

# International Students' Decision to Study in China: A Study of Some Selected International Students from Universities in China

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## Abstract

This study aims at finding out the current trends in international student education with emphasis on China as an emerging preferred study location by most international students in recent times. 583 international students took part in this study, using the simple random and convenience sampling methods. The study adopted the descriptive survey design, using an online questionnaire which was generated by the Microsoft Survey application and sent via personal online platforms. The data were analyzed using means (including mean of means) and standard deviations (including mean of standard deviation) for all questions. From the findings, it was revealed that most students now have a strong desire for international education for the purposes of getting international certifications, meeting new faculty, changing environment and having access to well-equipped universities. In addition, the study revealed that, most international students now choose to study in China in order to enjoy scholarships from the Chinese government and universities, learn the Chinese language, enjoy higher chances of gaining admission for subsequent studies, experience simple visa processes, experience the fast growth of the Chinese economy at firsthand as well as enjoy from the relatively low costs of obtaining a degree and living in China. Furthermore, the study also revealed that, in recent times, most international students do not patronize universities in the western countries as before, for reasons such as cumbersome visa processes, inability to properly integrate into western cultures as well as the relatively high costs of obtaining a degree and living there. The study also revealed that a few outstanding benefits of studying in China include: the establishment of business partnerships, higher post-graduation employment prospects, personal safety and the strategic positioning of China as a link to the rest of the world. The study further recommended that: the Chi-

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nese government through the Ministry of Education (MOE), should continuously put in place measures to attract more higher-calibre international students from all over the world by making sure all internationalized schools adjust to global standards, university authorities should also arrange necessary internship opportunities for international students to help bridge the gap between the job market and the classroom. In addition, higher institutions' administrators and other concerned stakeholders of international education should continuously implement sustainable measures to bring in more international students by providing foreigner-friendly services. Furthermore, on the part of international students, they must plan well and do enough research on the chosen study location before making an attempt to school abroad, they must also learn to abide strictly by the laws of their chosen location of study, so as to enjoy their time of study. Moreover, in choosing a location of study abroad, they can consider schooling either in the West or in the East, provided the prevailing conditions in the chosen location meets their expectations. Finally, schooling in China is a recommended option due to the relative possible benefits during and even after the completion of studies.

## Keywords

International Students, Decision to Study Abroad, Universities in China

## 1. Introduction

International education has now become a necessary wing in global education. This move has been gladly embraced by China and has placed it on a path to attract foreign students from all over the world. Currently, internationalization of higher education in China, has in recent decades seen great progress and has placed China as an emerging leading global strong hold in international education, thereby moulding China's educational system into one of the most promising, largest and affordable in the world (Yang, 2014). Reports, indicates that presently, China, attracts a large number of international students from all over the world (Ma, 2017). The following are data from the statistical report on international students in China for the year 2018 by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE, 2019).

**Item 1.** Number/percent of international students by continent.

| Continent | Number  | Percent |
|-----------|---------|---------|
| Asia      | 295,043 | 59.95%  |
| Africa    | 81,562  | 16.57%  |
| Europe    | 73,618  | 14.96%  |
| America   | 35,733  | 7.26%   |
| Oceania   | 6229    | 1.27%   |

**Item 2.** Number of international students by country of origin.

| Rank  | Country       | Number |
|-------|---------------|--------|
| No.1  | South Korea   | 50,600 |
| No.2  | Thailand      | 28,608 |
| No.3  | Pakistan      | 28,023 |
| No.4  | India         | 23,198 |
| No.5  | United States | 20,996 |
| No.6  | Russia        | 19,239 |
| No.7  | Indonesia     | 15,050 |
| No.8  | Laos          | 14,645 |
| No.9  | Japan         | 14,230 |
| No.10 | Kazakhstan    | 11,784 |
| No.11 | Vietnam       | 11,299 |
| No.12 | Bangladesh    | 10,735 |
| No.13 | France        | 10,695 |
| No.14 | Mongolia      | 10,158 |
| No.15 | Malaysia      | 9479   |

**Item 3.** The top 10 provinces/cities with the largest number of international students.

| Province/City      | Number |
|--------------------|--------|
| Beijing            | 80,786 |
| Shanghai           | 61,400 |
| Jiangsu Province   | 45,778 |
| Zhejiang Province  | 38,190 |
| Liaoning Province  | 27,879 |
| Tianjin            | 23,691 |
| Guangdong Province | 22,034 |
| Hubei Province     | 21,371 |
| Yunnan Province    | 19,311 |
| Shandong Province  | 19,078 |

Items 1, 2 & 3 retrieved from (MOE, 2019):

[http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201904/t20190418\\_378692.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201904/t20190418_378692.html).

In addition, statistics on the number/percent of international students by levels of education, revealed that: 258,122 international students were enrolled in degree programs, accounting for 52.44% of all foreign students, an increase of 16,579 or 6.86% over 2017 figures. There were also 85,062 postgraduate-level international students, an increase of 12.28% compared to 2017, of which 25,618 enrolled as doctoral students and 59,444 as master's degree students. An estimated 234,063 international students were enrolled in non-degree programs.

Furthermore, statistics on the number/percent of international students by

source of funding revealed that: 63,041 international students (12.81%) received Chinese government scholarships, and 429,144 (87.19%) were self-funded.

From the data indicated in **Items 1-3** and preceding statements, it can be observed that, but for China's giant breakthrough of becoming an emerging centre of international education, these concerned international students, hitherto, were looking at moving to the old acclaimed western centres of studies to have their various programmes of study. However, the situation and the centre of focus has now shifted to Asia, with China playing a leading role in providing international education. According to the *Open Doors Report for 2015 on International Educational Exchange* released by the **Institute of International Education (IIE, 2015)**, there was a clear indication that China was still the largest contributor of international students in American universities and colleges, accounting for 31%. Also, China was known to be providing the largest number of international students in the UK, Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand by 2014. Even though China is often seen as a major "sending" nation to other developed countries in the west, yet it is worth mentioning that China has been transformed and is becoming a leading "receiving" nation of international students from all over the world (**Wei, 2015**). This is a fact that has been overlooked. For instance, according to the IIE's 2015 *Open Doors Report*, Mainland China accounted for 8% of the international student market, as compared to Germany and France who recorded 7% each, hence placing China as the third-ranked destination for international college students. The USA and the UK, recorded 22% and 11% respectively during this same period. Based on the 2015 Chinese Ministry of Education's statistics, a total of 397,635 international students from 202 countries and regions were studying in Mainland China (**MOE, 2016**). This represented an increase of 20,581 (5.46%) over the figure for 2014. According to 2016 statistics from the Ministry of Education in China, a total of 442,773 international students from 205 countries and regions were studying in Mainland China in 2016, representing an increase of 45,138 (11.35%) from 2015, (**MOE, 2017**). In 2018, this number increased to 492,185 international students (**MOE, 2019**) from 196 countries, being hosted by 1004 institutions of higher education in China's 31 provinces/autonomous regions/ provincial-level municipalities as indicated in **Figure 1**. This figure marks a 0.62% increase in international student enrolment as compared to 2017 figures. These estimates however do not include international students from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. In April 2019, the Chinese MOE unveiled some new policies to bring in more international students to study in China. According to **Cai (2020)**, the *Plan for Study in China*, issued by the Chinese government, made projections that by the year 2020, it was expected that the number of international students studying in elementary, secondary, and institutions of higher education in Mainland China will reach 500,000 (including 150,000 degree students).

Indeed, with reference to the findings from **Items 1-3**, it can be observed clearly that China is becoming an authority when it comes to international education. China is currently occupying the position of the country with the third



**Figure 1.** International student enrolment trends in Chinese universities [inbound and outbound student mobility, 2013-2019]. Source: *Institute of International Education (2019)*, retrieved in 2021 from: <https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Project-Atlas/Explore-Data/China>.

largest international student population and is really playing a key role in providing international education in the East, an alternative to the known Western locations. This study reveals the trend of international students' mobility in recent times, with emphasis on China as a new preferred location for international education.

This paper aims at providing possible answers to a few urgent questions on international education in China and international students' current choice of China. The research questions reflect the views of international students with reference to a pilot study that was carried out a few months ago prior to this study involving 102 international students from various locations all over Mainland China. Based on the findings from the pilot study, specific emphasis had to be laid on why international students even travel for studies abroad, why China as a study destination, why international students no longer patronize universities in western countries as before and finally what schooling in China has for a current and potential student.

### 1.1. Research Questions

- 1) Why do international students travel abroad for studies?
- 2) Why do international students now choose China?
- 3) Why don't international students consider schooling in western universities?
- 4) What are the benefits of schooling in China?

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

This study will help international educational stakeholders know the efforts of the Chinese government and other internal stakeholders towards international

education and thereby appreciate as well as learn from it. Also, it will serve as a guide and reminder for the continuous improvement of existing measures to meet current global standards and international students' expectations.

This study would also help higher educational institutions' authorities and other key stakeholders to be updated on what's working to aid in the increasing preference for China as a destination for studies. Furthermore, it will help them to strategize well to attract more international students in the future.

This study will also help both current and potential international students know the relevance of international education and the need to plan well for it. Also, it will help them know the general expectations of any preferred location of study abroad as well as the unique experiences they would have from schooling in China.

Findings from this study, can also be a reference material for future studies.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Education in China according to many scholars began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC. In China, it started with the teachings of Confucius during Spring and Autumn. Indeed, China's decision to embrace international education with its attendant commitments is phenomenal. Currently, China is not only a known leading "sending" nation but is now on the path of coming an important "receiving" nation in the global market of international education, hence attracting a huge chunk of students from all over the world, who wish to pursue education abroad (Ma, 2017). China is becoming a strong stakeholder in the area of international education. Undoubtedly, the rate of inflows of students seeking international education in China is becoming very significant.

### 2.1. History of International Education in China

According to the history of international education in China, for over 1400 years, dating far back to the *Sui Dynasty* (581-618 AD), China has been accepting international students. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949, the issue of international student education has undergone several developmental stages (Li, 2000).

The first stage, spanned the period between 1950-1965, during which the foundation for the education of international students was laid. At this time, China was developing cordial bilateral and multilateral relations with the Former Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern parts of Europe. As a result, a greater number of international student exchanges were recorded. Particularly, after the *Bandung Conference* in 1954, China began to accept a large number of international students from neighbouring and distant developing countries in Asia, Africa and the Latin Americas. These were all moves by the Chinese government to fulfill its international assistance in the area of education, even though China had its inherent limitations to this worthy move.

The second stage, which spanned the period from 1966-1977, experienced

some setbacks as well as some recovery in the area of international student education. The major setback occurred mainly due to the *Cultural Revolution of 1966*, which significantly affected institutions of higher learning's ability to continue international student education. As a result, there was a seven-year termination of international student exchange programmes, between 1966-1972. However, fortunately in the 1970s, there was an end to the cultural revolution and China managed to re-establish its long-standing diplomatic relations with about 124 countries, thereby enabling China to resume international student education again.

The third stage, took place between 1978 and 1989, when there were some preliminary progress indicators recorded. For instance, in 1978, China adopted *reform and opening-up policies* that enhanced the development of higher education in China. These measures, included the facilitation of international student education. Historically, two documents approved by the State Council, made China more accessible to self-financed international students. These two documents included the 1979 *Regulations on Work Related to International Students (Revised Version)* and the 1979 *Charge Standards for Self-paying International Students*.

Between 1990 and 1998, the fourth stage was recorded. Within this stage there was the establishment of a new system that included both administrative and incentive mechanisms. In looking at the administrative mechanism, in 1996, the Ministry of Education established the *China Scholarship Council (CSC)*. This council was to help organize, finance and manage the arrangements of Chinese citizens wishing to travel abroad to study as well as citizens of other countries who were coming to study in China. During this period, international student education, entered a realm of rapid development (Cheng and Huang, 2008).

## 2.2. Recent History of Progress in Chinese International Education

Following the preceding memorable period marked by unique stages, by the twenty-first century, international student education in China, was experiencing some rapid development. The following is a breakdown of some key development trends that took place. First of all, the percentage of degree students at Chinese universities continued to increase, in addition to the significant increase in the number of international students studying in China. For instance, in 2015, 184,799 international students (representing about 46.47% of all international students), were enrolled in degree programmes. This represented an increase of 20,405 students, or 12.41%, compared to 2014 figures.

Secondly, the number of institutions of higher learning accepting international students, increased tremendously. For instance, in 1979, only 23 of such institutions were available but in 2015, 811 institutions of higher learning were accepting international students.

Thirdly, the profile of countries that sent international students to China for studies became more diversified and broader. For instance, by 2015, the top ten

sending countries were: South Korea, the USA, Thailand, India, Russia, Pakistan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, and France.

Furthermore, there was a great increase in the number of Chinese government scholarships and bilateral government agreements with foreign countries. Also, to help increase the level of accessibility and variety, scholarships were also provided by bodies such as: The Confucius institutes, Provincial and Municipal governments, foreign governments, institutions of higher education as well as businesses. These were all aiming at supplementing the efforts of the Chinese government.

China has demonstrated its commitment to increase international student enrolment. Indeed, this forms an important part of the process of internationalizing institutions of higher education in China. In line with this worthy vision, at the end of 2014, during the occasion of *National Work Conference on Studying Abroad*, the Chinese President Xi Jinping, provided some important instructions concerning the facilitation of international student mobility in international education exchange programmes. The President suggested for the first time that, student mobility for students both going abroad and coming to China should be facilitated (MOE, 2014a). Subsequently, on November 5, 2015, the State Council released *the Overall Plan for Coordinating and Advancing the Construction of First-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines* (China State Council, 2015). This move required a number of universities and disciplines to work together with the goal of becoming recognized internationally as part of the world's best universities by the year 2020. This agenda, also aims at ensuring that the quantity and quality of China's first-class universities and disciplines matches that of the world-wide front-runners by the middle of the twenty-first century. The overall plan also noted that, efforts should be put into the creation of strong international teaching and research environments that will attract high-quality international students. In addition, plans should be put in place so that, the international competitiveness and discourse power of China's higher education should portray China as a country that is focused on higher education and one that emphasizes "*internationalization ... as one of the important ways to build China's world-class research universities*" (Huang, 2015). Currently, as a representative of the Confucian model, Mainland China possesses strong state-driven power that can effectively shape the structure, provide needed funding and priorities to accelerate public investment in world-class universities (Marginson, 2011).

In 1999 for instance, over 800,000 students were recorded to be pursuing their studies abroad. These enrolment figures increased greatly to 1.2 million in 2002 and subsequently increased to about 4.3 million in 2011. By 2015, it was estimated that more than 5 million international students were abroad for their studies (*International Consultants for Education and Fairs [ICEF] Monitor*, 2015). This figure on international enrolments, has been estimated to increase to about 7.2 million by 2025 (*Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]*, 2013).

Prior to this latest development, the choice location of study for most international students has been English-speaking countries like: the UK, the USA, Canada



and Australia, since they have been known as providers of higher education to a large extent (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). Indeed, Asian countries like China, Japan, India, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea were not known for recording very high rates of international student enrolment as compared to the earlier indicated western locations, however, being new competitors in the international student market, these aforementioned Asian countries have adopted unique aggressive policies and sustainable strategies to gradually transform themselves as being “sources” of international students to being “home” to international students (Ding, 2016). In line with this, China as a country has really made unprecedented progress in international student enrolment over the past decade, making it currently the third largest receiver of international students in the world. These developments have occurred not by chance but by strategic planning by the Chinese government, the Chinese Ministry of Education and all other relevant stakeholders in education. Indeed, since the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978, China as a nation has seen a great transformation of its political, economic, educational and social systems. This policy has really opened-up China especially for most international students. For instance, in 1950, as part of China’s opening-up policy, the first batch of 33 international students from Eastern European Countries were received by China (MOE, 2014b). From then, since the late 1970s, the number of international students tremendously increased from 28,700 in 1992 to 41,000 in 1996 (MOE, 2014b). It is imperative to mention that, the Ministry of Education in China in May 1979, adopted the interim Regulations on Education of international students (amended), which was an updated and revised version of the one adopted in July, 1962. Per its contents, for instance, chapter 1, Article 1, states clearly that, “*accepting and training international students is an important effort to serve to accelerate China’s Socialist Modernization*”. To solidify its position as a preferred destination for international education and to attract about 500,000 projected international students by 2020 (Liu & Lin, 2016), the Chinese government in 2010, through the Ministry of Education, announced “*The National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020)*”. According to this outline, the Chinese government proposed a number of sustainable policies to achieve this aim. For instance, the government proposed the offering of more scholarships which by default, would attract a greater number of international students. To support this move, Li (2016), argued that the Chinese government’s intention to provide more educational scholarships were for political and cultural reasons and not just to generate more revenue or attract more international talents. Liu & Lin (2016), gave further clarifications by indicating that, the primary goal of attracting so many international students “*is to educate international friends that are knowledgeable about China, friendly to China, and fond of China*” (P7). The Chinese government in a quest to constantly ensure needful transformations to meet the needs of international students, through the Ministry of Education, provides funding for faculty and administrative staffs to travel to English-speaking countries to basically learn how to better serve international stu-

dents upon their return to China (Liu & Lin, 2016). In addition, the provision of English-medium instruction has over the past few years been the new trend in most top universities in China, a trend that is really spreading so fast even to the community-based universities currently. The use of English language as the emerging preferred medium of instruction has really helped to attract a lot of international students.

Currently, there are a lot of studies on international student education and general factors necessitating international student mobility. However, most of these studies have focused on the choice of western study destinations and the general factors necessitating such endeavours. Furthermore, available literature on study in China dwells much on history of reforms in international education as well as some form of comparison between western international education and the emerging international education in the east, without exploring deep into the singular updated case of China. Indeed, there still remains a gap in the research on international students' choice of the East, with emphasis on China as a key stakeholder in international education.

### **3. Methodology**

This study used the simple descriptive survey. According to McCombes (2020), descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. It is basically, a good means to answer questions on *what, where, when and how events do occur*. Descriptive research is an appropriate choice when the research aim is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories.

#### **3.1. Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The sample size was 583 international students mainly from: Africa, Asia, America, Oceania and Europe, who are schooling in Mainland China. The simple random sampling technique was employed for 500 respondents, while the convenience sampling technique was employed for the remaining 83 respondents.

#### **3.2. Research Instruments**

A research questionnaire was the instrument used for collecting data. This is because it was found to be a time-saving method and also ensures the accuracy of the information which is given since they were to be completed at the convenience of the respondent. Additionally, the research questionnaire guarantees confidentiality and may likely help to elicit more truthful responds than most other known methods. The questionnaire was generated via Microsoft survey platform and contained a total of 28 closed-ended questions. These questions were subdivided into two main sections. Section "A" was about the background information of the respondents, while Section "B" was on decision by respondents (international students) to school abroad with the context of China being the focus, using the closed-ended question format on a five-point Likert scale.

### 3.3. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure validity, experts in the field of international education, had thoroughly checked the instrument. Furthermore, to ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted involving 102 international students from different countries studying all over Mainland China. The internal consistency coefficient of each item was computed using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Model (SPSS) and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was determined subsequently. This confirms the internal consistency of the instrument is acceptable according to Wim et al. (2008).

### 3.4. Data Collection

As a way of eliciting reliable responses, the researcher personally visited and, in some cases, called the respondents on phone or contacted via text messages, ahead of time to seek their kind permission and also explain the purpose of the study to them. Subsequently, the questionnaire's link was sent via preferred internet platforms to international students all over Mainland China for the completion and submission of the electronic questionnaires at their own convenience. A satisfactory response rate of 100% was realized. This was mainly due to the flexibility of the means of submission and their constant online presence. All responses were received within a few days' time.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Data gathered from respondents were edited, coded and analyzed statistically (quantitatively), using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Being a descriptive survey, special emphasis was on descriptive statistics. As a result, percentages and frequency tables were used to support the analysis of major responses. The research questions were analyzed with emphasis on means and standard deviations. The responses for all the close-ended questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The values assigned to the responses ranged from 0.00 (Strongly Disagree) to 5.00 (Strongly Agree). By implication, the mean of means and the mean of the standard deviation were computed and their numerical values gave the direction of the response to each research question.

### 3.6. Ethical Consideration

In order to meet the ethical standards in research, respondents' permissions were sought and their confidentiality assured. In addition, the main objectives backing the study were explained to each respondent and so respondents participated in the study voluntarily.

## 4. Analysis, Discussion and Findings

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS software. Presentation and analysis were done with special reference to the sub-themes created in the research questionnaire. This begins with the analysis of background data of the respondents, followed by the main data. The analysis of the main data include: Why interna-

tional students travel abroad for studies, why international students now choose China, why international students do not consider schooling in western universities as before, and benefits of Schooling in China.

### Background Data of Respondents

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of section “A” on the respondents’ questionnaire, were used to collect relevant information on the background details of the 583 respondents.

With reference to **Table 1**, it can be observed that there were more male respondents (57.5%), than female respondents (42.5%), with those within the age of 25 - 34 years, being the majority (75.2%). A greater proportion of the respondents were master’s degree students (59.8%), with most also being natives of countries within the continent of Africa (47.4%). With reference to the source of funding, there’s a clear indication that most respondents (70.5%), were on the Chinese government or university scholarship, these are mostly post-graduate students, with master’s degree students being the majority. A smaller proportion were self-funded students (28.6%) being mostly undergraduate students. Indeed, one key indicator has also been the experience of international education by respondents or members of their respective families. Though a small proportion (39.5%) of respondents admitted international education wasn’t a new concept in their families, majority (60.5%) claimed it was a new concept. All these background indicators, have significantly affected their decision to first of all travel abroad and secondly the preference for China as a destination of study.

**Table 1.** Background data of respondents.

|   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| <b>Gender</b>                                       | Male                                      | 57.5% |
|   | Female                                    | 42.5% |
| <b>Age</b>  | ≤24 yrs                                   | 13.9% |
|   | 25 - 34 yrs                               | 75.2% |
|   | ≥35 yrs                                   | 10.9% |
| <b>Current Academic Level</b>                       | Chinese language                          | 3.7%  |
|   | bachelor                                  | 25.7% |
|   | master’s degree                           | 59.8% |
|   | Phd                                       | 10.8% |
| <b>Continent of Origin</b>                          | Africa                                    | 47.4% |
|   | Asia                                      | 23.5% |
|   | America                                   | 3.9%  |
|   | Oceania                                   | 8.6%  |
|   | Europe                                    | 16.6% |
| <b>Source of Funds</b>                              | Self-funded                               | 28.6% |
|   | Scholarship from Home Gov’t/Company       | 0.9%  |
|   | Scholarship from Chinese Gov’t/University | 70.5% |
| <b>Families’ History of International Education</b> | Experience                                | 39.5% |
|   | No experience                             | 60.5% |

Source: Field data (2021).

#### 4.1. Why International Students Travel Abroad for Studies

This sub-section under section “B”, consist of four questions (items 7, 8, 9, and 10). The responses do indicate the reasons why international students like travelling abroad for studies. The mean of means (4.45) and mean of standard deviation (0.74) indicate in agreement the key reasons why international students of all levels like to travel abroad for their studies.

From **Table 2**, it can be observed that, all the four items provided, recorded higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree).

These statements are incorporated into reasons why international students of all levels travel abroad for studies. These includes: the quest to obtain an international qualification, the quest to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences, the quest to have a change of environment and new experiences, and the presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking. All these statements recorded a higher level of agreement than disagreement. 89.5%, agreed to the desire to obtain an international qualification while 4.2% disagreed. The mean value for this statement was 4.439, implying most respondents agree they travel abroad for studies in order to meet their desire to obtain an international qualification.

The desire to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences, also recorded some remarkable level of agreement. It was also observed that 91.8% of the respondents agreed on their desire to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences compared to 3.2% who disagreed. The mean value was 4.491. This implies most respondents find studying abroad as an opportunity to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences.

Furthermore, findings on the desire to have a change of environment and new experiences and the presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking revealed, 97.3% and 90.4% respectively agreed to such reasons but 1.0% and 1.2% respectively disagreed. The respective mean values were 4.633 and 4.226. This implies most respondents agree to travelling abroad for studies as a result of the desire to have a change of environment and new experiences and the presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking.

**Table 2.** Why international students travel abroad for studies.

| Statement   | SA<br>N (%) | A<br>N (%) | U<br>N (%) | D<br>N (%) | SD<br>N (%) | Mean  | St. D  |
|---|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| The quest to obtain an international qualification  | 353 (60.4)  | 169 (29.1) | 37 (6.3)   | 12 (2.1)   | 12 (2.1)    | 4.439 | 0.8631 |
| The quest to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences                     | 362 (62.1)  | 173 (29.7) | 29 (5.0)   | 10 (1.7)   | 9 (1.5)     | 4.491 | 0.7992 |
| The quest to have a change of environment and new experiences                                 | 395 (67.8)  | 172 (29.5) | 10 (1.7)   | 2 (0.3)    | 4 (0.7)     | 4.633 | 0.6084 |
| The presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking | 200 (34.3)  | 327 (56.1) | 49 (8.4)   | 2 (0.3)    | 5 (0.9)     | 4.226 | 0.6838 |

Mean of means = 4.45 Mean of Standard Deviation = 0.74. Mean ranges for **Table 2**: Strongly Disagree (SD)—(0.0 - 1.0); Disagree (D)—(1.1 - 2.0); Uncertain (U)—(2.1 - 3.0); Agree (A)—(3.1 - 4.0); Strongly Agree (SA)—(4.1 - 5.0). Source: Field data (2021).

However, a few respondents also indicated uncertain positions for the items above. In all, the direction of response for this question, suggests that most international students go in for international education as a means to obtain certifications, meet new international faculty, have a change of environment and attend institutions with good global ranking. This supports the assertion made by Tucker (2021) on reasons to study abroad.

#### 4.2. Why International Students Now Choose China

This part under section “B”, consist of eight questions (items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18). The responses indicate why international students now choose China as a study location.

Observations from Table 3, with reference to the mean of means (3.675) and mean of standard deviation (0.8895) indicate in agreement the reasons why international students now choose China as their preferred destination for international education. It can be observed that, three out of the eight items presented for respondents to indicate their decision to choose China as their preferred destination of international education, recorded remarkably, higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree).

On the issue of their quest for full or partial scholarship options from the Chinese government, the relatively higher admission rates in Chinese universities, and the fast growth of the Chinese economy with its attendant business opportunities, 76.3%, 77.3% and 94.5% respectively agreed while 13.9%, 11.6% and 1.4% respectively also disagreed. The respective mean values for these statements were 4.137, 4.113 and 4.005, implying most respondents agree to choose China for studies due to the full or partial scholarship options from the Chinese government, the generally relatively high admission rates in Chinese universities especially for international education and the remarkably fast growth of the Chinese economy with its attendant business opportunities. Indeed, the quest for full or partial scholarship options from the Chinese government is also highlighted in Table 1 by the huge number of international students indicated there on Chinese government scholarship/university scholarship.

Furthermore, noticeable levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree) were recorded for questions on: the opportunity to learn another language such as Chinese language and experience rich Chinese and Asian culture at firsthand, relatively low cost of obtaining a degree, the quality of faculty members at various universities, and relatively low cost of living. 74.3%, 73.9%, 67.2%, and 60.7% agreed respectively, while 19.5%, 14.3%, 19.2% and 24.1% disagreed respectively. The respective mean values recorded were: 3.623, 3.597, 3.489 and 3.379. These implies that most respondents agree on choosing China as a destination for international education due to the need to learn the Chinese language, quality of faculty at various Chinese universities as well as relatively low costs of obtaining a degree and living.

**Table 3.** Why international students now choose china.

| Statement  | SA<br>N (%) | A<br>N (%) | U<br>N (%) | D<br>N (%) | SD<br>N (%) | Mean  | St. D  |
|--|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| Quest for full or partial scholarship options from the Chinese government  | 307 (52.6)  | 138 (23.7) | 57 (9.8)   | 73 (12.5)  | 8 (1.4)     | 4.137 | 1.1100 |
| The opportunity to learn another language such as Chinese language and experience rich Chinese and Asian culture at first hand | 50 (8.6)    | 383 (65.7) | 36 (6.2)   | 108 (18.5) | 6 (1.0)     | 3.623 | 0.9166 |
| Relatively higher admission rates  | 269 (46.1)  | 181 (31.2) | 65 (11.1)  | 66 (11.3)  | 2 (0.3)     | 4.113 | 1.0225 |
| Easy visa and entry procedures   | 48 (8.2)    | 178 (30.5) | 121 (20.8) | 229 (39.3) | 7 (1.2)     | 3.053 | 1.0366 |
| The fast growth of the Chinese economy with its attendant business opportunities   | 44 (7.5)    | 507 (87.0) | 24 (4.1)   | 7 (1.2)    | 1 (0.2)     | 4.005 | 0.4247 |
| The quality of faculty members at various universities   | 14 (2.4)    | 378 (64.8) | 79 (13.6)  | 103 (17.7) | 9 (1.5)     | 3.489 | 0.8632 |
| Relatively low cost of obtaining a degree  | 15 (2.6)    | 416 (71.3) | 69 (11.8)  | 68 (11.7)  | 15 (2.6)    | 3.597 | 0.8252 |
| Relatively low cost of living  | 17 (2.9)    | 337 (57.8) | 88 (15.2)  | 132 (22.6) | 9 (1.5)     | 3.379 | 0.9168 |

Mean of means = 3.675 Mean of Standard Deviation = 0.8895. Mean ranges for **Table 3**: Strongly Disagree (SD)—(0.0 - 1.0); Disagree (D)—(1.1 - 2.0); Uncertain (U)—(2.1 - 3.0); Agree (A)—(3.1 - 4.0); Strongly Agree (SA)—(4.1 - 5.0). Source: Field data (2021).

However, it was also observed that 40.5% of the respondents expressed disagreement on the easy visa and entry procedures for travelling to study in China, compared to 38.7% who agreed. The mean value was 3.053, implying most respondents admit the visa and entry procedure for travelling to China for studies is quite an emerging phenomenon yet, it could really be a daunting task, all things being equal.

Additionally, a sizeable number of respondents did indicate uncertain positions for reasons why international students now choose China as their destination for studying abroad.

Generally, the higher levels of agreements on reasons why international students now prefer China is buttressing the assertion by Minsky (2016) that China is already the fourth most popular destination to travel generally and has the third-largest population of international students, just after the US and the UK.

#### 4.3. Why International Students Do Not Consider Schooling in Western Universities

This construct under section B, consist of six questions (items 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24). The responses obtained here indicates the reasons why most international students now do not consider schooling in universities in western countries as before.

Based on findings from **Table 4**, it can be observed that the mean of means (3.3735) and mean of standard deviation (1.0371) indicate in agreement the decision of most international students not to consider schooling in universities in western countries but rather universities in China. It can be observed that, five out of the six items provided recorded higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree).

Looking at questions on relatively cumbersome visa and entry procedures, relatively high cost of living, relatively high cost of obtaining a degree, the relatively low admission rates and inability to integrate properly into western cultures. 80.3%, 78.8%, 64.8%, 50.1% and 53.5% respectively agreed while 9.8%,

**Table 4.** Why international students do not consider schooling in western universities.

| Statement   | SA<br>N (%) | A<br>N (%) | U<br>N (%) | D<br>N (%) | SD<br>N (%) | Mean  | St. D  |
|---|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| Relatively high cost of obtaining a degree            | 140 (24.0)  | 238 (40.8) | 61 (10.5)  | 134 (23.0) | 10 (1.7)    | 3.624 | 1.1312 |
| Relatively high cost of living                        | 40 (6.9)    | 419 (71.9) | 58 (9.9)   | 62 (10.6)  | 4 (0.7)     | 3.736 | 0.7658 |
| Relatively low admission rates                        | 20 (3.4)    | 272 (46.7) | 83 (14.2)  | 201 (34.5) | 7 (1.2)     | 3.166 | 0.9852 |
| Relatively cumbersome visa and entry procedures       | 249 (42.7)  | 219 (37.6) | 58 (9.9)   | 53 (9.1)   | 4 (0.7)     | 4.125 | 0.9685 |
| Inability to integrate properly into western cultures | 5 (0.9)     | 307 (52.6) | 75 (12.9)  | 170 (29.1) | 26 (4.5)    | 3.163 | 1.0030 |
| Generally low employment prospects upon graduation    | 6 (1.0)     | 203 (34.8) | 78 (13.4)  | 43 (7.4)   | 253 (43.4)  | 2.427 | 1.3689 |

Mean of means = 3.3735 Mean of Standard Deviation = 1.0371. Mean ranges for **Table 4**: Strongly Disagree (SD)—(0.0 - 1.0); Disagree (D)—(1.1 - 2.0); Uncertain (U)—(2.1 - 3.0); Agree (A)—(3.1 - 4.0); Strongly Agree (SA)—(4.1 - 5.0). Source: Field data (2021).

11.3%, 24.7%, 35.7% and 33.6% respectively also disagreed. The respective mean values for these statements were 4.125, 3.736, 3.624, 3.166 and 3.163, implying most respondents now agree to choose China instead of universities in western countries for studies abroad.

On the contrary, it was also observed that 50.8% of the respondents expressed disagreement on the issue of generally low employment prospects upon graduation from universities in western countries, compared to 35.8% who agreed. The mean value was 2.427, implying most respondents either disagree or are unsure of employment prospects upon graduation from universities in western countries.

A great number of respondents did also indicate uncertain positions for reasons why international students no longer consider schooling in western universities. This could be but not limited to the high incidence of financial hardships, anxiety and stress as well as cultural shock and change as indicated by [Wu et al. \(2015\)](#).

#### 4.4. Benefits of Schooling in China

From **Table 5**, the mean of means (3.9615) and mean of standard deviation (0.8221) indicate some level of agreement on the possible benefits of schooling in China. It can be observed that all four items provided recorded some higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree). From items 25, 26, 27 and 28, it is observed that 83.9%, 68.3%, 90% and 78.2% agreed respectively, while 5.8%, 18.8%, 2.6% and 9.8% disagreed respectively. The respective mean values were: 4.230, 3.477, 4.424 and 3.715, implying most respondents agreed on the possible benefits of schooling in China. This supports the statement of [Bridgestock \(2020\)](#), which indicates that, studying in China has great post-graduation benefits.

However, a noticeable proportion of respondents also did indicate uncertain positions to the general direction of responses. This could partly be because of their uninformed positions or references they are making from other people's experiences.



**Table 5.** Benefits of schooling in china.

| Statement   | SA<br>N (%) | A<br>N (%) | U<br>N (%) | D<br>N (%) | SD<br>N (%) | Mean  | St. D  |
|---|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| Easy establishment of business partnerships with Chinese companies                                  | 273 (46.8)  | 216 (37.1) | 60 (10.3)  | 23 (3.9)   | 11 (1.9)    | 4.230 | 0.9206 |
| Relatively higher employment prospects after graduation   | 7 (1.2)     | 391 (67.1) | 75 (12.9)  | 93 (15.9)  | 17 (2.9)    | 3.477 | 0.8768 |
| Personal safety and well-being  | 322 (55.2)  | 203 (34.8) | 43 (7.4)   | 13 (2.3)   | 2 (0.3)     | 4.424 | 0.7534 |
| China is strategically positioned as a relatively good transit location to other parts of the world | 26 (4.5)    | 430 (73.7) | 70 (12.0)  | 49 (8.4)   | 8 (1.4)     | 3.715 | 0.7377 |

Mean of means = 3.9615 Mean of Standard Deviation = 0.8221. Mean ranges for **Table 5**: Strongly Disagree (SD)—(0.0 - 1.0); Disagree (D)—(1.1 - 2.0); Uncertain (U)—(2.1 - 3.0); Agree (A)—(3.1 - 4.0); Strongly Agree (SA)—(4.1 - 5.0). Source: Field data (2021).

## 5. Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

From the study, the following findings were derived:

a) With reference to the background information of respondents (**Table 1**), it was observed that there were more male respondents (57.5%), than female respondents (42.5%), with those within the age of 25 - 34 years, being the majority (75.2%). A greater proportion of the respondents were master's degree students (59.8%), with most being Africans (47.4%).

Furthermore, it is noticed that 70.5%, were on the Chinese government or university scholarship, while 28.6% were self-funded students. 39.5% of respondents admitted the concept of international education was known but, 60.5% claimed it was a new concept.

b) From the findings of **Table 2**, it can be observed that all the four statements incorporating why international students travel abroad for studies, recorded higher levels of agreement than disagreement. 89.5% agreed to the desire to have an international qualification, while 4.2% disagreed. 91.8% agreed on the desire to meet new faculty members with rich international experience, compared to 3.2% who disagreed. 97.3% agreed on the desire to have a change of environment and new experiences, while 1.0% disagreed. In addition, 90.4% agreed to the presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking, while 1.2% disagreed.

c) The mean of means (3.675) with reference to **Table 3**, is an indication that most international students now prefer China as a study location.

d) Based on findings from **Table 4**, a greater proportion of respondents agree than disagree on the cumbersome visa and entry procedures (80.3%), relatively high cost of living (78.8%), relatively high cost of obtaining a degree (64.8%), the relatively low admission rates (50.1%) and inability to integrate properly into western cultures (53.5%). However, majority also disagreed on the issue of generally low employment prospects upon graduation from universities in western countries (50.8%). The final mean of means (3.3735), indicates without doubts that international students, now do not greatly prefer universities in western

countries than China. Indeed, the current preferred location is China.

e) Most international students agree on the possible benefits of schooling in China according to information gathered from **Table 5**. Nonetheless, a noticeable proportion of them, expressed their uncertainties regarding the aforementioned possible benefits. A mean value of 3.9615 was obtained suggesting even though some respondents are uncertain of the possible benefits, yet a greater proportion of them, still agreed on the possible benefits of schooling in China.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were enumerated:

a) First of all, the Chinese government through the Ministry of education should continuously put in place measures to attract more higher-calibre international students from all over the world. These measures must make sure all internationalized academic institutions in China continue to adopt and adapt to current international practices needed to meet global standards.

b) Secondly, university authorities should also arrange necessary internship opportunities for international students to help bridge the gap between the job market and the classroom. This will make studying abroad more relevant to international students and arouse their interest greatly as they can relate what is learnt in the classroom and what to expect in the job market.

c) Furthermore, higher institutions' administrators and other concerned stakeholders of international education should continuously implement sustainable measures to bring in more international students. The administrative set-ups must be foreigner-friendly and must create the right atmosphere to make international students feel at home and enjoy their time of studies.

d) Indeed, international education is a good experience. However, students planning to travel abroad for studies must do thorough research on key indicators that will warrant the chosen location. This will help them to make informed choices.

In addition, international students must learn to abide strictly by the laws of their chosen location of study, so as to enjoy their time of study. They must put in all efforts to add value to themselves so they can become employable upon graduation either abroad or in their various home countries, should they return back after studies.

Moreover, international students considering schooling abroad could also consider universities in western countries provided they can afford the cost of obtaining a degree there as well as the general cost of living and conditions there. Indeed, almost all locations in the world are potential grounds for exploration through international studies, depending on the prevailing conditions there.

e) Schooling in China is a recommended option due to the possible benefits during studies and even after completion of studies. For instance, since China is the industrial hub of the world now, several business opportunities could emerge

aside academic/professional opportunities.

## 7. Conclusion

From the findings and recommendations of the study, it was concluded that: the subject of international student education is phenomenal. According to available records, over the past decade, most western countries have experienced a decline in the rate of international student enrolment, while countries such as China, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia have experienced significant increase in their role in international education (Jon et al., 2014). Indeed, China is currently a force to be reckoned with when it comes to international student education. China has become a preferred destination for many international students globally. The Chinese government through the Ministry of Education has put in place certain strategic measures to serve as pull-factors for international students. Most institutions in China, through the guidance of the Chinese Ministry of Education are also gradually upgrading their systems to be able to meet international standards as well as meet the needs and expectations of international students.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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