

Evaluating the effect of the adoption of English as the default language on a homepage for a university in a non-English speaking university

Han-Chiang Ho

Wenzhou-Kean University, China

Ling Ling Lee

Taipei City University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

Ben K. Agyei-Mensah

SolBridge International School of Business, Korea

Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory study using survey data collected at two universities in South Korea and China to analyze students' opinions when a university in a non-English speaking country adopts English as the default language of its Web site homepage. The results show that Chinese students and non-Chinese Asian students have similar opinions toward this university promotion strategy, which makes the institution more attractive to prospective students, enhances the university's image, and increases their willingness to apply. These findings suggest that in a highly competitive higher education market, a higher education institution in a non-English speaking country may employ English as its homepage default language to enhance student's evaluation of it.

Keywords: university image, university attraction, higher education promotion, English homepage, competence motivation theory

Introduction

During the last two decades, with fierce competition among universities and the economic downturn around the world, higher education institutions have experienced quite intense challenges, with enrollment of students becoming increasingly difficult. As a result, higher education in each country faces substantial competition, which threatens the development of several existing institutions with scarce resources.

The aim of this study is to explore the effect on students of a university in non-English speaking country adopting English as the default language of its World Wide Web homepage. Specifically, it seeks to understand whether this promotion strategy impacts students' evaluation of the institution and willingness to apply to this university. In the current digital age, Internet technology helps students to search available information about institutions (Simões & Soares, 2010; Sojkin, Bartkowiak, & Skuza, 2012). With the increase in globalization over the last decade, English has become a dominant language of communication in business activities (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Perceiving this trend of internationalization, international and domestic students compare institutions before applying to one or more. However, it is not known whether the use of a default English homepage is relevant in this situation? The web page of an educational institution can be classified as part of its image. According to Dowling (1988) institutions have multiple images. In their studies of university image Parameswaran and Glowacka (1995) and Landrum, Turrisi, and Harless (1999) posit that higher education institutions need to develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage, as image is one the main factors that influence prospective students to apply for admission. Thus developing an English-webpage and using English as the medium of instruction can be described as one of the distinct images of the university.

Our review of current literature shows that little research has been conducted in this area. This study therefore addresses the gap by presenting exploratory findings with regard to the implementation of using English as the default language of a university homepage to promote this university. The intense competition among higher education institutions makes universities try to develop unique features to attract students. In the higher education market, some universities in non-English speaking countries have started to adopt this marketing strategy to promote their universities and also attempt to build an image of an international university, thus enhancing students' willingness to apply. This study therefore tries to explore the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. The benefits of a university in non-English speaking country adopting English as its default homepage might provide a user-friendly interface for English language speakers, thus reducing the difficulty for searching for relevant information about the university. This strategy will increase the international image of that university for international students, and also evoke a stronger motivation to apply to the university by both international and domestic students. To increase personal competition and ability, many non-English speaking

students select English as their first foreign language, hoping to be fluent in its proficiency (Alishah & Dolmaci, 2013; Wang & Pape, 2007; Wang, Schwab, Fenn, & Chang, 2013).

Several studies discuss the components that affect university choice, such as friends' recommendation (Henning-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001), university image (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Wilkins & Huisman, 2014), university characteristics (e.g., programs, location and so on; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007), family connections to the institution and ranking of the university (Treadwell & Harrison, 1994), the quality of education (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffit, 2001), and so on. We conceptualized those factors as different beliefs about a university that provide students with a comprehensive evaluation of a university, and we hypothesized that the importance of those beliefs would contribute to the students' attitude toward a university. Despite what is known about the factors influencing students' willingness to apply to a university, no study that discusses the effect of a university adopting English as the default language of its homepage on students. Therefore, this study examined the extent to which such factors predict university choice across different groups of students. It also investigated the importance of students' opinions toward the promotion strategies of a university.

Literature review and hypotheses

Decision making

Consumer decision-making is usually classified into four steps: motivation, information search, evaluation of alternative and purchase (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2009). In addition, consumer decisions arise from consumers' perceptions of problems ("I'm hungry") and opportunities ("This book looks like interesting to try"). In turn, consumers' self-concepts and lifestyles generate needs and wants that conform to the environment in which consumers recognize themselves as generating the decision-making behavior. Regarding the student decision making process, students usually hope to select the best choice from the available information. It results in a comparatively bigger effect on "recognition of need." This study focuses on the effect of information on a university Web site on international students in terms of their willingness to apply, the university image and their attraction to the university.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is extended from the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and designed to explain social behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, any social behaviors or behavioral intentions could be interpreted by the behavior of antecedents, such as attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (PBC).

Behavior is interpreted by intention to perform. Here, attitude toward the behavior is “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Subjective norm is “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Perceived behavioral control is defined as “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Based on these conceptions, it is obvious that people develop self-concepts and subsequent lifestyles depending on varied internal (psychological and physical) and external (sociological and demographic) influences (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013). Hence, there should be a close relationship between individual intention to perform a particular behavior and his or her actual performance of that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). As individuals encounter some situations, the decision making process is activated.

University selection

Many factors affect students’ decision behavior in university selection, such as students’ gender, academic competence and personality (Vrontis et al., 2007), students’ social background (Li & Bray, 2007), media influences (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), and the location of an institution (María Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006). Given that higher education can be critical for one’s life career, students usually take considerable time to make a decision, trying to get adequate information to make an appropriate decision. A high need is more likely to motivate prospective students to compare quantitative and qualitative research before making their decision.

Due to technological progress, searching through the available information is more efficient and more effective these days. Students easily get adequate information to form opinions from internal (personal memory, experience, etc.) and external (advertisements, friends, etc.) sources about different alternatives and to understand what information is more useful for them. In turn, students first organize interesting attributes to consider when evaluating a university. They then use their beliefs to assess the particular attribute of each university and to weigh the relative priority of those attributes (Solomon et al., 2009). Students consider sets of university attributes by using varied rules, depending on the complexity and the importance of the decision to them. After students collect adequate information, they will base their decision on the image of the institution they have assembled from the information. In some cases, students’ decision rules are easy, such as simply depending on a cutoff to select a university (e.g., education agents). Mostly students put much effort into discreetly comparing alternatives before making a decision. Therefore, the process of a university selection is very complicated, because it is subject to multiple factors (Wilkins & Huisman, 2014).

Personal ability and willingness to apply

Students' ability and self-efficacy are other important issues in the study. Harter (1978, 1981) proposed the competence motivation theory, which describes a child's competence as related to the degree of approval or disapproval of a result that this child has tried to achieve. In addition, children will be interested in one school subject or one event that could show their strengths, which let children feel capable of doing or performing these things and have more confidence in those fields. Nicholls (1984), extending Harter's idea, points out that high and low abilities are judged by individual past performance or knowledge. Ability is the competence of individuals to attend to and process information (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013). High ability means that individuals achieve a higher result than others, only expending average effort; alternatively, an individual uses less effort than others but gets equal performance. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) explains how the expectations of individual efficacy decide whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort needs to be made, how long one persists in the face of obstacles and antipathetic experience. Self-efficacy is the belief related to individual's ability to accomplish a goal successfully. It demonstrates that people usually will only try to do a task they believe they can carry out successfully and will not try to do a task they believe they cannot complete successfully (Bandura, 1995). People with high ability who are confident of their ability set challenging targets and keep strong commitment to accomplish their goals, even though in difficult situations those people still make more effort to be successful. On the contrary, people with low ability who question their ability to attain difficult targets consider these targets as obstacles. They have less confidence in their personal ability and give up easily when confronting difficulties and barriers.

Earlier studies posit that a specific attribute of a university plays a significant role in attracting students (e.g., Bryant et al., 1996; Treadwell & Harrison, 1994). When a university in a non-English speaking country adopts English as the default language of its homepage, it implies that this university has the ability and equipment to provide full/part English programs for students. International students anticipate that after enroll at this university, they will have a better English-learning environment. It might, however, bring dichotomous situations for students with high- and low-English ability, when facing an English teaching program. Students with high English proficiency might be confident to face the English learning environment, but those with low English proficiency may lack the confidence to adapt themselves to such an environment (Huang & Tsai, 2003). Huang and Tsai (2003) also point out that students with high English proficiency try to hold relatively positive language learning beliefs compared to those with lower proficiency. The self-efficacy of students with high-English ability is also influential for them to gain insight and become more assertive about how to succeed in a new environment (Alishah & Dolmeci, 2013). Dweck (1998) posits that in terms of fulfilment, students usually select targets and tasks within their ability level. When

students feel like they can achieve tasks, the targets are related to controllable self-performance, or have the chance to succeed. In turn, their confidence level also develop. This attitude leads to a strong learning motivation.

Overall, students react differently to their learning situations, based on their perception of ability (Lawson, 2011). Prospective international students with high English ability might be positively predisposed to study at a university in a non-English speaking university that adopts English as the default language of its homepage. They would then be more likely to apply to this kind of university. Conversely, prospective international students with low-English ability might be afraid that they cannot fully handle the English learning environment. Hence, they are less motivated to apply to this kind of university. Therefore, based on these considerations, we draw the following hypotheses:

- H1: A university in a non-English speaking country that adopts English as the default language of its World Wide Web home page is likely to attract international applicants with high-English ability.
- H2: A university in a non-English speaking country that adopts English as the default language of its World Wide Web home page is not likely to attract international applicants with low-English ability.

University image

Image is an entire conception that a consumer perceives about an object (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Dowling (1988) notes that a body corporate has multiple images, based on any or all sorts of factors, such as organizational size, profitability, employee relations and so on. In terms of corporate image, it is the result that a body corporate delivers signals and messages over time to its stakeholders (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Corporate image is important to attract and retain customers (Alves & Raposo, 2010) and keep customer loyalty (García de Leaniz & Rodríguez, 2016). Kazoleas et al. (2001) point out that corporate image can be classified into positive, neutral or negative facets toward the corporate entity, which affect the corporation's shareholder and employee attractiveness, consumer behavior, product differentiation, product sales, product favorability, and so on.

Even though corporate image has been usually studied with regard to corporate operations, it has seldom been explored in the non-profit sectors, such as university image. A university consists of tangible (e.g., location, size of an institution, appearance, etc.) and intangible (e.g., educational quality, prestige, university image, ranking of a university, etc.) features (Arpan et al., 2003; Bryant et al., 1996; Theus, 1993). University image is particularly related to cognitive and affective components, which influence students' perception about a university (Palacio, Meneses, & Perez, 2002). An image evaluation points out to the institution what strengths to enhance and what weaknesses to improve. In this sense, university image can be explained

as the total of personal beliefs toward the university (Arpan et al., 2003). Therefore, a university needs to take advantage of its image to find ways to compete and survive. According to Landrum et al. (1999), university image represents a valuable asset in a competitive higher education arena. Helgesen and Nettet (2007) propose that university image strongly influences students' retention and loyalty. These results are in line with the work of Eskildsen, Martensen, Gronholdt, and Kristensen (2000), which shows university image as fairly influential for students' loyalty.

In this study, a university in a non-English speaking country adopting English as the default language of its homepage demonstrates how distinct the image of this university is from other competing universities. As English is a global language, this internationalized and attractive idea may guide the choice of specific appeals to be used in a promotion campaign. It may motivate students to have a positive image of this university and to believe that this university will deliver the promised advantages. In addition, such a positive university image may help this university to communicate positively and promote its internationalized merits and benefits. Based on the literature above, we hypothesized that:

H3: A university in a non-English speaking country that adopts English as the default language of its World Wide Web home page is likely to receive positive image evaluation from international students with both a high and a low English ability.

University attraction

A consumer might apply constructive heuristics, based on their previous experience and knowledge and possibly task-specific, to integrate the obtainable information. For product managers, being capable of distinguishing the varied attributes to introduce a product attractiveness is critical (Gotzsch, 2008), because consumers' preferences are too numerous, broadly scattered, and different in their needs and purchasing practices. The benefits of products to consumers are dependent upon the value the products provide to them. It is highly possible that when consumers feel that they are gaining more than what they pay, they are willing to choose the product from which they receive acquisition value.

From a marketing point of view, there is no easy way to promote a product to attract customers. Product attraction depends upon customers' interactions and experiences with a product, covering emotion, recognition, and knowledge (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007). Hence, products need to feature some values relevant to consumers' perception. Unique and innovative features, high product quality, meeting customer needs better than competitors' products, solving customers' problems with competing products, and reducing customers' costs are important components driving consumers' attention toward product attraction (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1995). In line with product attraction, Baxter (1995) also presents four dimensions of attraction of a product. These four dimensions obviously affect

consumers' attitude toward products: (1) the attractiveness of the previous usage, (2) the attractiveness of the function, (3) the symbolic attractiveness, and (4) intrinsic attractiveness.

Concerning product consumption, consumers' motivation to purchase a product is relevant to the symbols of added value from a product. These symbols' ability to cause different impacts and influences on consumers depend on owners' perceptions, as well as the respondents and interaction with the owners' environment, because symbols are projections of consumers' interior thoughts. This implies that symbols are not only perception of products, but individually also have meaningful value. Therefore, products refer to the meaningful symbols for consumers that create a positive attraction.

In the prevailing trend of internationalization in recent years, higher educational institutions in non-English speaking countries have attempted to attract and then enroll international students. If a university adopts English as the default language of its Website in a non-English speaking country, it implies that the full- or part-English programs in this university may not only provide international students a better English learning environment, but also reduce the obstacles to study by using the local language. In addition, because of an English learning environment, the composition of students may be diversified. Prospective international students expect, when they study at this university to have more opportunities to meet many different students from different cultural backgrounds (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). In turn, students may perceive that this university is different from other universities and able to provide an attractive environment for them. This value positioning allows this university to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of international students. Based on this assumption, we draw the following hypothesis:

H4: A university in a non-English speaking country that adopts English as the default language of its World Wide Web home page is likely to attract international students with both high and low English abilities.

Method

Sample universities

This study used a survey to collect students' responses toward four selected universities in non-English speaking countries that use English as the default language of their homepage. They are IE Business School (Spain), IESEAD Business School (France), Carlos III University of Madrid (Spain) and Tilburg University (Netherlands). We chose those higher educational institutions because they are among a small number of institutions that use English as the default language of their homepage, and are located in non-English speaking countries within continental Europe. Our respondents are from Asian countries, whose students are fond of

selecting universities in continental Europe. To avoid the effect of ethnocentrism (Meeusen, de Vroome, & Hooghe, 2013), this study excluded higher educational institutions in Asia. We used real higher educational institutions so that students could evaluate them more easily than fictitious counterparts.

We needed to test students' degrees of familiarity toward the four institutions, because when respondents have similar levels of familiarity with tested institutions, they can easily evaluate the "equal" contributions of the marketing strategies of these institutions (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). We tested the degree of familiarity using a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing "highly familiar" and 1 representing "highly unfamiliar."

Recruitment

This study planned to test two main international student groups: Chinese students and Non-Chinese Asian students. Since Chinese students represent the highest number of all international students in the U.S. (Haynie, 2014), higher education marketers should place importance on Chinese students' preferences. Therefore, this study separated respondents into Chinese students ($n_C = 219$) and Non-Chinese Asian students ($n_{N-C} = 119$). In the group of Chinese students, students were grouped into high English ability ($n_H = 104$) and low English ability ($n_L = 114$). The data on Chinese students with high English ability were collected from one business school in South Korea, which fully provides full English programs and requires a minimum of 5.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Respondents with low English ability were collected from one business school in a third tier university in China, who can be classified as prospective international students. All the programs are totally taught in Chinese language and there is no minimum requirement of English proficiency for new students. Non-Chinese Asian students are those who study in the same business school in Korea.

Measures and procedures

All participants completed the paper survey in their schools. The paper survey consists of three sections. Section 1 is the demographics. Section 2 includes the institution information sheet providing two pieces of information: (1) the name of each sample university/business school and in which country it is located, and (2) a picture of its homepage. Section 3 contains the main part of the tested measures.

All measures employed in the surveys were 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We translated our questionnaires into Chinese using a back-translation to assure comparability and equivalence in the meaning of the questionnaires (Hult et al., 2008). We adopted these items from

previous studies. To measure the attraction (reliability coefficient – Cronbach alpha, $\alpha_{A(\text{Non-Chinese})} = .81$; $\alpha_{A(\text{Non-Chinese})} = .72$), we used the items from Williams and Drolet (2005). The scale by Arpan et al. (2003) was used to measure the university image ($\alpha_{I(C)} = .86$; $\alpha_{I(\text{Non-C})} = .85$). To measure the willingness to apply ($\alpha_{R(C)} = .80$; $\alpha_{R(\text{Non-C})} = .85$), we used the scale developed by Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000). Our Cronbach's alphas for all the scales were above .6. This is considered an acceptable Cronbach's alpha cutoff according to Bagozzi and Yi (1988).

This study used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses. The reason for using an ANOVA test is that it could help researchers obtain more detailed information about the opinions of students with high and low English ability toward the hypotheses.

Results

Respondents

This study explores the effect of a university in non-English speaking country adopting English as the default language of its homepage on students' preferences. Respondents were undergraduate students from two major universities in South Korea and China. There were 362 original responses. After excluding invalid surveys, 338 responses (93%) were left. Respondents were almost evenly split between the sexes ($n_{\text{Male}} = 170$ and $n_{\text{Female}} = 168$).

The results of respondents' familiarity towards these four institutions are: IE Business School (MHigh English ability students (High) = 2.35; MLow English ability students (Low) = 2.54); INSEAD Business School (MHigh = 2.24; MLow = 2.33); Carlos III University of Madrid (MHigh = 2.18; MLow = 2.37); and Tilburg University (MHigh = 2.20; MLow = 2.42). The results of university familiarity show that students with high English ability and low English ability have insignificant differences in attitudes toward those four higher education institutions (IE Business School: $t = -1.27$, $df = 217$, $p = .205$; INSEAD Business School: $t = -0.56$, $df = 217$, $p = .576$; Carlos III University of Madrid: $t = -1.35$, $df = 217$, $p = .176$; Tilburg University: $t = -1.53$, $df = 217$, $p = .127$). Detailed information is shown in Table 1.

Those students come from Northeast Asia (NEA) ($n_{\text{NEA}} = 46$): Korea ($n_{\text{K}} = 44$) and Japan ($n_{\text{J}} = 2$); Central Asia (CA) ($n_{\text{CA}} = 38$): Kazakhstan ($n_{\text{Ka}} = 27$) and Uzbekistan ($n_{\text{U}} = 11$); Southeast Asia (SEA) ($n_{\text{NSA}} = 35$): Vietnam ($n_{\text{V}} = 15$), Taiwan ($n_{\text{T}} = 4$), Brunei ($n_{\text{B}} = 3$), Thailand ($n_{\text{Tha}} = 5$) and Indonesia ($n_{\text{I}} = 8$).

Table 1. Comparisons of university familiarity of high and low English ability students

University familiarity	High ability	Low ability	Mean comparison
IE Business School	2.35	2.54	$t = -1.27, df = 217, p = .205$
INSEAD Business School	2.24	2.33	$t = -0.56, df = 217, p = .576$
Carlo III University of Madrid	2.18	2.37	$t = -1.35, df = 217, p = .176$
Tilburg University	2.20	2.42	$t = -1.53, df = 217, p = .127$

Chinese students

Table 2 shows the results of the ANOVA test and comparisons of Chinese students with High/Low-English ability. Both Chinese students with high and low English ability represent a willingness to apply to a university adopting English as the default language of its homepage ($F(1,217) = 1.232, p < .05$). Hence, H1 is supported, but H2 is not supported. Moreover, the willingness of students with high English ability is higher than the willingness of students with lower English ability ($M_{\text{High}}(3.29) > M_{\text{Low}}(3.15)$).

Hypothesis H3 is supported because of the significant result ($F(1, 217) = 6.130, p < .05$), which shows that students with low English ability evaluate a university image more strongly than students with high English ability ($M_{\text{High}}(3.30) < M_{\text{Low}}(3.38)$).

The results show that if one higher education institution adopts English as the default language of its homepage, this feature attracts students ($F(1,217) = 5.665, p < .05$). Besides, the degree of attraction of students with high English ability is stronger than those of students with low English ability ($M_{\text{High}}(3.30) > M_{\text{Low}}(3.01)$). Therefore, H4 is supported. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between students with high and low English ability.

Table 2. ANOVA and comparisons of high and low English ability of Chinese students

	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Comparison
Willingness to apply (3 items)	1.232	.03*	$M_{\text{High}}(3.29) > M_{\text{Low}}(3.15)$
University image (6 items)	6.130	.01*	$M_{\text{High}}(3.30) < M_{\text{Low}}(3.38)$
University attraction (6 items)	5.665	.02*	$M_{\text{High}}(3.30) > M_{\text{Low}}(3.01)$

Note. * $p < .05$.

Figure 1 clearly shows that the evaluation of university image for students with low English ability is higher than students with high English ability. For the other effects, students with high English ability have stronger preferences.

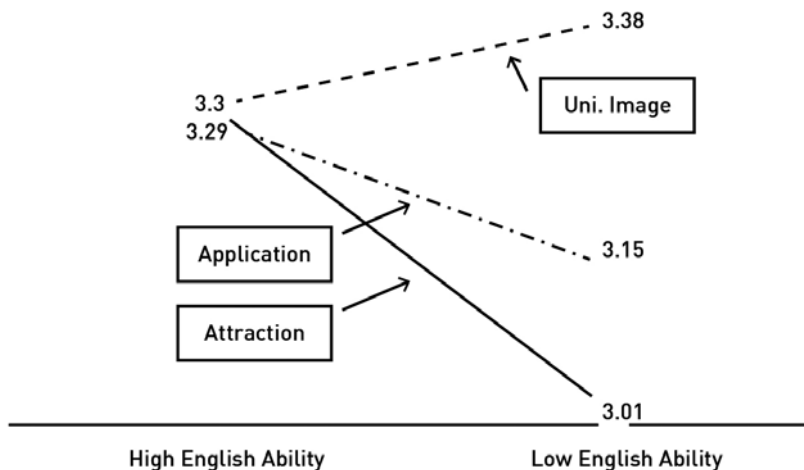


Figure 1. High/low English ability for each variable

Non-Chinese Asian students

To check the consistency and robustness of the empirical results, we used the sample of non-Chinese Asian students to test the hypotheses. The test of homogeneity of variances of all variables are insignificant for all variables (Willingness to apply: $F(2,116) = 1.292, p = .28$; University Image: $F(2,116) = 1.101, p = .34$; Attraction: $F(2,116) = 0.392, p = .68$). This demonstrates that there are no differences among the three variances for each variable.

Table 3 shows the results of the ANOVA test and comparisons of non-Chinese Asian students from Northeast Asia (NEA), Central Asia (CA) and Southeast Asia (SEA). Students expressed significant willingness to apply to a university ($F(2,116) = 7.165, p < .05$), thus supporting H1. Through a Scheffe post hoc test, the effect of Central Asian students on the university attraction is stronger than Northeast Asian students ($p < .01$) and Southeast Asian students ($p < .05$). This test did not test H2 because the data of all non-Chinese Asian students were collected from the business school in South Korea. They are high-English ability students.

H3 is supported because of the significant result ($F(2,116) = 2.358, p < .10$), but there is no significant result among the comparisons of the Scheffe post hoc test. This means that the students from those three areas do not have significantly different opinions toward university image.

The empirical results show that if one higher education institution adopts English as the default language of its homepage, this feature attracts students ($F(2,116) = 4.557, p < .05$). Hence H4 is supported. The Scheffe post hoc test shows that there is a significant relationship between Central Asian students and Southeast Asian students and the effect of Central Asian students is stronger than that of Southeast Asian students ($p < .05$).

Table 3. ANOVA and comparisons of non-Chinese Asian students

	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	Mean comparison
Willingness to apply (3 items)	7.165	.01*	$M_{CA}(3.97)^{\#} > M_{SEA}(3.57)^{\#} > M_{NEA}(3.37)^{\#}$
University image (6 items)	2.458	.09**	$M_{CA}(3.40) > M_{SEA}(3.12) > M_{NEA}(3.06)$
University attraction (6 items)	4.557	.01*	$M_{CA}(3.78)^{\#} > M_{SEA}(3.60)^{\#} > M_{NEA}(3.27)$

Notes. Numbers with the same superscript # means statistically significant difference from each other.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .10$.

Figure 2 shows that the mean of Central Asia students has the highest values among three Asia areas, and the mean of Southeast Asia students is higher than the counterparts of Northeast Asia students.

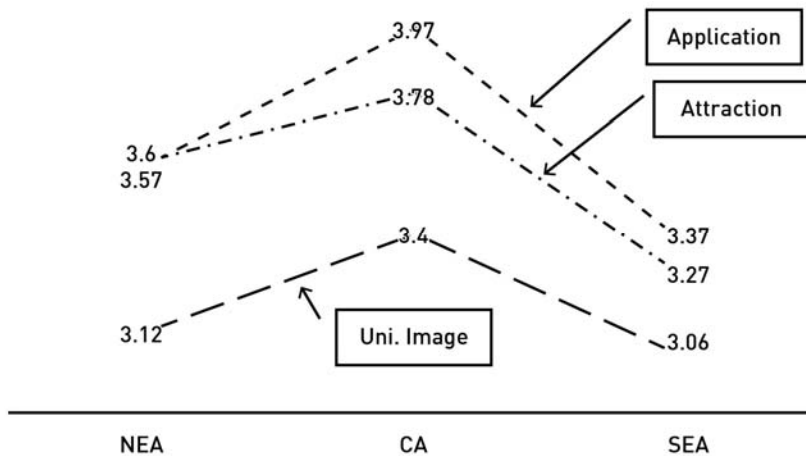


Figure 2. NEA, CA and SEA students' responses for each significant variable

Discussion

The findings are of use to higher education scholars and practitioners. With low birth rates and high competition among higher education institutions, the marketers of these institutions have to find ways to attract students and increase their willingness to apply.

This study tested the opinions of two main student groups: Chinese students and non-Chinese Asian students. Those two groups of students show similar opinions. For Chinese students, when a university in a non-English speaking country adopts English as the default language of its Website homepage, it increases students' willingness to apply. Based on Harter's (1978, 1981) competence motivation theory, and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this study found that students with high English ability are more likely to be attracted to a university in a non-English speaking country that adopts English as its default language on its homepage, compared to students with lower English ability. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that this marketing strategy is effective in improving a student's perceptions toward an institution.

Students with high English ability have more willing to apply to a university in a non-English speaking country that uses English on its homepage. This result is consistent with the findings of Huang and Tsai (2003). As Lawson (2011) suggests that high ability learners have high confidence and are accustomed to succeeding in mastery-oriented tasks, and therefore seek a challenge. Surprisingly, students with low English ability are also willing to apply to this kind of university. It is plausible that those students have similar ideas to those presented by Schunk (1991), who concludes that, without considering ability as high or low, when students believe an objective can increase their competence, they will persist and intensify efforts to achieve the objective.

The effect of university image is significant. This means that a university in a non-English speaking country whose homepage defaults to English default can improve prospective students' impression of it. Students with low English ability present particularly stronger preferences than those with high English ability.

The degree of university attraction for students with high English ability is higher than students with low English ability. This finding is also consistent with Harter's (1978, 1981) competence motivation theory and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It seems reasonable that students with high English ability should be better placed to comprehend the information from a full English website. This result also supports the findings of Lawson (2011), who concludes that learners have different reactions to a learning situation based on their ability.

Non-Chinese Asian students show a significantly positive opinion toward: willingness to apply, university image and university attraction. Central Asian students, compared to Northeast and Southeast Asian students, particularly demonstrate their strong preference for these components. Overall, this finding implies that adopting English as the default language of its website strongly affects students' decision making about a university.

Managerial implications

The profile of customer behavior is constantly changing in response to changes in the complicated marketing environment. To build profitable relationships with customers, marketers must understand customer needs and wants, and deliver better customer value than their competitors. In recent years, the difference between the strategic objective of higher education and marketing goals was equivocal. In the prevailing phenomenon of the commercialization of higher education (Drummond, 2004), the marketers of higher education institutions have to understand who their target customers are and try to create a distinct feature of a university to attract students around the world.

English is a global language and a university that adopts an English homepage as its default might attract prospective international students, as it makes it easy for them to understand the content of the Web site. On one hand, the English teaching program helps them enhance their English ability; on the other, they have more opportunities to know different students from various cultural backgrounds.

Generally students in Asia believe that an international university provides them with more diversified university life. Consequently, international universities have to take such opportunities to build an inspirational image to attract such students. Higher education marketers should advertise an attractive image of internationalized university through social media to encourage prospective international students to apply to this university. This is just one of many factors affecting students' selection of their ideal university. In terms of marketing strategies to promote a university, even with an English homepage, a university Website would need to have a clearer and easily navigable interface for students. Since students have different levels of English language ability, having a full English homepage improves the university image only if it is accompanied by an easily accessible interface to facilitate information retrieval. This approach may help prospective students understand the institution more easily and form an image of a more international university. This study is consistent with the research of Haedrich (1993), who proposes that the strategic task of an organization is to establish an acceptable corporate identity for its marketplace.

With the help of effective marketing, universities can attract target students to the high quality education they offer (Naidoo, 2007). Universities in developed countries can use the results of this study to attract prospective international students from China and Central Asian countries.

Conclusion

Today the trend in higher education is towards globalization. More and more students try to select international higher education institutions. Students generally prioritize studying abroad in English-speaking countries (e.g., the United States and United Kingdom). The objective of this study was to propose and test a new emerging idea about how to promote a university in a non-English speaking country.

The study finds that when a university in a non-English speaking country adopts English as the default language of its home page, it will have a positive impact on prospective students' decision making. The influence on Chinese students is as follows: (1) Chinese students with high and low English abilities are willing to apply to this kind of university; (2) Chinese students with low English ability have stronger evaluation of university image than students with high English ability; (3) the degree of attraction of students with high English ability is stronger than students with low English ability. Regarding the impact on non-Chinese Asian students; first, Central Asian students express the strongest motivation to apply to this kind of school among the three different student groups. Second, students from NEA, CA and SEA perceive a positive image toward this university promotion policy. Third, the effect of university attraction has a greatest impact on Central Asian students.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that suggest opportunities for future research in the field of marketing higher education institutions. First, it uses European universities/business schools as the sample universities. Other researchers for the future research may use universities not in Europe (e.g., Asian universities) to test the generalizability of the empirical evidence. Similarly, future studies could beneficially use Asian universities/business schools to test non-Asian students' (e.g., European students or Latin American students) opinions. Second, as the respondents in this study are current university students, future research may collect data from prospective students (i.e., high school students) to test the hypotheses. Finally, this study only focuses on international students; future research may consider local students' opinions to expand knowledge in this area.

Address for correspondence

Han-Chiang Ho
Assistant Professor
Wenzhou-Kean University
88 Daxue Rd, Ouhai, Wenzhou
Zhejiang Province, 325060, China
Email: sausare@gmail.com

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179–211.
- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Alishah, A. R., & Dolmaci, M. (2013). The interface between self-efficacy concerning the self- assessment on students studying English as a foreign language. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70(25), 873–881.
- Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2010). The influence of university image on student behavior. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 24(1), 73–85.
- Arpan, L. M., Raney, A. A., & Zivnуска, S. (2003). A cognitive approach to understanding university image. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 8(2), 97–113.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 16(1), 74–94.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Education Psychologist*, 28(2), 117–148.
- Bandura, A. (1995). Exercise of personal and collective efficacy in changing societies. In A. Bandura (Ed.), *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies* (pp. 1–45). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Baxter, M. (1995). *Product design: A practical guide to systematic methods of new product development*. London, UK: Chapman and Hall.
- Bryant, J., Maxwell, M., Gehr, J., Hoff, E., McCord, L., Ralstin, L., ... Tate, M. (1996). *The Case of the Missing Students*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Institute for Communication Research.
- Cooper, R. G., & Kleinschmidt, E. J. (1995). Benchmarking the firm's critical success factors in new product development. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 12(5), 374–391.
- Cronin, J. J., Brady, M. K., & Hult, G. T. M. (2000). Assessing the effects of quality, value, and customer satisfaction on consumer behavioral intentions in service environments. *Journal of Retailing*, 79(2), 193–218.
- Desmet, P., & Hekkert, P. (2007). Framework of product experience. *International Journal*

- of Design*, 1(1), 57–66.
- Dowling, G. R. (1988). Measuring corporate images: A review of alternative approaches. *Journal of Business Research*, 17(1), 27–34.
- Drummond, G. (2004). Consumer confusion: Reduction strategies in higher education. *International Journal of Education Management*, 18(5), 317–323.
- Dweck, C. S. (1998). The development of early self-conceptions: Their relevance for motivational processes. In J. Heckhausen & C. S. Dweck (Eds.), *Motivation and self-regulation across the life span* (pp. 257–280). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Eskildsen, J. K., Martensen, A., Gronholdt, L., & Kristensen, K. (2000). Benchmarking student satisfaction in higher education based on the ECSI methodology. *Sinergie - Rapporti Di Ricerca*, 9(18), 385–402.
- Fombrun, C., & Shanley, M. (1990). What's in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(2), 233–258.
- García de Leaniz, P. M., & Rodríguez, I. R. B. (2016). Corporate image and reputation as drivers of customer loyalty. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 19(2), 166–178.
- Gotzsch, J. (2008). Key aspects of product attraction: A focus on eco-friendliness. *International Journal of Environmental Technology and Management*, 8(1), 37–52.
- Haedrich, G. (1993). Image and strategic corporate and marketing planning. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5(2), 83–93.
- Harter, S. (1978). Effectance motivation reconsidered: Toward a developmental model. *Human Development*, 1, 34–64.
- Harter, S. (1981). A model of intrinsic mastery motivation in children: Individual differences and developmental change. In W. A. Collins (Ed.), *Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology* (Vol. 14, pp. 215–254). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hawkins, D., & Mothersbaugh, D. (2013). *Consumer Behavior - Building Marketing Strategy* (12th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Haynie, D. (2014). *Number of international college students continues to climb*. Retrieved August 9, 2015, from <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2014/11/17/number-of-international-college-students-continues-to-climb>
- Helgesen, O., & Nettet, E. (2007). Images, satisfaction and antecedents: Drivers of student loyalty? A case study of Norwegian University College. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(1), 38–59.
- Henning-Thurau, T., Langer, M. F., & Hansen, U. (2001). Modelling and managing student loyalty: An approach based on the concept of relationship quality. *Journal of Service Research*, 3(4), 331–344.
- Huang, S. C., & Tsai, R. R. (2003). *A comparison between high and low English proficiency learners' beliefs* (Report No. ED482579). Taiwan: National Changhua University of Education.
- Hult, G. T. M., Ketchen, D. J., Griffith, D. A., Finnegan, C. A., Gonzalez-Padron, T., Harmancioglu, N., ... Cavusgil, S. T. (2008). Data equivalence in cross-cultural international business research: Assessment and guidelines. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(6), 1027–1044.
- Kazoleas, D., Kim, Y., & Moffit, M. A. (2001). Institutional image: A case study.

- Corporate Communications: An international Journal*, 6(4), 205–216.
- Kotler, P. T., & Fox, K. (1995). *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Krishna, A., & Ahluwalia, R. (2008). Language choice in advertising to bilinguals: Asymmetric effects for multinationals versus local firms. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(4), 692–705.
- Landrum, R. E., Turrisi, R., & Harless, C. (1999). University image: The benefits of assessment and modeling. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9(1), 53–68.
- Lawson, R. (2011). Concepts of ability and their effect on approaches to learning and motivational orientation. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(1), 30–46.
- Li, M., & Bray, M. (2007). Cross-border flows of students for higher education: Push-pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. *Higher Education*, 53(6), 791–818.
- María Cubillo, J., Sánchez, J., & Cerviño, J. (2006). International students' decision-making process. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(2), 101–115.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), 82–90.
- Meeusen, C., de Vroome, T., & Hooghe, M. (2013). How does education have an impact on ethnocentrism? A structural equation analysis of cognitive, occupational status and network mechanisms. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(5), 507–522.
- Naidoo, R. (2007). *Higher education as a global commodity: The perils and promises for developing countries*. London, UK: The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.
- Nguyen, N., & LeBlanc, G. (2001). Image and reputation of higher education institutions in students' retention decisions. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(6), 303–311.
- Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review*, 19(3), 328–346.
- Palacio, A., Meneses, G., & Perez, P. (2002). The configuration of the university image and its relationship with the satisfaction of students. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(5), 486–505.
- Parameswaran, R., & Glowacka, A. E. (1995). University image: An information processing perspective. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 6(2), 41–56.
- Schunk, D. H. (1991). Self-efficacy and academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3-4), 207–231.
- Simões, C., & Soares, A. M. (2010). Applying to higher education: Information sources and choice factors. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(4), 371–389.
- Simonin, B. L., & Ruth, J. A. (1998). Is a company known by the company it keeps? Assessing the spillover effects of brand alliances on consumer brand attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 35(1), 30–42.

- Sojkin, B., Bartkowiak, P., & Skuza, A. (2012). Determinants of higher education choices and student satisfaction: The case of Poland. *Higher Education*, 63(5), 565–581.
- Solomon, M. R., Bamossy, G., Askegaard, S., & Hogg, M. K. (2009). *Consumer Behaviour: A European Perspective* (4th ed.). London, UK: Prentice Hall.
- Theus, K. T. (1993). Academic reputation: The process of formation and decay. *Public Relations Review*, 19(3), 277–291.
- Treadwell, D. F., & Harrison, T. M. (1994). Conceptualizing and assessing organizational image: Model images, commitment and communication. *Communication Monographs*, 61(1), 63–58.
- Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., & Melanthiou, Y. (2007). A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(9), 979–989.
- Wang, C., & Pape, S. J. (2007). A probe into three Chinese boys' self-efficacy beliefs learning English as a second language. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(4), 364–377.
- Wang, C., Schwab, G., Fenn, P., & Chang, M. (2013). Self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies for English language learners: Comparison between Chinese and German College students. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 3(1), 173–191.
- Wilkins, S., & Huisman, J. (2011). Student recruitment at international branch campuses: Can they compete in the global market? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15(3), 299–316.
- Wilkins, S., & Huisman, J. (2014). Factors affecting university image formation among prospective higher education students: The case of international branch campuses. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(7), 1256–1272.
- Williams, P., & Drolet, A. (2005). Age-related differences in response to emotional advertisements. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 343–354.