Chapter Five

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter provides a summary of the purpose and the methodology of the research, the main findings and some relevant recommendations and suggestions.

5.0 Research Objectives and Findings

The purpose of the survey was to determine the factors which influenced students in their choice of a private higher education institution in Petaling Jaya. A research instrument making use of a Likert scale of 5 ranging from very strong influence to no influence was used to measure the level of influence of the factors.

A survey questionnaire was used to gather all the necessary information. The questionnaire basically aims to find out the demographic background of the students in Part One and the factors which influenced them in their choice of the college in Part Two. Part Two has six sub-sections, namely, course information, reputation of the college, location, facilities, sports activities and financial considerations.
The questionnaire in this survey was administered to a sample population of 71 students who were studying the Foundation Programme in the college. All 71 respondents answered the questionnaire. However, one or two respondents did not answer all the questions.

The section which follows summarises the findings of the study to the following questions: What type of information do parents and students look for during the search process? Does the reputation of the institution of higher learning affect the student’s final decision? Do physical attributes such as location and facilities play an important role in their final choice? Is the employability of the final award an important consideration to students and their parents? Do students select colleges based on financial reasons? Does the existence of financial aid or arrangements such as instalment schemes make a difference in the parents’ and students’ decisions?

Under the area of course information, the findings seem to concur with published literature in that students generally are affected by the type of information they receive when considering a college for further studies. Therefore, it is important to ensure that such information is available to them even before they graduate from secondary school. There is research evidence to show that intervention are most critical during the early stages of the search process (Hossler et al., 1991).
The findings under reputation of the college is again supportive of existing literature which indicate that students are affected by the general reputation of the college. General reputation and prestige are bound to continue to be important and reasonable considerations for students when choosing a college because of the benefits that will be conferred on a graduate by others such as social status and employment opportunities Litten (1991).

The findings relating to the influence of parent / guardian recommendation and desire on the student decision making is consistent with those of other studies as well. Kallio (1995) reported that research on undergraduates has established that parents have substantial influence early in the process through the setting of decision boundaries – particularly those related to finances, geographic location and school quality – but that students make the final college choice decision. This is consistent with adult development theory, which states that one of the primary development tasks of “late adolescence and youth” (age range 16 – 23) is becoming independent of one’s parents.

The existing literature supports the findings of this study that location of the college is an important factor in decision making. This study has also focused on the availability of public amenities and facilities around the college. The findings point towards a moderate influence of these aspects on college choice.
The responses received on the availability and accessibility of computing and library facilities indicated that there are important factors in college choice. Almost 100% of the respondents indicated that these facilities influenced their decisions. These findings are also consistent with the existing literature which indicate that students are generally influenced by study facilities.

Course fees and financial aid availability have also been found to have substantially influenced the respondents' college choice. More than 90% have indicated that these were factors of consideration for them.

To summarise, prospective students are affected by various institutional characteristics in the process of their decision making. The college choice process is really a multi-stage complex process involving an interaction of institutional characteristics and personal variables. According to Paulsen (1990), available evidence indicates that the most important institutional characteristics in the search process vary according to a number of student characteristics such as sex, race, parental educational level, income, parental preferences, religion and even ethnic background.

The findings described in this project are largely consistent with those of other studies on college choice process. Furthermore, they also provide evidence that no one institution of higher learning can attract all the students at the same time. Different students will be attracted by different institutional characteristics. The literature has identified a concept of what is called natural stratification of students and institutions / universities according
to the student-environment fit. These findings may help administrators and policymakers of higher education institutions to decide which category or group of students they want to attract to their college. They should then amend or implement their strategies for marketing and recruitment accordingly.

5.1 Recommendations

The above findings and conclusions formed the basis upon which several recommendations are made. The recommendations will generally pertain to policies and practices that higher education institutions and departments might consider instituting in order to improve the effectiveness of their efforts to recruit students into their undergraduate or graduate programmes.

It is recommended that the findings be made available to the administrators and policymakers of the college surveyed so that they can assess the current situation and decide on how to improve the recruitment strategy.

The findings of this study reveal that general recruitment strategy should first and foremost take into account student concerns about the quality of the institution in terms of its reputation. As such, information should be disseminated to the public through various means like college brochures and pamphlets, advertisement in the appropriate local dailies and public talks and forums. These informational materials and other communications with students (face-to-face counselling or via the media) should also
address the aspects of the academic environment that students are concerned with. Perhaps the most effective way of doing this is to hear it from the horses’ mouth. Therefore, the college should facilitate interaction between potential students and those who are currently enrolled in the college. Existing students can be engaged to help out in Open Day in the college, whereby the public is invited to visit and tour the college before enrolment date.

The college can also create awareness of the academic performance of their students by putting up examination pass rates and congratulatory messages / notices to successful students in the college premises to create a positive competitive spirit amongst the students. The college can also organise awards presentation ceremonies to recognise the outstanding performance of the students and their lecturers. During these ceremonies, the press should be invited so that further mileage can be obtained from these activities.

As the findings also reveal that the respondents are influenced by study facilities, the college must ensure that the library and computer facilities are upgraded and maintained. The college must ensure that there is adequate sitting capacity with conducive environment for study in the library.

Another finding of the study shows that students are influenced by adequacy of computer facilities. As such, it is important that such facilities are available in the college. Furthermore, since the advent of information technology is moving rapidly, the college is
recommended to ensure that the computer facilities are updated and equipped with the latest software packages in the market.

To be seen as providing a balanced concept of education, it is recommended that the college organise sports activities and competition amongst students within the college to generate a sense of belonging and comradeship amongst the students. Inter-college games, on friendly and competitive basis may also be organised. This is important because the findings show that availability of adequate sports facilities has influenced students' college choice.

It is also recommended that the college enhance its location by making arrangements with developers and landlords to make reasonably priced accommodation nearby available to students. The college can also make arrangements with nearby restaurants or food chains, clinics and even banks to give priority services to their students.

Another recommendation is for the college to make arrangements to tie up with corporations and businesses to employ their graduates. Maybe as an initial step forward, the college should organise internship programmes for their final year students so that they can get exposure to actual working experience during their studies. This will definitely give the college graduates a cutting edge in the job market.

The importance of financial aid considerations suggest that greater investments in any or all aspects of offering assistance might improve a college’s ability to recruit students.
Effective strategies should be formulated and implemented so that the right kind of students will be attracted to apply for the scholarships or financial aids available. Payment of fees by instalment could probably be instituted to lighten the burden of parents. Further, the college can make arrangements with one or two banks to offer study loans at attractive terms to aspiring students.

Another recommendation relates to the latest changes in the education scenario whereby degree education can be more accessible to the average Malaysian, many are going for post graduate studies. Higher education institutions should strategise and go for this relatively new market to establish an early niche in the market. Furthermore, the Malaysian government is increasing emphasising on encouraging lifelong education and re-education through the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC). It is recommended that educational institutions formulate strategies based on factors that are likely to attract these adult students.

Lastly, in line with the Malaysian government’s plan to export education, educational institutions should strengthen their position in the overseas markets by providing information about their courses and making them available on the Internet since this is becoming a popular source of information for students. Participating in overseas educational fairs organised by the government is also another recommendation whereby educational institutions can increase their market share.

Hence knowledge of the factors which are likely to attract these students is important for formulating effective strategies. It is recommended that the higher education institutions
recognise the need to develop different strategies for different markets. As highlighted earlier, it is important to understand the need to identify the important attributes that potential students consider when choosing a tertiary institution. If educational institutions are to develop strategies that will attract a sustainable share of the market, they need to know their customers, understand their needs and develop strategies to satisfy those needs.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The recent increase in competition for students has undoubtedly created the need to have more focused recruitment efforts. It is hoped that a clearer understanding of those factors influencing students' college choice will facilitate the recruitment process.

The research findings thus far appear to suffer from a lack of empirically derived body of information. As such, there should be further research in this aspect as well as using a systematic means of measuring these factors. The College Choice Influence Scale (CCIS) seems to be a useful tool for additional research in this area.

Another area for further research arise from the need to have a bigger sample population so that the findings can be generalised. Further, a longitudinal study may also be carried out so as to find out if there are changes regarding the degree of influence of the various factors over time.