The selected number of respondents is insufficient to show the real variation of the total number of international students' intention to study in Malaysia. So, there must be room for improvement in the future as adjusted R square shows 0.552, which is 55.2% of the variance of independents towards Students' decision to come to Malaysia in the future. According to ANOVAs table interpretations, the process of regression proves to be a positive one that is due to the value of F being 50.037 and a value of $p < 0.05$.

Table 9: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1946.670	5	389.334	50.037	.000 ^b
	Residual	1509.485	194	7.781		
	Total	3456.155	199			
a. Dependent Variable: SISM						

b. Predictors: (Constant), COVID19, LC, ROI, IOM, SPM

Table 10: Coefficients α (Students' Intention to Study in Malaysia)

Model		Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.144	1.608		1.955	.048
	Student Personal Motivation	.516	.147	.416	3.501	.001
	Image of Malaysia	.316	.118	.428	2.678	.011
	Reputation of Institutes	.538	.082	0.960	6.585	.000
	Low Cost	.025	.076	.041	.330	.743
	COVID19	.099	.107	.160	.928	0.49

(a): Dependent Variable: Students Intention to Study in Malaysia

In this table, results are representing regression analyses of students' responses via survey. According to this, apart from Low Cost, every other variable has a relationship with the students' intention to study abroad amidst the threat of Corona Virus. From the table we get values of Students personal motivation (B=0.416, $p < 0.05$), Image of Malaysia (B=0.428, $p < 0.05$), and Reputation of Institutes (B=0.96, $p < 0.05$). If the value of p is less than 0.05 then the hypothesis is accepted for future research; otherwise, it is not accepted. According to the analysis following hypothesis are confirmed:

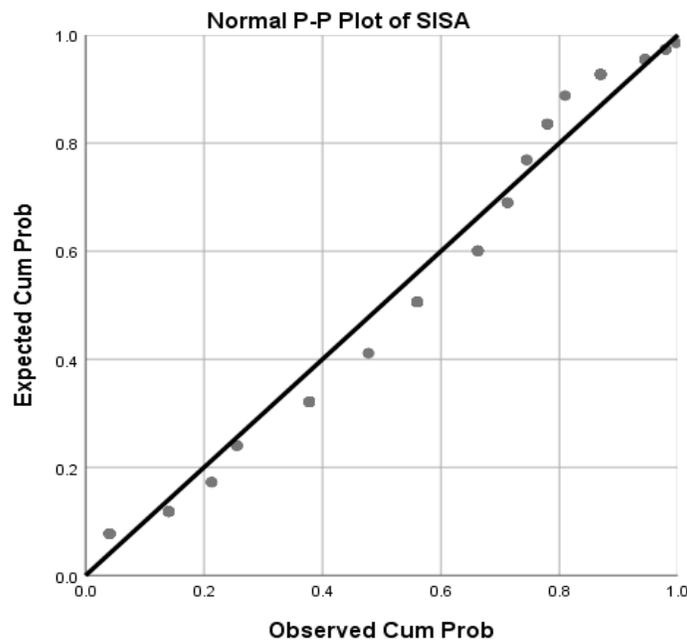
Table 11: Hypothesis Testing

H1:	There is a significant relationship between Students Personal Motivation and Students Intention to Study in Malaysia.	Confirm
H2:	There is a significant relationship between Image of Malaysia and Students Intention to Study in Malaysia.	Confirm
H3:	There is a significant relationship between the Reputation of Institutes and Students Intention to Study in Malaysia.	Confirm

H4:	There is a significant relationship between Low Cost of program and Students Intention to Study in Malaysia.	Confirm
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P-P plot graph means the Probability plot is a technique to verify whether researchers' assumptions hold weight or not. According to this study, the premises of researchers are verified that they do wait and are right because of the dots near the straight line from the left corner to the right angle in an upward direction. Dots being close to line mean nothing is wrong with the study direction and assumptions of researchers.

Figure 6: P-P Plot Test



Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

The major constraint or limitation of this study paper is that there is less literature to support the assumptions. There are only one or two published studies on the influence of coronavirus on students' decision to study abroad but none on the implications of COVID'19 on students' decision to come to Malaysia in the future. That is why all data collected was related and modified accordingly by the researchers. Apart from that, one more limitation was fewer respondents because researchers can only approach respondents through online means due to extensive air bans and lockdowns.

This study will contribute towards the theory of the same area and give direction to future researchers to explore the same area in more depth or other perspectives. Researchers from other countries or regions can also conduct something similar to their territory to understand their city better. Policymakers and governmental agencies can also consider the intentions of future international students for better attraction programs etc.

Conclusion

In this study, researchers focused on identifying the relationship between students motivation, image of Malaysia, reputation of institutes and low-cost studies with international students' decision to come to Malaysia in future. Also, the one significant impact on the relationships of those independent variables and foreign students' decision to go to Malaysia in future is COVID'19. Due to lockdowns, air bans, and closure of educational institutes, international students face a high amount of anxiety, depression, and vagueness regarding their travel plans for higher studies abroad.

Researchers designed a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents because they cannot travel and collect in person due to current pandemic restrictions regarding travelling. Developing a self-arranged survey and sending it to students via online channels was the most reliable method to collect data in present circumstances. After collecting data from 200 respondents, ' researcher analyzed the results and tested the assumptions with the help of SPSS. All the hypotheses were confirmed except two that belong to a low-cost variable, but that can be because of less sample size because due to many constraints, researchers were not able to collect data from more. Due to less literature support and published material on said topic, researchers contributed something new to the literature and gave direction for future research work.

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