

# INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT ATTRACT AND RETAIN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST (UCC)

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## **Abstract**

*Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are changing in making its products 'fit' for the new age of diversity and globalization due to the new trends in demand for education. This study was undertaken to identify the factors that attract and retain international students in HEIs in Ghana. The total study population was 200 international students at University of Cape Coast (UCC) which was conveniently sampled to 171 students. Descriptive data analysis was used and the study sought using questionnaires and analysed with SPSS version 21. The study revealed that the cost of tuition and lack of scholarship opportunities prevent international students from studying in UCC. Yet, factors such as availability of peace and security, appreciable length of programmes, and job opportunities for programmes were some of the factors influencing international students' stay at the host institution. The study, therefore, recommends that Policy makers and institutions should maintain reasonable education costs and scholarships as an advantage to attract international students. UCC and other tertiary institutions must continue to maintain peaceful, secure, and conducive environment for international students.*

**Keywords:** *Attraction, Retention, International Students, Higher Education*

## **Introduction**

Cross-border higher education has experienced tremendous growth in the last two decades. Its existence has created new opportunities across the globe whereas, some nations have used it to the development of economic policies (Knight, 2006; Armstrong & Harbon, 2008; Lane, Owens & Kinser, 2014). It has moved from the import and export of textbooks and international examinations to more cooperative and productive education (Guruz, 2010). All around the world students are beginning to embrace a new wave of international education for research and collaboration. In 2017 over 5.3 million international students were studying abroad (UNESCO, 2019). Other studies predicted that more than 7.2 million students would be accepted in 2025 (Fegan & Field, 2009; OECD, 2012).

Currently, more students are still in the quest for an international opportunity. According to Cisneros-Donahue, Krentler, Reinig, and Sabol (2012), the thirst for being an international student is seen by the benefits that come in return. Many indigenous students are rushing out of their country to acquire new knowledge, skills, experience, and cultural diversity. Businesses and organisations are also in need of people who are open to cultural diversity and are adaptable to changes in an uncertain complex situation (Chao, Okazaki, & Hong, 2011). Notwithstanding, higher education in general, is believed to play a major role in developing the new set of employees that can increase the trends of globalization and receptiveness of diversified culture (Fox & Hundley, 2011). International education is very crucial to both the students and the Institutions offering the opportunity. Ignoring foreign students in a higher education setting means overlooking the trends of globalizations and the financial growth of the institution.

### ***Factors that Attract and Retain International Student***

Most universities in developed countries are making keen efforts to attract and retain the number of international students by offering full/half scholarships (Caruso & De Wit, 2015). Notwithstanding these efforts, the questions that are hammering the minds of higher education Institutions are the factors and the environment conducive to retain international students. According to Afful-Broni and Noi-Okwei (2010), the cost of attendance, faculty reputation, institution's reputation, employment after graduation, specific academic programmes, geographical location, and quality of faculty were important factors that affect undergraduates' choice of a higher learning institution. More so, Shank, Quintal and Taylor (2005) found that family influence is another major factor in studying abroad. Likewise, Salazar, Oerlemans and van Stroe-Biezen (2013) affirms that the opinion of family members may exert different types of influence on one's behaviour. Family recommendations and opinion influence students' options of

their host institutions (Brooks & Waters, 2010).

Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015) also demonstrated that there is the importance of friends' opinion on international student's choice of host institutions to study. Shanka, Ali-Knight, and Pope (2006) identified that 37% of international undergraduate students rated parents and friends as their source of information for the UK and Australia. Several other reasons include the possibility of having friends studying at the same institution, personal experiences of friends and their family members (Wu et al., 2015). The influence of family and friends are all related to the importance of word of mouth communication which is seen as objective, reliable, and not commercially oriented. Such sources of information are much easier as not motivated by profit.

Another important determinant of institutional choice is the financial situation of student's (Lu, Mavondo & Qiu, 2009). Naffziger, Bott, and Mueller (2008) suggested that financial consideration is a major factor in travelling abroad to study. Naffziger et al., (2008) proposed that in general, undergraduate studies are sponsored by families whilst post-graduate studies are funded by government or some other form of scholarship. Most literature had revealed that scholarships, family and friends support and financial considerations are the major factors attracting international students to host countries.

### *The importance of Attracting and Retaining International Student*

Presently, the movement of the international student has led to most higher education institutions to operate under an increasingly market-oriented approach. This paradigm shift has led to the admission of international students as a source of revenue (Naidoo, 2006). It has shifted the overseas students' policy from an 'aid' to a 'trade' rationale (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Naidoo (2006) explains that studying abroad was no longer for those who earn scholarships and fellowship but rather, all those who could afford it had a chance for cross-border education. Internationally, mobile students constitute a large group of potential fee-paying (Cantwell, 2015).

The relevance of attracting international students rely heavily on student fees as a growing source of income (Maslen, 2007). In 2016, 5.1 million tertiary students studied outside their home countries compared with 2.5 million in a decade. This mobility of students was estimated to contribute US\$300 billion in fees to higher education institutions (Choudaha, 2019). This is why the Universities in Ghana and especially the University of Cape Coast should make a conscious effort in attracting and retaining international students.

### **Study Gap**

Most Universities in Ghana have not given much emphasis to international students and most precisely UCC. The current students' population of the University of Cape Coast for the year 2018/2019 academic year was 20,108 (UCC, Basic Statistics, 2017). Out of this only 67(0.33%) were international students. However, nearly a decade ago, the students' population was 15,789 in the 2010/2011 academic year and the number of international students was 200 (1.3%) (UCC, Basic Statistics 2012). This shows that the number of international students had drastically declined over the years and calls for an urgent review and critical studies. The study aims at investigating the factors that attract international students and their experiences during their stay at UCC.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the factors that attract international students to study in UCC?
- ii. What are the international student's experiences with their decision to study in UCC?

### **Description of Sample and Research Method**

A descriptive research design was adopted and a quantitative technique was used as a result of the vast number of participants sampled for the study. The targeted population for this study was all international students at the University of Cape Coast as at 2010/2011. The international students at the time of data collection were from sub-Saharan Africa. A survey sampling procedure was used since the total international student population was 200.

A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered and 171 were retrieved. In calculating the response rate (Saunders et. al., 2009), the formula below was considered:

$$\text{Total response rate} = \frac{\text{total number of valid responses}}{\text{total number in approached} - \text{Out of scope}}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Using this formula, the total response rate} &= \frac{171 * 100\%}{(200-0)} \\ &= 85.5\% \end{aligned}$$

Data used for the study were generated on a Likert scale from 1 to 4 and are defined as follows:

- 1 represents "strongly agree"; (SA)
- 2 represents "agree"; (A)
- 3 represents "disagree"; (D)
- 4 represents "strongly disagree"; (SD)

Mean and the composite mean was used to make statistical analysis. The reliability estimate for the study was also 0.83 showing good internal consistency of the items in the scale (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ranges between 0 and 1).

### Description of the Demographic Data

Based on the demographic characteristics of the study, 49.1% of respondents were males and 50.9% were females. Out of this, 43.9% were below 20 years, students within the age group of 20-24 years were 49.1%, 25-30 years were 5.8% and 31 years and above were 1.2%. The study revealed that 95.0%, 1.8%, and 2.3% were graduates, postgraduate and Non-Degree/Diploma/Certificate students respectively.

Research Question 1: What are the factors that attract international students to study in UCC?

**Table 1: Factors that influence students' choice of UCC**

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
I had Faculty advice	11	34	59	40	2.89	0.90
UCC's admission process favours IS	38	56	21	28	2.27	1.06
It is my family desire to study in UCC	29	53	27	40	2.52	1.09
There are Scholarship opportunities	13	33	33	54	2.96	1.03
UCC tuition fee is affordable	14	32	47	66	3.04	0.99
UCC offers my academic programme	61	90	8	6	1.75	0.71
It has good academic reputation	61	53	14	10	1.80	0.89
Job opportunities for my programme	78	53	11	6	1.63	0.79
The length of programme is appreciable	71	65	9	7	1.68	0.78
Language for instruction is easier	44	68	11	8	1.69	0.88
Degrees and certificates are recognized	46	94	9	8	1.87	0.73
There is peace and security	59	79	8	2	1.68	0.64
<b>Composite Mean</b>					<b>2.15</b>	<b>0.88</b>

Table 1 shows the factors that influenced students' choice of institution. The composite mean of items considered here is 2.15, an indicator of the fact that the respondents were enthused by the above factors. Specific mean scores such as 2.89, 2.96 and 3.04 unveiled the factors that did not influence their choice of studying in UCC.

Research Question 2: What are the international student's experience with their decision to study in UCC?

**Table 2: Students' experiences at the University of Cape Coast**

Students Experiences at UCC	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Socialization is easy	17	52	45	38	2.68	0.97
Living expenses are affordable	15	55	47	35	2.67	0.94
There is available excellent health service	13	44	26	45	2.82	1.04
Transportation on campus is easy	32	61	24	23	2.27	1.00
IS are treated fairly	9	32	34	66	3.11	0.97
IS are given the needed attention	21	67	28	39	2.55	1.01
There is peace and security in UCC	32	89	13	17	2.10	0.86
There exist good Social life activities on campus	14	47	31	48	2.81	1.02
There is available of Standard library facilities	31	69	26	23	2.28	0.96
The language for communication is easy in UCC	20	79	15	16	2.21	0.85
I understand the institution culture	22	58	27	19	2.34	0.94
Lecturer/IS relationship is good	21	74	30	9	2.20	0.78
There is a good Local students/IS relationship	24	81	26	14	2.21	0.83
Student workload is manageable	15	45	29	47	2.81	1.03
UCC provides onsite accommodation	13	23	41	74	3.17	0.98
Offsite and onsite accommodation are attractive	48	44	32	33	2.32	1.12
International students Association is recognized	68	77	7	0	1.60	0.58
IS are opened students' clubs and societies	18	69	34	10	2.28	0.80
There is easy access to internet	26	52	23	42	2.57	1.10
UCC website is accessible to IS	37	75	16	14	2.05	0.88
Level of crime on campus is low	13	89	29	11	2.27	0.73
There are low level of conflicts among students	15	73	22	13	2.27	0.81
Academic processes favor IS	4	39	29	54	3.06	0.93

Continue education in UCC	8	15	11	65	3.34	1.01
It is easy to obtain a job in the host country	12	70	12	36	2.55	1.00
<b>Composite Mean</b>					<b>2.50</b>	<b>0.93</b>

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of international students' experiences in UCC. A composite mean of 2.50 indicates that respondents were sure about their expectations and were positive in their experience at UCC. Apart from these positive experiences, factors such as UCC provide onsite accommodation (3.17), not treated fairly (3.11) and unfavourable academic processes for IS (3.06) were few undesirable experiences.

### **Discussion and Implication on the Determinant of International Students**

The University of Cape Coast just as any accredited Universities in Ghana had focused on offering standard programmes that meet corporate needs, building a good reputation and creating peace and secured environment for international students. But, has not been enough to pull international students to UCC campus. Even though these factors such as "UCC offer my academic programme", "It has a good academic reputation", "There are job opportunities for the programmes", "The length of the programme is appreciable", "Language for instruction is easier", "Degrees and certificates are recognized in my home country" and "There are peace and security in the host country", played a significant role in attracting international student, yet their experiences on campus could not encourage some to continue studying in UCC.

The study also showed that students were not pleased with the tuition fee. Rubin (2014) revealed that international students back-out from school because of the high tuition fee and most results to scholarships. Despite the high rate of fees for international students in UCC, the scholarship was also not available to international students. According to Caruso and De Wit (2015), Europe over a decade had attracted several international students, which most of the students were scholarship based. Also, Naffziger, Bott, and Mueller (2008) in their study observed that financial consideration was a major factor in traveling abroad to study. Liu and Wang (2009) study revealed that tuition fees and US federal support of education showed a significant influence on international student mobility. Liu, Kamnuansilpa and Hirofumi (2018) also emphasised the cost of study as a major factor preventing students from studying in China. Thus, universities which aim to attract international students had to make conscious efforts to discount international students and offer them available scholarship to reduce the cost of schooling while maintaining quality value chain.

This study further identified appreciable length of the programme, easy language for instruction, recognized degrees and certificates as a determinant of international students. Although, family factor did not influence students' choice which was contrariwise to Shank, Quintal and Taylor (2005), Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Pimpa (2003) studies where these researchers found that family influence was a major factor in overseas study decisions. Similarly, Saelazar, Oerlemans and van Stroe-Biezen (2013) found that family recommendations and opinions also influence students' options of their host institutions. Nonetheless, the study proved otherwise.

Last but yet important contribution to the determinant of international students, is the academic facilities which included the Library and Technology (internet access and accessible website) played a role in attracting international students. Technology has been the most important facility in the academic environment which provides information needed in the provision of high-quality education. Many universities face the challenge of providing learning support for an increasingly diverse cohort of students. But in this new era, due to technological enhancement, higher education institutions are serving more ethnically, and culturally diverse student bodies than ever before. The infusion of technology has redefined work skills and society's expectations about what it means to be an educated person. The use of computers, projectors, and an online environment can support the variety of ways learners construct their understanding. Students who gather information from the internet can be self-directed and independent (Hussain, Iqbal & Akhtar, 2010).

### **Discussion and Implication on the experience of international students**

According to Rubin (2014), each student's experience counts more than ever, and based on their experience on campus, students decide to stay for further studies (retain) or leave. UCC was successful in attracting some international students, however, its effort had not been enough to maintain them or even retract them. The number of international students had declined over time. The study proved that the international students were not treated fairly, international students worried about accommodation, academic processes did not favour international students and workload within the semester was not easy to deal with and thus made the system difficult to manage. These factors were seen to be the very parasitic that do not retain and retract international students.

Han, Stocking, Gebbie, and Appelbaum (2015) in their research titled "Will they Go or Stay" raised an alarm as to whether international student's satisfaction in the United States was met. Han et al., (2015) revealed the number of international

students would not want to leave the US and wishes to stay for further studies and job seeking. Hence, it is of no surprise that the number of international students at the University of Cape Coast declined drastically since students were not pleased with their experience at the University. This raises a concern for interested parties to ensure that international students' needs are met. On the other hand, international students considered the University of Cape Coast peaceful and secured, available library facilities, good institutional culture, healthy relationships between lecturers and international students, international student association was recognized and technological facilities were available for international students.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study adds to the current literature on the determinants of international students' mobility. The study revealed that the cost of tuition and lack of scholarship opportunities prevent international students from studying at the University of Cape Coast. Yet, factors such as availability of peace and security, appreciable length of programmes, and job opportunities for programmes studied in UCC pulled international students to study in UCC. Students' experience on campus in total was positive, however, some issues such as how international students were treated, difficulty in accommodation, unfavourable academic schedules, and workload did not enthruse them to stay.

The research, therefore, recommends that there should be appreciable tuition fees on international students. Policy makers and institutions should maintain reasonable education costs as an advantage to promote their academic programmes worldwide. The University of Cape Coast and other universities or colleges should re-examine their price policy of the tuitions and accommodation on campus to make sure cost always plays as a competitive advantage to attract international students. Future studies should be done to expand the current literature as well as the determinant of international students' mobility in Ghana.

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