

# Factors motivating adult learners in their selection choice for further education a study from a postgraduate fair in Penang

URL	<a href="http://weko.wou.edu.my/?action=repository_uri&amp;item_id=416">http://weko.wou.edu.my/?action=repository_uri&amp;item_id=416</a>
-----	---



# **Factors motivating adult learners in their selection choice for further education: a study from a postgraduate fair in Penang.**

LILIAN YAP

Wawasan Open University, Penang, Malaysia

## **Abstract**

*Malaysia has launched “Malaysia’s National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) in 2007, which is expected to be achieved by the year 2020. The rationales of the NHESP are to make Malaysia a “Hub of Higher Education Excellence” in the region and internationally, to development human capital with “first-class mentality” and to reposition the country’s higher education to meet current and future challenges. And according to the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-10), it is expected that 1.6 million students or 40% of the relevant age cohort are enrolled in tertiary education in 2010 and 50% of these at private institutions. There are currently 534 higher education institutions in Malaysia, of which, 20 are public, 42 are private, 5 are foreign university branch campus, 27 polytechnics, 42 public community colleges and 398 private colleges. (MOHE, 2010)*

*In Penang, there is limited data available to understand the needs of the adult population or the efficacy of higher education in meeting these needs. This study will attempt to study the factors motivating the adult learner on their selection choice of a higher education institution. The study will investigate the extent adult learners will engage in the information search influence by motivational factors, prior to the selection of their choice of institution. The research was conducted at the Penang Career and Postgraduate Expo 2011 on 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2011.*

*The survey results provide valuable information on the adult learners’ decision making process that precedes the entry into a higher education institution. Information on individuals motivating factors in their selection of higher education institution can serve a basis for more informed planning of the marketing policy, for higher rates of return.*

## **Introduction**

Lately there has been enormous change in government policy, governance, structure, and the status of higher education institution. Forces of environmental change such as globalisation, privatisation, decentralisation, internationalisation, and diversification have increased the competition in the higher education industry across all countries. These changes had affected the way higher education institution conduct their business (Maringe, 2006).

The higher education in developing countries have become very competitive and higher institutions have to increasingly compete for students in the recruitment markets (James, Baldwin, & McInnis, 1999). In the case of Malaysia, Malaysia has launched “Malaysia’s National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) in 2007, which is expected to be achieved by the year 2020. The rationales of the NHESP are to make Malaysia a “Hub of Higher Education Excellence” in the region and internationally, to development human capital with “first-class mentality” and to reposition the country’s higher education to meet current

and future challenges. And according to the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-10), it is expected that 1.6 million students or 40% of the relevant age cohort are enrolled in tertiary education in 2010 and 50% of these at private institutions. There are currently 534 higher education institutions in Malaysia, of which, 20 are public, 42 are private, 5 are foreign university branch campus, 27 polytechnics, 42 public community colleges and 398 private colleges (MOHE, 2010).

In Penang, there is limited data available to understand the needs of the adult population or the efficacy of higher education in meeting these needs. This paper will attempt to study the factors motivating the adult learner on their selection choice of a higher education institution. This paper will investigate the extent adult learners will engage in the information search influence by motivational factors, prior to the selection of their choice of institution. The research was conducted at the Penang Career and Postgraduate Expo 2011 on 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2011.

The research objective of this research is to study the prioritisation choice on adult learners' selection of higher education institution in terms of popular motivational factors such as time flexibility, financial aid, service support, academic support, administrative support, facilities offerings, e-learning and motivational influences.

### **Review of literature**

There are many motivators that influence a person's choice of higher education institution. Previous researches had been conducted to study these motivators.

#### **Price motivator**

Price motivator refers to the setting of prices for educational services. Price information includes tuition fees, cost of living, scholarships is of equal importance to the program attributes in the student's choice, given the recent consumerism surged in the choice of higher education institution (Maringe, 2006).

#### **Financial aid**

The offering of financial aid by a high education institution is also another motivational choice in students' selection. Olsen & Rosenfeld (1984) observed that obstruction to students' financial aid access may limit the students' choice in their selection of higher education college opportunity.

#### **Service**

Service in the educational sector refers to educational services as the main product and support services as secondary associated services, for example secretaries, administrative offices, personnel and others to be responsive to students' needs and expectation from the institution. Quality in higher education institutions' services is regarded as a high priority as it triggers the level of student satisfaction.

#### **Academic**

Higher education institution brand, image and reputation are also considered as factors that attract the students. They formed the bases of delivering quality service towards the students and other stakeholders of the institution. With reference to higher education, the product (service) itself, in terms of teaching, research and academic support are important factors to deliver student satisfaction. According to (Chapleo, 2004) reputation is something that is built over time, whereas brand is constructed. Reputation is seen as a collective presentation of past images of the institution established over time while image is the immediate set of meanings associated with an institution (Kantanen, 2007). (Temple & Shattock, 2007) says the universities' reputation is their very being and it is what the institution sells everyday. So the concept of reputation is more relevant in the context of higher education.

## **Facilities**

Elements such as facilities in the university campus are also considered as critical factors in students' choice of selection. High standards, curriculum, facilities and safety are the top four factors cited by parents' choice when selecting a different school for their children (Armor & Peiser, 1998).

## **Online education**

E-learning can be defined as the use of computer network technology, primarily over an intranet or through the Internet, to deliver information and instruction to individuals. According to (Galagan, 2000) the increased use of Internet technologies to deliver training has been heralded as the 'e-Learning Revolution'. Published estimates indicate that organizations have increased and will continue to increase the use of technology to deliver training (Rossett, 2002).

## **Family**

Reay, in their studies on young people's educational choices found a matrix of influences best represented by the circle of the individual's family, friends and peers (Reay, David, & Ball, 2001). Studies have been conducted on the role played by family and friends contributing to the young person's higher education choice (MIRIAM, STEPHEN, Davies, & DIANE, 2003; Reay, 1998; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001; Roker, 1993). However, the essence on how it influence has not been fully explored. A number of surveys conducted on the factors that influence young people's higher education choices suggested that a large number of students discuss their decision with friends (Connor, Burton, & Regan, 1999; Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999; Roberts, Allen, & Heist, 1997).

In summary, the popular type of motivators influencing the adult learners' selection choice, namely price, financial aid, service, academic, facilities, online education and family influence had been reviewed above.

## **Methodology**

### *Design of questionnaire*

The first portion of the questionnaire covers the demographic profile of the respondents. The demographic information includes the gender, the age group, the race, the intended program of study of the respondent and the respondent's resident state.

The survey questions were built on a 5 point Likert scale, with most favourable on one end of the scale and the least favourable on the other end. The Likert scales were built on the motivation factors discussed earlier but expanded to cover the Malaysia context. For example, we discussed financial aid as one of the motivational factor in selection of higher education choice. In the Malaysian context, financial aid towards funding of the higher education was expanded to include PTPTN scheme, EPF withdrawal scheme, HRDF claimable scheme, scholarships and self-funding. Each of the motivational factors was expanded into the Malaysian context.

The survey questions were designed based on the rank order scales. The rank order scale gave the respondents a set of items and required the respondent to rank the items according to the respondents' priority for each of the motivational variable. The rank order scale measures in terms of the respondents' preference / priority in each of the motivational variable in their selection of a higher education institution.

### Sampling

The target population for this research are the adult learners. As there was a Penang Career and Postgraduate Expo 2011 in PISA on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011, the target population was the working adults as defined by the participants of the Expo. The objective of the Expo is to assist the Government in providing more career opportunities in Malaysia; to provide those unemployed in the market a wider choice of career opportunities; to provide a platform for employers to carry out recruitment and showcase their companies; to cultivate continuous learning amongst the graduates and work force; and to showcase franchise companies and their products.

The simple random sampling method was adopted. Each individual visitor to the Expo had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the survey. There were 35 surveys completed and 7 of the survey could not be used as the respondents did not complete the rank order questions as per the questionnaire. These seven surveys had to be discarded. The balance 28 respondents' survey were then coded and input onto SPSS for a simple frequency analysis to determine the adult learners' preference choice in terms of the variable mentioned above.

### Findings

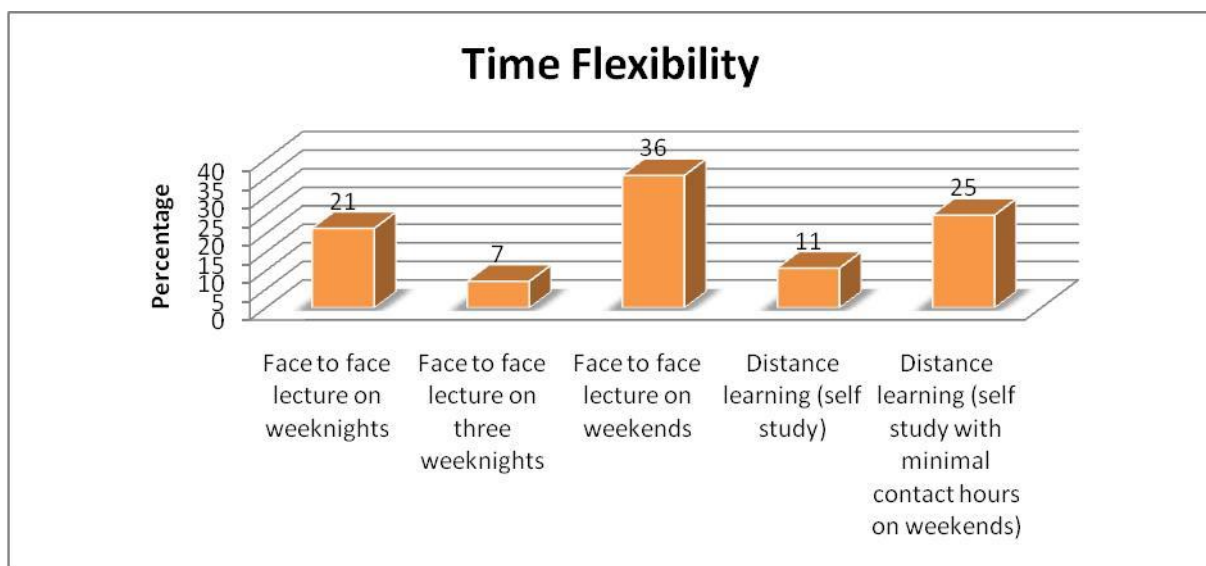
The following table is the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the survey.

Demographics		Percentage	100
Gender	Male	35.7	100.0
	Female	64.3	
Age	Below 24 years	3.6	100.0
	25 - 34 years	39.3	
	35 - 44 years	28.6	
	45 - 55 years	17.9	
	Above 56 years	10.7	
Race	Chinese	57.1	100.0
	Indian	25.0	
	Malay	10.7	
	Others	7.1	
Program	Undergraduate	14.3	100.0
	Postgraduate	85.7	
Resident state	Penang	64.3	100.0
	Perak	7.1	
	Selangor	21.4	
	Kelantan	3.6	
	Sabah	3.6	

*Table 1: Profile of respondents*

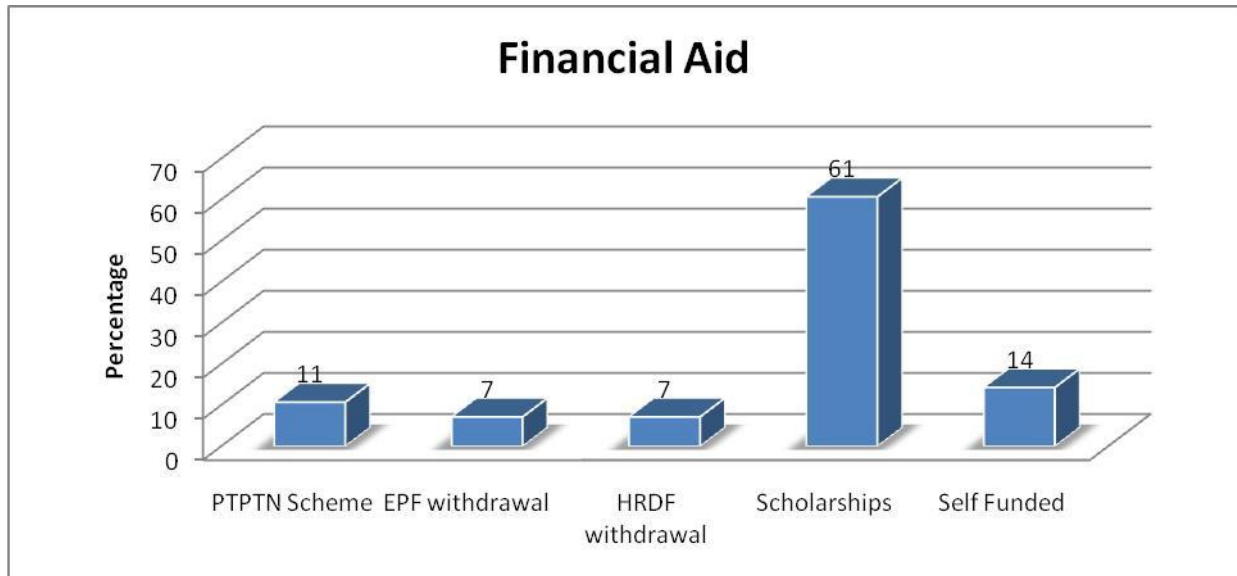
It was observed that majority of the participants were female, which accounts for 64.3%. Majority of the respondents fall into the 25-34 years old and 35-44 years old bracket, they accounted for 67.9% of the total respondents. As for the ethnicity of the respondents, the majority of them were Chinese – 57.1%, followed by Indian – 25% and Malay at 10.7%. As it was a Postgraduate Expo, the visitors were mainly interested in the postgraduate program. The respondents who were interested in the postgraduate program accounted for 85.7%. The Postgraduate Expo was held in PISA, Penang. 64.3% of the respondents were from Penang itself with 21.4% from Selangor and 7.1% from the state of Perak.

In terms of time flexibility variable for the adult learners, 36% of them preferred to have face-to-face lectures over the weekend, while the second ranking of distance learning preference which accounted for 25%. About 21% of the adult learners do not mind having face-to-face class on weeknights. See Diagram 1 below.

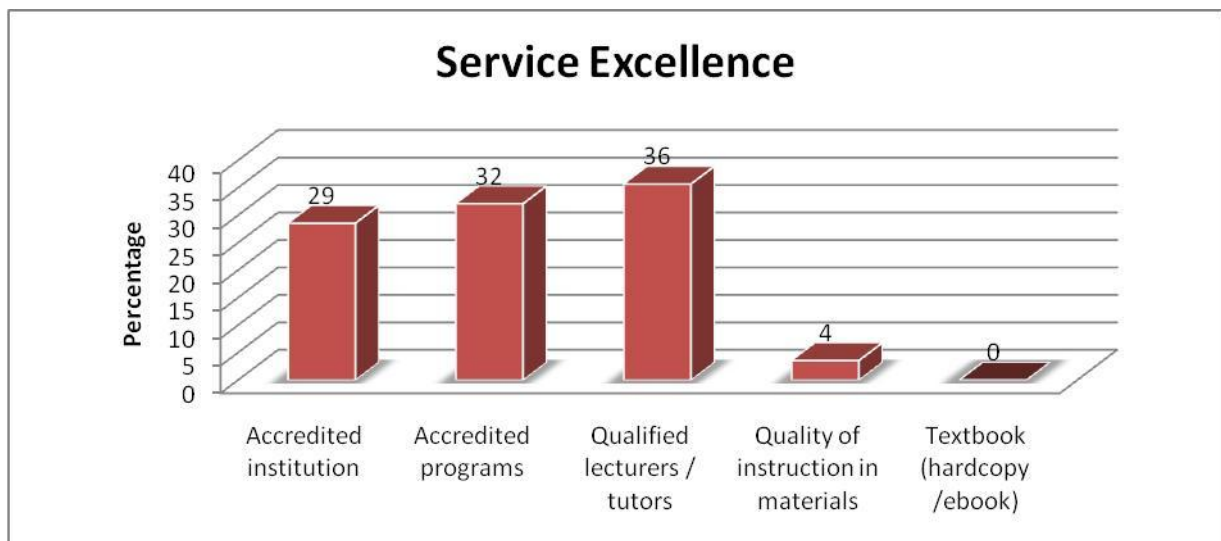


*Diagram 1: Time flexibility preference for adult learners*

It is observed that majority of the adult learners named scholarship as their first choice in terms of the financial aid available to them for their further studies. It accounted for 61% of the respondents. Their second choice self-funded at 14% while the preference for PTPTN assistance scheme only accounted for 11% of the respondents. See Diagram 2 below.

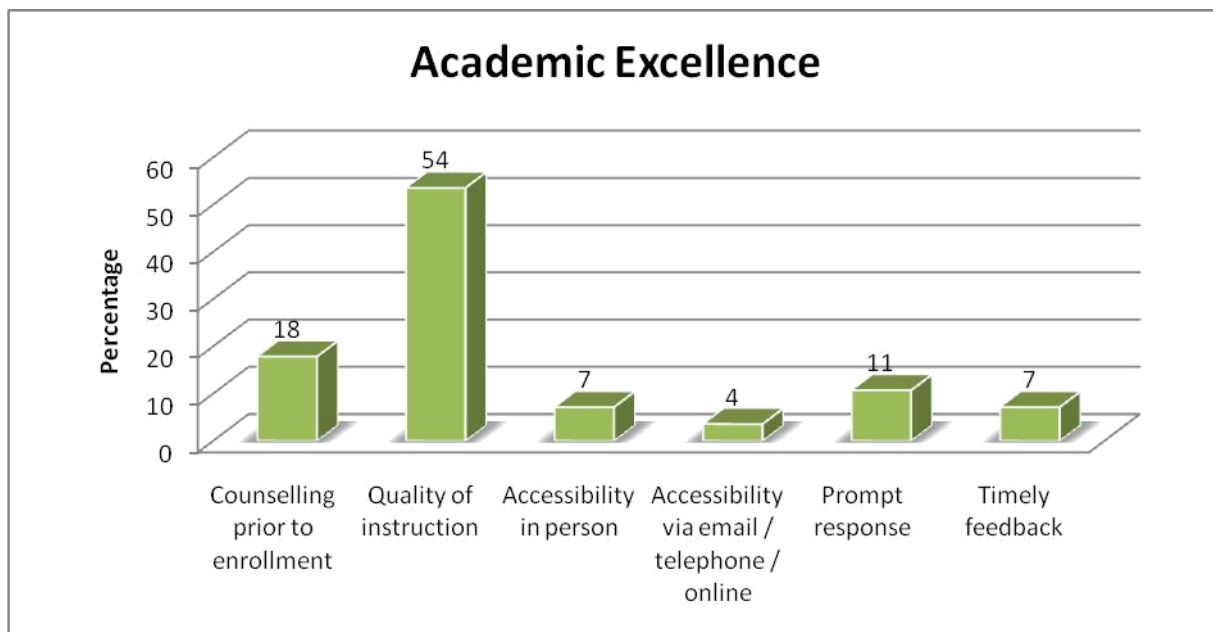


*Diagram 2: Choice of financial aid preference for adult learners*



*Diagram 3: Choice of preferred service by the adult learners*

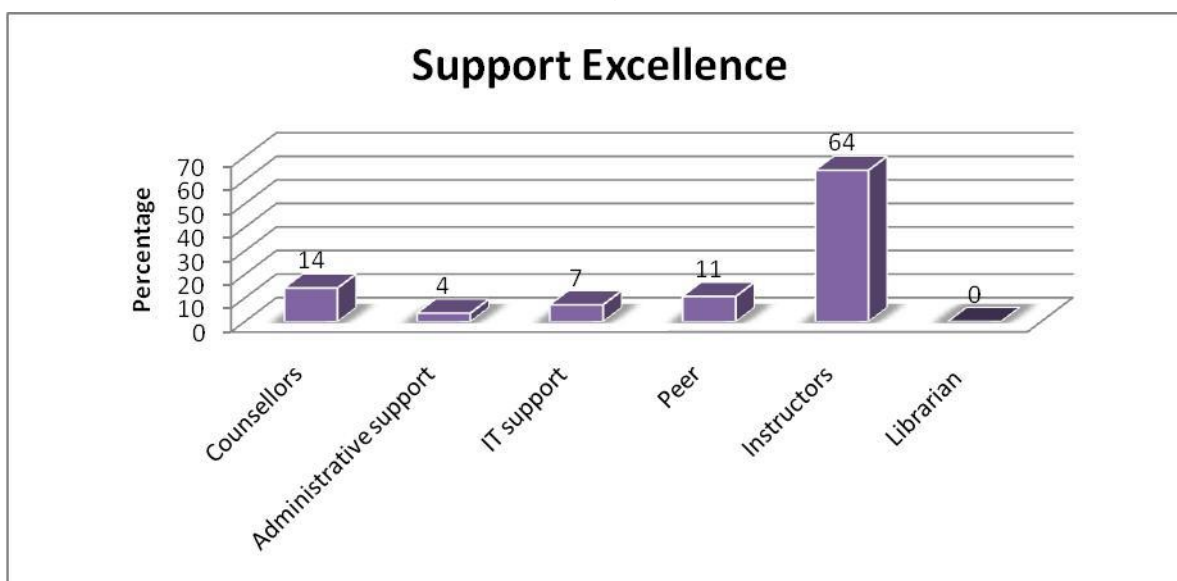
It is observed that Malaysian students are familiar with the concept of accreditation – at least the importance of either being an accredited program or an accreditation institution. The preferred choice of the service excellence variable offered by the higher education institution was observed to be the qualified lecturers or tutors at 36%. The second selection choice for the adult learners was observed to be the offering of accredited program by the higher education institution, at 32%. The third preferred choice was the accredited institution status, at 29%. See diagram 3 above.



*Diagram 4: Adult learner's preference on the academic service*

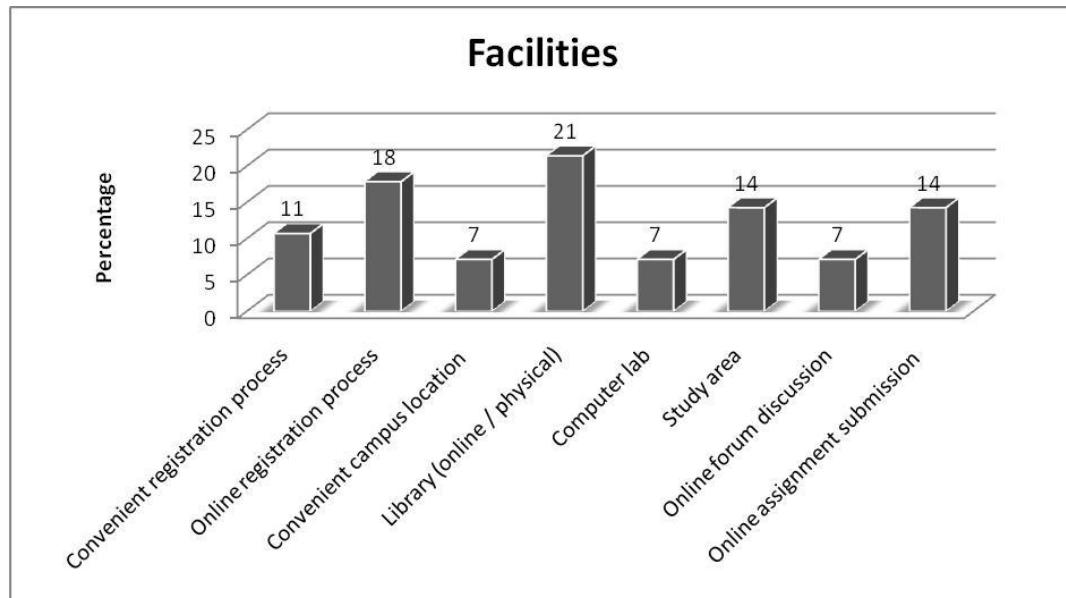
The adult learners indicated that the quality of the instruction as the most preferred choice when selecting the services contribution from the academics, scoring 54%. Academic counselling for the students though important was indicated to be the adult learner's second choice at 18%. Though low percentages were scored in terms of physical and technological enabled accessibility to the academics, and timely feedback, they are part and parcel of the academic services to the students. See Diagram 4 above.

In terms of administrative or academic support, the adult learners viewed instructors' support as priority over other types of support, scoring at a high of 64%. The adult learners do not view the administrative support provided by a higher education institution as part of their selection choice as they scored 14% as counsellors and 11% as peer support. Other support such as the librarian and other administrative were viewed as of low importance. See Diagram 5 below.



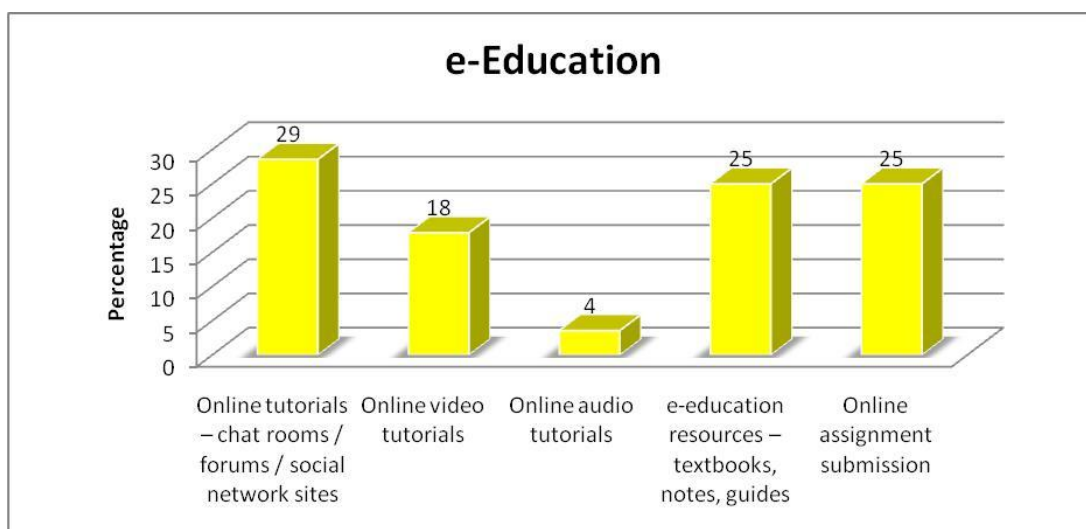
*Diagram 5: Adult learner's preference on the role of support*

In terms of the higher education institution facilities offerings to adult learners, they viewed having a library, be it a physical library or an online library, it hold priority in their preference selection choice. Adult learner scored the library facilities at 21%. According to the survey results in Diagram 6 below, adult learners preferred convenience in terms of online registration process at 18% and online assignment submission at 14%. Another element that contributed 14% is the study area available within the higher education institution, which the adult students include in their selection choice. See Diagram 6 below.

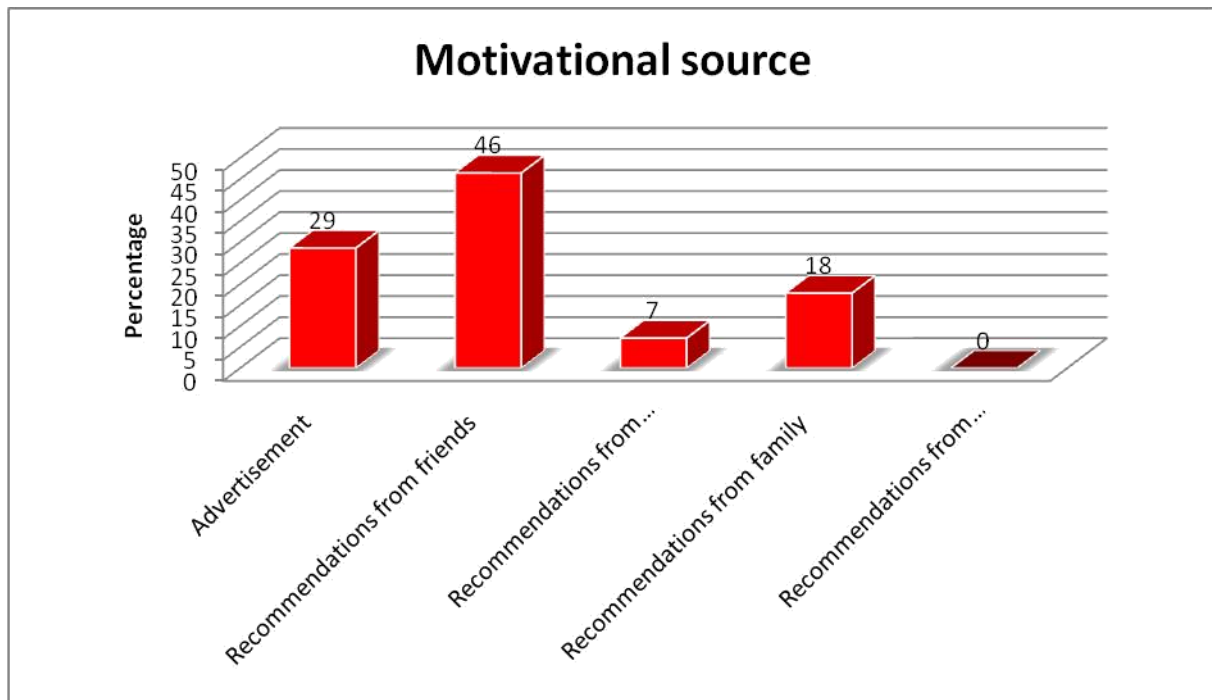


*Diagram 6: Adult learners' preference in terms of facilities provided by an institution*

As we moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, technology has enabled many educational tools to facilitate convenience in learning. Many e-tools are available for online learning, from online tutorial classes using internet chat, internet forum, social networking sites, online video lessons, online audio lessons, online resources in terms of ebook, enotes, eguides and online assignment submission platform. Adult learners do view e-education as the way forward for e-learning, preferring online tutorials adopting internet tools at 29%, second choice would be in terms of e-books and online assignment submission platform at 25% each. See Diagram 7 below.



*Diagram 7: Adult learners' preference on e-learning*



*Diagram 8: Adult learners' motivational source for higher education institution selection*

The final variable would be the motivational source. According to the survey conduct, adult learners react instantly when the higher education institution was recommended by their friends, at 46% and family, at 18%. Advertisements do influence the adult learners' higher education institution selection. Advertisement contributed to 29% of their selection choice. See Diagram 8 above.

## Conclusion

From the findings above, we can summarise the priority of adult learners' choice of higher education institution in terms of the following:

- Time flexibility – adult learners preferred face-to-face tutorial class over the weekends.
- Financial aid – adult learners' first choice of preference was for scholarships.
- Service excellence – quality lecturers were adult learners' top choice.
- Academic excellence – quality of instruction, similar to quality lecturers were observed choice of adult learners.
- Support excellence – similar to quality lecturers, and quality of instruction, adult learners preferred instructor as their first choice of support.
- Facilities – adult learners stated the library as their top choice in terms of facilities provided by an institution.
- e-Education – it is observed that adult learners is able to cope best with online tutorials, conducted via internet chat rooms, forum and adopting the tools from the social network media.
- Motivational source – adult learners' selection choice was observed to be influenced by recommendations from their friends.

### **Implications of the study**

Consumers in higher education now exist in positional market, where institutions compete for the best students while the applicants compete for the most preferred institutions. No institution can be excellent at everything, nor can any single institution pander to needs of all applicants. Higher education institution in the environment needs to play to their strengths or situate themselves around aspects for which they can become excellent.

Positioning in the higher education involves three elements of developing an institutional brand or image, deciding on the market segments to serve and developing a communication strategy that accentuates the institutional capability to deliver to this market. Understanding choice and decision making of adult learners feeds into the institutional positioning strategy through a clear identification of both the reasons for purchase behaviour of the adult learners.

The above results provided valuable information on the decision making process of the adult learner that precedes the entry into a higher education institution. Information on adult learners' motivating factors in their selection choice of higher education institution can serve a basis for more informed planning of the marketing policy, for better higher rates of return.

### **Reference list**

Armor, D. J., & Peiser, B. M. (1998). Interdistrict choice in Massachusetts. *Learning from school choice*, 157-186.

Chapleo, C. (2004). Interpretation and Implementation of Reputation Brand Management by UK University Leaders. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 5(1), 7-23.

Connor, H., Burton, R., & Regan, J. (1999). Making the right choice How students choose universities and colleges; appendix 2, the year 11/S4 survey.

Galagan, P. A. (2000). The E-Learning Revolution. *Training & Development*, 54(12), 24-30.

James, R., Baldwin, G., & McInnis, C. (1999). Which university? The factors influencing the choices of prospective undergraduates. *Australian Department of Education, Training and Skills (DEST) Evaluation and Investigations Programme Document*, 99(3).

Kantanen, H. (2007). Do we live up to our brand proposition? Organisational identity, university image and stakeholder perspectives. *B. Stensaker &*, 500, 56-72.

Maringe, F. (2006). University and course choice: implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(6), 466-479.

MIRIAM, E. D., STEPHEN, J., Davies, J., & DIANE, R. (2003). Gender issues in parental involvement in student choices of higher education. *Gender and Education*, 15(1), 21-36.

Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)

<http://www.mohe.gov.my/transformasi/> [Access on 21 July 2011]

Moogan, Y. J., Baron, S., & Harris, K. (1999). Decision making behaviour of potential higher education students. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 53(3), 211-228.

Reay, D. (1998). 'Always knowing' and 'never being sure': familial and institutional habituses and higher education choice. *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(4), 519-529.

Reay, D., David, M., & Ball, S. (2001). Making a difference?: Institutional habituses and higher education choice.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M., & Ball, S. J. (2001). Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology*, 35(04), 855-874.

Roberts, D., Allen, A., & Heist, L. (1997). Young applicants' perceptions of higher education.

Roker, D. (1993). Gaining the edge: girls at a private school. *Youth and inequality*, 122-138.

Rossett, A. (2002). Waking in the night and thinking about e-learning. *The ASTD e-learning handbook*, 3-18.

Temple, P., & Shattock, M. (2007). What does "branding" mean in higher education?