

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Factors influencing African postgraduate international students' choice of South Africa as a study destination

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**Many African countries are concerned with the targeting of international postgraduate students by developed countries for skilled migration. Increased provision of postgraduate studies within the continent would go a long way in dealing with the problem. Success will however depend on the ability of countries in the continent to attract international postgraduate students. This study aimed at investigating the factors that influence African postgraduate students' choice of South Africa as their study destination. Focus group discussions, in depth interviews and a structured online questionnaire were the main methods used to collect the data. The findings show that factors related to lower cost of living and tuition as well quality of education offered are the main ones that influence postgraduate students' choice of the country. The findings have wider implications on marketing of the country to international students and these have been highlighted in the paper.**

**Key words:** African, international, postgraduate students.

## INTRODUCTION

The number of students going international for the purposes of pursuing studies has been growing rapidly since the early 1990's. According to UNESCO (2010) and (OECD, 2009) there were a total of 2.97 million students studying outside their country of origin in the year 2008 compared to 1.2 million in 1990 and 0.6 million in 1975. Statistics further show that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest outward mobility ratio of all the regions of the world at 4.6 compared to the world average of 1.9 (UNESCO, 2010). Outward mobility ratio measures the total number of students from a given country or region studying abroad as a percentage of the total tertiary enrolment in the country or region. Thus, an outward mobility ratio of 4.6 means that for every single student enrolled at tertiary level in their country of origin within the sub-Saharan Africa region, there are 4.6 others who have moved and enrolled abroad. In terms of hosting of students, statistics show that over 60% of all international students in the world are hosted in only seven countries of the world namely USA, UK, France, Australia, Germany, Japan and Canada. Bashir (2007) observed

that there is heavy competition for international students between major hosting countries.

He attributed this to the economic incentives derived by countries and institutions of higher learning from hosting international students. The OECD (2009) observed that international students are increasingly being used by major hosting countries to help in revenue generation by universities and improve a country's export earnings. For example, reports show that in the 2008 to 2009 financial year, international education activity contributed \$17.2 billion to the Australian economy in the form of export income (Australian Government, 2009). NAFSA (2010) reported that foreign students' and their dependents' contributed US\$17.6 billion to the United States economy during the 2008 to 2009 academic years. Hawthorne (2010) and the Australian Government (2005) noted that international postgraduate students are particularly targeted by the major hosting countries for skilled migration aimed at strengthening competitiveness in key industries by addressing the problems of ageing populations and skill shortages.

### **Problem statement**

The targeting of international postgraduate students for skilled migration by developed countries is an issue of major concern for most sub-Saharan African countries as it exacerbates the problem of brain drain experienced by many countries in the continent. South Africa as a country and its institutions of higher education have seen an opportunity in this to promote the country to African countries and students interested in international studies. This is because unlike the major international student hosting countries, South Africa does not target international postgraduate students for skilled migration purposes but mainly for their potential in contributing to the country's research output. However, the ability of the country to successfully compete for international postgraduate students with other countries especially the major hosting countries depends on its ability to favourably position itself in the mind of the customers. This requires among other things a good understanding of factors that influence international postgraduate students to choose the South Africa as their study destination. There is however lack of literature based on empirical studies on this hence the need for this study.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the factors that influence African international postgraduate students to choose South Africa as their study destination. The specific objectives are (a) to investigate the extent to which different factors influenced African international postgraduate students' decision to study in South Africa (b) to investigate if there are any significant differences between different groups of students in the factors that influenced their decision to choose South Africa as an international study destination and (c) to highlight the implications of these findings on the marketing of South Africa as an international study destination.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Maringe and Carter (2007) noted that the decision to study abroad is one of the most significant and expensive initiatives that students may ever undertake requiring a lot of deliberation on their part. The success of any marketing efforts aimed at attracting international students will depend on ability to identify and meeting customer needs and wants. Meeting customer needs is often a challenge for marketers of service products such as higher education unlike those dealing with physical products. Unlike physical products, services are characterised by perishability, intangibility, inseparability and heterogeneity. Services are perishable in that unlike

physical products, they cannot be stored, inventoried or returned (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006). Closely related to perishability is the fact that services are intangible. They can thus not be touched or tasted prior to purchase. It also means that services cannot be easily exhibited or simply communicated to customers (Duggirala et al., 2008). Inseparability relates to the fact that services are often sold and consumed at the same time. Service provision often requires that the providers and consumer interact in order for the customer to derive the benefits.

This makes it difficult for prospective students to objectively evaluate the quality of services to expect from a country or compare competing offers before delivery. As a result the purchase decision processes of consumers are greatly influenced by indirect mechanisms of service evaluation such as image of the country and/or institution in the case on international education (Cubillo et al., 2006). Heterogeneity on the other hand relates to the fact that services are less standardised than goods. This is due to the fact that services are mostly performed by humans and it is difficult for service providers to ensure that exactly the same service quality is provided by different individuals. The service quality provided by the same individual is also likely to vary from day to day or even from one customer encounter to another. Despite the difficulties associated with marketing services, countries and institutions in particular have a vested interest in understanding the factors that influence students' application and enrolment decisions as these have a bearing on their ability to increase the fit between students and themselves. A review of literature shows that there are many factors that influence international students' choice of study destination. Mpinganjira (2011), Maringe and Carter (2007) as well as Yang (2007) found that quality of education offered in a country is the primary factor that influences international students' choice of study destination.

This is because, for students looking for international study opportunities, the primary service they are looking for is international education. Yang (2007) observed that in terms of quality, students are more likely to favour getting studying in countries offering qualifications that are well recognised by employers in their countries of origin. Such qualifications can make it easy for students to get employment once they are finished with their studies. Mpinganjira (2009) found that students favour providers of internationally recognised qualifications in their decision to study abroad. This is due to the fact that such qualifications make it easy for those looking for international jobs and those looking for opportunities to further their studies in some other countries to easily be accepted. Increased globalisation of world markets has resulted in greater demand for skilled labour that is ready to be deployed to work outside their own countries and cultural settings. OECD (2007) noted that the growing internationalisation of labour markets for skilled labour witnessed in the 80's and the 90's fostered individuals'

incentives to gain an international experience as part of their studies thereby helping in boosting demand for international education.

Much as the primary service sought by international students is international education, there are a number of other factors that students consider in their choice of study destination. Cubillo et al. (2006) noted that prospective students consider various aspects related to living in the host country including issues of safety and quality of life in general. Financial and social costs associated with studying abroad, visa and/or other entry conditions, geographic proximity to home country and social links have also been found to significantly impact on study destination choice. Financial related costs include tuition fees, living expenses and travel expenses. Maringe and Carter (2007) noted that opportunities to work part time can help reduce the financial costs associated with studying in some countries. Social costs relate to such factors as crime, racial discrimination and presence or absence of students or other people in general from home country (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Yang (2007) found that Chinese students consider the lower levels of crime and discrimination associated with Australia as important factors that positively influenced them to choose the country as their international study destination.

Opportunities to migrate, language of instruction as well as personal referrals have also been found to influence country choice in the decision to study abroad (Baas, 2005). There are thus many factors that can influence the decision to study abroad. Hadjiphanis (2010) and Arambawela et al. (2006) noted that the importance of different factors influencing choice of study destination vary between different segments of students. Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2005) found that female students, younger students and those coming from lesser developed countries, respectively, are influenced more by academic related factors than male students, older students and those coming from developed countries, respectively. More students in the latter group were found to be influenced more by experience related factors such as meeting new people and having fun.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data used in the analysis was collected using an online structured questionnaire administered on international students studying at University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. The questionnaire looked at various issues to do with international study. The focus of this paper is on factors influencing the decision to choose South Africa as an international study destination by African postgraduate students. A five point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 agree and 5 = strongly agree, was used to measure the extent to which various factors influenced the decision to study in South Africa. A total of 24 factors were included in the structured questionnaire. The factors were identified after triangulation of findings from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with international students as well as findings from the review of literature. A total of two focus

group discussions, each consisting of 8 international students and taking about 1 h were conducted.

The in-depth interviews each lasting for about 30 min were conducted with 7 international postgraduate African students. The in-depth interviews were aimed at getting a deeper understanding of issues relating to individual students at individual level. Non-probability cross sectional convenience sampling was used to identify respondents for the focus group and in-depth interviews. In order to capture diversity of opinion, deliberate measures were taken to ensure that the participants chosen were mixed in terms of gender, country of origin, year and program of study. The focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed on paper before being subjected to thematic analysis. The first draft of the structured questionnaire was pre-tested on a convenience sample of 16 international student's office before coming up with the final version that was posted online. This was done to ensure that the wording used in the questions was clear and understandable.

An e-mail sent through the international students was used to invite students to participate in the study. By the end of the data collection period a total of 94 usable responses were obtained. 61 of the students, representing 64.9% were from the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) while 33 representing 35.1% were from other non-SADC member countries. 27 (29%) of the respondents were female while 67 (71%) were male. 43 students indicated that South Africa was their country of first choice in their discussion to study abroad while 51 indicated other countries mostly the USA (16), UK (15), Canada (7) and Australia (6). The data was analysed using version 18 of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Mean values, factor analysis and independent sample t-tests were the main statistical tools used in the analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the rank order analysis using mean values of all the 24 items investigated. As a five point scale was used in the investigation, mean values of less than 1.5 denote strong disagreement, mean values of 2 or to the nearest of 2 denote disagreement, mean value of 3 or to the nearest of 3 denote neutrality (do not agree nor disagree), mean value of 4 or to the nearest of 4 denote agreement while those of 4.5 and above denote strong levels of agreement. According to the findings the most important factor that influenced the decision to study in South Africa was the low cost of living followed by low of tuition. The lower cost of living and tuition should be interpreted in relation to the major competitors of South Africa which are mainly developed countries such as USA, UK, Canada and Australia. The cost of living in these countries as well as tuition is comparatively higher than developing countries such as South Africa. In looking at the lower cost of tuition, it is also important to bear in mind that about 65% of the respondents were the SADC region of which South Africa is a member. Under the SADC protocol on education, students originating from member countries are treated as local students for the purposes of tuition fees and are charged similar tuition fees as local students.

This is often significantly lower than that charged to other international students. In general, the findings

according to mean values show that only 6 factors can be considered to have played a much greater role in influencing the decision to student abroad. Apart from the lower cost of living and tuition the other factors included modern and technologically advanced facilities, use of English as a medium of instruction, the fact that South Africa's qualifications are respected at home and high reputation of South Africa's qualifications internationally. These factors had mean values of 3.5 and above. According to Menon (2009), South Africa is considered the most developed country in Africa. It is thus not surprising that international students associate the country with modern and technologically advanced facilities especially when they compare the country with their own home countries. On the issue of language of instruction, South Africa is a multilingual country with eleven official languages. Afrikaans and English are however the commonly used languages of instruction in the higher education sector.

The influence associated with use of English would thus only apply to courses or institutions offering their programs in English. In terms of quality of education, Yang (2007) indicated that students are more likely to favour countries offering qualifications that that are well recognised by employers in their home countries. This is because such qualifications make it easy for students to get employment once they finish the studies and return back to their home countries. Qualifications that are well recognised internationally, not just in the home country, are also of much benefit as they make it easy for students seeking international job opportunities to easily get one. They also make it for students interested in pursuing further studies in other countries to easily be accepted.

According to Tables 1 and 2 factors were found to exert little influence on the decision to choose South Africa. They all had mean values of less than 2.5. These included in order of least influence, information from offices of South African high commission/embassies on study opportunities in the country, reputation that South Africa is a friendly society, opportunities to work part time while studying, belief that studying in South Africa can improve chances of immigrating, positive information about South Africa in the mass media, ease of university admission entry requirements, ease of getting a visa/study permit, advertising/promotion by South African institutions/representatives in the home country, inability to get a study place in preferred study country(ies), having many people from one's home country living and studying in South Africa and lastly 'study South Africa' publications.

A closer look at these factors indicates that the least influencing factors relate to information/promotion of South Africa as an international study destination and general perceptions of South Africa as a country. From the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews it was clear that although South Africa is favoured by

international students due to the low cost of living and tuition as well as its modern infrastructure and facilities, issues of safety were of primary concern amongst most students. Cubillo et al. (2006) observed that prospective international students consider various aspects related to living in a prospective host country in their decision to study abroad including issues of safety. Yang (2007) found that lower levels of crime and discrimination associated with Australia positively influences international students to choose it as a preferred international study destination. High levels of crime associated with South Africa, its past history of racial discrimination as well as the recently widely publicised incidences of xenophobia, all contribute to unfavourable perceptions of the country as a welcoming place.

From the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews it was also clear that most students were not reached by promotional efforts aimed at attracting international students to come and study in South Africa. This can help explain the low numbers of students who indicated that they were influenced by promotional messages coming from South Africa's institutions or their representatives or information from offices of South African high commission/embassies on study opportunities in the country. Well managed promotional efforts would help address some of the major concerns that prospective students may have towards studying in the country. Table 1 also presents percentages of respondents who strongly agreed/disagreed, those who were neutral and those who agreed/strongly agreed to being influenced by each of the factors in their decision to choose South Africa as their international study destination. The results show that 8 factors had more than 50% of the respondents indicating that they were influenced by them in their decision to study in South Africa. They included all factors with mean values of 3.5 and above as well as location, the fact that South Africa is near home and having a scholarship to study in the country. A total of 11 factors had more than 50% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they influenced their decision to study in the country.

These include all the 11 factors with mean values of less than 2.5 except one namely having many people from one's home country living/studying in South Africa. The eleventh factor instead was having friends and/or family in South Africa. After examining the variables individually, exploratory factors analysis was undertaken for the purposes of identifying underlying dimensions in the variables. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to measure the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis. The results showed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.72 and a Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significant at 0.000 level of significance. According to Hair et al. (2010) factor analysis should not be conducted on samples with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of less than 0.5 and a statistically insignificant Bartlett's test of sphericity (sig.

**Table 1.** Factors influencing choice of South Africa as a study destination.

|   | SD/D (%) | N (%) | A/SA % | Mean |
|---|----------|-------|--------|------|
| Lower cost of living  | 8.5      | 21.3  | 70.2   | 3.71 |
| Lower cost of courses   | 10.6     | 22.3  | 67.1   | 3.67 |
| Modern and technologically advanced facilities                              | 12.1     | 15.9  | 72.0   | 3.63 |
| Use of English as medium of instruction                                     | 13.4     | 22.0  | 64.6   | 3.56 |
| South Africa's qualifications are respected at home                         | 12.3     | 19.8  | 67.9   | 3.52 |
| High reputation of South Africa's qualifications internationally            | 12.1     | 23.2  | 64.7   | 3.51 |
| Location – being closer to home country                                     | 27.2     | 16.0  | 56.8   | 3.32 |
| Having a scholarship to study in South Africa                               | 32.9     | 12.7  | 54.4   | 3.24 |
| People you know who are studying/have studied in South Africa               | 35.7     | 19.8  | 44.5   | 2.94 |
| The fact that South Africa is a multicultural society                       | 35.5     | 32.9  | 31.6   | 2.82 |
| Recommendations by friends/family members living in South Africa            | 41.3     | 17.5  | 41.2   | 2.76 |
| Having friends and/or family in South Africa                                | 51.9     | 12.7  | 35.4   | 2.65 |
| Recommendations by friends/family at home                                   | 44.3     | 22.8  | 32.9   | 2.61 |
| 'Study South Africa' publications   | 56.8     | 24.7  | 18.5   | 2.31 |
| Having many people from your home country living/studying in R.S.A.         | 49.4     | 26.6  | 23.5   | 2.44 |
| Inability to get a study place in preferred study country (ies)             | 58.7     | 18.8  | 22.5   | 2.26 |
| Adverting/promotion by S African institutions/ reps in home country         | 62.5     | 27.5  | 10.0   | 2.14 |
| Ease of getting a visa/study permit   | 64.2     | 17.3  | 18.5   | 2.14 |
| Ease of university admission entry requirements                             | 60.0     | 20.0  | 20.0   | 2.14 |
| Positive information about South Africa in the mass media                   | 58.7     | 30.0  | 11.3   | 2.13 |
| Belief that studying in S. Africa can improve chances of immigrating        | 63.3     | 27.8  | 8.9    | 2.09 |
| Opportunities to work part-time while studying                              | 70.0     | 13.8  | 16.2   | 2.08 |
| Reputation that South Africa is a friendly society                          | 68.8     | 22.5  | 8.7    | 2.03 |
| Information from SA high commission/embassy on studying opportunities in SA | 73.8     | 20.0  | 6.2    | 1.91 |

>0.05). This shows that the sample in this study was adequate for factor analysis. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis. According to the results, the original 24 variables were reduced to 6 underlying dimensions. Only dimensions with Eigen values of at least 1 were chosen and variables with loadings of at least 0.5 were included in determining the make-up of each dimension.

The six identified dimensions together accounted for 72.8% of the total variance. Composite variables were then computed as a summated average of the items loading on each underlying dimension and renamed based on the items loading on each. The dimensions were named promotion/recommendation on study opportunities, entry related conditions, perceptions of South Africa and migration plans, language and social links, quality of education and lower cost of living and tuition. Table 3 presents a rank order analysis of the dimensions using mean values. According to the results, lower cost of living and tuition (mean = 3.69) as well as quality of education (mean = 3.58) were the two dimensions that greatly influenced the decision to study in South Africa. The factor with the lowest influence was general perception of South Africa and migration plans (mean = 2.25). Respondents were rather neutral about the other three factors namely language and social links (3.04), entry related conditions (2.49) and promotional

information/recommendations on study opportunities in South Africa (2.46).

A further analysis of the mean values at group level (Table 4) showed that students in the age group of 30 years and below just as those 31 years and older had the dimensions exactly in the same rank order as that of the whole sample. Both groups indicated lower costs of living and tuition as well as quality of education as the two most important factors that influenced their decision to choose South Africa. In both cases the factor with the least influence was general perceptions of South Africa and migration plans. The only difference between the two groups was that students in the 30 years and below age group disagreed with the fact that promotion/recommendations on study opportunities in South Africa influenced their decision to choose the country (mean value = 2.39). A rank order analysis of the students grouped according to country of first choice showed that the rank order for students whose first choice was not South Africa was exactly the same as that for the overall group.

The rank order for students whose first choice was South Africa was however different. These students were influenced in order of importance by the lower cost of living and tuition, quality of education, language and social skills, promotional information/recommendations,

**Table 2.** Factor analysis rotated component matrix (a).

|  | Components |       |       |       |       |       |
|--|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | 1          | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     |
| The high reputation of South African qualifications internationally                              |            |       |       |       | 0.868 |       |
| SA's qualifications are respected at home  |            |       |       |       | 0.944 |       |
| Lower cost of courses  |            |       |       |       |       | 0.713 |
| Lower cost of living   |            |       |       |       |       | 0.806 |
| Location - being closer to your home country   |            |       |       | 0.840 |       |       |
| Use of English language  |            |       |       | 0.764 |       |       |
| Reputation that South Africa is a friendly society   |            |       | 0.829 |       |       |       |
| The fact that South Africa is a multicultural society  |            |       | 0.849 |       |       |       |
| Modern and technologically advanced facilities   |            |       |       |       | 0.620 |       |
| Having a scholarship to study in South Africa  |            | 0.653 |       |       |       |       |
| Having friends and/or family in South Africa   |            |       |       | 0.557 |       |       |
| Having many people from your home country living/studying in South Africa                        |            |       |       | 0.603 |       |       |
| Inability to get a study place in preferred study country(ies)                                   |            | 0.663 |       |       |       |       |
| Opportunities to work part-time while studying   |            |       |       |       |       |       |
| Ease of university admission entry requirements  |            | 0.768 |       |       |       |       |
| Ease of getting a visa/study permit  |            | 0.591 |       |       |       |       |
| The belief that studying in South Africa can improve chances of migrating                        |            |       | 0.526 |       |       |       |
| Positive information about South Africa in the mass media  |            |       | 0.621 |       |       |       |
| Adverting/promotion by South African institutions/representatives in your home country           | 0.628      |       |       |       |       |       |
| Information from South African high commission/embassy on studying Opportunities in South Africa | 0.834      |       |       |       |       |       |
| Recommendations by friends/family members living in South Africa                                 | 0.912      |       |       |       |       |       |
| Recommendations by friends/family at home  | 0.882      |       |       |       |       |       |
| 'Study South Africa' publications  |            |       |       |       |       |       |
| People you know who are studying or have studied in South Africa                                 | 0.866      |       |       |       |       |       |
| Eigen values   | 7.45       | 2.50  | 2.04  | 1.61  | 1.60  | 1.29  |
| Percentage variance explained  | 28.7       | 11.6  | 9.7   | 9.0   | 8.7   | 5.1   |
| Cumulative percentage  | 28.7       | 40.3  | 50.0  | 59.0  | 67.7  | 72.8  |

Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. a Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

perceptions of South Africa and migration plans and lastly by entry related conditions. Just as in the overall group, only the first two factors had mean values of 3.5 or more. However unlike the overall group, they were neutral about 2 factors

namely language and social links as well as promotional information and recommendations. They disagreed with two factors namely perceptions of South Africa and migration plans and entry related conditions. An independent

sample t-test was run in order to investigate if the differences in mean values between the different groups of students were statistically significant. The results according to Table 4 show that there were no statistically significant differences

**Table 3.** Rank order factors.

| Factor  | N  | Mean | Std. deviation |
|---|----|------|----------------|
| Lower cost of living and tuition                | 94 | 3.69 | 0.93           |
| Quality of education                            | 94 | 3.58 | 0.79           |
| Language and social links                       | 94 | 3.04 | 0.92           |
| Entry related conditions                        | 94 | 2.49 | 0.85           |
| Promotional information/ recommendations        | 94 | 2.46 | 0.92           |
| Perceptions of South Africa and migration plans | 94 | 2.25 | 0.78           |

**Table 4.** Independent sample t test.

| Variable                               | Mean  | T-test for equality of means |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
|--|-------|------------------------------|--------|--------------------|--------------------|--|--------|-------|
|  |       | t                            | df     | Sig.<br>(2-tailed) | Mean<br>difference | 95% confidence<br>interval of the mean |        |       |
|  |       |                              |        |                    |                    | Lower                                  | Upper  |       |
| <b>Age group</b>                       |       |                              |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Lower cost of living and tuition       | 21-30 | 3.59                         | -0.938 | 92                 | 0.351              | -0.18                                  | -0.566 | 0.203 |
|  | 31+   | 3.77                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Quality of education                   | 21-30 | 3.51                         | -0.735 | 92                 | 0.465              | -0.13                                  | -0.482 | 0.222 |
|  | 31+   | 3.64                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Language and social links              | 21-30 | 2.99                         | -0.380 | 92                 | 0.705              | -0.08                                  | -0.499 | 0.340 |
|  | 31+   | 3.07                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Entry related conditions               | 21-30 | 2.49                         | -0.068 | 92                 | 0.946              | -0.01                                  | -0.399 | 0.372 |
|  | 31+   | 2.50                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Promotional info/recommendations       | 21-30 | 2.39                         | -0.684 | 92                 | 0.497              | -0.14                                  | -0.558 | 0.273 |
|  | 31+   | 2.53                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Perceptions of RSA and migration plans | 21-30 | 2.20                         | -0.509 | 92                 | 0.612              | -0.09                                  | -0.442 | 0.262 |
|  | 31+   | 2.29                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| <b>1<sup>st</sup> Choice</b>           |       |                              |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Lower cost of living and tuition       | RSA   | 3.86                         | 1.626  | 92                 | 0.107              | 0.31                                   | -0.069 | 0.692 |
|  | Other | 3.55                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Quality of education                   | RSA   | 3.74                         | 1.638  | 92                 | 0.105              | 0.28                                   | -0.062 | 0.634 |
|  | Other | 3.46                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Language and social links              | RSA   | 3.03                         | -0.062 | 92                 | 0.951              | -0.01                                  | -0.434 | 0.408 |
|  | Other | 3.04                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Entry related conditions               | RSA   | 2.32                         | -1.640 | 92                 | 0.105              | -0.31                                  | -0.696 | 0.067 |
|  | Other | 2.63                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Promotional info/ recommendations      | RSA   | 2.48                         | 0.153  | 92                 | 0.878              | 0.03                                   | -0.388 | 0.452 |
|  | Other | 2.45                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |
| Perceptions of RSA and migration plans | RSA   | 2.40                         | 1.559  | 92                 | 0.123              | 0.27                                   | -0.076 | 0.623 |
|  | Other | 2.13                         |        |                    |                    |  |        |       |

between the younger and older students as well as between students who had South Africa as their country of first choice and those who had other countries as their first choice.

This does not necessarily contradict the conclusions drawn by Hadjiphanis (2010), Arambawela et al. (2006) as well as Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2005) to the effect that the importance of different factors influencing choice of study destination vary between different segments of students. The results rather show that in this sample, postgraduate students coming from Africa countries can be seen as one segment of the international students' population with similar needs and wants.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was undertaken to investigate factors that influenced international African postgraduate students to choose South Africa as their study destination. From the findings it can be concluded that lower costs of living and tuition as well as quality of education are the two factors that exerted most influence on the decision to choose South Africa. In terms of quality of education students were attracted mostly by the fact that South African qualifications are respected in their home countries and internationally as well as by modern and technologically advanced facilities associated with studying in the country. It can also be concluded from the results that initiatives to promote the country and its institutions to international students are bearing less fruit in terms of influencing the decision to choose the country. The findings in the study have wider implications on the marketing of South Africa and its institutions of higher learning on the international market and to African students wanting to pursue postgraduate studies internationally. The ability of the country to attract more African postgraduate students and of the quality wanted depends on its ability to compete on the international students market. From the findings, it is clear that the major competitors are from the developed world namely USA, UK, Australia and UK.

The lower costs of living and tuition associated with South Africa is its major source of competitive advantage as the cost of living and tuition in developed countries is often much higher than in developing countries such as South Africa. Opportunities to work part time as well as wide availability of scholarships especially at postgraduate levels in most developed countries can however reduce the competitive advantage associated with studying in South Africa. The country should also consider increasing the number of scholarships available for postgraduate studies if it is to attract high quality students. The fact that South Africa's qualifications are known by many to be internationally recognised is something the country and its institutions of higher learning should capitalise on, in its efforts to position itself on the international students market. It is also something

that needs to be safeguarded and strengthened by ensuring that the best service quality standards are practiced and maintained.

Clear quality standards needs to be established and maintained at different levels of the service offer. In most institutions this will include ensuring high quality standards in teaching and research, student support services as well as facilities such as library services, computer labs, health services, accommodation and cafeteria services where applicable. It is important for those responsible for marketing the country and its institutions of high learning to look at those factors that are having less impact on students and see if improvements can be made to assist in attracting international students. Measures need to be taken to ensure that information on study opportunities in the country is widely available. Offices of diplomatic missions can be cost effectively used to achieve this. Officers working in such offices need to be sensitised of the need to promote the country's education offers in targeted markets. They also need to be provided with promotional materials that they can use in this regard. In order to have more impact, the promotional material needs to address the concerns of prospective students and their families such as quality standing of qualifications offered and general issues relating to living in South Africa including safety issues.

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