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The Decision to Study Abroad at Hungarian University – What Benefits International Students Are Looking For?


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Abstract

Globalisation is driving the internationalisation of higher education, promoting open access to universities, enhancing educational programs with an international focus, and stronger presence in the international higher education market. Thus, globalisation stimulates the internationalisation of universities. For universities to attract international students successfully, it is necessary to understand general issues regarding the decision-making process. The study aims to analyse the benefits of studying abroad at a Hungarian university among international students. To fulfil the aim of this study, a questionnaire was administered to 100 international students, aged 18 to 38. The study results showed that international students had been looking for benefits while studying abroad, such as personal development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling. Some benefits were also related to social and economic factors such as access to unique courses and knowledge, positive country image, safety situation, and affordable living costs in Hungary. The decision to study at a Hungarian university was made according to such benefits, including a desired program of study, comfortable facilities, flexible schedule, admission criteria, opportunity to improve English language skills, good reputation of the university, European degree, supportive environment, related costs, and future career prospects. At the same time, different age groups of international students considered the importance of benefits differently. Also, different groups of international students based on perceived social family status paid attention to different benefits. The findings of this study can be used for the promotion of Hungarian universities internationally to attract more international students with benefits that they look for when studying abroad.

Keywords: decision-making, Higher Education, international students, study abroad

1. Introduction

Globalisation serves as a driving force behind the internationalisation of higher education, facilitating broader access to universities, the enrichment of academic programs with a global focus, and a more formidable presence within the global higher education arena (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Consequently, globalisation actively fosters the internationalisation of universities. To successfully entice international students, it becomes essential for universities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping the entire customer decision-making process and the nuances involved in decision formation. According to the widely recognised five-stage decision-making process model, consumers in the purchasing process go through five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This model can also be applied to decision-making among international students who are considering studying abroad.

International students can contribute to the scientific cooperation, economic development (Dassin & Navarrete, 2018), and innovation growth of the host country (Hilal, 2013). To attract and retain talented international students, host countries often use scholarship programs. One of the central purposes of many host countries and universities has been to promote marketing strategies for successful invitation and recruitment of international students, who can contribute to the host country's development.

Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme was founded by the Government of Hungary in the spirit of its foreign policy “Opening to the East and the South” (Stipendium Hungaricum Programme: Operational Regulations, 2020). Thousands of international students from all around the world apply for higher educational studies in Hungary each year, based on bilateral educational cooperation agreements signed between the Ministries responsible for education in the sending countries/territories and Hungary or between higher education institutions. The objective of this program is to increase the diversity of Hungarian higher education institutions and to promote competitive Hungarian higher education in the world.

The Hungarian university in this study engages international students to participate in the educational process, provides intensive research opportunities, and serves a wide variety of educational programs, talent management and quality education for future professionals in a friendly atmosphere and unique favourable cultural environment.

A better understanding of the benefits international students are seeking can help us comprehend how the decision to study abroad is made. If a particular university knows what students are looking for, it is possible to work on delivering and highlighting those aspects in the marketing campaigns. Highlighted benefits promote higher education in Hungary, attracting more international students according to their needs (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Kéri, 2018). International education is an interesting research field not only because of its importance for many people and countries, but also because relatively little has been written on the marketing of education within international markets (Mazzarol, 1998).

The study aims to analyse the benefits related to the general expectations of studying abroad among international students, the benefits of studying in Hungary, the benefits of studying at a Hungarian university, and which benefits are delivered by the university. To fulfil the aim of the study, the questionnaire “What benefits international students are looking for in Hungary and Hungarian universities?” was created and distributed among international students in Hungary. The data were statistically analysed by using mean, standard deviation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

2. Literature review

For countries and institutions to be successful in the international area is significantly important to understand not only educational issues but also consumer behaviour and the entire customer decision process. Consumer behaviour can be defined as steps of psychological and physical activities that individuals undertake in the selection, purchase, and consumption of products or services (Kesić & Piri-Rajh, 2004). Universities are interested in attracting and retaining the most talented international students who can contribute to the economic and scientific development of the country.

Based on our literature review, an absence of a student's decision-making theoretical model to study abroad is found (Cubillo et al., 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006). To cover this gap, the proposed solution is to apply students' decision-making to study at home as a basis for decision-making to study abroad, due to the similarities between the decision to study at home and study abroad. Three major similarities are identified. The first major similarity is financial outlays. Both decisions require consideration of financial resources for an extended period. Secondly, both decisions include considering the criteria such as academic quality and reputation of a higher education institute (HEI) (Anderson, 2007). Finally, the decision to study both cases include several complex influencing factors that need to be considered before making an important decision (Anderson, 2007).

Customer decision is the outcome of consumer behaviour. According to the Five-Stage Model of the Consumer Buying Process, consumers go through five stages, namely: recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation in the purchasing process (Kotler & Keller, 2006). The stage model of the consumer buying process provides a foundation for how the buying process is viewed (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). At the same time, this model can be used as a basis for understanding the decision-making process for studying abroad.

The main focus in this study is on the third stage - the evaluation of alternatives. After the consumer has recognised that there is a need to satisfy and has searched for information, it is time to evaluate the different available alternatives. This first evaluation can be based on objective criteria such as the price, services available, distance, or more subjective criteria such as the status or trust of a supplier – reputation of the university (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). To satisfy their needs, students look for certain benefits in the product or service, and which program or university can provide the desired benefits.

According to the third phase of the decision-making model, international students look for certain benefits in the product or service, which country, university, or program can provide desirable benefits, and these benefits constitute the foundation of their decision. Based on the previous studies several general benefits to studying abroad can be identified, namely: an opportunity to gain cultural experience; access to unique knowledge; higher quality of education; possibility for migration; improved career prospects, personal development; status and prestige; international travelling; and learning a foreign language (Cubillo et al., 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; (Petzold & Moog, 2018; Schmidt & Pardo, 2017; Waibel et al., 2017).

The cultural experience is a unique benefit associated with studying abroad and has a major impact on a student deciding whether to engage in international education or not (United Minds, 2007). All countries and universities offer different programs and courses, and this difference in the courses offered constitutes a factor in the decision (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Russel, 2005). Another benefit for students who are looking to study abroad is to get a higher quality of education abroad than they can get at home (Li & Bray, 2007). Higher education quality is a

core element that makes high-quality perception an important motive for students when deciding where to study (Cubillo et al., 2006; Russel, 2005; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; (Petzold & Moog, 2018; Schmidt & Pardo, 2017; Waibel et al., 2017). Also, a significant number of international students go abroad to study with the purpose of staying in the country after graduation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The core outcome of studying abroad is not limited to education alone; rather, it primarily revolves around the benefits that a degree can offer in terms of future employment. (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Additionally, enhanced career prospects resulting from an international degree stand out as one of the primary benefits that students are seeking when studying abroad. (Cubillo et al., 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; (Petzold & Moog, 2018; Schmidt & Pardo, 2017; Waibel et al., 2017). Another benefit is to get a higher status due to studying abroad, especially for students coming from developing countries to study in more developed countries (Cubillo et al., 2006). Also, foreign language study is still a common component of university education. International students have expectations that spending time in a country will automatically bring about language gains (Freed, 1998).

International students' selection of a host country can be influenced by a variety of factors. Socio-economic factors include ties between host and home countries (Anderson & Bhati 2012; Singh et al., 2014), the country's image and reputation for offering high-quality education (Li & Bray, 2007), a safe and favourable environment (Russel, 2005; Chen & Zimitat, 2006), living cost, and living standard (Anderson & Bhati, 2012; Pimpa, 2003; Singh et al., 2014).

The second group is Cultural factors. Among these, cultural proximity emerges as a significant influence on international students' choices to study abroad, as they often prefer studying in a country with well-defined social norms and practices that align with their own, contributing to a sense of comfort and familiarity (Singh et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2012).

However, some recent studies indicate that many international students choose to study in a country whose culture is completely different from their own culture to gain valuable life experience. That is why a lot of students would like to study in China, South Korea, or India (Clavel, 2015; Eder et al., 2010). Language is also part of a culture, and it is natural that international students would choose to study in a country where they can communicate in the language of the host country well or improve their foreign language proficiency (Bourke, 2000; McCarthy et al., 2012). Learning a language and the availability of English-speaking lecturers must be considered as a desired benefit when students evaluate different options concerning study destinations (Russell, 2005).

The third group is Political factors. Political proximity between the home and the host country has been long recorded as an influential factor in the flow of international students. In the past, a large number of students travelled for study purposes between socialist countries (Nguyen, 2013; Pismennaya, 2010; Pugach, 2012). This political factor still influences the choice of international students nowadays. In addition, policies in the host country that relate to visa procedure, students' jobs, post-graduation employment, or immigration opportunities for international students also draws the attention of international students when selecting a host country (Ho et al., 2007; Yang, 2007).

Several studies have confirmed that some factors influence international students' choice of the host institution. In general, those factors are related to institutional image and international reputation, international and supportive environment, cost issues, outcomes and benefits, admission criteria, and recommendations of stakeholders. (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lee, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The institution's image is the sum of opinions, ideas, and impressions that someone has of an institution. This image can be

formed by word of mouth, and feedback from students. Students are becoming more aware when choosing an institution which means that institutions need to maintain and develop a distinctive image to be able to attract more students (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Furthermore, it is also substantial that future employers recognise and accept the institution, program studied and academic certificate.

An international and supportive environment is also important. Recent studies indicated that international students were greatly concerned about the location of the host institution and the presence of other international students in an institution in their selection process to maintain their social life (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Price et al., 2003; Rooijen, 2015).

At the same time, many studies indicated that international students are concerned about the cost they invest in choosing a host country and institution (Anderson & Bhati, 2012; Maringe, 2006; Pimpa, 2003). In the case of granted education through Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Program, international students get the opportunity to study in Hungarian universities without paying tuition fees. The choice of institution is based on other factors once cost-related issues are eliminated.

According to the institution choice, international students are considering the benefits that they might receive during and after study, such as improving their academic skills and career prospects (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Counsell, 2011; Eder et al., 2010; Ivy, 2010). Stakeholders' recommendations have been found to influence students' choice of host country and institution (. Stakeholders can be family members, friends, teachers, current and previous students, and recruiting agents. Bodycott, 2009; Ivy, 2010; Lee, 2014; Lee & Morrish, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McCarthy, Sen & Fox Garrity, 2012; Pimpa 2003).

The physical environment of a university can constitute an important element in the decision-making process. University facilities can be considered a relevant factor in influencing a student's selection. High-quality facilities, technical equipment – projectors, computers, laboratories, scientific attachments, and educational tools are especially important. (Cubillo et al., 2006; Russel, 2005).

Admission criteria are one of the key issues for students to consider studying abroad. Academic entry standards and English language proficiency have been found to be two key factors that international students pay attention to when they choose a host institution (Bourke, 2000; McCarthy et al., 2012). According to admission criteria and entrance procedure, a host university tries to facilitate a smoother process for international students by providing special support, instruction, and guidance.

The existing literature on students' decision-making to study at the university mostly has focused on studying in their home country but there has been limited research on student's decision-making to study abroad. To cover the gap, the most famous Five-Stage Model of the Consumer Buying Process is used as a basis for the decision-making process to study abroad (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). International students look for certain benefits in the product or service, which country, university, or program can provide desirable benefits, and these benefits constitute the foundation of their decision (Cubillo et al., 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006). This study aims to analyse the decision to study abroad with a focus on the benefits associated with studying in Hungary and at a Hungarian university.

3. Methodology

A quantitative design was used in this study to analyse the benefits of what international students are looking for studying abroad with a specific focus on survey. It is often associated with the generalization of findings to the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A survey design provided a quantitative description of benefits for what international students are looking for studying abroad and in Hungary, by studying a sample of that population. Survey designs helped to answer descriptive questions and questions about the relationships between variables in this study. Data were statistically analysed with the help of SPSS 22.0 software (Statistical Package for the Social Science).

3.1. Instruments

The questionnaire “What benefits international students are looking for in Hungary and Hungarian universities?” was developed based on the literature review. General benefits associated with the choice to study abroad, different factors associated with the socio-economic, cultural, and political factors of the host country, these factors which influence international students’ choice of the host university, received benefits during the study were identified as a foundation for the questionnaire.

The participants were administered the “What benefits international students are looking for at Hungarian university?” to get to know about the benefits associated with studying in Hungary and at a Hungarian university. Based on the broad literature review, this questionnaire was developed. The scales were formulated in English. On this questionnaire, the international students were required to rate, based on a 5-point Likert scale from “fully disagree” to “fully agree”, the extent items correspond to what benefits they are looking for in Hungary and at a Hungarian university.

The questionnaire was composed of 43 items subdivided into four scales assessing general benefits associated with the choice to study abroad (cultural experience, access to unique knowledge, or opportunity to improve foreign language). Different factors associated with socio – economic (The study in Hungary would give me a higher status and a certain prestige, affordable living costs), cultural (To understand social practice or to learn Hungarian language) and political factors in Hungary (Political proximity of home country and Hungary, easy to work during my studies abroad would constitute a benefit). Factors which influenced international students’ choice of the university (International recognition of the home country, Desired programme), and perceived benefits were identified during the studying in Hungary.

3.2. Procedure

The questionnaire was formed in the Google form service and distributed online to international students who are studying at a Hungarian university. The distribution was carried out through social media in a personal message and a special university group on Facebook. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; each participant could choose the most convenient time to fill out the questionnaire. The approximate length of filling out this questionnaire is fifteen minutes. In this study, the research data were analysed using the software SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Science). For all the statistical analyses conducted, the level of significance was taken as 0.05. Descriptive statistics were used such as mean and standard deviation. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 100 international students who were enrolled in a Hungarian university. The sampling procedure involved convenience sampling based on the students' location in Hungary, studying at a Hungarian university on a full-time basis, their accessibility, and their willingness to take part in this research. The sample consisted of 100 international students (53 female, 47 male, mean age = 26 with an age range from 18 to 37 years. All participants stated their age, gender, level of study and major, gender, perceived social family status, future plans for work, and country of origin.

The English language was the medium of instruction in the module. To ensure that students had sufficient time for adaptation in Hungary and at a Hungarian university, the survey was conducted at the beginning of the second semester. The total time required to complete the questionnaire is approximately 15 minutes. All students provided their background and demographic information.

100 international students are represented in the levels of study – 69 students are Bachelor and 31 are Master students from different programmes of study such as Economics, Agriculture, Business Development, Management, Tourism, Leadership, and Accounting.

Two-thirds of the international students emphasized their perceived social family status as average, some international students perceived family status as over average, and some of them as under average. International students have no greater preference towards working in either their home country, or in Hungary after graduation. However, the students generally did plan to work abroad for more than two years. The participants of the study were from 27 different countries. Table 1 contains the demographic data of the sample.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	47	47%
Female	53	53%
Age		
18-21	38	38%
22-24	43	43%
< 25	19	19%
Level of study		
Bachelor	69	69%
Master	31	31%
Perceived social family status		
Over average	18	18%
Average	69	69%
Under average	13	13%
Working plans after graduation		
Work at home country	28	28%
Work in Hungary for 1 year	24	24%
Work in Hungary for 1 or 2 years	20	20%
Work in another country	10	10%
Work in Hungary for more than 2 years	18	18%

Source: own calculations

4.2. Data analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed. Four scales were represented: expectations about the general benefits of studying abroad, benefits of studying in Hungary, benefits of studying at a Hungarian university, and benefits received during studying abroad. The scale of benefits to study in Hungary consisted of three subscales: socio-economic factors, cultural factors, and political factors. Personal development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling were the most important benefits of studying abroad related to international students' general expectations. The less popular benefits of studying abroad were associated with the possibility of migration, higher quality of education in the host country, and the prestige of a diploma.

Table 2 represents general expectations about the benefits of studying abroad.

TABLE 2. BENEFITS OF STUDYING ABROAD

Benefits of Studying Abroad	Frequency	Percentage
Personal development	60	60%
Cultural experience	54	54%
Career prospects	51	51%
Possibility for travelling	51	51%
Diploma status	25	25%
Higher quality of education	23	23%
Possibility for migration	21	21%

Source: own calculations

According to socio-economic factors, the most valuable benefits for international students to study in Hungary are improving career prospects, work opportunities after graduation, and access to unique courses and knowledge. Hungary has a positive country image and international recognition, a safe environment, and affordable living costs. At the same time, international students do not perceive studying in Hungary with a higher status or certain prestige. In international students' opinion, the most important benefits of studying in Hungary among cultural factors are understanding the social practice and getting different experiences for life in the international environment, improving English language proficiency as an official language of the study program, and getting familiarity with Hungarian culture. International students do not see the opportunity to learn the Hungarian language as a cultural benefit. Considering the political factors, the most important benefits of studying in Hungary are the opportunity to work while studying and after graduation, a simple visa procedure, and easy access to Hungary. Half of the students do not consider the possibility of migration as a benefit.

Some benefits were identified due to the choice of the particular Hungarian university, such as the desired study program, comfortable university facilities and infrastructure, flexible schedule, admission criteria, and enrolment procedure, the opportunity to improve English language proficiency, good reputation, and popularity of the university, European degree, supportive environment, related costs to study at this university, and future career prospects. Also, these international students did not pay attention to the international recognition of the university in their home country. They did not follow any recommendations of stakeholders, parents, or friends to choose this university.

After more than one semester of studying, students have received some benefits in a particular university. More than half of the students have comfortable university facilities and infrastructure, desired programs, improved future career prospects, refined English language proficiency, and the opportunity to get a European degree.

The level of significance was taken as 0.05 for all the statistically conducted analyses. To compare what benefits international students look for in Hungary and in a Hungarian university, concerning the variables of age and perceived social family status, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Regarding the participants' age, there was a statistically significant difference between the different benefits of studying at a Hungarian university ($p < 0.05$). The youngest group of international students (18-21 years old) considered the most important benefits of studying at a Hungarian university, such as international recognition of the Hungarian university, the reputation of the university, the opportunity to get a translated European degree, and the opportunity to learn Hungarian language, compared to the oldest age groups. Table 3 represents the results of one-way variance analysis of the benefits to study at Hungarian university based on age.

TABLE 3. ONE-WAY VARIANCE ANALYSIS OF THE BENEFITS OF STUDYING AT A HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY

Dimension	Age Groups	F	X	SD	p
International Recognition	18-21	23	3.3333	0.97590	0.018
	22-24	39	2.5806	0.88597	
	<25	38	2.8235	1.08629	
University Reputation	18-21	23	3.5333	0.83381	0.001
	22-24	39	3.3871	0.91933	
	<25	38	3.0588	1.12657	
European Degree	18-21	23	3.6000	0.91026	0.049
	22-24	39	3.7419	0.85509	
	<24	38	3.3529	1.04105	
Hungarian Language	18-21	23	3.5333	0.74322	0.039
	22-24	39	2.9032	0.94357	
	<25	38	2.9412	1.07142	

Source: own calculations

Additionally, statistically significant variation in the results were found between the benefits of studying in Hungary in favour of the international students' perceived family social status ($p < 0.05$). Due to the different perception of the family's social status as above average, average, or below average, international students considered important benefits of studying in Hungary differently. A higher quality of education in Hungary, access to unique courses and knowledge, and international recognition of Hungary were some of these benefits. Students who considered their family status as over average paid attention more to the benefits of higher quality of

education, access to the courses and knowledge, and international recognition. Students with the perception of family status as average considered access to the courses and knowledge and international recognition to be more important than the quality of education in Hungary. Students who estimated perceived family social status as under average paid more attention to the quality of education in Hungary than to the access to the courses and knowledge and international recognition. Table 4 represents the results of one-way variance analysis of the benefits to study in Hungary based on perceived social family status variable.

TABLE 4. ONE-WAY VARIANCE ANALYSIS OF THE BENEFITS OF STUDYING IN HUNGARY BASED ON PERCEIVED SOCIAL FAMILY STATUS

Dimension	Group Status	f	X	SD	P
Quality of Education in Hungary	Above Average	18	3.4167	0.79296	0.045
	Average	69	3.0484	0.87642	
	Below Average	13	3.3333	1.03280	
Courses and Knowledge	Above Average	18	3.3333	0.88763	0.040
	Average	69	3.2742	0.99456	
	Below Average	13	2.8333	1.16905	
International Recognition	Above Average	18	3.8333	0.71774	0.027
	Average	69	3.7419	0.69978	
	Below Average	13	3.3333	0.51640	

Source: own calculations

5. Discussion

Personal development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling were the most important benefits of studying abroad related to international students. Personal development is seen by students as an opportunity to be independent and organize their lives and time around the host university. During studying abroad students could meet people from different countries and get to know more about new cultures. Cultural experience could be considered as a unique benefit, to become more adaptive and flexible. The possibility of travelling greatly affected students' worldviews and helped them to discover different parts of the world.

The less popular benefits of studying abroad were associated with the possibility of migration, higher quality of education in the host country, and the prestige of a diploma. The opportunity to study abroad was linked to the excitement of immersing oneself in a new culture, gaining valuable experiences, and opening up future possibilities. However, it was not primarily associated with the intention to migrate, dissatisfaction with the quality of education in one's home country, or the prestige of a future diploma.

The received results partly corresponded with previous findings. According to the literature review, general benefits to studying abroad had been identified: an opportunity to get cultural experience, access to unique knowledge, a higher quality of education, a possibility for migration, improved career prospects, personal development, status and prestige of diploma, international travelling, (Cubillo et al., 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006). Students of this study did not consider the higher quality of education, the possibility for migration, and the status and prestige of a diploma as benefits.

According to socio-economic factors the most valuable benefits for international students to study in Hungary were improving career prospects, work opportunities after graduation, access to unique courses, and knowledge which would be difficult to get at home country. Hungary

has a positive country image and international recognition, a safety situation, and affordable living costs. At the same time, international students did not perceive studying in Hungary with a higher status or certain prestige compared to their home country.

According to international students' perspectives, the most significant cultural benefits of studying abroad in Hungary include gaining insights into local social practices and acquiring diverse life experiences within an international setting. Additionally, enhancing proficiency in the English language, which serves as the official language of the study program, and developing an understanding of Hungarian culture are also considered valuable advantages. Unfortunately, international students did not see the opportunity to learn the Hungarian language as a cultural benefit – only 20% of students considered that. However, it's worth noting that learning the Hungarian language could be useful for integration and improvement of career prospects in the future.

Considering the political factors, the most important benefits to study in Hungary were an opportunity to work while studying and after graduation, a simple visa procedure, and easy access to Hungary. The same benefits were identified in several studies, that international students had paid attention to visa procedures, students' jobs, and post-graduation employment, when selecting a host country (Yang, 2007). Almost half of the international students did not perceive political proximity between their home country and Hungary as a benefit to studying in Hungary, one fourth of international students did not see this proximity. Additionally, half of the students did not consider the possibility of migration as a benefit.

The most important benefits when choosing a particular Hungarian university were the desired study program, comfortable university facilities and infrastructure, flexible schedule, admission criteria and enrolment procedure (requirements, English language certificate), an opportunity to improve English language proficiency, good reputation, and popularity of the university, European degree, a supportive environment in both academic and non-academic aspects of life, related costs to study at this university, and future career prospects. Also, these international students did not pay attention to the international recognition of the university in their home country. International students did not follow any recommendations of stakeholders, parents, or friends to choose a particular university. According to the literature review, the most important benefits of choosing a particular university were institutional image and international reputation, international and supportive environment, cost issues, outcomes and benefits, admission criteria, and recommendations of stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lee, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The main difference between the received results of this study and previous findings is that international students did not consider any recommendations from stakeholders.

Some benefits could be identified based on the students' experience during studying at the university for more than one semester. More than half of the students became accustomed to the university's facilities and infrastructure for the educational process, while almost half of the students reported a blend of immediate improvements and future prospects.

Several studies were conducted to investigate international students' experience while studying at a Hungarian university (Borodina, 2022, Tick et al., 2022, & Kéri, 2018). In a study conducted by Borodina (2022), the motivation of international students to study at a Hungarian university was explored with the help of a two-factor model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation proposed by the self-determination theory (SDT) of human motivation. The results of the study demonstrated that international students had a high sense of self-determination towards intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is expected to be facilitated when the university's environment satisfies the three basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness

(Deci et al., 1991). Therefore, the environmental factors of Hungarian universities organise a studying process that satisfies the three basic psychological needs, so international students' intrinsic motivation can be facilitated.

In another quantitative study, by Tick et al. (2022), international students' perception of lecturing modes and methods was analysed in connection with university recommendations - a case study of Obuda University. The study aimed to discover how international students evaluate lectures, lecturers, and the student-lecturer relationship, whether they have positive impressions and whether their experience and impression would result in an increase in recommendations and could attract more international students and contribute to the internationalization strategy of higher educational institutions. The sample was represented by 151 international students, in results 44.4% of the respondents were fully satisfied with the quality of the lectures and would recommend studying at the university. All three factors – quality, content and lecturers' guidance had a positive effect on whether students recommended the university to friends. Thus, university recommendations can be boosted by higher lecture quality, content and better lecturer guidance for future careers.

In a quantitative study conducted by Keri (2018) foreign students' motivation and expectations at the University of Szeged, Hungary was examined. Five types of motivation influence students' expectations. These five motivation types are reference groups, self-realization, getting to know the culture, integration into the Hungarian community, and gaining knowledge. Motivation to get knowledge about Hungarian culture and motivation to gain knowledge plays an important role to study in at the University of Szeged. Similar results were received in the current investigation, and benefits to study in Hungary were identified, such as improving career prospects, access to unique courses and knowledge, and getting familiar with social practice and Hungarian culture. Based on these studies, the university environment, lecturing modes and methods, the opportunity of gaining knowledge and familiarity with Hungarian culture among international students can be considered the main part of the experience of studying at a Hungarian university.

At the same time, students from different age groups considered differently the importance of the following benefits: international recognition of Hungarian university, good reputation, the possibility to get a European degree, and the opportunity to learn the Hungarian language. The youngest group of students from 18 to 21 years old paid more attention to university recognition in their home countries compared to the older students ($p = 0.018$). They considered international recognition of the university as an important benefit. The youngest group of students desired to study abroad ($p = 0.001$) in a university with a good reputation that is famous internationally. It could guarantee a safe atmosphere, good quality of education, and favourable conditions. Older students paid less attention to it, but it was still important, for students who were older than 25 it has become more neutral.

The age groups of students between 18-24 years old considered a European degree ($p = 0.049$) as an important benefit to studying abroad compared to older students. It could be related to the future perspectives to continue education; the older group paid less attention to the status of degree. Also, international students between 18-21 years old emphasized ($p = 0.039$) the opportunity to learn the Hungarian language as a significant benefit to choosing a particular university for integration. This age group was motivated to learn the Hungarian language. For older groups, this fact was more neutral.

International students with different perceived social family statuses (above average, average, below average) assessed different social and economic factors in Hungary as benefits. Students with above average ($p = 0.045$) and below average perceived social family status emphasized the

higher quality of education in Hungary as a benefit to studying in this country compared to the education in their home country, but students with average perceived social family status paid less attention to this benefit or did not consider it as a benefit.

Also, students with above average or average perceived social family status of the family considered access to unique courses and knowledge which would be difficult to get in the home country as a significant benefit ($p=0.040$) for future perspective and personal development, but for the group with below average perceived social family status this benefit is more neutral. Either students with an above average or average perceived social status of the family paid more attention to the positive country image and International recognition of Hungary than students with under average perceived social family status ($p=0.027$), this could be connected with the desire to keep their status or to improve it.

Personal development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling are the most important benefits of studying abroad related to international students' general expectations. The most valuable benefits for international students to study in Hungary are improving career prospects, work opportunities after graduation, access to unique courses and knowledge, cultural factors, and the opportunity to work while and after studying. Students from different age groups considered differently the importance of the following benefits: international recognition of Hungarian university, good reputation, the possibility to get a European degree, and the opportunity to learn Hungarian language. International students with different perceived social family statuses (above average, average, below average) assessed different social and economic factors in Hungary as benefits.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study was based on the qualitative research design. The sample of study – 100 international students who were studying at Hungarian university from 27 different countries. According to the results, international students were looking for some benefits to studying abroad, and the most important benefits related to the general expectations were personal development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling. The less popular benefits were associated with the possibility for migration, higher quality of education in the host country, and prestige of a European diploma. Education abroad was also associated with new experiences and future perspectives.

Some benefits were related to social and economic factors such as improving career prospects, access to unique courses and knowledge, positive country image and international recognition of Hungary, safety situation, and affordable living costs. International students did not perceive studying in Hungary with higher status or a certain prestige than in their home country. The most important benefits among cultural factors were understanding social practices, improving their English language, and gaining familiarity with Hungarian culture. Unfortunately, international students did not see an opportunity to learn the Hungarian language as a benefit. Half of the students did not mention the possibility of migration as a benefit to studying in Hungary. Important benefits for students were the opportunity to work during their study period in Hungary and after graduation, the opportunity to enter Hungary, and a simple visa procedure.

The decision to study at a Hungarian university was made according to some benefits for what international students are looking for in regard to general expectations: desired program of study, comfortable facilities and infrastructure, flexible schedule, admission criteria and enrolment procedure, opportunity to improve English language skills, good reputation and popularity of the university, translated degree, supportive environment, related costs, and future career prospects.

Students did not consider international recognition of the university in their home country and did not follow any recommendations of stakeholders, parents, or friends to choose this university. According to the opinion of international students, more than half of students got comfortable facilities and infrastructure in the university for education, almost half received desired programs, and improved future career prospects. A smaller but still noteworthy proportion of students benefited from improved English language proficiency and a European degree as benefits.

As reported by relationship analysis between different variables in the SPSS program with the help of ANOVA - Analysis of Variation method, some significant differences were found. Different age groups of international students considered the importance of benefits associated with studying at the university differently. At the same time, different groups of international students based on perceived social family status paid attention to different benefits of studying in Hungary.

Analysing the advantages that international students seek when considering studying abroad can provide valuable insights into the decision-making process behind their engagement in international education. If a particular university knows what students are looking for, it is possible to work on delivering and highlighting those aspects in their marketing campaigns. The university of this study can emphasize marketing campaign-related benefits to studying abroad: development, cultural experience, career prospects, and the possibility of travelling in general. Some socio-economic, cultural, and political benefits to studying in Hungary can be highlighted. Different marketing messages can be built for different age groups with an emphasis on the benefits of studying abroad. It is significantly important for this university to enhance its visibility and promotion through various measures, including active engagement on social media platforms, the development of an official website with English content, increased participation in social events, and a stronger presence among other Hungarian universities.

There are a few limitations of the current study that need to be addressed in future studies. Firstly, the study was self-reported. However, the research does offer some confirmatory evidence for the investigation of what benefits international students are looking for when considering studying abroad, studying in Hungary and at a Hungarian university. Future intervention studies can be conducted to compare what benefits international students are looking for in Hungary and neighbourhood countries (Austria, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine) to discover the main differences. Secondly, the data was collected in Hungary and limited by the European level of data collection. Future studies can be conducted among international students who study in Asia, South or North America, Africa, or Australia to move the research focus to the worldwide area.

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Conflict of Interest

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