What extent do fees matter in the process by which students select their university?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of the university tuition fees on the education market in the UK. The aim is to identify university tuition fees and whether they are important in the decision making when choosing a university and the extent of this importance in different students. 100 students from the north campus of the London Metropolitan University were chosen as the sample for this research. Because of the significant differences between the respondents of this research and previous studies (which are mentioned in this paper's literature review), a structured interview was conducted to find out the importance of the factors for choosing a university. A multi answer survey is conducted to collect data about the extent of each factor plus. This study uses the mix method approach; Qualitative and Quantitative method. The result of this study shows increasing university fees is more important for young students than mature students and there is a relation between increasing fees and the students expectation of university facilities.

Introduction

The UK is the one of the leading countries for education in the world. Such top universities like Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College etc make the UK an attractive country for education. As well as UK Students there are a huge number of international students and EU students moving to the UK to complete their higher education.

Analysis of 41 universities in developed countries has shown that the UK universities fees are the 3rd most expensive in the world. (Lindvall, 2001).This analysis was conducted before the tuition fees rose in 2012 as high as £9000 (www.keynote.co.uk). In 2010 the UK parliament allowed the universities to increase their fees for courses commencing after September 2012 by more than 75% to £9000.(gurdian In /2010)there was decline in the number of students entering higher education and this decline continued by a further 4.1% in 2011. This is mainly due to a lack of or reduction in funding available to students as the fees continue to rise (keynote).

This current study aims to identify to what extent do fees matter in the process by which students select their university? To answer this question this study looked at some previous students in the same area. Although this paper will look at the impact of recent reductions in educational budgets on the UK economy, this study is used to interview and survey to identify the paper subject.

Literature review:

The universities prospect is to involve their stakeholders (Hans van Weenen, 2000), universities have stakeholders not shareholders, which makes the university independent and able to act quickly and make decisions without external impact (Wright, 2010). In counties like the UK with such vibrant higher education systems monitoring the stakeholder exception and demands is an import factor across the segment (Marsh and Dunkin, 1997). A lot of providers in higher education discussed, that there is a need to fix a fair and affordable university tuition, plus improving and revising the higher education approach by placing the expectations and satisfaction factors of university on stakeholders, especially students (Cheng and Tam, 1997, Griffin err al, 2003)

Briggs (2006,pp. 717-8) discuses that it is very complicated to highlight which factors are important when choosing a university, he points out that these factors might change between students in different courses and grid.. Reputation about a specific subject would involve decision making for students (Moogan et al .2001). The provision and quality of Libraries, Classrooms, Computer Labs and modern facilities can be important elements for engineering and science students (Slack et.al.,2007p69) although these factors are different for medical students in some ways (Moogan, Baron,2003). Word-of-mouth and website advertising have an impact on student's decision making. Because of this the reputation of a course and the location of an institution are 2 of the most important factors for students when choosing a university (Worthington and Higgs, 2004)

On the other hand the importance of various choices is often weighted differently depending on the level of study. For example, a Graduate or Undergraduate course will have different decision criteria (Coocari and Javalgi 1995). Course and career information showed up as the most important factors specifically in postgraduate courses (Joseph and Joseph 2000).

Holly and lynch (1981) examine the impact of looking at a universities previous performances when choosing a university in the UK. The result shows the general reputation of the university and in particular the reputation of that university for that specific course and the advice of parents and teachers have the most influence during the process of choosing a university.

A study in Netherlands conducted in 1992 by Oosterbeek et al to identify the relationship between potential student earnings and choosing a course. The result of the study identified that there is not a significant relationship between students earning

prospects and choosing a university. (Oosterbeek, Groot, Hartog, 1992)

Lin (1997) conducted a study in the Netherlands; in this study students from seven different universities answered his questionnaire to identify the student's reasons for choosing their university. The most important reason for students choosing their universities during this survey were: university facility, university reputation, traineeships, faculty qualification and student life style. (Lin1997)

Mazarin (1996) conducted a study in Australia. In this case, international students were asked about important factors that impact their decision making for studies. Reputation of the university in the work place was the most important factor that was pointed out by students. Institutions reputation for quality, academic group reputation for quality and willingness to recognize previous qualifications were other important factors for international students in the Mazarin case study (Mazarin et al.1996). The results of this study can be helpful for current studies, as London metropolitan as a large number of international students which were chosen for the current study.

Methodology:

Research questions:

The global issue of attracting foreign students has become a very profitable business, especially in the western world where western countries are investing to attract foreign students to their universities (Zimmerman et al.2000). Foreign student fees make a large contribution to the UK's university finance. The UK universities are becoming more and more dependent on overseas students. 1 in 8 students in UK universities are foreign which generate a very important income for the government too. The number of higher education students in the UK rose from 2.2 million in 2004/2005 to 2.3 million in 2008/2009. From 2000 to 2004 the number of undergraduate foreign students rose by over 2.5%. From 2004/2005 to 2007/2008 foreign students in undergraduate courses rose from 8.7% of total undergraduate students to 10%, and the number of overseas postgraduate students rose from 31% to 32% in the same period. Students shot up by 63.1%. According to the British Council's 2007 Global Value Report, export of UK education during 2003-2004 was estimated to be worth GBP 8,640.2 million. (www.keynote.co.uk).

In 2007/2008 more than 45,000 of the UK's students were Asian and 55,000 were EU. According to Grant Thornton research centre in 2009, 2010 9% of total income of university come from overseas students (www.Keynote.co.uk). It's a good success for the UK universities but it makes the segment more and more susceptible for universities to keep their market attractive for overseas students.

In 2011 the number of students entering higher education in the UK had more than a 4.1% decline. This is mainly due to a lack of or reduction in funding available to students as the fees continue to rise. Given the complexity of these relationships, it has been hypothesised that:

H1: fees do matter in the process by which students select their university.

H2: the UK Universities are in danger of losing the education market.

On the other hand The UK parliament has planned to cut funding in the universities by September 2012. Prior to this new policy in 2010 the UK parliament allowed the universities to increase their fees for courses commencing after September 2012 to £9000. According to this new policy university are allowed to increase the fees for all students; home country, EU and non EU students (www.keynote.co.uk). According to

previous university funding rules, non EU students had to pay the total amount of courses fees (university funding does not support the non EU student) which would have made a huge difference with these new fees, so this new policy would not have a huge effect on non EU students. The main influence will be on EU and home students, the tuition fee for EU and home students would increase by more than 75%, given the current issue of university fees, it has been hypothesised that:

H3: increasing universities fees will be have an effect on the process of choosing a university for the UK and EU students.

London Metropolitan University is an international university with more than 90% non British students" (P.Block, 2011), which was identified by this research. This huge number of foreign students has a significant impact on this research. London Metropolitan students as they are foreign students might have different expectations and demand and opinions about the important factors of university. So for relating the finding of this study to other universities it was necessary to identify that there is not a significant difference about what factors had been important when choosing the university for the metropolitan university students or any other students. It has been hypothesised that:

H4: there is a significant different expectation, demands or opinions about the important factors of choosing a university between London metropolitan university students as foreign students and other universities students.

Interview:

Choosing the method for research is dependant on the purpose of the research (Yin, 1994). Newman and Benz (1998) identified qualitative research as *"A Detailed description of situations, events, people and interactions"* (Newman and Benz, 1998). To test the 4th Hypothesis, this study used a qualitative research approach in an attempt to capture the essence of the attitude of the London Metropolitan University about factors which were important to them when choosing the university, and comparing this data to the previous study findings about important factors when choosing a university.

To collect this qualitative data, secondary data about important factors when choosing a university which were identified in the lecturers review are used to design and write a structured interview by variety yes/no by a clinical psychologist. The yes/no questions are aimed to recognize if the factors which assisted in previous studies in the UK are important for London Met students or not. To avoid making assumptions in that question, the questioner tried to break up the questions and give some examples to the students.

A pilot study program is chosen to examine the questions in the interview, to identify any ambiguities in the questions and the range of responses for each question. But as English is the second language of the majority of London Met students, and the interviews are supposed to be conducted in the English language, I decided to pre-pilot the interview questions by informal interview with non native English persons (family and friends). Pre-pilot exams identified that some of the interview questions needed some small changes. After rewriting the interview, to make sure if the interview is clear and acceptable, new interviews are tested by a formal pilot study. The pilot study was based on subjects from a similar population, of that which would be interviewed (non native English students). Nottingham University are interviewed, they had no problem in understanding the meaning of the questions, and they noted that questions were very clear and simple. After doing the pilot study, the interview was ready to be conducted in the regarded population.

100 undergraduate students from the North campuses of the London Metropolitan University were chosen as the sample for interviewing. The 3 different cafes in the university were chosen as the places to conduct the interviews. The interviewer was unqualified on interviewing, so to avoid effects in the data which were supposed to be collected by the interviewer, the interviews were conducted with 3 interviewers. Each interviewer took the responsibility of interviewing 5 students during several different days. By the end of the interview program the interviewer group had interviewed 100 undergraduate students in total.

As the questions in this interview were Yes/No answers, coding the answers was very simple.

Qualitative interview analysis

If you look closely at chart 1 it illustrates the percentage of each important factor when choosing a university that previous studies identified as important for the students.

The reputation of a specific course (Hooley, Lynch, 1981) (Moogan et al 2001) (Worthington and Higgs, 2004), and the location of the university (Worthington and Higgs, 2004), that are mentioned as 2 important factors in a students' decision making process had an effect of 10% and 20% respectively in the process of choosing a university with the London met students. The reputation of the university in the work place by 18% was one of the most important factors for the students which was identified as an important factor in the case study of international students in the Mazzarol (1996) study.

What is very surprising is that the student's life style (lin1997) was the most important factor for students with 27% importance. While the general reputation of the university which is identified as an important factor by several studies was just 3%. Whilst university facilities (Slack et.al, 2007) (Lin1997) were important for 57% of the students. Just two factors, financial support aid and family tradition were of no importance to students when choosing a university.

These results show a support for the 4th hypothesis: there are no significant different expectations demands or opinions about the important factors of choosing a university between London metropolitan university students as foreign students and other universities students. That meant the result of this study can be relative to students of others universities and future studies in other universities can use the findings of this paper.
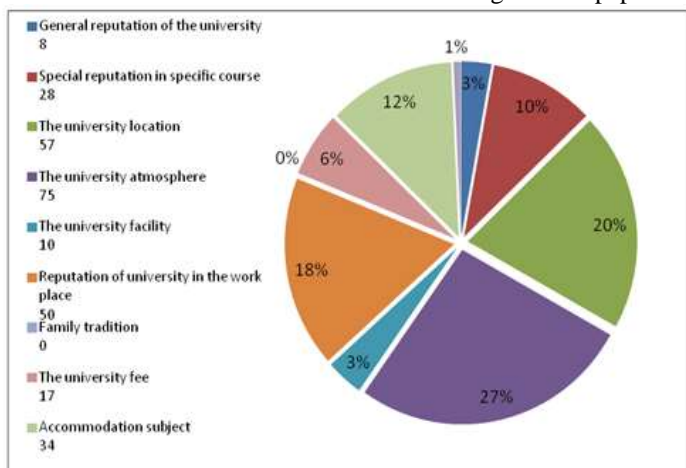

Chart 1

Survey

This paper follows a quantitative approach to identify the students excepting and satisfaction factors. Quantitative data will be analyzed by statistic analysis to describe the relation of personal differences and important factors when choosing a university.

Surveys are the common tools that universities usually use to identify the students excepting and satisfaction (Ramsden, 2005). To capture the extent of importance of each factor a survey with 20 questions is wrote. 10 questions were same as the interview questions about important factors of choosing a university. To answer the H2 and H1 of this study: would increasing the university fee in the UK impact on the education market in this country?, 2 more questions are added to the survey about: how important would be the future increase of fees for students and how difficult would it be for students to complete their education if their university fees increase? In total 13 questions were measured using multiple items, four point type scales, that ranged from 1) not at all 2) important 3) very important and 4) extremely important.

In addition to these 13 questions the survey included 7 personal questions about Age, Gender, Family situation, and study background etc. The pre-pilot and pilot study is used to pilot and pre pilot (same process as interview question). Questions in the survey aim to identify the relationship between age, gender, nationality, family situations, educational background, subject of study and employed or unemployed and any other factors which a student may mention during the interview which are important when choosing a university and the university tuition fee. This data later is analyzed by statistical factor analysis.

The population of the survey was the same as the interview population: 100 undergraduate students in north campuses of London Metropolitan University. The survey was conducted by 2 interviewers in 2 cafes in the London Met tower building in the north campus. Over 5 different days 10 undergraduate students were asked each day to answer the questions in the survey. The information about all 100 students which answered the survey are collected in table

Qualitative Data Analysis(Survey)

To analyze the quantitative data this paper I have used T-tests and regression statistic analysis.

The t –test was used to measure how likely it is that the difference between the means of the two groups (e.g.: Single and married, female and male, young and mature, etc.) who respond in the survey, is due to some real difference between the groups and not due to random chance at the level of 0.05 (Table 2). (Kairis, 2000). Tables A1, A2 and A3 show the results comprising of the performance of female and male, Single and married, young and mature, non EU and EU students for the questions 18, 19 & 20 of the survey.

Table A1	Average female	Average male	t-test
Question 18	1.95	1.84	0.61
Question19	2.37	2	0.13
Question 20	2.07	1.61	0.03

Table A2	Average single	Average married	t-test
Question 18	2.02	1.6	0.09
Question 19	2.12	2.42	0.47
Question 20	3.04	2.95	0.73

Table A3	Average young	Average mature	t-test
Question 18	1.44	3.29	0.51
Question 19	2.18	2.12	0.80
Question 20	2.94	3	0.87

A4	EU	Non EU	t-test
Qustion18	1.93	1.84	0.70
Question 19	2.46	2.15	0.31
Question 20	2.96	3.15	0.45

By looking closely at the T-test analysis in table A4 it illustrates that, in the Level of 0.05% there is not a statistically significant difference between European and Non European students, that means there is not a relationship between the fee as an important factor in the process when selecting a university and students nationality. These results do not support the 3rd Hypotheses: "so increasing universities fees will not have a greater affect on the UK and EU students over then non EU students".

Although table A3 shows that on average there is a difference of importance in fees between young and mature students, the T-test results show these differences are just because of random chance. A T-test between single and married students illustrates that the tuition fee has been statistically more important for single students than married students while there is not a difference between these two groups of students about the extent of the importance of fees and the possibility of these fees increasing in the future. In addition, table A2 shows on average the tuition fees have been more important for single students than married students and the t-test result supports that differences on average and is not by chance, there is a real different level of importance of fee s between single and married students.

What is surprising in this data is University fees on average have been more important for female students than male students, and T-test results shows that there is statistical difference in level of 0.05% in the data of question 20, which means that if the university fees increase then females are less able to complete their studies than males. While according to the t-test result of questions 18 and 19 fees and the possible increase of courses fees have not been more important for females than males. So if the increasing of the fees will affect the affordability to finish the courses on females how come the increasing the fee is not significantly important for female?!

Regression analysis can help us to find out if there is a reason for this paradox in the results or if it's because of a lack of research in the process. With regression analysis we are able to find out if there is a relationship between gender and other variables, which will show us if there is any logical reason for this paradox or not.

Regression is a very useful analysis tool. In market research regression can be used to examine sample data and draw conclusions about the importance of relationships that exist between variables (Russell and Martin ,1976).

In this study Question 17, 18 & 19 which were about the importance of fees were the dependant factors (Y) and other questions were the independent factors (X). After doing several Regression tests, data about nationality and subject of study and background are removed to reduce the error. Table B1, B2 and, B3 shows the result of regression between other data.

As we can see in table B1 and B3 significant F is much higher than 5% which means the data in the table are not significant. But Significant F in regression analysis of question 19 is reliable at 5% level, looking closely at P-value in this table shows the X3 age and X15 facility are significant. According to this data we can conclude that fees are more important for young students than mature students. And according to the relationship between X15 (facility) and Y19 (Increasing fee), we can say if the tuition fee increases in future students are expecting to see an improvement in facilities in university despite this increase.

Charts C1andC2 are the distribution for importance of increasing fees (Y) and age (X3)and facilities (X15).

According to regression test, the young students who care more about facility are more care about increasing the fees in future.

Regression Statistics							
Multiple R	0.41098574						
R Square	0.16890928						
Adjusted R Square	0.01891216						
Standard Error	1.128						
Observations	99						

ANOVA							
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F		
Regression	15	21.45	1.43	1.125	0.34827239		
Residual	83	105.54	1.272				
Total	98	126.99					

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	0.58592982	1.233	0.475264330	0.63584692	-1.86616	3.038	-1.86616	3.038
X1	-0.01785341	0.244356910	-0.073062960	0.94193180	-0.50386950	0.46816263	-0.50386950	0.46816263
X2	-0.103598010	0.38146857	-0.271576900	0.78662168	-0.862323690	0.65512756	-0.862323690	0.65512756
X3	0.065526370	0.320111500	0.204698590	0.83830875	-0.571162520	0.70221527	-0.571162520	0.70221527
X4	0.273121500	0.283292730	0.964096400	0.33779817	-0.290336330	0.83657934	-0.290336330	0.83657934
X5	-0.005757810	0.25129030	-0.022913310	0.98177441	-0.505564180	0.49404839	-0.505564180	0.49404839
X6	0.361820880	0.13487680	2.683	0.008813860	0.093556350	0.63008541	0.093556350	0.63008541
X7	-0.003688110	0.12076861	-0.030539020	0.97571044	-0.243892070	0.23651574	-0.243892070	0.23651574
X8	-0.020038210	0.12312382	-0.162748620	0.87111179	-0.264926590	0.22485007	-0.264926590	0.22485007
X9	-0.099668310	0.12773024	-0.780303260	0.43743205	-0.353711860	0.15438198	-0.353711860	0.15438198
X10	0.148624200	0.10538776	1.410	0.16219840	-0.060987800	0.35823622	-0.060987800	0.35823622
X11	-0.157974210	0.11169190	-1.414374950	0.16099223	-0.380124930	0.06417647	-0.380124930	0.06417647
X12	0.236535010	0.11027479	2.145	0.034679000	0.017202880	0.455867130	0.017202880	0.45586713
X13	0.067117030	0.132250820	0.507498010	0.61315132	-0.195924540	0.330158600	-0.195924540	0.33015860
X14	0.2433346	0.14861025	1.637	0.10533276	-0.052245200	0.53891440	-0.052245200	0.53891440
X15	-0.013878110	0.10719572	-0.129465470	0.89730257	-0.227086120	0.19932983	-0.227086120	0.19932983

Chart B1: Y18-How important to you are the fees when selecting a university?

Regression Statistics							
Multiple R	0.51965934						
R Square	0.27004583						
Adjusted R Square	0.13822640						
Standard Error	1.146						
Observations	99						

ANOVA							
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F		
Regression	15	40.332	2.689	2.047	0.02103570		
Residual	83	109.02	1.314				
Total	98	149.35					

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	1.473	1.253	1.175	0.24324607	-1.01956396	3.965	-1.01956396	3.965
X1	0.320978600	0.24836413	1.292	0.19979723	-0.172987760	0.81494496	-0.172987760	0.81494496
X2	-0.276690010	0.38770866	-0.713654520	0.47744277	-1.047826960	0.49444686	-1.047826960	0.49444686
X3	0.677196670	0.32534791	2.081	0.040473870	0.03009276	1.324	0.03009276	1.324
X4	-0.140663010	0.28792685	-0.488190210	0.62679232	-0.713238000	0.43211183	-0.713238000	0.43211183
X5	0.208871340	0.255400920	0.809986650	0.42026405	-0.301110820	0.71485350	-0.301110820	0.71485350
X6	0.010141310	0.137083120	0.073979300	0.94120485	-0.262311500	0.28279413	-0.262311500	0.28279413
X7	-0.195999110	0.12274415	-1.59681060	0.11410849	-0.440132360	0.04813401	-0.440132360	0.04813401
X8	0.196372380	0.12513789	1.569	0.12039488	-0.052521800	0.44526662	-0.052521800	0.44526662
X9	-0.075560010	0.12981956	-0.582036830	0.56211852	-0.333786100	0.18264606	-0.333786100	0.18264606
X10	0.100937600	0.107111700	0.942358320	0.34874407	-0.112103200	0.31397846	-0.112103200	0.31397846
X11	0.119251200	0.11351897	1.050	0.29653926	-0.106533440	0.34503586	-0.106533440	0.34503586
X12	0.112115520	0.11207867	1.0	0.32005890	-0.110804450	0.3350355	-0.110804450	0.3350355
X13	-0.206215610	0.13444419	-1.53418080	0.12878837	-0.473560110	0.06112874	-0.473560110	0.06112874
X14	-0.029392810	0.15104123	-0.194601780	0.84618024	-0.329807810	0.27102203	-0.329807810	0.27102203
X15	0.259110880	0.10894924	2.378	0.019690800	0.042415230	0.47560654	0.042415230	0.47560654

CHART B2: Y 19 important would the future increase of university fee be to you?

Compare between charts C1 and C2 shows facility is more important for student than fees, so we can conclude, if the universities fees increase young student will expect the university facilities improve as well. Or we can say if the

university facilities arebetter young students are more agree to pay more fees.

This result support the H1: fee dose matter for young students who have expectation high standard facilities in a university.

And as the regression analyze result of Question 20 (which was How difficult would it be for students to complete their education if their university fees increase) do not shows any significant   statistic we can conclude : this result don't support the H2 , the UK university are not in the danger to lose their market.

Chart B3: Y20: How difficult would it be for students to complete their education if their university fees increase?
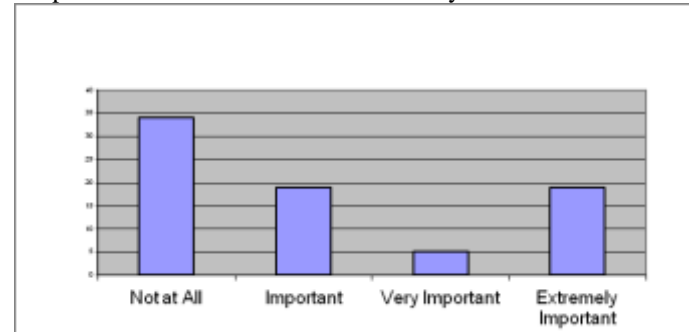

Chart :C1

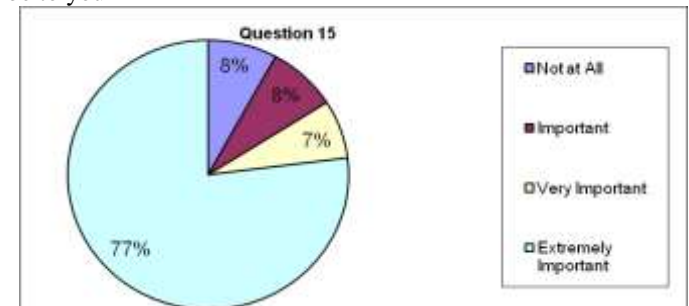Y19:How important would the furute increase of university fee be to you

Chart: C2

X15:How important are the facilities ofthe university to you?

Conclusion

Because of the competitive education market across the world in universities, UK universities to keep this market should be more understanding of the extents of the negative impact of the current issue on their students (as a stakeholder). What concepts of the universities should be improved upon and expanded to make their stakeholders satisfied? To save the market and insure the universities future, this study was conducted in London and the sample chosen from just one university. Consequently it was not a very big sample size (because research is an expensive approach) but as the finding of this research shows we can relate the findings of this study to other students, which canbe a useful guide for a universities understanding for future studies to identify the expectations of students and insure the future of the education market in the UK. As the result of this paper shows the universities to attract the young students should improve the universes facilities. But there is big possibility of another important factors that future studies can focuses on them.

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