An examination of factors that influence Hong Kong students’ selection of local top-up bachelor degree programmes

CHENG, Wah On (Calvin)
BA (Hons), MEcon

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The University of Newcastle, Australia
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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to empirically investigate the factors determining Hong Kong students’ selection of local top-up bachelor degree programmes. Local top-up bachelor degree programmes are top-up undergraduate programmes offered by local institutions, which form a progression route for sub-degree graduates to earn bachelor’s degrees. In the last decade, the low enrolment rates in the local top-up bachelor degree programmes in Hong Kong have engendered policy discourse among the local top-up bachelor degree institutions and the HKSAR Government. Utilizing a modified framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), this study examines the drivers and impediments influencing students’ selection of local top-up bachelor degree programmes in Hong Kong. This is the first study to adopt the TRA model to study Hong Kong students’ study choice behaviour. In addition, this study is the first one to extend the TRA model to cover an additional determinant, perceived value. A questionnaire was administered to 388 students from four local sub-degree institutions in Hong Kong. The model was estimated using PLS-SEM.

The findings are summarized. First, the empirical results indicate that the factors influencing a student’s decision to pursue a local top-up bachelor degree programme are attitude, subjective norm, perceived value of programme, job availability, job security, social image and difficulty of the curriculum. Second, and importantly, family and professors (teachers) do have a positive influence on a student’s decision to pursue a local top-up bachelor degree programme. Lastly, the empirical results reveal that while gender has no moderating effect, the year of study, academic achievement and level of education of parents, do have a moderating effect on students’ choice to embark on a top-up bachelor degree programme.

The empirical findings of this dissertation have significant policy implications. For the local top-up bachelor degree institutions, there is the need to develop and deliver quality courses that emphasise flexible learning strategies and deepen student-centred learning. Importantly, there is the need to offer a range of course relevant concepts and principles that are well-structured and stimulating thus demonstrating the relevance of the course to the student’s own context. In addition, there is the need to deliver
programmes effectively, thereby enabling students to develop an in-depth specialized knowledge and skill base that enables them to become competitive in the job market. There is also the need for institutions to maintain a high standard for their programmes thus paving the way to aggressively promote their programmes in Hong Kong. Creating greater awareness of the benefits of local top-up bachelor degree programmes among households via adverts and education expos as well as using instructors to promote the programmes has the potential to instil a sense of high perceived value among future students. Last but not least, there is the need for institutions to provide detailed information about their programmes to parents and teachers of sub-degree students as they are the most influential reference groups for future students.

The theoretical contribution of this study is that it extends the TRA framework by incorporating perceived value, in addition to the traditional factors that influence consumer behaviour, namely, attitude and subjective norm. The empirical findings demonstrate the importance of including perceived value as an additional factor influencing the decision of students to enrol in local top-up bachelor degree programmes. The dissertation affirms that attitude, subjective norm and perceived value can all determine students’ behavioural intention. Practically, this dissertation contributes to the better understanding of what influences students’ selection of local top-up bachelor degree programmes and suggests measures to encourage the selection of these programmes in Hong Kong.