

## International Student Recruitment: Benefits and Globalisation to The University

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**Abstract:** *The internationalization of higher education has growing significance in Malaysia, with international student enrollment emerging as a pivotal element in this discourse. This paper assesses the impact of the government-to-government approach as recruitment strategies aimed at potential applicants, the direct financial benefits international students bring to the university and effectiveness of this recruitment strategy within the context of UiTM. The methodology used in this project was a descriptive approach. The research adopts a multidimensional framework encompassing various data sources, analyses, and evaluations. This study shows that student recruitment strategy through the government-to-government approach has a higher impact on student enrolment in comparison to other methods employed. This approach also creates avenues for potential collaborative endeavours across various departments within the university. It expands the prospects for collaborative research initiatives and opens doors to various other forms of cooperation. Over the course of the years 2021 to 2023, this initiative made a substantial contribution*

*to the university's revenue stream by generating a total of RM 683,107 in tuition fees. This study underscores the noteworthy financial impact of the initiative on the university's financial sustainability, highlighting the potential implications and opportunities for further investigation in the field of higher education finance.*

**Keywords:** *International Student Recruitment, Globalisation and Student Recruitment Strategy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The recruitment of international students to universities in Malaysia has become a central issue in an era of globalisation. Along with the significant improvement of Malaysian universities' visibility in the global higher education field, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has been working towards establishing Malaysia as an international higher education hub. International enrolment has gained increasing importance and become a key component of the internationalisation discourse in Malaysia towards the improvement in global ranking (Times Higher Education, 2022). Minister of Higher Education, Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin highlighted a new direction of globalization branding in his speech early this year to market Malaysia as the lynchpin for talents and knowledge between the two oceanic regions; not only promoting itself as a prevalent destination for international education. International branding is a major influencing factor for the international students to select the potential university as their destination (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2017; Nuseir & El Refae, 2022).

Strategic marketing planning stands as a critical determinant for the effective recruitment of international students, a necessity accentuated by the heightened competitive landscape within the global higher education sector. The value proposition such as quality of life and value for money education that can be offered by the universities to their international students can attract "push-and pull" factor (Pawar et al., 2020). Another important criterion to attract international students is the online visibility that can be obtained through a strategic digital marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2022). Furthermore, the social media reviews authored by alumni who have

enjoyed a high-quality academic experience at the foreign university can also serve as a compelling factor in influencing international students to choose the university as their preferred destination. (Phonthanukitithaworn et al., 2022). Nevertheless, it is imperative for the university to diversify its marketing strategies beyond digital media, given that a significant portion of education financing comes from parents and government agencies. Consequently, facilitating in-person consultations within the students' countries of origin represents a practical approach. Implementing a hybrid marketing strategy that combines digital and physical promotional efforts emerges as an effective means to attract international students (Naidoo & Wu, 2011).

The strategic objective set for UiTM's postgraduate student enrolment by the year 2025 is to attain a total of 40,000 students, comprising 35,000 local students and 5,000 international students. The responsibility for executing this directive has been delegated to the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPsIs), which has implemented a diverse array of recruitment strategies. These strategies leverage UiTM's expertise to effectively promote the institution's postgraduate programs and ultimately bolster postgraduate student enrolment. These strategies encompass active participation in physical educational consultation, leveraging digital marketing channels, and establishing collaborative partnerships with government agencies and employing student recruitment agents. The enrolment of international postgraduate students has increased gradually since 2017. Fig. 1 shows the number of new international students in UiTM from 1997 to May 2023.

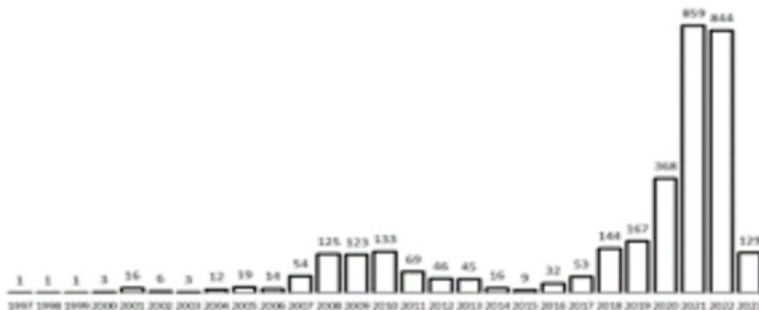


Fig. 1 Number of international students 2017 – 2023

The goal of this paper is to share the outcome of government-to-government approach as recruitment strategies aimed at potential applicants and the direct financial benefits international students bring to the university.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The project focuses on evaluating the outcomes of the government-to-government approach in international student recruitment at UiTM, specifically in the context of the partnership with the province of Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB). The primary objectives are to:

- i) Assess the impact of the government-to-government approach on the enrollment of international postgraduate students at UiTM.
- ii) Examine the financial benefits that international students from NTB bring to UiTM.
- iii) Analyze the relevance and effectiveness of this recruitment strategy within the context of UiTM's collaboration with NTB.

## 3. STRATEGIC MARKETING FRAMEWORK

IPSiS has conducted a strategic marketing plan to support the university in achieving as Globally Renowned University by 2025. In 2020, IPSiS has proposed four (4) strategic objectives (OS) for the university to achieve its objective which is shown in Fig. 2. Widening academic access is the first OS that is outlined in the planning. This strategy is established to achieve 40,000 postgraduate students that consist of local and international Master and PhD students in the university.



Fig. 2 Strategic Objective from 2020 to 2025

In achieving Objective OS1, IPSiS has initiated the implementation of a comprehensive 7Ps marketing strategy for its postgraduate programs, as illustrated in Fig. 3. With 226 distinct postgraduate programs presently offered at UiTM, the university has earned a reputation as a distinguished and all-encompassing institution, capable of drawing a diverse range of students from various backgrounds. This strategic approach underscores our commitment to promoting these programs effectively and ensuring their appeal to a broad spectrum of prospective students. The tuition fees for our students vary considerably, ranging from RM1,100 to RM40,000 per semester, encompassing fields such as social sciences, business management, and the science and technology cluster. Additionally, UiTM extends the availability of postgraduate research programs across all campuses located throughout Malaysia.



Fig. 3 7P Postgraduate Marketing Strategy

To effectively promote these programs, a combination of digital and physical promotional activities are employed. The admission process has been streamlined through an online platform, with the university actively embracing digitalization for most of its systems. Furthermore, the university places a strong emphasis on the regular maintenance and timely upgrades of its infrastructure to ensure the provision of quality facilities and services when needed.

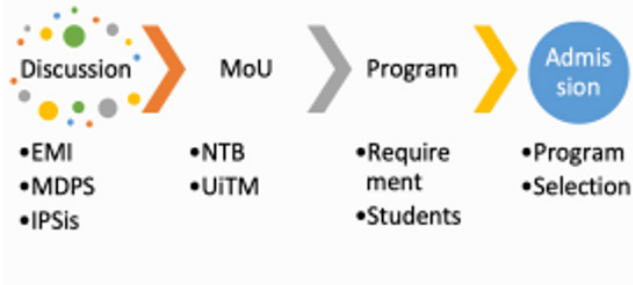
To achieve the objectives, the research adopts a multidimensional framework encompassing various data sources, analyses, and evaluations:

- a) Document Analysis: Examination of official documents such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), agreements, and meeting reports related to the UiTM-NTB partnership.
- b) Financial Analysis: Evaluation of financial data to determine the direct financial contributions made by international students from NTB, including tuition fees, accommodation fees, and other expenditures.
- c) Enrolment Data Analysis: Examination of enrolment data for cohorts of Indonesian students from NTB who joined UiTM since the inception of the partnership, focusing on trends, program preferences, and demographic information.
- d) Program Evaluation: Assessment of the effectiveness of academic programs offered to Indonesian students from NTB. This includes program satisfaction, academic performance, and program relevance to the development plans of the NTB Province.
- e) Stakeholder Interviews: In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives from UiTM, LPPNTB, and the Governor's office, to gather insights into motivations, challenges, and the overall impact of the government-to-government approach.
- f) Impact Assessment: Evaluation of the partnership's impact on NTB's development goals, with a particular focus on sustainable tourism and other flagship programs.
- g) Cost-Benefit Analysis: Detailed examination of the financial and non-financial benefits for both UiTM and NTB, considering scholarship costs, infrastructure investments, and long-term returns.
- h) Comparative Analysis: Comparative assessment of the UiTM-NTB partnership with similar international collaborations involving Malaysian public universities to identify best practices and lessons learned.
- i) Case Studies: Development of individual case studies showcasing the academic and professional journeys of selected students to illustrate the tangible impact of the government-to-government approach.

## **4. MARKETING METHODOLOGY FOR NTB**

Promotional marketing strategy for the postgraduate studies is more effective with the mixed method that combines the digital and the physical engagements (Naidoo & Wu, 2011). Through this mixed method, the university reputation will be increased through digital visibility and social media promotions. Digital marketing can be conducted through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. The audience for the targeted group can be assigned or selected by using the big data analysis that is assisted by the social media platform. Through digital visibility, the university will be promoted by social media and can be viewed by the targeted audience before and after the physical consultation.

IPSiS has been actively promoting the postgraduate programs via physical consultation by attending the promotional program conducted by the international students' agent and the local authorities in the foreign countries. In 2019, IPSiS was invited by the Governor of Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB), Indonesia. Consequently, UiTM signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the province through a special collaborative project with the West Nusa Tenggara Education Development Agency (LPPNTB) on August 23, 2019. Fig.4 depicts the strategy for the international promotion to get the sponsored students by the NTB province. The project is called the NTB project and it represents a partnership between Education Malaysia Indonesia (EMI) and the Council of Postgraduate Deans (MDPS), involving all Malaysian Public Universities. The Governor of NTB expressed the intention to sponsor and send 2,500 Indonesian students to pursue postgraduate studies in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. This project spans five (5) consecutive years, with the dispatch of 500 students each year. Discussions regarding this project took place during a meeting of the Postgraduate Deans Council (MDPS), and a delegation from MDPS visited Lombok to present a list of programs and tuition fees from each public university interested in participating in this initiative on December 16, 2018.



**Fig. 2** Strategic Objective from 2020 to 2025

The NTB Provincial Government focuses on the academic program cluster based on the development plans for the province. The NTB Provincial Government has established several flagship programs and one of the development missions of the NTB Province is providing a scholarship to the local community. The scholarship offered was geared up gear up towards the development plan for developing sustainable tourism; to increase attractions, accessibility, security, health and public facilities of NTB province.

Following discussions with LPPNTB and the Governor of NTB, UiTM welcomed an initial cohort of twenty-seven (27) students for the March 2021 session, a second group of fourteen (14) students for the September 2021 session, and a third cohort of forty-six (46) students for the October 2022 session. The first group of students was enrolled into programs under the cluster of Social Science and Business and Management such as Education, Art and Design and Hotel Management. The second group of students concentrates on Science and Technology clusters cluster and was enrolled into Applied Sciences, Architecture and Engineering programs. The third group was a mixture of Science and Technology cluster and Business and Management cluster. This group of students enrolled into programmes program such as Applied Sciences, Business, Medical, Pharmacy, Engineering, Hotel Management and Law.



## **5. PROJECT OUTCOME**

IPSI is given four (4) Performance Indicator (PI) to gauge its long term performance. The PIs are shown in Table 1.

<b>PI No.</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
PI043	Number of student enrolment (national master students)
PI044	Number of student enrolment (national PhD students)
PI045	Number of student enrolment (international postgraduate students)
PI048	Number of PhD Graduate

**Table 1.** Performance Indicator of IPSI

This paper concentrates PI045 - International student enrolment only. Current enrolment of postgraduate students by program and citizenship status as of September 2023 are shown in Table 2.

<b>ENROLMENT - CITIZENSHIP</b>				
<b>PROGRAM LEVEL</b>	<b>MALAYSIAN</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>
ADVANCE DIPLOMA	144	0		144
MASTER	5558	264		5822
PhD	2803	1433		4236
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8505</b>	<b>1697</b>		<b>10202</b>
<b>ENROLMENT – STUDY MODE</b>				
<b>STUDY MODE</b>	<b>MALAYSIAN</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>
FLEXIBLE	33	0		33
FULL TIME	4917	1693		6610
PART TIME	3555	4		3559
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8505</b>	<b>1697</b>		<b>10202</b>
<b>ENROLMENT – PROGRAM TYPE</b>				
<b>PROGRAM LEVEL</b>	<b>PROGRAM TYPE</b>	<b>MALAYSIAN</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
ADVANCE DIPLOMA	COURSEWORK	144	0	144
MASTER	COURSEWORK	3601	127	3728
MASTER	RESEARCH	1886	132	2018
MASTER	MIXED MODE	71	5	76
PhD	COURSEWORK	11	0	11
PhD	RESEARCH	2222	1425	3647
PhD	MIXED MODE	570	8	578
		8505	1697	10202

**Table 2.** Current enrolment of postgraduate student by program and citizenship status

The enrolment of 1,697 for International Postgraduate students are for ‘Active’ students. Operational Definition (OD) of enrolment include students with academic status as below:

- i. Active
- ii. Graduated
- iii. Dismissed
- iv. Withdrawal from Study (MD)

Graduated international students for the academic session of October 2022 and Mac 2023 are 52 students and 36 students respectively. Student attrition for the academic session of Mac 2023 is 247 students. Table 3 shows the target and achievement of international student enrolment for 2022 to 2025 in UiTM.

2022		2023		2024	2025
Target	Achievement	Target	Achievement	Target	Achievement
2,000	1918	2,520	2032	4,000	5,000

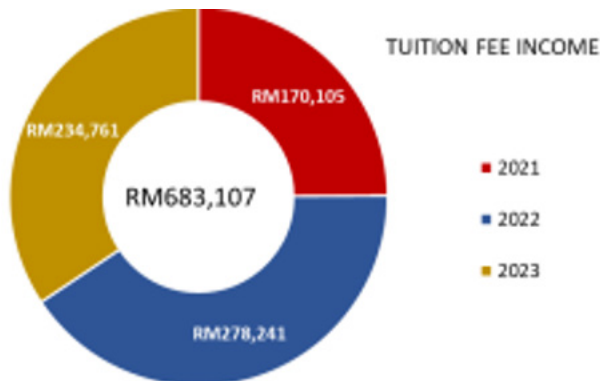
**Table 3.** Target and Achievement of International Student Enrolment for 2022 – 2025

IPSiS’s performance based on PI045 - International student enrolment shows an achievement of 95.9% for 2022 and 80.6% for 2023. We anticipate that enrollment for 2023 will rise, considering that the registration process for the academic session of October 2023 is currently ongoing. When assessing the recruitment strategies employed, it is evident that UiTM has achieved notably higher student enrollment through the government-to-government approach, in comparison to other methods utilized. Through this approach, UiTM garnered admissions in larger cohorts rather than on an individual basis. IPSiS has received the prestigious “Student Recruitment Campaign of the Year” award at THE Awards UiTM 2021 and THE Awards UiTM 2022, marking an exceptional achievement and recognition for its outstanding accomplishments over two consecutive years.

The assessment of applicants' quality and background was conducted during the scholarship interview sessions by LPPNTB. Consequently, UiTM admitted candidates of high calibre, ensuring their ability to meet financial obligations throughout their tenure at the university. Factors contributing to the choice of a university by the scholarship sponsor are affordable tuition fee, the availability of financial aid, university infrastructure and location. Additionally, UiTM offers tailored services such as group registration process, airport pick-up services upon arrival, a dedicated communication platform exclusive to NTB student groups, facilitation of MUET examinations, and other customized arrangements as per request from the NTB Provincial Government.

The enrolment of international students holds a substantial influence on the university's financial income, as illustrated in Fig. 5, which depicts the income generated from tuition fees charged to NTB students during the period spanning from 2020 to 2023. Over this duration, the university accumulated a total revenue of RM683,107 from this initiative. Notably, the peak income was realized in 2022, amounting to RM278,241.

These findings emphasize the financial significance of international student enrolment to the university's overall income generation, highlighting the potential for further exploration into strategies for sustained growth in this area.



**Fig. 5** Income Generated from NTB's Sponsored Student status

This partnership not only benefits IPSis but also makes a positive contribution to other department in UiTM. Office of Industry, Community and Alumni Network (ICAN) under the initiative of International Community Empowerment (ICE) has conducted two (2) program with NTB Provincial Government: STEM Benchmarking: STEM – Based Learning in the Digital Age@Lombok, Indonesia and UiTM STEM Awareness in Youth for Next Generation (SAY4NG) NTB Youth Science Camp 2023 in July 2023. These is projects involve involves six (6) lecturers from the College from College of Engineering UiTM and 150 participants from Badan Riset dan Inovasi (BRIDA), universities and institutions institution in Lombok.

ICAN also organized visits to universities in Lombok as part of its efforts to bolster the collaboration between UiTM and other institutions, with the aim of implementing impactful programs that contribute to society. The visits have yielded several additional outcomes:

- i. The collaboration project between UiTM and Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram (UIN) such as student exchange, mobility program and joint research.
- ii. The establishment of double-degree programs with UNRAM.

## **6. PROJECT IMPACT**

The motivations behind students' pursuit of postgraduate studies appear to be associated with well-established and career-aligned pathways. In the context of NTB scholarship recipients, the cohort comprises individuals from diverse backgrounds, including recent graduates seeking postgraduate opportunities, educators, freelancers, self-employed professionals, and individuals employed within the private sector.

Among the first cohort of NTB scholarship recipients, 25 out of the 27 students who initially enrolled at UiTM successfully graduated. In the subsequent cohort, 12 out of 14 students successfully completed their studies. The third cohort, consisting of 46 students, is currently in their second semester. The graduation rates for the first and second cohorts were 93% and 86%, respectively. According to data provided by BRIDA, all graduates have successfully secured employment in various sectors, with four of them gaining employment within BRIDA across different

departments. Additionally, lecturers who have received scholarships and subsequently returned to their respective universities have actively forged partnerships and collaborations with UiTM. Notably, a recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been established with Universitas Cordova Indonesia (UNDOVA). These developments underscore the significance of graduate employability and the institution's commitment to fostering productive collaborations within academia and beyond.

Alumni engagement stands as a pivotal facet of a university's institutional framework, offering multifaceted benefits that resonate across academic, financial, and societal dimensions. The relationship between the university and its alumni not only advances the institution's mission but also reinforces its standing within the broader educational landscape.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, it becomes apparent that UiTM has achieved a significantly higher student enrolment through the government-to-government approach, surpassing the effectiveness of other methods employed. UiTM secured admissions in larger groups rather than individual applications.

This finding will help the administrators of private and public universities in Malaysia, in particular, and other regional and international universities, in general in assessing recruitment recruitments strategies employed. It will also help policymakers to design effective policies and strategies to make UiTM as an international education hub and to establish UiTM as Globally Renowned University of Science, Technology, Humanities and Entrepreneurship by 2025.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The successful realization of our research and initiatives owes a debt of gratitude to several instrumental contributors. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Office of the Vice Chancellor for generously allocating the promotional budget to IPSis. This invaluable support has played a pivotal role in facilitating the attainment of our University's strategic

enrolment objectives. We also express our sincere thanks to the Bursary Department for their cooperation in providing essential data concerning the tuition fees of NTB scholarship recipients. Their assistance has been integral to the precision of our analysis and outcomes.

Furthermore, we are deeply grateful to the dedicated faculties whose unwavering commitment and collaborative efforts have greatly assisted IPSis in meeting the targeted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as set forth by the University.

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