ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

Choosing a UK University:
Interpersonal Influences for African Students

Richard R. Bakare

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia Ruskin University for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

Submitted: January 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT

LORD ASHCROFT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL
DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

CHOOSING A UK UNIVERSITY: INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES
FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS
RICHARD R. BAKARE

January 2017

This paper explores the use of interpersonal sources in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa. The objectives of the study were to identify the main sources from which they obtain information about UK higher education, assess the importance of information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process, identify the interpersonal sources that are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the process and explain the ways in which those sources influence their decisions about which university to choose.

The mixed methods strategy employed by the study used data collected through archival research, survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews to provide answers to the research questions.

The study identified the main interpersonal sources from which prospective African students obtain information about UK higher education as agents, parents, family members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students & employers, and found that information obtained from interpersonal sources are more important than information from other sources. Agents & parents were identified as the most influential interpersonal sources in the evaluation of alternatives

stage of the decision-making process and the study explains some of the ways in which they influence the decisions of prospective African students.

The study builds on existing knowledge in the subject area by highlighting significant differences in the way that African students approach the decision-making process compared to their counterparts from other regions. The identification of the main ways in which agents, parents, friends and family members influence the decisions of prospective African students about UK higher education is a significant contribution to knowledge. It provides UK higher education institutions with valuable insights that should enable them to devise marketing strategies that will improve the effectiveness of their student recruitment activities in the region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

LIST OF TABLES

ABBREVIATION OF TERMS

Acronym	Meaning
ARU	Anglia Ruskin University
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CDP	Consumer Decision Process
CIM	Chartered Institute of Marketing
DFES	Department for Education & Skills
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEPs	Higher Education Providers
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HND	Higher National Diploma
MBA	Master of Business Administration
PVC	Pro – Vice Chancellor
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
THES	Times Higher Education Supplement
TNE	Transnational Education
UCAS	University & Colleges Admissions Service
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs

UK   United Kingdom

UN   United Nations

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization

US   United States

USD   United States Dollar

LIST OF APPENDICES

COPYRIGHT DECLARATION

CHOOSING A UK UNIVERSITY: INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS
RICHARD R. BAKARE

1 INTRODUCTION

As the balance of funding in the UK higher education sector continues to shift more rapidly from public to the private sector and students, universities have become more dependent upon their responsiveness to customer needs and the agendas of funding providers. Not only do they have to act much more like commercial organisations in order to obtain the funding that they need to survive, they also have to attract students through the use of traditional marketing strategies. Although the demand for universities places has increased significantly during the past few decades, so has the number of institutions. This and several other factors like the increase in tuition fees, changes in the student lifecycle, sector diversity and foreign competition has put UK universities in a position where they might just find themselves scrambling over a much smaller number of students than they had anticipated. The recent entry of private and brand – backed players like BPP and Pearson Education has resulted in a crowded market where leading players must employ creative marketing strategies to attract students. The need to emphasise value for money and compete with new rivals means HE is a sector where the importance of marketing is growing and new marketing roles are being created to serve the business needs of the sector (Costa, 2011).

This study will discuss the driving forces behind the marketisation of the UK HE sector and explore the activities undertaken by universities in order to attract students. It will focus on the role of interpersonal sources in the decision – making process when international students are selecting which university to attend.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the use of interpersonal sources (teachers, career advisers, friends & relatives, agents, university reps, etc.) in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa.

The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?
4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

There are several other major issues in the UK HE sector which are worthy of discussion, but outside the scope of this study. Although there has been important debates about issues like funding, regulation, quality and research in HE during the past few years, this study will not attempt to provide answers to the many challenges being experienced in those areas.

The identification of the specific interpersonal sources that are most influential in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK higher education students from Africa is the main gap in knowledge that the research aims to fill. The study will identify which source is most influential and also explain the specific ways in which interpersonal sources influence the decisions of prospective African students.

In recent years international students' higher education decision- making has become a high stakes process as UK institutions grow more aggressive in their efforts to attract them. As African countries like Nigeria become major sources of international students, strategic planners in UK universities require more evidence in order to devise effective strategies. Proper analysis of consumer behaviour and determining factors in the decision-making process of African students will enable educational institutions interested in attracting these students to strengthen their image, eliminate weaknesses and thus increase their chances of being chosen as the preferred institution.

In the UK, HE courses and qualifications are delivered by a wide variety of institutions, including universities, further education colleges and privately – owned colleges. The unit of analysis for this study is international students studying at UK HE institutions. A HE institution is a 'recognised body' that delivers higher – level courses and qualifications. Recognised bodies are institutions that have been granted degree – awarding powers by a royal charter or by Act of Parliament. According to HESA (2016)

there were 161 publicly – funded UK Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in 2014/15. A UK university is an educational institution that is authorised by an Act of Parliament or Royal Charter to use that name or granted university status by the Privy Council. A UK domiciled student for the purpose of this study is a person that is ordinarily resident in the UK and have been living in the UK for at least three years prior to their university education. International students can be defined as those students that left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study (British Council, 2013). They are usually not permanent or usual residents of their country of study, having obtained prior education in a different country.

Chapter One examines the structure of the UK higher education sector, discusses the recent trends in the sector, highlights the importance of international student recruitment to the sector and provides some background information about Anglia Ruskin University. Chapter Two examines the existing literature in the subject area and identifies the main gap in knowledge that the study intends to fill. Chapter Three contains a discussion of the research strategies and methods available to the researcher and identifies those that are employed in the study. Chapter Four contains details of the main findings from the study. Chapter Five contains a detailed analysis and discussion of the findings in the light of current knowledge in the subject area. Chapter Six brings together the main conclusions and highlights areas for future research.

2 THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR & INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT

2.1 Introduction

The United Kingdom has a leading system of HE that attracts students and staff from all over the world. According to the 2014 - 15 Times HE World University Rankings, the UK has three universities in the global top 10 and 11 in the top 100 (THES, 2014). The number of young people entering HE has increased from about 15% in 1987 to about 45% in recent years. With 2.27m studying at 162 HE institutions in 2014/2015 (HESA, 2016), the UK is also the second most popular destination for international students, behind only the United States. International students are estimated to generate £3.3bn of output across the UK economy and over 27,800 jobs (Browne Report, 2010). The HE sector is a major part of the UK economy, contributing more revenue than the advertising industry, and significantly more than the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries. With an income of £23.4bn per year, the sector is estimated as generating £59bn of output (Brown Report, 2010). The sector includes a diverse range of universities, colleges and specialist institutions operating with high levels of autonomy by international standards. These institutions offer a broad range of qualifications across an ever increasing range of subject areas in their efforts to provide the knowledge and skills that students need to be competitive and successful in the world of work.

According to the HE Funding Council for England (2009), the main purposes of HE are to enable people to develop their capabilities and fulfil their potential, both personally and at work; to advance knowledge and understanding through teaching and research and to contribute to an economically successful and culturally diverse nation

Whilst there might be a general consensus on the purposes of HE, the environment in which they are being fulfilled has changed significantly during the last five to six decades. Greenaway & Haynes (2003) identified the major systemic changes that had dramatically transformed the UK HE sector during the previous 40 – year period as:

- A threefold increase in the number of universities since the 1960s; due to the entry of 20 new universities and the granting of university status to 40 former polytechnics.

- A growth in student numbers which outstripped the growth in providers. The number of students in the sector had risen from about 400,000 in the early 1960s to over 2m in 2000.

- An irrevocable change in the balance between public and private funding; with a significant move away from public funding to direct public subventions.

- Changes in the mechanism for disbursing funds to providers and consumers. For universities, there had been a shift away from block grants to funding based on several performance measures and for students, a shift away from income support transfers to student loans.

- A dramatic increase in regulation and compliance requirements, with formal appraisal of teaching and research well embedded in the sector.

It is interesting to find that not only have these changes continued, they have actually intensified during the past decade. These changes have transformed the sector from one traditionally tasked with training individuals to contribute to the development of society to one whose 'product' is freely traded in the open market like any other.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the use of interpersonal sources (teachers, career advisers, friends & relatives, agents, university reps, etc.) in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa.

The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

This chapter provides information about the context of this study; including background information about the UK HE sector and the driving forces behind marketisation, UK institutions as part of the global HE sector, international student recruitment in the UK, the African market as a major source of international students for UK institutions and the international student recruitment activities of Anglia Ruskin University.

2.2 The UK Higher Education Sector

The UK HE sector comprises of universities that are both ancient and modern institutions of learning. They are ancient in the sense that some can trace their origins to the late middle ages and modern in the sense that it was only in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that they developed into the form that is recognizable today (McCaffery, 2010). Teaching in the city of Oxford is documented from around 1096 and the association of scholars in Cambridge can be traced back to 1209; making the universities of Oxford & Cambridge two of the oldest universities in the world. St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen were founded in the 15th century, whilst University of Edinburgh was established by royal charter in 1583. McCaffery (2010, pp. 28) outlined the main aims of universities as:

- To generate a highly educated and trained population
- To generate a population that is able to work and live together
- To generate a society that reflects certain inherent moral values
- To transmit a shared culture that is consistent with the ideal of cultural diversity
- To preserve and transmit knowledge
- To assist in spreading the benefits of informational and technological advances
- To enable its graduates to play an active part in wealth creation of the nation
- To generate a population that is skilled in the wide range of specialized activities necessary to sustain a complex society.

The sector expanded significantly during the 19th century with the awarding of royal charters to St David's College, Lampeter (later became part of the University of Wales), Durham University, King's College London and University College London. According to McCaffery (2010), it was the Industrial Revolution, the progressive extension of the franchise and the rise of the professional society that created the demand for, as well as shaped the development of a more elaborate university system in nineteenth century Britain. In the later part of the century medical, science and engineering colleges were

established in the major cities of England and some eventually amalgamated and became the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. The development of the industry continued in the late 1940s as the universities of Exeter, Keele, Leicester, Nottingham and Southampton were created by Royal Charter.

As a direct response to the demands of the expanding population and the needs of an increasingly technological economy, the government adopted a strategy aimed at expanding the HE sector. It had become clear to the government by the 1950s that gradual expansion of the sector was not going to yield the growth that was required, mainly because universities raised their entry requirements to cope with increased demand, rather than accommodating larger groups of students within the existing infrastructure (Stevenson & Bell, 2009).

The Committee on Higher Education chaired by Lord Robbins was established in 1961 to enquire into the future development of the UK HE sector. The Robbins report was published in 1963 and recommended that all young persons qualified by ability and attainment to pursue a full – time HE course should be given the opportunity to do so. It also recommended the expansion of universities and that all colleges of advanced technology should be given the status of universities. Thus the award in 1966 of university status to the colleges of advanced technology established from 1956 created Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Loughborough, Salford, Surrey and the University of Wales Institute of Science & Technology (became part of Cardiff University in 1988). Another 13 UK institutions, including Hull and Leicester gained university status during this period and seven new universities were created in East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Sussex, Warwick and York.

The sector was further transformed in 1992 by the Further & HE Act which abolished the division between universities and polytechnics and allowed the UK government to grant university status to 35 institutions which were mainly polytechnics offering degrees that were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Many of these polytechnics were already the size of average sized universities and had long and illustrious histories of delivering courses in practical subjects. A small number

of other higher institutions have also joined the ranks of the post – 92 universities during the past two decades.

2.2.1 Key Developments in the UK HE Sector

1963 Robbins Report	The Committee on HE recommended substantial expansion in UK HE provision. The principles and recommendations of the report provided the basis for the development of the sector for the next few decades.
1986 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)	The first RAE was conducted to provide ratings of the quality of research undertaken in UK universities and HE institutions.
1988 Education Reform Act	The Act created the Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) and the Universities Funding Council (UFC). The PCFC provided funding for over 50 polytechnics and colleges previously supported by local education authorities. The UFC provided funding for all 52 UK universities.
1992 Further & HE Act	The Act created new funding councils and abolished the binary divide between polytechnics and universities. This led to the granting of university status to polytechnics.
1997 National Committee of Enquiry into HE	The Dearing report recommended further expansion of the sector, changes in institutional and student funding, a framework of qualifications, creation of the Office of Fair Access and Arts & Humanities Research Council.
1997 The Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA)	The QAA was established to safeguard quality and standards in UK HE institutions.
1998 Teaching & HE Act	The Act introduced ground – breaking measures to change the way that students are provided with financial support in the sector. Tuition fees were to be paid by all except the poorest students, maintenance grants for living expenses were replaced with loans and bursaries were to be provided for teaching, health & social care students.
2002 – 2003 Roberts Review of Research Assessment	The report recommended a new method for assessing the quality of research in the sector. The new RAE process was announced in February 2004.
2004 The HE Act	The Act took forward the proposals outlined in the White Paper "The Future of HE" with the aim of widening access to UK HE institutions and enabling them to remain competitive in the dynamic world economy.
2005 National Student Survey	HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned the first annual National Student Survey to provide student feedback on the quality of teaching on HE courses.
2007 Burgess Group recommends the HE Achievement Report (HEAR)	The creation and implementation of the detailed report was recommended to record an individual's achievement in HE. The system was proposed as a record of achievement that could replace existing degree classifications.
2010 Brown Review	The Independent Review of HE Funding & Student Finance recommended major changes to the funding of HE in England; including removing the cap on the level of fees charged by universities and increasing the income level at which graduates must begin to pay back their loans.

2011	The White Paper takes forward the proposals in the Browne
White Paper: Students at	Review by seeking to ensure that the sector is more responsive to
the Heart of the System	student choice, provide a much better student experience and
	helps to improve social mobility.

Table 2.1: Key Developments in the UK HE Sector. Adapted from "A Guide to UK HE" (HEFCE, 2009)

In the period following the Robbins – driven expansion of the sector, UK HE experienced turbulent times as state control over the funding and the work of universities increased. This was justified on the ground that universities needed to make a more effective contribution to national economic development. The introduction of the assessment of both research and teaching created an elaborate process of scrutiny, evaluation, measurement and quality assurance in exchange for state funding (Stevenson & Bell, 2009).

The Dearing Committee was established in May 1996 and tasked with making recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of HE should develop to meet the needs of the country over the next 20 years. The Committee was established in response to a funding crisis in the sector, which was partly caused by the doubling of the number of young people going to university when the former polytechnics were relabelled universities. Contrary to the expectations of the polytechnics, the end of the binary divide did not put them on the same level of funding as the older universities, but created a system where they were forced to compete for funding with universities whose research and teaching expertise were much better than theirs. There was pressure from the Treasury to reduce the unit of resource down to the level that reflected the price at which the cheapest supplier of the programme would supply it as well as pressure from the institutions which were prepared to expand their intakes at a very low cost (Ryan, 2005). Thus, in the quest to boost their revenue, the expansion of provision by the new universities increased pressure on HEFCE. By the late 1990s, underfunding had left universities significantly stretched and struggling to survive. The amount available for universities to spend on teaching had halved and funding for infrastructure and research had been significantly reduced.

Having won the 1997 elections on the platform of 'education, education, education,' the Blair government inherited an HE sector which was severely underfunded due to the

shift from an elite to a mass system. The sector also had to respond to the perceived need to raise the knowledge and skills of the labour force in order for the country to be competitive in the global economy. As part of New Labour's Third Way agenda, the role of HE was seen as contributing to Britain's competitive advantage in the global market by producing and disseminating economically productive knowledge. The belief that a knowledge – based economy requires large numbers of highly qualified employees endorsed a continued commitment to increasing the total number of students and within that, the overall proportion of graduates students (Lunt, 2008). The need for the country's HE sector to compete and stand amongst the top universities in the world meant a focus on further developing the research capacity and output of universities. Economic and financial imperatives implied the creation of incentives for other modes of funding HE, and further drives for entrepreneurial activity and involvement of the private sector. The party's strong commitment to widening participation and greater social inclusion meant continued expansion of the sector. According to Lunt (2008), the big political question that needed to be answered was: who should pay for the continued expansion of the UK HE sector?

The Dearing Report of 1997 made 93 recommendations concerning expansion of student numbers, widening participation, increasing public funding in the sector, the introduction of a graduate contribution to tuition costs, professionalism in teaching and expanded quality arrangements. According to Crace & Shepherd (2007), the report contained eight key messages:

- All full – time undergraduates should contribute £1,000 per year of study after graduation on an income – contingent basis
- A return to expansion of student numbers in the sector
- Protection of the world – class reputation of UK degrees
- Increase in the level of government funding for research
- There should be a stronger regional and community role for universities
- HE should make greater use of technology
- There should be more professionalism in university teaching
- There should be a review of pay and working practices of all staff.

Dearing's Report highlighted the economic, social and cultural contribution that HE makes to the quality of life in the society and also emphasised its vital role in

contributing to commercial success in a globalized economy. According to Stevenson & Bell (2009), there are three main issues in Dearing's analysis that have shaped the development of HE policy in the UK. They are the analysis of the world as knowledge – driven and global; a policy response that sees competitive advantage secured through the development of human capital and the view of the role of the state in facilitating these changes whilst market forces drive innovation and provide value for money in the public sector (Bell, 2009). The recognition of knowledge as a key source of competitive advantage meant that universities now had a key role to play as production sites for the output required for economic success.

The Blair government initially rejected Dearing's recommendation that individual students should meet part of the cost of full time HE through income contingent loans after graduation. It introduced £1,000 per year up – front tuition fees in 1998, with free tuition for students from lower – income families. Variable tuition fees of up to £3,000 per year were introduced by the HE Act 2004 from the 2006/7 academic year with funding provided through a system of student loans, means – tested grants and university bursaries.

The HE Act 2004 represented an attempt to position HE firmly within the drive for competitive success in the increasingly globalised economy. It advocated the continued expansion of the sector and the belief that training more people at all levels represents the investment in human capital required for increasing economic prosperity. Most of this expansion was to come through new types of qualifications like foundation degrees, which are better tailored to the needs of the students and the economy.

According to Lunt (2008), the major initiatives pursued by the labour government in its second term resulted from its attempts to maintain simultaneous commitment to a marketised HE system and a policy of widening participation. As part of New Labour's modernisation of public services, there was increasing emphasis on enhancing student choice and their control over the educational process by labelling them as 'consumers'. The ranking of universities in international league tables and the introduction of student satisfaction surveys in an environment where universities were expected to 'compete' for fee paying students increased the pace of marketisation. The government also emphasised the importance of international students and the significant contribution that

they made to the UK economy as a way of encouraging universities to employ appropriate marketing strategies to attract more of them in order to increase their revenue. International student recruitment targets were set in 1999 & 2006 as part of the Prime Minister's Initiatives on International Education (PMI1 & PMI2) which were aimed at helping UK universities to gain a competitive edge in a crowded global marketplace. Universities were also encouraged to increase their income leads by seeking new markets and devising new methods of delivery to increase consumption.

2.3 Recent Developments in the UK HE Sector

2.3.1 Sector Diversity

The Future of Higher Education 2003 report acknowledged the significant strength that UK universities have in the area of research and committed the government to an increase of 30% in research spending for 2005 – 2006 (DfES, 2003). The report also stressed the need to reap the benefits that flow from concentrating the best research in larger units and that future investment will focus more on enabling the leading research departments and universities to compete with the best in the world. This and the growing expectation amongst universities that research income will be drawn increasingly from the private sector has increased the institutional hierarchies that is primarily determined by the distinction between research – based and teaching – based institutions. The research – intensive institutions are seen as knowledge producers, whilst the non – research intensive institutions are seen as knowledge transmitters focussed on facilitating knowledge exchange, especially through the development of networks with local and regional businesses.

According to McCaffery (2010), the funding council's separation of funding for teaching and research has produced a 'super league' of elite research universities which exist alongside but are largely segregated from the bulk of HE institutions whose primary role is that of providing mass teaching. The rationale behind the drive for greater institutional segregation has been the desire to preserve and enhance excellence in elite research universities and protect them from the pressures of massification whilst simultaneously satisfying political and public pressures for mass participation. However, many of the former polytechnics have been reluctant to forsake research for an existence based solely on transmitting knowledge through teaching. Most have made

significant efforts to expand their research activities based on the belief that without significant research activities they might not be taken seriously as universities.

2.3.2 Globalisation

Globalisation represents one of the most significant challenges facing the HE sector today. The growing realisation that national economic success no longer depends on the physical exploitation of natural resources or mass production of consumer goods means that we are becoming increasingly dependent on our ability to create and use new ideas and knowledge effectively. Although new technologies have increased the ability of institutions to transmit knowledge, it has also enabled new players to challenge the dominance of universities in the market for producing and transmitting knowledge. This new wave of competitors from both home and abroad constitute a formidable challenge which the sector will have to tackle effectively in order to maintain its established role in the society. According to McCaffery (2010), this new wave of competitors includes:

- Mega Universities: UK Open University, Academic University Turkey, University of South Africa & Indira Gandhi National Open University, India
- For – Profit Universities: Phoenix, BPP & Corinthian Colleges
- Corporate Universities: BAE, Disney, Ford, Microsoft, Motorola & Unipart
- Private HE Training Organisations: Apollo, DeVry, Kaplan, Laureate Education & Pearson
- Sleeping Giants: IBM, News International.

The new wave of competition is in addition to existing competition from other traditional universities in countries like the United States, Australia, Canada and Europe that are perceived to offer education that are similar in standard to the UK.

On the domestic front, UK institutions continue to prepare students for success in the globally integrated economic environment by internationalising their curricula, promoting cross – cultural understanding and providing opportunities for the development of foreign language skills. As part of their internationalisation strategy, many institutions recruit significant numbers of international students onto their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. HESA statistics for 2013/14 indicate that 5.5% of students were from other countries within the EU whilst 13.5% were from countries outside the European Union (HESA, 2015).

The development of physical presence and engagement in partnership activities overseas has also become a major aspect of the commitment of many UK institutions to internationalisation. In 2012/13, 521,245 Non - EU students were studying wholly or mainly overseas for UK HE qualifications (HESA, 2014). The different types of provision include branch campuses, distance learning, collaborative arrangements and overseas partner organisations.

2.3.3 Funding

The publication of the Independent Review of Higher Education & Student Funding – the Browne Report in October 2010 led to significant changes in the funding of the UK HE sector. The report was based on the following six principles (Browne, 2010):

1. More investment should be made available for higher education
2. Student choice should be increased
3. Everyone who has the potential should be able to benefit from higher education
4. No one should have to pay until they start to work
5. When payments are made they should be affordable
6. Part – time students should be treated the same as full time students for the costs of learning.

The report emphasised the fact that the current system did not meet the aspirations of prospective students; that students were no more satisfied than ten years ago and that the system was still too dependent on public resources which were being cut. The report outlined the following benefits of implementing its proposals (Browne, 2010):

- Higher education will expand sustainably to meet demand, with access for anyone who has the talent to succeed.
- Institutions will actively compete for well – informed, discerning students, on the basis of price and teaching quality, improving provision across the whole sector, within a framework that guarantees minimum standards.
- Increased private contribution and more targeted public investment to support high quality provision and allow the sector to grow in order to meet qualified demand.

In November 2010, the government announced plans for reform and implemented many of the recommendations of the Browne Report. The new provisions were:

- A cap on tuition fees of £9,000 with no levy on fees above this level, but obligations on the institution to put more effort into providing access for disadvantaged students.
- Graduates earning above £41,000 (in 2016) will pay back their student loans at a real interest rate of 3% above inflation with a sliding scale rising from inflation only at £21,000.
- Annual increases in both thresholds in line with the growth in average earnings.
- No increase in student numbers.

In line with the existing arrangements, no student will be required to pay up – front tuition fees. They can continue to take out loans to cover fees and maintenance; graduates start to repay 9% of any income above the earnings threshold of £21,000. Under the current system full – time home and EU students on qualifying courses can take out a loan to cover their tuition fees. Maintenance loans are only available to home students and their amount depends on the student's household income, where they live and where they study. New part – time students on courses with an intensity of 25% or greater are also eligible for tuition fees loans from 2012.

According to Universities UK (2015), the total income for UK HE institutions in 2013/14 was £30.7 billion.
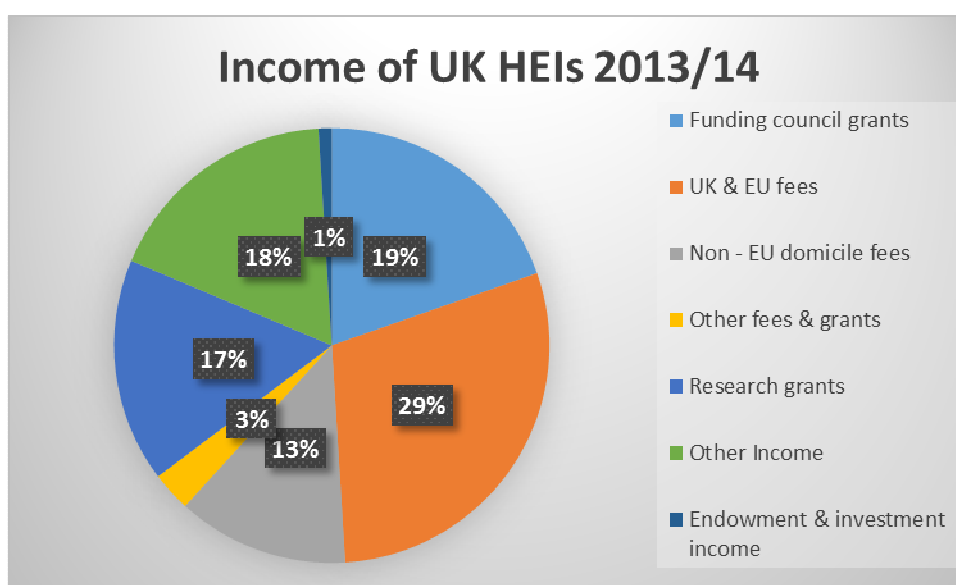
Figure 2.1: Income of UK Higher Education Institutions in 2013/14 (Universities UK, 2015)

2.3.4 The Role of League Tables

The quest for quality in the UK HE sector during the past decade has led to the proliferation of performance indicators that measure how well an institution or a programme of study is operating. UK institutions have followed in the footsteps of other universities and colleges throughout the world in undertaking benchmarking exercises that allows them to use specific performance indicators to compare themselves to other institutions on appropriate indices in order to establish their current levels of performance and initiate strategies for continuous self – improvement. In the same way that commercial organisations prepare financial statements and accounting reports for internal and external stakeholders, HE institutions use performance indicators and self – evaluation reports to provide feedback on how well they are doing and highlight the aspects of their operations that require improvement.

The most recognised performance indicator in the UK HE sector is the ranking of universities in University League Tables. The main aim of the ranking of universities in league tables is to provide information to prospective applicants about the many institutions operating in the sector based on a range of criteria, including student satisfaction, entry standards, academic services, staff/student ratio, research quality, completion rates and student destinations. The four main rankings of universities in the UK are published by The Complete University Guide, The Guardian, The Sunday Times and The Times. Each league table is compiled using a number of criteria that are judged by the organisation as the best indicators of quality in the sector. The most important determinants of an institutions position in the rankings are the National Student Survey (NSS), the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) report.

2.3.5 The UK Higher Education Sector in 2015

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) there were 2.27m students studying for a qualification or for credit at 162 UK HE institutions in 2014/15 (HESA, 2016). All the institutions were publicly funded, except the University of Buckingham which is privately funded. 80.7% of students were domiciled in the UK

before entering higher education, 5.5% are from other countries within the European Union (EU) and 13.8% were from countries outside the EU (HESA, 2016).
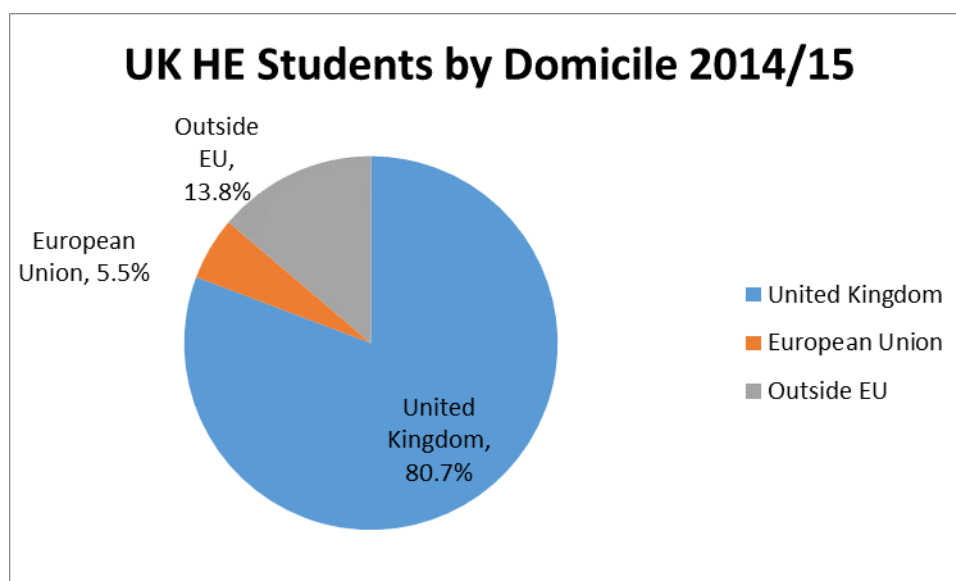
Figure 2.2: UK Higher Education Students by Domicile 2014/15 (HESA, 2016)

Student numbers have increased significantly during the past decade, from just under 2 million in 2000/01 to 2.55m in 2011/12 (HESA, 2013). It decreased to 2.38m in 2012/13, to 2.3m in 2013/14 and to 2.27m in 2014/15 (HESA, 2016).
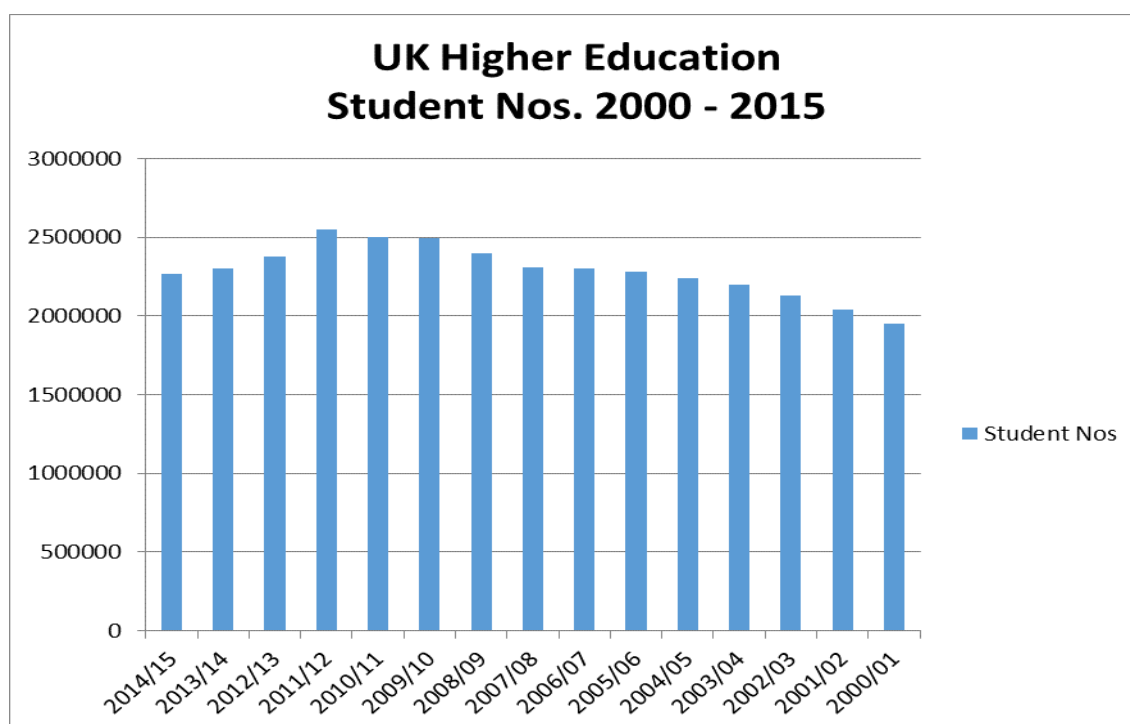
Figure 2.3: UK Higher Education Student Numbers 2000 - 2015 (HESA, 2016)

The growth in UK HE student numbers has mainly come from a significant increase in the number of international students studying at UK universities. In 2002/03 non – EU students comprised 8% of the total student population; by 2012/13 this had risen to 12.8% (HESA, 2014). HE as an export industry is believed to have contributed around £7.9 billion to the UK economy in 2009 and has the potential to contribute almost £17 billion by 2025 (Universities UK, 2012). One of the most important trends in the student population has been the increase in demand from international students for masters' degrees in the UK. The number of non – EU postgraduate students taking taught programmes has doubled since 2002/03 (Universities UK, 2012).

2.4 Marketisation of Higher Education in the United Kingdom

Recent developments in the UK HE sector has significantly increased the rate of marketisation and led to the development of a market – based system for university education. According to Universities UK (2012), the shift towards demand – led funding together with policies to relax the entry barriers for new providers is indicative of a more open and competitive sector. There are several features of the current system that indicate a shift towards a more open and competitive system (Universities UK, 2012):

- The move towards demand – led funding and deregulation of places
- Policy agendas aimed at opening up the sector to a wider range of providers with different models of governance and delivery
- The progressive deregulation of student number controls between institutions
- The opening up of HESA statistics to third party organisations to provide information in support of student choice
- The application of competition law and Office of Fair Trading scrutiny to the sector

The influence of national and international league tables and the growing use of impact and other evaluation metrics as part of research assessments and funding allocations indicate a move towards a market – based system in which universities compete for students and funding.

Adcroft, Teckman & Willis (2010) argued that the most important objective of variable fees in the UK HE sector has been the introduction of competition into the sector. They observed that the preconditions for competitive behaviour are met in the sector and that the main hurdles to competitive behaviour are absent across much of the sector. They concluded that universities will increasingly adopt a competitive orientation that will make issues such as management, performance measurement, globalisation, mergers, acquisitions and partnerships more prevalent in the sector.

In addition to market pressures, the government also wants to see significant improvements in the quality of the services delivered by universities. The June 2011 White Paper "Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System" contains several proposals aimed at improving the student experience and making universities more accountable to their customers. Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi (2013) identified several challenges facing modern universities and stressed the need to respond effectively to competition from several sources in order to survive and thrive.

Thus the main result of the environmental changes that has occurred in the sector is that institutions have to market themselves aggressively in order to be able to continue to attract and retain the students that they need to survive and increase the quality of those that are enrolling on their programmes. McCaffery (2010) identified the main marketing strategic challenges facing the modern universities as market positioning, brand identity, proactive strategic communication, reputation management and league table positioning. The institutions that respond effectively to these challenges will survive and thrive, but those that fail to adapt are likely to struggle and may have to leave the sector.

The recognition by most UK HE institutions of the need to market themselves in a climate of local, national and global competition and the emergence of marketing as a major concept in the sector justifies a study into the behaviour of consumers in the sector. Durkin & McKenna (2011) observed that the introduction of deferred fees in UK higher education has led to commentators taking the position that students must be regarded as customers in the same way as would other purchasers of goods or services. Students are the consumers of the 'product' (education) that universities produce and must be recognised as such by institutions that want to be successful in the 'new' UK

HE sector. In a sector where the number of places available continues to exceed the demand for places, an understanding of customer needs and the ability to satisfy them will be a major determinant of survival and success.

The main implication of the developments in the UK higher education sector during the past few decades is that institutions have to do a lot more to appeal to prospective students. The changes outlined in the June 2011 White Paper, Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system, spells the end of the traditional system under which there was a large number of students chasing the few available places and universities having the privilege of selecting from a large pool of applicants. The move away from tight number controls, removal of regulatory barriers and simplification of the process for obtaining and renewing degree – awarding powers will significantly increase the supply of university places during the next few years. Recent decreases in the number of 18 year olds in the population and in the number of UCAS applications is also likely to create a situation where an increasing number of players are competing for a shrinking population of prospective students. The increasing importance of student charters and feedback through the National Student Survey will also empower students and make more information available to prospective students in the decision – making process.

The White Paper emphasised the fact that higher education has a fundamental value in itself and UK universities are world – class institutions that attract international students and contribute significantly to the economy. It identified the major challenge facing institutions as that of putting the undergraduate experience at the heart of the system and proposed reforms to tackle three main challenges. The first challenge is the need to shift public expenditure away from teaching grants and towards repayable tuition loans in order to ensure that the sector receives the funding that it needs even as substantial savings are made in public expenditure. The second challenge is the need for institutions to deliver a better student experience; improve teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work. The third challenge is the need to take more responsibility for increasing social mobility.

In addition to the implementation of the changes to the funding of higher education proposed in the Browne Review, the White Paper also proposed the following changes in order to improve student experience in the sector:

- Putting financial power in the hands of learners in order to make student choice more meaningful. In order to be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and earn the respect of employers.

- A move away from tight number controls that constrain institutions in order to create a more dynamic sector in which popular institutions can grow and where all institutions must offer good student experience to remain competitive.

- The removal of the regulatory barriers that are preventing a level playing field for all providers in order to improve student choice by supporting a more diverse sector.

- To make it easier for new providers to enter the sector by simplifying the regime for obtaining and renewing degree – awarding powers.

- To radically improve and expand the information available to prospective students by asking institutions to provide much more information about individual courses and graduate employment prospects.

- To increase the importance of student charters and student feedback in empowering university students. Institutions will be expected to publish online summary reports of student surveys in order to aid choice and stimulate competition between the best academics.

- To establish a new regulatory system that protects standards and quality, empowers students to trigger quality reviews where there are grounds for concern, whilst reducing the burden for high performing institutions.

Universities have to perform and must compete effectively in the new UK higher education sector in order to survive and succeed. In the past decades universities have been focussed on their research profiles, teaching excellence and preservation of their traditional heritage. But in the new UK higher education sector, all activities must be directed at attracting, retaining and satisfying students as the customers of universities. McCafery (2010, pp.31) highlighted the differences between traditional higher education and the new higher education:

Traditional Higher Education	New Higher Education
• Competition: other universities	• Competition: everywhere
• Student as apprentice scholar	• Learner as customer (and producer)
• Delivery in the classroom	• Delivery everywhere
• Technology as an expense	• Technology as market differentiation
• Institutional – centric	• Market – centric
• 18 – 25 year – old audience	• Lifetime learner
• Terminal degree	• Lifelong learner
• Mode 1 knowledge	• Mode 2 knowledge
• Take what is offered	• Courses on demand
• Academic calendar	• Year – round campus
• Course as 3 – 4 year revenue	• Course as business plan
• Teacher as director of learning	• Teacher as facilitator of learning
• Academic as 'jack of all trades'	• Academic as specialist
• Multicultural	• Global
• Diversity as problem	• Diversity as strength
• Process – compliant	• Outcomes – driven
• Public subsidy	• Portfolio management
• Peer review	• Quality 'kite marks'
• Producer of knowledge	• Agent of learning
• Organized by subjects	• Organized for solutions

Table 2.2: The differences between traditional higher education and the new higher education (McCafery, 2010)

For most universities there is a direct relationship between student numbers and revenue, because an increasing proportion of their funding comes from the tuition fees charged to students. A fall in student numbers will mean a drop in revenue which will affect the ability of the institutions to operate effectively or even survive. In order to maintain the level of funding required to operate effectively and succeed in the sector, universities require a major change of philosophy from production or product orientation to marketing orientation. All activities must now be directed at identifying, anticipating and satisfying the needs of students as consumers efficiently and profitably. Thus the ability to devise and implement an effective marketing strategy has become a critical success factor in the UK higher education sector.

2.5 Internationalisation of the Higher Education Sector

2.5.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education

International students can be defined as those students that left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study (British Council, 2013). They are usually not permanent or usual residents of their country of study, having obtained prior

education in a different country. Over the years the demand for higher education has increased, mainly due to the expectation that it would raise the economic and social status of the graduate. For those living in less developed countries, the limited access to higher education in their own countries led to a significant increase in the number of those studying internationally. International student flows grew by an average of 9% per annum between 1960 and 1970, and continued to grow by an average of 6% per annum from 1970 to 1980 (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

Traditionally, the British higher education system served the need of thousands of elite and gifted international students from throughout the former British Empire who were attracted by the reputation of Oxford and Cambridge. The variety of reforms to the British education system following the Second World War increased accessibility to home students and enabled all students with appropriate Advanced Level grades at sixth form to enter tertiary education in a range of courses of their own choosing. During the 1960s, the international students who studied in the UK were charged the same fees as home students. Although the fees charged to international students increased in 1967, and again in the 1975 – 79 period, they were still heavily subsidised by the British taxpayer and served to increase the number of international students in the country. By 1979, there were 88,000 international students studying in the UK and the cost of subsidising them was estimated at £100m per year (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). When Margaret Thatcher's government introduced full – cost fees for international students from outside the European Community in 1980, there was a major uproar throughout the British Commonwealth, with some governments campaigning for a boycott of British products.

The introduction of full – fees for UK Higher Education led to a dramatic decrease in the number of international students, from a peak of just over 90,000 in 1978 to 55,000 in 1984. The decline in international student enrolments led to a severe shortfall for the sector at a time when the government withdrew £100m in subsidies to the institutions. This forced many institutions to adopt a more coordinated and active international student recruitment policy. Thus the withdrawal of public subsidy for international students made universities and polytechnics to realise that the only way to prevent a significant shortfall of income was to go out into the world market and recruit students with the ability to pay the new full – cost fees. Declining birth rates and increasing costs

during the 1980s also led many higher education institutions to take a greater interest in marketing than had previously been the case. In a climate of increasing budgetary constraints due to the decline of government funding, many universities have sought to expand their financial base by using international students as a source of revenue (De Vita & Case, 2003). Revenues from fees charged to international students has been an important source of financing for UK universities with international student fees rising from 2.8% to 5.6% of total revenues (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). This had risen to 11% in 2011 (Universities UK, 2012). McNamara & Harris (1997) argued that the drive to attract international students into UK Higher Education is based mainly on the need for foreign currency to compensate for institutional shortfalls and only secondarily for genuine educational considerations.

The British Council is the main agency responsible for the international marketing of UK higher education. The British Council works in over 100 countries to create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries, and builds trust between them. It connects millions of people with the United Kingdom through programmes and services in the English language, the arts, education and society. Their work in English aims to bring high quality language materials to every learner and teacher who wants them. They also offer over three million UK examinations worldwide, helping people gain access to trusted qualifications to support their career and study prospects. Their work in education and society helps transform national education systems, builds more inclusive and open societies and increase opportunities for young people. They encourage international students to come and study in the UK, and British students to experience life abroad. Their work in the arts involves the very best British and international artistic talent and help increase audiences for international work in the UK and for UK work globally.

British Council Services for International Education Marketing provides a comprehensive set of solutions, tailored to cater to the diverse international marketing needs of UK educational institutions. The services are delivered through experienced overseas teams at country level, led by specialist Regional Managers who ensure that the right people, process and approach are employed to meet the international marketing needs of UK institutions.

Knight (1994) described internationalisation as the process of integrating an international / intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution. It is a process that requires continuing management action in order to be achieved. Internationalisation has been quite prominent at regional and international level. Europe's Bologna Process which draws more than 40 countries into a process of enabling a European Higher Education Area is one of the clearest examples of international engagement. The past decade has seen a significant explosion in the number of programmes and institutions that are operating internationally. Countries like Qatar, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and China stand out as examples of those that have boldly promoted internationalisation as a matter of national policies. They have actively recruited prestigious foreign universities to establish local campuses for the purpose of expanding access for the local student population and serving as higher education 'hubs' for their regions.

Jane Knight's definition of internationalisation is usually accompanied by a classification that is made between "internationalisation at home" and "internationalisation abroad". Internationalisation at home refers to activities on the home campus whilst internationalisation abroad covers a wide range of activities abroad:

Internationalisation at Home	Internationalisation Abroad
- Internationalising the curriculum and related materials - Foreign language study for home students - New courses with international themes - A mix of international students - Involvement of international students in the teaching / learning process - International academic staff - Intercultural campus events - Liaison with community groups - Student placements with local ethnic organisations.	- Home students studying abroad - Academic staff working overseas on teaching, research or consulting - Delivery of courses offshore jointly with partners - Accreditation of partners' programmes as part of a home degree/award - Establishment of an offshore campus delivering home degrees/awards - Establishment of joint research centres abroad - Research projects undertaken abroad - Capacity building or technical assistance projects - International volunteering and charity work.

Table 2.3: Differences between "internationalisation at home" and "internationalisation abroad".

Source: Fielden, 2007.

Gallagher & Garrett (2012) argued that for most of the 20th century, the main way in which universities internationalised themselves was through the recruitment of academics and PhD students from abroad, the incorporation of international modules into their curriculums and short – term study abroad to provide students with international experience. International scholarship programmes provided some of the first opportunities for students to gain experiences abroad before universities around the world began to move to more ambitious internationalisation strategies based on the recruitment of full - fee paying foreign students onto undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. They argued that the first wave of internationalisation was through 'study abroad' programmes for domestic students. These programmes give home students international experiences through studying and living in another country and comprise a relatively small portion of what remains essentially a home degree for a relatively small number of the total student population.

The second wave of internationalisation began in the early 1990s as national universities began to educate large numbers of foreign students. In the 'export' model, universities in developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom and Australia not only opened their doors to foreign students, but devised and implemented strategies to actively recruit them. They wanted to create an international experience on the domestic campus, develop human capital in the developing world and generate significant amounts of revenue. In 2009, over 3.4 million students were studying outside their home country, with UNESCO projecting that this number will rise to 7 million by 2020 (Gallagher & Garrett, 2012). Student mobility has been identified as one of the most visible aspects of globalisation and has been a reflection of not just national and institutional strategies but also the decisions of international students all over the world. Altbach et al (2009) observed that the mobility of international students involved two main trends. The first one consists of students from Asia entering the major academic systems of North America, Western Europe and Australia in response to the adjustment of visa and immigration requirements to attract them by governments that want to maintain economic competitiveness and realise financial gains by enrolling large numbers of full fee – paying overseas students. The second trend is the development of various programs within the European Union to encourage student mobility.

The third wave of internationalisation involves the establishment of branch campuses in developing countries in order to bring the provision of higher education to international students rather than asking them to come to the home campus. Students at the branch campus receive degrees from the home university, often using the home university's curriculum with a smaller number of course offerings. The main benefit of the model is lower cost for both the students and the universities. The main challenge is quality control, as the admission criteria and teaching standards are likely to be lower. There are currently more than 200 degree – awarding international branch campuses in operation worldwide (Gallagher & Garrett, 2012).

2.5.2 Internationalisation in Other Countries

2.5.2.1 The United States

The motive for promoting internationalisation in US institutions is based on the same national economic arguments as in the UK. However, the rationale for recruiting foreign students into many American universities is not necessarily financial. In some private universities in the United States foreign students are actually a net expense rather than a source of income (Fielden, 2007). As the criterion for admitting foreign students is merit rather than their family wealth, some universities have to meet some of the bursary costs due to limited federal financial aid. The large US institutions are not as dependent on international student fee income as UK institutions; only four of them (Southern California, Columbia, Purdue and New York) had more than 5,500 international students in 2005 – this number is almost equalled by some UK universities (Fielden, 2007). Gallagher & Garrett (2012) argued that the growth of international higher education at prestige universities in the United States is not without its own challenges. They observed that the increasing numbers of international students in already full public campuses is either at the expense of in – state student places or further eroding student/faculty ratios. Despite the strong economic case for recruiting more international students, American public universities face continuing political pressure to focus on serving in-state students, public hostility towards the rising numbers of overseas students and rising strains on campus resources from larger total student numbers.

The US Information Agency (USIA) promotes US education through its network of offices located throughout the world and is a valuable source of information for

prospective students. The Fullbright-Hays program, the Institute for International Education (IIE), the Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE) and the National Association for Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) are amongst other agencies that engage in the promotion of international education. By the early 1990s, the United States was estimated to have 400 Government assisted advisory centres in 143 countries promoting international education (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

2.5.2.2 Canada

Internationalisation has been a policy priority for most Canadian universities for many years and they have well – established mechanisms for encouraging foreign travel and study abroad by staff and students. The activities of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) have encouraged institutions to adopt a broad view of internationalisation and emphasise its importance to the provincial and federal governments. Many institutions now offer scholarships targeted at international students and International Offices continue to play a major role in internationalising the curriculum of their institutions. Canadian universities place a much higher value on international development than their major competitors; and helped to train over 265,000 people in the developing world between the 1970s and 2007 (Fielden, 2007). The high priority given to international development by universities is partly driven by a growing upward push from students demanding that their institutions be more engaged with the problems of the developing world.

Canada's proximity to the United States, its bilingual education system, high quality education and sophisticated economy has positioned it as a major provider of international education. As a response to concerns over its declining status as a supplier of international education, the Canadian government launched several initiatives in the 1990s. The country established a number of Canadian Education Centres (CECs) managed by the Asia – Pacific Foundation of Canada (APFC) throughout key Asia – Pacific markets. A number of provincial agencies like the British Columbia Centre for International Education (BCCIE) were also established to represent the universities and colleges located within their provinces. The BCCIE claims to have increased international student enrolments within British Columbia by 25% since its establishment (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

2.5.2.3 Australia

Australia has been ahead of the UK for many years in terms of the application of the principles of internationalisation in the higher education sector. Large Australian universities such as Monash, Bond and RM devised ambitious international strategies involving the establishment of offshore campuses and collaborative partnerships many years before UK institutions. Australian universities have always had very strong incentives to create links and partnerships in the Asia – Pacific region and have become major competitors to UK & US universities in international student recruitment in the region. Australia has the highest level of international students per capita of comparable English – speaking countries. According to UNESCO data, there are 1.2 international students for every 100 Australians, roughly double the UK as second highest and more than five times Canada and the US (Gallagher & Garrett, 2012). In 2009, 21% of enrolments at Australian universities were overseas students compared to 15% in the UK, 3% in the US and 8% in Canada (Gallagher & Garrett, 2012). The Australian government values internationalisation for mainly economic reasons and has been an active supporter of the international ambitions of its institutions.

Before 1994, the marketing of Australian international education was largely the responsibility of individual institutions. In 1994, the Australian International Education Foundation (AIEF) was established to provide strategic co-ordination of the Australian industry's marketing efforts. It was later renamed Australian Education International (AEI) and managed a network of Australian Education Centres (AECs) in several countries and placed representatives in others. Other agencies involved in the international marketing of Australian education included the International Development Program of Australian Universities & Colleges (IDP Ltd), the Australian Trade Commission (AUSTRADE) and various state and territory based organisations. Within the university sector, IDP Education Australia Ltd has been the most successful in recruiting international students for Australian higher education. The company acts as a recruitment agent and also undertakes the management of education exhibitions in selected overseas markets throughout the year. Its offices are located in most Asian capitals from where Australia draws its students.

2.5.3 Internationalisation in the United Kingdom

Fielden (2007) provided a SWOT analysis of the UK's position compared to its major competitors with regards to internationalisation:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Perceived reputation for good teaching Proven reputation for excellent research Good number of world class universities in all the major league tables An international faculty A multi-cultural society and many multi-cultural campuses Multidisciplinary approaches reinforce strong creativity Competitive course lengths English Language Overall strengths of the UK brand	Perceived high tuition fees and reputation for being concerned with revenue High cost of living and accommodation Perceived high visa costs Limited potential for enhanced employment opportunities Limited scholarship programmes Limited support for home students' overseas study costs Some perceived quality issues around the total student experience Negative perception about crime and violence in some cities Reputation as not a particularly friendly host
Opportunities	**Threats**
Continuing global demand for higher quality higher education at all levels Keenness of many international institutions to forge partnerships with UK institutions Potential for offering quality learning experiences and improved value for money Potential for more strategic partnerships, joint curriculum development and associated student flows Potential for closer working links with businesses to improve job opportunities Potential for improved Government, institutional and business - backed scholarships Government to offer more consistent and friendly approaches on visas and work permits Potential for using alumni as ambassadors as well as donors	The USA seizes the opportunities available Growing competition from European universities for international students Increase backing by foreign governments to their universities' expansion Asian students choose to study in the growing political and economic power house of China Decline in student numbers from Asia in the long term.

Table 2.4: SWOT analysis of the UK's position compared to its major competitors with regards to internationalisation (Fielden, 2007)

For a long time the UK has enjoyed a world – leading position in terms of numbers of international students attracted to study in its higher education sector. According to Universities UK (2012), this competitive advantage is based on the following features of the sector: an international reputation for education & research; the profile of its elite global higher education brands; historical trade & political links; the popularity of English Language study & culture and post – study employment prospects.

Whilst the increasing global demand has had significant beneficial effects on the UK higher education system as well as the wider economy, the international student market is changing dramatically. Competition from mainland Europe and the rapid emergence of entrepreneurial institutions in countries such as China, India, Malaysia & Singapore mean that the UK's traditional sources of internationally mobile students are no longer guaranteed (Fielding, 2007). Asian governments are seeking to limit the numbers who study abroad and their institutions are seeking to recruit international students themselves, with a small number establishing offshore campuses.

2.5.4 Trends in the internationalisation of Higher Education

The QS World Grad School Tour Applicant Survey (2014) identified the following major trends in international student mobility:

- International students are considering a broader range of study destinations: Although the big four English speaking countries are still amongst the most popular, countries like Germany, France, Switzerland & Netherlands are gaining prominence as potential study destinations.
- Study costs, financial aid and post – graduation employment prospects are becoming increasingly important factors; especially for younger applicants.
- Although international recognition remains the single most important criteria for students when choosing a country and institution, its importance is declining. As a much broader selection of countries and institutions enjoy global visibility in the higher education world, students are increasingly focussed on other more distinguishing factors, especially those relating to costs, funding and career prospects.
- Graduate degree applicants have high expectations for career development and salaries.

The British Council (2013) recently identified seven Megatrends or core drivers that will have a profound effect on the growth of international higher education in the future:

- Demographic shifts: The world's population is currently ageing at an unprecedented rate, with examples from developed economies providing an understanding of the profound effect that this will have on societal development. Converse to this is the growth of younger populations in emerging and

developing economies like India, the Middle East and North Africa. By 2024, four countries (India, China, Indonesia & the United States) will be home to over 50% of the global 18 – 22 year old population. The largest growth outside these four countries will be from the African continent including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa.

- Economic dynamics: Economic analysts suggest that the global economy is now slowly healing, led by the strengthening of the US job market and China's recovery from its recent slowdown in GDP growth. The slower rate of growth in the BRIC economies has shifted the focus to CIVETS (Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey & South Africa), a group of emerging economies that are forecast to become increasingly important. It has been observed that these growth markets will witness the steepest rise in gross tertiary enrolments as their GDP per capita reaches USD 10,000. Growth in mobile tertiary students has proved to be recession – proof and continues to outstrip that of world trade and GDP.

- Changes to political conditions: The introduction of new policies, changes in legislation, reform agendas and increasing political tensions that are regularly occurring across the political systems of many nations can have a profound effect on national and international education provision. Major changes in policy such as the March 2013 introduction of new post - study work arrangements for graduates in Australia and removal of post - study work entitlements for graduates in the UK can have positive or negative effects on the sustained growth and longevity of international competitiveness of a country as a leading destination for international students.

- Growth in education provision: As emerging economies develop, they will place greater emphasis on education as central to aiding progress, empowering individuals and acting as a catalyst for further economic stability. These economies are likely to invest in the development of their own educational provision in order to encourage more of their brightest students to study at home and enable their leading institutions to ascend in the global rankings. This will reduce the opportunities for direct international student recruitment from those markets as their main priorities become research collaborations, institutional partnerships and inward recruitment of international students.

- Digital technology: The digital technology revolution of education that began with the packaging of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and the opportunity to capitalise on the big data they capture will continue to influence future pedagogical formats. The phenomenon has intensified with the design of courses for gaining academic credit which are unbundled from regular course structures and allow students to create their own teaching and learning experience. Whilst digital technology and the opportunities for progress and access continue to develop, the experiential value of international education remain at the heart of individuals' aspiration to learn and grow.

- Global workforce demands: Despite the large numbers of unemployed graduates in most countries, many industries are still experiencing a shortage of skilled workers. The graduates that are being produced by universities are not meeting the needs of industry, with many overseas graduates returning home from their studies struggling to find appropriate employment due to their lack of relevant skills. Whilst many countries have started investing heavily in education, it will take some time to close the gap.

- Cultural impact: Culture is a term that encompasses all activities that distinguish one particular group of people from another and is becoming more important at a time when many countries are trying to maximise their 'soft power'. Soft power refers to the ability of countries to achieve their international objectives through attraction and cooperation rather than coercion. The main forces that are known to shape a nation's cultural activity are commerce, foreign policy objectives, cultural assets, language, resources, ideology, history and the desire to create a good impression. The choice of one study destination over another by prospective students is greatly influenced by a nation's culture and the potential to experience living and studying within it.

The report concluded that the future of international education is likely to be found at the intersection of these seven drivers. These trends will determine how the world teaches, learns and researches; shape how world - class institutions are developed and how young learners are grown into leading academics. They will also guide how nations respond to global demands for skilled workers and how they collaborate across cultures to harness what individual nations do best for a shared and prosperous future.

The global education sector, including expenditure on national education systems, is reported to be the second largest global market after healthcare, with expenditure estimated to be US$4.5tr in 2012 (HM Government, 2013). Global tertiary enrolments was estimated to have reached 170 million in 2009 with four countries alone (China, India, US & Russia) having a combined share of 45% of total global tertiary enrolments (British Council, 2012). The rise in the number of internationally mobile students has been a key feature of the global tertiary education sector, with the numbers rising from 800,000 in the mid – 1970s to over 3.5 million in 2009 (British Council, 2012). In 2011, there were 4.3 million internationally mobile students, representing a growth of 99% between 2000 and 2010, equivalent to an annual growth rate of 7.1% (HM Government, 2013). The major countries of origin for internationally mobile tertiary students are China, India, South Korea, Germany, Turkey and France. In 2010, nearly a fifth of internationally mobile students were Chinese (18.2%), with Indian (6.4%) and German (3.1%) students the next biggest groups.
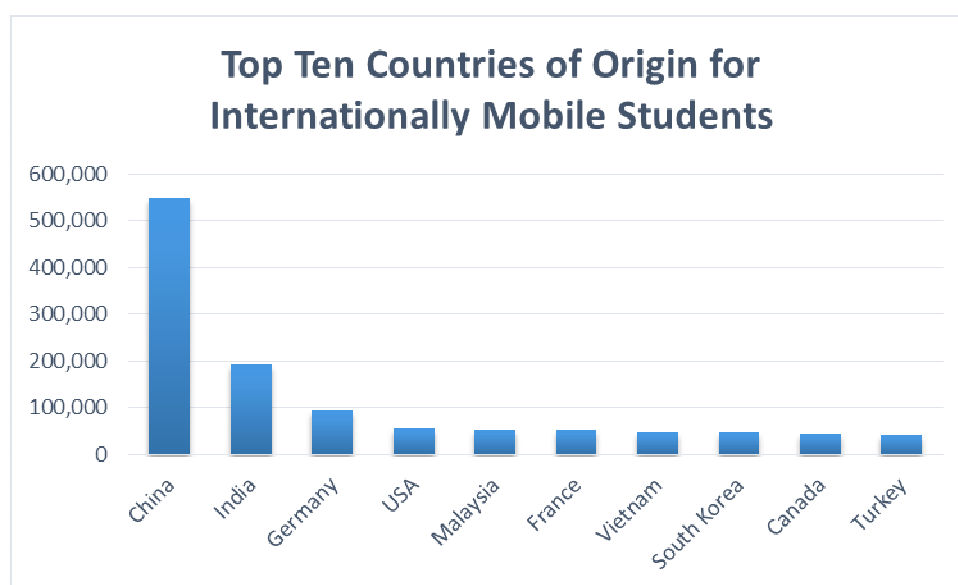
Figure 2.4: Top 10 countries of origin for internationally mobile students (Source: HM Government, 2013)

The main destination countries for mobile tertiary students are the United States, UK, Australia, France, Germany, Russia, Japan and Canada. In 2012, five destinations (United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia & Germany) hosted almost half of total internationally mobile students (UNESCO, 2014). The top five have also seen their market share decline from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012 (UNESCO, 2014).

Country	2000 (%)	2011 (%)	2013 (%)
United States	22.9	16.5	19.4
United Kingdom	10.8	13.0	10.3
France	6.6	6.2	5.7
Australia	5.1	6.1	6.2
Germany	9.0	6.3	4.9
Russian Federation	2.0	4.0	3.4
Japan	3.2	3.5	3.4
Canada	4.6	4.7	3.4
China	1.8	1.8	2.4
Italy	1.2	1.7	2.4

Table 2.5: Changing shares of the international student market, 2000, 2011 & 2013 (Sources: UK HE International Unit, 2013, UNESCO, 2014 & UK HE International Unit, 2016).

Other countries that are becoming increasing popular as study destinations for international students are South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia & South Korea. The British Council (2012) predicts that the largest inbound student flows by destination in 2020 will be United States (582k), UK (331k), Australia (277k), Canada (176k) and Germany (155k).

The British Council report on higher education global trends and emerging opportunities to 2020 identified the following potential barriers to international student mobility:

- Student visa restrictions / migration laws
- Post – graduation employment restrictions on mobile students in host countries
- Political relations
- Social and cultural norms, like female students in some countries being less likely to travel.

2.6 International Student Recruitment in the UK Higher Education Sector

2.6.1 About International Student Recruitment in the UK

There were 436,585 international students in the UK higher education sector in 2014/15 (UCKISA, 2016). In 2013/14 the figure had increased by 3% to 435,500 (UCKISA, 2015). 124,575 of the 436,585 international students in UK higher education in 2014/15

were from other EU countries whilst 312,010 were from outside the European Union (UCKISA, 2016). Since 2007/2008, the number of international students at publicly – funded higher education institutions has increased by an average of 6.2% per year, with the balance between EU and non – EU students remaining broadly constant (HM Government, 2013).

During the past decade, there has been a significant shift in the origin of international students in the UK. In 2000 half of them came from Europe, with Asia accounting for another third. By 2010, Asia accounted for over half, with a further 30% coming from Europe. The table below shows the top 10 source countries in each year:

2000			2010		
Greece	29,300	13.1%	China	55,500	14.1%
Ireland	14,300	6.4%	India	38,200	9.7%
Germany	13,500	6.0%	Nigeria	16,500	4.2%
France	12,500	5.6%	Ireland	16,500	4.2%
USA	11,200	5.0%	Germany	15,100	3.6%
Malaysia	10,400	4.6%	USA	13,900	3.5%
Hong Kong	8,300	3.7%	France	13,600	3.5%
Spain	7,500	3.4%	Malaysia	12,500	3.2%
Japan	6,200	2.8%	Greece	11,700	3.0%
China	6,200	2.8%	Cyprus	11,300	2.9%

Table 2.6: Top ten countries of origin for international HE students studying at publicly – funded HEIs in the UK (Source: HM Government, 2013).

The top 10 countries of origin for international students enrolled in UK higher education institutions in 2014/15 are China, India, Nigeria, Malaysia, United States, Hong Kong, Germany, France, Ireland & Greece (UKCISA, 2016).
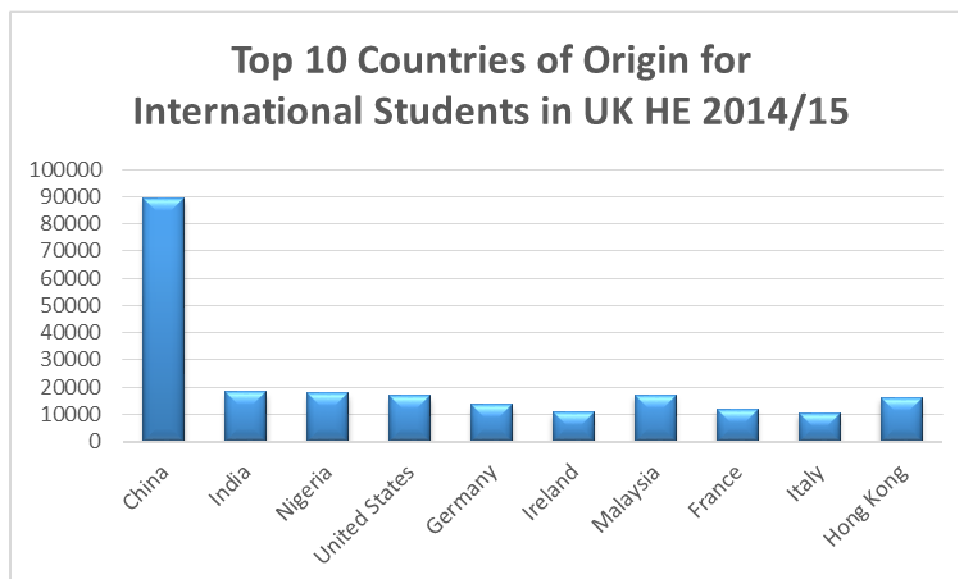
Figure 2.5: Top ten countries of origin for international students in UK HE in 2014/15 (Source: UKCISA, 2016)

The table below shows the top ten EU and non – EU countries of origin for international students in UK higher education institutions in 2014/15:

Non – EU	2014/15	EU Countries	2014/15
China	89,540	Germany	13,675
India	18,320	France	11,955
Nigeria	17,920	Republic of Ireland	10,905
Malaysia	17,060	Italy	10,525
United States	16,865	Greece	10,130
Hong Kong	16,215	Cyprus	9,745
Saudi Arabia	8,595	Spain	7,040
Singapore	7,295	Romania	6,590
Pakistan	7,295	Bulgaria	6,255
Thailand	6,240	Poland	5,245

Table 2.7: Top ten EU & non – EU countries of origin for international students in UK higher education (Source: UKCISA, 2016).

Although international students study courses across all subject categories, Business and Administrative Studies is by far the most popular subject area at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, accounting for nearly a third of international students overall. The second and third most popular subject areas are Engineering & Technology and Social Studies (UKCISA, 2016). London is the most popular region of the UK for international

students and accounts for about a quarter of the total, with similar proportions for undergraduates and postgraduates (HM Government, 2013).

International students seem to have stronger preferences when it comes to the type of institution that they attend, with Russell Group institutions being the most popular and accounting for over a third of all international students in the UK in 2011/12 (HM Government, 2013). The largest proportions of international students in the sector in 2011/12 were 75% at the London Business School and 67% at the London School of Economics (HM Government, 2013). UKCISA (2016) identified the largest recruiters of international students in 2014/15 as University College London (13,545), The University of Manchester (12,215) and The University of Edinburgh (10,080).

2.6.2 International Student Impact

In considering the ways in which international students impact the UK economy, it is important to identify the key drivers of international student demand and impact (PA Consulting Group, 2011). Examining the reasons why international students come and will continue to come to the UK will be helpful in maximising the economic impact of their presence. It is also important to consider the fact that the nature of international study in the UK and the wider environment causes different patterns of expenditure and brings other benefits to the economy. PA Consulting Group (2011) identified the key drivers of international student impact as:

- Institutional reputation: The presence of world class UK universities with established reputations for excellence in teaching, significant research capability and supporting infrastructure is a critical factor in bringing international students to the UK. The Times Higher Education 2014/15 World University Rankings include 11 UK universities in the top 100 globally (THES, 2014). UK universities have a long track record of delivering quality learning to international students.

- Specialist niche: Success in attracting international students also depends on the ability of institutions to distinguish their offerings from other competing education providers and develop an international reputation for specialist excellence. Whilst there is a strong interest in business degrees and related professional qualifications, specialist institutions (like the Royal College of Art, Royal Academy of Music and Institute of Education) bring substantial numbers

of students to the UK from abroad as a result of expertise within their particular specialist disciplines.

- Multi – cultural environment: The growth of the UK's international student base over the years has generated a multi – cultural environment within many institutions. This environment creates ready – made support communities which have made a very positive contribution to the student experience and the presence of others from the same nationality is a contributory factor in international student demand.

- Culture and amenities: The wider attraction of spending a period of time in London, Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh and other major UK cities is a key driver of international student demand. The status of these cities as major tourist and cultural destinations and the significant base of associated infrastructure are key assets in persuading students to come and also to remain once the period of study concludes. The presence of a wide variety of amenities also encourages higher levels of spend than would be the case for students in other locations around the world.

- Business and employment opportunities: The UK's status as a global business hub brings many people to the country to study with the prospect of further employment and business opportunities after graduation. The UK's feature as the location of the headquarters of many professional bodies attracts international students that are pursuing a career in such professions.

- Accessibility: The status of London as a global transport hub with direct access to most international destinations makes UK institutions highly accessible to international students. The wide range of transport options available facilitates cost effective travel and the transport infrastructure within major cities is a notable asset in drawing people to study in the country.

- Cost effectiveness: Although there is a perception that London, Oxford, Edinburgh and other UK cities are relatively expensive study locations, it is also true that the development of the international student base has been supported by the UK's ability to offer cost – effective educational opportunities that are tailored to the needs of the market. The UK's international student fees are comparable to equivalent international fees in Australia, Canada and the United States, but the perceived value of the educational experience along with other factors drives considerable student demand.

2.6.3 The Value of International Student Recruitment to the United Kingdom

The recent UK Government's Industrial Strategy for International Education estimates that education exports were worth £17.5bn to the UK economy in 2011 (HM Government , 2013). Fees income and living expenses from the almost 500,000 non – UK domiciled students studying on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at UK universities is by far the largest contributor to this figure. This estimate makes the education sector the country's fifth largest services export sector, ahead of both insurance service as well as computer and information services (HM Government, 2013).

	£m*
Higher Education (including EU students):	
Tuition fees (net of scholarships)	3,600
Living expenditure	5,540
Other	1,000
(Cost to Govt of tuition fees loans to EU undergraduates)	(70)
English Language Teaching:	
Tuition & living expenses	2,000
Schools:	
Tuition & living expenses	620
Education Products & Services	1,590
Further Education:	
Tuition fees	320
Living expenditure	810
Other	40
Transnational Education Income (indicative figures):	
Higher Education	300
English Language Teaching	90
Schools	960
Further Education	30
TOTAL	**17,490**

*2011 prices, to nearest £10m

Table 2.8: Estimated value of UK education exports in 2011 (Source: HM Government, 2013)

The main beneficiary of international student mobility is the mobile student who is likely to be embedded in other social networks that may also receive immediate and short – term direct benefits from their overseas studies. Other potential beneficiaries in the student's home country include sponsors and facilitators, such as employers, government or sponsors, as well as those who employ or engage with the student on

their return home. The most direct beneficiary in the host country is the host institution, especially the faculty or department that recruits the student. The wider higher education sector, local communities, regions and even nations can benefit from inward mobility as mobile students engage more broadly with their host country during and after their university education.

The main impacts and benefits of international student recruitment to the UK manifest themselves in a range of different ways – planned and unplanned, positive and negative, short – term and longer term, and implicit or explicit. The main categories of benefits and impacts of international student recruitment are discussed below:

2.6.3.1 Financial benefits
The financial benefits of international student recruitment to UK higher education institutions are the short – term cost – related benefits. These include the fees paid by international students as well as their associated accommodation and living costs. These benefit host institutions directly by contributing to their revenue streams, as well as the much broader benefits to the national and local economy in the form of inward foreign investment. In 2011/12, fee income from non – EU students accounted for more than 20% of total income at 13 HEIs and between 10% and 20% for a further 68 HEIs; meaning that half of all publicly – funded HEIs in the UK earn more than 10% of their income from non – EU students (HM Government, 2013). In 2013/14 universities received £3.9 billion in tuition fees from 310,000 international students enrolled in the UK (Universities UK, 2015).

2.6.3.2 Wider economic benefits
Beyond the direct, short – term financial benefit, there are also a range of indirect economic impact of international student mobility that are less straightforward and may be less tangible, but potentially accrue over a period of time:
- Positive impact on economic development through skilled migration and skills development for specific sectors of the labour market; especially the STEM sector where there has been shortages in recent years.
- By increasing the pool of employable graduates available in the national knowledge economy and meeting local skills needs.
- Through the development of national research and development capacity.

- Through the establishment of trade and research & development networks between the UK and other countries / regions.

2.6.3.3 Academic benefits

International student recruitment makes a significant contribution towards the internationalisation agendas of UK institutions. This improves the ability of institutions to 'internationalise at home' for local students unable or unwilling to travel overseas for study and for locally – oriented staff. Home students will have the opportunity to interact with international students in both classroom and social setting, and an international student body may facilitate the adaptation of traditional teaching and learning approaches. International student recruitment also stimulates demand for courses where domestic demand alone is insufficient to sustain them, thus ensuring that some strategically important courses remain viable and a wider range of courses are available to all students. For taught postgraduate courses in 2011/12, non – UK students made up 84% of new entrants in Electronic & Electrical Engineering, 76% in Production & Manufacturing Engineering and 67% in Computer Science (HM Government, 2013). Longer – term alumni relationships with international students also support and facilitate collaborative research and consultancy projects, which are becoming increasingly important to many institutions (Mellors – Bourne et al, 2013).

2.6.3.4 Socio – cultural benefits

The international students in UK higher education bring diversity to the sector and help to provide an international dimension that benefits all students. Home students who study alongside internationally mobile students in a multi-cultural environment acquire such attributes as tolerance and respect for diversity, which are normally associated with the highly desirable characteristics of cosmopolitanism and global citizenship. These competencies can help home students to gain competitive advantage when seeking to enter the labour market and provide access to international networks. International education also helps to strengthen the UK's social and cultural links as those that have studied in the UK are significantly more likely to be interested in working with and doing business with the UK than those who have not (HM Government, 2013).

2.6.3.5 Political benefits

Engagement in international education enhances the reputation and brand reputation of UK institutions and helps project the country's soft power (HM Government, 2013). Positive perceptions and attitudes amongst those that have previously studied in the UK could contribute to reductions in the likelihood of future conflict and also facilitate increased positive international engagement culturally, politically and economically. This can be important as most international graduates are likely to have some degree of influence in their home countries (or elsewhere in the world), even if they do not form part of a national elite.

2.6.4 Challenges & Issues facing UK International Student Recruitment

Although UK higher education institutions have been quite successful at recruiting an increasing number of international students during the past decade, there are a number of major challenges and issues that currently face the sector:

2.6.4.1 Migration policy

The UK's migration policy affects the attractiveness of the nation as a study destination relative to key competitor countries like the United States, Australia & Canada. The recent changes to the visa regulations were designed to address past abuses on the visa system by creating controls that discourage those who are not genuine students from applying. There have recently been strong concerns within the sector that the changes have had a negative impact on the perception of the UK as a place to study. Media reporting of these changes has created a perception that international students are not welcomed in the UK as observers begin to notice significant reductions in the number of visas issued. The Indian sub – continent countries of India, Pakistan & Bangladesh saw reductions of 38%, 62% & 30% respectively in the number of visas issued in the year to March 2013 compared to the previous year (HM Government, 2013). These countries also happen to be amongst those predicted to see the largest increases in outbound student mobility between now and 2020 (British Council, 2012).

The closure of the Tier 1 (post – study work route) in April 2012 as part of the changes to the visa regime makes the UK considerably less appealing for international students as a place to work after completing studies. The Tier 1 (post – study work) visa was available to students who had been awarded a UK recognised HND, bachelors or

postgraduate qualification and enabled them to remain in the UK for the purpose of employment up to two years after completion of their education. In a survey by Universities UK in 2011, 56% of respondents cited the possibility of getting post – study work experience as a factor that they considered when applying to the UK (Universities UK, 2011). A survey by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UCKISA) found that of the recent changes to UK visa rules, the abolition of the post – study work route had the greatest negative impact on students' decisions to study in the UK (HM Government, 2013). It is interesting to note that the UK's key competitors such as Australia, Canada and the United States allow international students to work after graduation. Australia recently increased the period of post – study work entitlement and lifted restrictions on the nature of eligible jobs.

2.6.4.2 International student numbers

The number of international students in UK higher education decreased by 2% from 435,230 in 2011/12 to 425,265 in 2012/13 (UKCISA, 2014). The 1% fall in the number of non – EU students at UK universities is the first such decline ever recorded and included a 25% drop in the number of Indian first year students (Morgan, 2014). UK universities have seen the number of Indian first – year students drop by half in just two years, falling from 23,985 in 2010/11 to 12,280 in 2012/13 (Morgan, 2014). India is still the second largest source of non – EU students for British universities (UKCISA, 2014). The decline in the number of entrants coming from traditional UK postgraduate markets like India, Pakistan and Iran coupled with the continued growth in entrants from China has increased the proportion of Chinese postgraduate taught masters students in UK universities to 23% in 2012/13. This is only marginally lower than the proportion of UK students, who made up 26% of the full – time taught masters entrants population in 2012/13 (HEFCE, 2014).

International student numbers increased by 3% to 435,500 in 2013/14; comprising 125,300 European Union students and 310,190 students from outside the EU (UCKISA, 2015).

2.6.4.3 Stronger country to country competition

UK higher education institution are facing stiff and increasing competition from institution in the United States, Canada, Australia and other parts of Europe. The United

States is opening up its higher education sector to more international students and increasing the number of international students that can study at its universities. Canada is working on a new international strategy that will enable the country to double the number of international higher education students in the next ten years. In February 2013, Australia published a report titled "Australia – Educating Globally", which forecasts that the number of international students at Australian Universities will increase by 30% between 2012 and 2020 (HM Government, 2013). Non – traditional competitors like Germany and The Netherlands are also looking to increase their share of international students by increasing their marketing budgets.

2.6.4.4 Other challenges & issues:

- Institutional strategies & structures: The decisions, strategies and structures of UK higher education institutions can limit their potential to increase the number of international students in the UK. For example, some institutions have been unwilling to increase the number of international students beyond a certain point in order to protect their 'brand', avoid excessive expansion or preserve the quality of the education offer.

- Co-ordination failure: Co-ordination is an area where more needs to be done in order for UK higher education institutions to fully exploit the global opportunities available. Universities UK have provided evidence to support the fact that in order to take advantage of global opportunities, the HE sector requires seamless coordinated services and support to bring together existing services from governments and partners to assist in their international activities in the UK and overseas.

- UK outward student mobility: This refers to the number of students from the UK in higher education overseas. It is important because it provides a range of development opportunities for UK students and plays a major part in enabling cultural exchange and long term UK overseas ties. Only around 6% of those that graduated from UK higher education institutions in 2011/12 had experience of mobility placements abroad, against an EU target of 20% by 2020, while Germany has ambition to achieve 50% of its students (HM Government, 2013).

2.6.5 Major Trends in UK International Student Recruitment

- New types of provider: Until recently, higher education in most countries was a state – controlled business, dominated by national providers and national norms. This is changing rapidly with the emergence of genuinely multi-national companies that operate higher education institutions across the world. These companies are the private sector's response to the rapidly growing global demand for education, coupled with a realisation by national governments that State provision alone cannot meet the demand. Companies like Pearson, Apollo Group, Laureate and Kaplan are becoming major players in the UK higher education sector. Their typical business model is focussed on developing large scale operations that seek economies of scale and aims to offer value for money to students. Laureate runs online degrees in partnership with Roehampton University and the University of Liverpool whilst Pearson College runs degrees validated by Royal Holloway University of London. Apollo Group owns BPP University College, which is one of a small number of private UK institutions with degree - awarding powers.

- Transnational Education (TNE): TNE involves the delivery of UK university degree programmes at overseas locations and presents significant strategic opportunities for institutions wishing to extend their reach across the world. Most importantly it enables institutions to reach a huge potential new market of students who seek a UK degree, but don't have the means to travel to the UK to study. TNE collaborations have increased global opportunities for access to higher education and created significant social value and public benefit in the process. Typical TNE models include full – scale campuses, franchising of UK degrees for local delivery, twinning arrangements with study in both the local country and the UK, validation of local programmes by UK institutions, distance learning programmes and advanced standing or articulation agreements. Since 2009/10, there has been more overseas students undertaking UK courses overseas than coming to the UK to study (Universities UK, 2012). In 2011/12, there were 571,010 TNE students compared to 435,235 non – UK students enrolled in UK higher education (UK HE International Unit, 2013).

- Increasing competition within the sector: The level of competition within the UK higher education sector in the area of international student recruitment has increased significantly during the past few years. The recent changes to the

funding regime and the fall in the number of UK postgraduate and part – time students has increased the importance of the revenue from international students for most institutions in the sector. Competition has intensified to the extent that even Russell Group universities like Birmingham & Southampton are offering part – scholarships to attract international students onto their masters programmes. As suggested by Adcroft et al (2010), international students are increasingly behaving like rational consumers making trade-offs between price/cost and quality of UK university education.

2.6.6 International Student Recruitment in Africa

The African continent is the world's second largest and second most populous with about 1.1 billion people as of 2013. The continent's 54 countries has a population that is among the youngest of all the continents; an estimated 50% of Africans are 19 years old or younger. All African countries have different cultural and language backgrounds. The most common language which is spoken by more than 40% of Africans is English; which along with French, Portuguese, Spanish and German has replaced traditional local African languages in many parts of the continent. The UN predicts that the world's population is going to increase to 9.6 billion in 2050 (from 7.2 billion in 2013) and that more than half of the extra 2.4 billion people will be African (ICEF, 2013). Thus the projected phenomenal population growth along with economic development in some countries in the continent represent a significant opportunity for the international student recruitment sector.

Maringe & Carter (2007) found that African student migration to Western countries tend to reproduce patterns of colonisation. Partly due to derived cultural capital and language ability, students tend to look for study opportunities in countries with which they have a colonial association. Out of the 380,376 African students electing to study abroad in 2010, 29.2% went to France, 15% went to South Africa, 9.7% went to the United Kingdom and 9.7% to the United States (ICEF, 2013). The table below shows the African countries with the largest proportion of students engaged in study abroad:

Morocco	42,800	11.3%
Nigeria	38,851	10.2%
Algeria	22,465	5.9%
Zimbabwe	19,658	5.2%
Cameroon	19,506	5.3%
Tunisia	19,506	5.1%

Table 2.9: African countries with the largest proportion of students in overseas study (ICEF, 2013)

The colonisation of large parts of Southern, Eastern and West Africa by the British Empire, the use of English as the medium of instruction and the high quality of UK qualifications has made the UK a destination of choice for many African students. Although African students represent about 10% of the 333,150 international students enrolled in UK universities in 2012/2013, the projected phenomenal growth of the population and the high numbers of young people makes the continent an attractive opportunity. The British Council's recent study titled "The Future of the World's Mobile Students to 2024" listed the countries with the top fastest growing 18 – 22 populations as Nigeria, India, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines, Iraq, Pakistan, Angola & Nepal (British Council, 2013). It is interesting to note that four of these countries, including three of the top five, are in Africa. Another recent British Council study on future postgraduate student mobility trends concluded that Nigeria will overtake India as the second major source of postgraduate students by 2024 (British Council, 2014). The British Council (2014) expects China to continue to dominate UK postgraduate enrolments with 85,000 postgraduates by 2024, followed by Nigeria (29,000), India (24,000) and the United States (15,000). There were 35,535 African students enrolled in UK universities in the 2012/2013 academic year (British Council, 2014). The table below shows the top 10 African countries of origin for international students enrolled in UK universities in 2012/2013:

Country	Nos.
Nigeria	18,150
Ghana	2,135
Kenya	1,990
Libya	1,845
Egypt	1,490
Mauritius	1,380
South Africa	1,150
Zimbabwe	935
Uganda	780
Tanzania	750

Table 2.10: Top 10 African countries of origin for UK HE international students 2012/13 (Source: British Council, 2014)

2.6.6.1 Overview of an African Market: Nigeria

Nigeria is the main African student recruitment market for the UK higher education sector and accounts for over 50% of the continent's market based on 2012/ 2013 figures. The country is the most populous on the African continent and one of the 11 Global Growth Generators - large population countries identified as having the right economic and political conditions to influence the global economy. Although there are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, English is the language of education, business and official proceedings. Nigeria had an estimated population of 170.1 million in 2012, with 40% of the population under the age of 15 (British Council, 2013). In April 2014, Nigeria became Africa's largest economy with a GDP of $509.9bn in 2013.

Although Nigeria has about 51 private and 78 public universities with about 300,000 places, about 1,503,931 students sat for the university entrance examinations in 2012 (British Council, 2013). The poor quality of provision and high demand for university places means that students often re – sit the university entrance examinations year on year, with the affluent ones opting for overseas study and others opting for polytechnics and other tertiary institutions. In 2010, 38,851 Nigerian students travelled overseas to study at tertiary level. An estimated 75,000 headed to regional education hubs such as Ghana, 18,420 headed to the UK and 7,028 headed to the US. Other popular study destinations include Malaysia, Canada and South Africa. Small numbers of Nigerian students travel to Germany, Australia, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Ukraine and Saudi Arabia.

The UK's position as the most popular traditional higher education destination for Nigerians is as a result of its strong historical ties and large Nigerian diaspora. The number of Nigerians enrolled in UK higher education institutions increased from just 8,170 in 2004/2005 to 18,420 in the 2011/2012 academic year (British Council, 2013). 64.7% of Nigerian students in the UK in 2012 were enrolled on postgraduate taught and research programmes. The most popular subject areas are Business & Management, Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Computer Science, Law, Economics, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Finance, Chemical, Process & Energy Engineering and subjects allied to Medicine. The willingness and capacity of families and individuals from Nigeria's developing consumer class to pay the elevated tuition fees charged to foreign students is demonstrated by the fact that about 77% of Nigerian

students enrolled in the UK are self – funded. The British Council (2014) identified the most important factors for Nigerians in selecting institutions as quality of the course (21.6%), career prospects (16.8%), institution reputation (9.6%) and low tuition fees (8.8%).

2.6.7 The International Student Recruitment Process

Prospective international students obtain information about studying in the UK and UK universities from the Internet / search engines, the network of British Council offices, institutions' websites / prospectuses, education exhibitions, career centres, education agents, UCAS website / directory, newspaper / magazine adverts and recommendations from family / friends. The ability of many young people to access the Internet through computers and mobile devices has made it easier for them to get access to reliable information about studying in the UK. There are three main methods that international students use to apply for places at UK universities:

1. Direct Applications: Some prospective international students apply for places on UK university programmes by completing an online application form on the university's website or sending a completed hard copy application to the university by post.

2. UCAS: The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. It processes about 2.5 million applications every year and helps 650,000 students to gain access to 340 universities and colleges. Students normally complete a single online application with their personal details and a personal statement. UCAS forwards the application to the institutions that the student has applied to, who then decide whether to offer the student a place on the programme.

3. Recruitment Agents: Some students apply through locally - based UK university recruitment agencies who are authorised representatives of UK institutions in their respective markets / regions. Recruitment agents provide advice on the institutions / programmes available, guide students through the application process and liaise with the institution on behalf of the students to secure a place on their chosen programme.

2.6.7.1 The Role of Recruitment Agents

Krasocki (2002) defined education agents as individuals, companies or other organisations providing services on a commercial basis to help students and their parents gain places on study programmes overseas. Most agents fall into four broad categories:

- Education specialists who place students on behalf of one or more overseas institution
- Non – education specialists, like travel agents and training providers, who may offer overseas education placement as a subsidiary activity
- Education specialists who place students but have no ties to any particular institution
- Other individuals such as alumni, parents and overseas – based staff, working in the capacity of education agents.

Recruitment agents operate extensively in all the key international student recruitment markets and play a major role in recruiting students to overseas institutions. They offer a cost – effective approach to the challenge of recruiting simultaneously in a range of countries and provide valuable local knowledge and routes for connecting with potential students (HM Government, 2013). Humfrey (1999) identified the use of agents as one of the most hotly debated marketing issues that international recruiters face. Whilst some institutions view them as a logical requirement for successful overseas sales, others see them as intrusive and out of place in the matching of students with courses as a marriage broker with clients who seek true love (Humfrey, 1999). Most institutions believe that they can be supportive, successful, student – centred and valuable partners if sufficient time, effort, patience and resource are invested into managing them. British Council research found that 40% of prospective UK international students use the services of a recruitment agent; especially those in countries like China & India (HM Government, 2013). Raimo et al (2014) observed that more than 100 UK higher education institutions used international student recruitment agents in 2012 and that in the 2010/2011 academic year, 50,000 international students were recruited through agents, with total commission payments of £57.8m. Universities generally pay recruitment agents 10% - 15% of the student's first year's tuition fee for the services provided in getting the student enrolled. Some institutions also pay a retainer or contribute to the cost of promotional activities undertaken by an agent on their behalf.

In many markets students and parents use agents to arrange overseas study because they lack knowledge and understanding of international education systems or lack the confidence or time to complete the necessary formalities, especially the increasingly complex UK student visa application process. They play an important role in countries where customers have limited English Language skills by providing information and advice in the customers' own language. Raimo et al (2014) observed that universities use agents due to the need / demand for increasing numbers and diversity of international students and the direct resources available to the International Office. They identified six main rationales for the use of recruitment agents by UK universities:

1. Institutional factors – numbers, diversity and maturity of market development: Recruitment agents are well placed to respond quickly in situations when the university's strategic plan demands higher levels of recruitment. Many institutions have observed a correlation between agent activity, student numbers and fee income, whilst others believe in the benefits of recruiting students from a wider range of countries in order to decrease dependence on a few major markets.

2. Institutional factors – Resources available to international recruitment activities and risk preference: In the current higher education funding environment where funding may be insecure, uncertainty over the success of international recruitment could result in a downward spiral where fewer students lead to a reduction in expenditure with fewer staff and less marketing activity. Recruitment agents represent a solution to such situations by providing access to networks and allowing a spread of effort without the institution being committed to investing much resource in less certain markets.

3. Agent – related factors – Local knowledge and cultural bridges: Agents possess local knowledge and provide basic explanations of culture, information about educational qualifications and the reputation and ranking of local institutions. Based on their experience, they can also provide information on trends, past data and major changes.

4. Agent related factors – Local connections: Agents provide valuable support with connectivity and networking by introducing university staff to identified contacts in local schools and universities as well as helping prospective students search for sponsors. They have the knowledge of the right people to meet at

education ministries, scholarship agencies, professional associations and local companies.

5. Agent – related factors – Services provided to prospective students: Apart from recruiting students to an institution, agents raise the brand image of the institution, make a positive impression on the market, meet a need that students and parents express and further the reputation and contacts of the institution in their region. This support can be even more valuable in areas where British Council offices are not available to provide ongoing assistance to students and families.

6. Agent – related factors – Services provided to universities: Most universities see the role of the agent as a continuous process of helping to create the market, raise the brand profile, encourage applicants and then support both the university and the applicant until that process has been satisfactorily completed. They help to ensure that the university attracts the right quality of students by screening applications and communicating the institution's requirements to prospective students. The process of converting applications into enrolments is one of the most important aspects of the agents' role as many institutions want to see an improved application to enrolment ratio. Some institutions also refer direct applicants to agents and pay the agent for their role in providing the practical support required for the students to enrol successfully.

Hulme et al (2013) identified the three categories of agents used by universities as individual agents, established agents and large international recruitment consultancies:

1. Individual agents: These agents are beginners or alumni who are yet to 'prove their worth' to the institutions. They are usually engaged on a 'letter of referral' basis, whereby they have the support of the university and are paid a flat fee of about £1,000 for every successful applicant. Some universities do not use individual agents for student recruitment activities.

2. Established agents: These are agents with a proven track record of successfully recruiting students for a university. They are sometimes in a position to negotiate a higher rate of commission for a consistent and large number of successful application referrals.

3. Large international recruitment consultancies: These are well established organisations with several offices and well trained counselling and marketing

staff. They normally hold a significant share of their local market and often expand their operations into other countries in their region. Most universities sub – contract a number of experienced agents from these companies or employ local in – country staff that are based in their offices. Universities often pay a fee to secure their exclusive services. This allows the university to acquire an office and permanent representation in the city in which the agent is located. These agents receive significant amounts of funding from institutions for promotional activities and are known to negotiate commission rates of up to 25% of the students' first year tuition fees as a reward for recruiting up to a hundred students per year for some institutions.

2.6.8 About Anglia Ruskin University

The story of Anglia Ruskin University dates back to 1858 when the art critic, patron and philanthropist John Ruskin opened the Cambridge School of Art. Over the years, a number of colleges and institutes including Cambridgeshire College of Arts & Technology (CCAT) and the Essex Institute of Higher Education combined with the Cambridge School of Art to become Anglia Higher Education College in 1989. The merged college became Anglia Polytechnic in 1991and was awarded university status and became Anglia Polytechnic University in 1992. The institution became Anglia Ruskin University in 2005. In addition to the main campus in Cambridge, the university has campuses in Chelmsford & Peterborough. The university's mission is: "We are exceptional and imaginative in the advancement of knowledge and education of students. We are passionate about collaboration, innovation and transformation to enhance social, cultural and economic well – being" (Anglia Ruskin University, 2014).

With more than 30,000 students from 177 countries studying on its three main campuses and with a number of partner institutions in the UK and overseas, Anglia Ruskin is one of the largest universities in the East of England and was recently awarded 'Entrepreneurial University of the Year 2014' by the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES). Anglia Ruskin is ranked 105 in the 2015 Guardian University League Table and 116 in the Complete University Guide 2015 University League Table. The university is ranked 90 in the league table for top universities for research (power rank) 2014.

The university has six high – profile research institutes; namely the Postgraduate Medical Institute, the Institute for International Management Practice, the Cultures of the Digital Economy (CoDE) Research Institute, the Global Sustainability Institute, the Veterans & Families Institute and the Anglia Ruskin IT Research Institute. It also has a range of research units that are dedicated to research in a range of subject areas, including music therapy, eye diseases, children's book studies and political history. In the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, 12 of the university's research areas were ranked as 'world leading'. The subject areas are:

- Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
- Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
- Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
- Business and Management Studies
- Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
- English Language and Literature
- Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology
- History
- Law
- Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
- Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
- Social Work and Social Policy

The university consists of five faculties:

1. Lord Ashcroft International Business School: The faculty offers undergradute, postgraduate and research degrees in Accounting, Business, Marketing, Human Resource Management, Tourism Management, Finance & Supply Chain Management.

2. Faculty of Science & Technology: The faculty offers undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees in Architecture, Biomedical Science, Computing, Engineering, Construction, Forensic Science, Optometry, Psychology, Sports Science, Zoology, Biotechnology, Project Management and Town Planning.

3. Faculty of Health, Social Care & Education: The faculty offers undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes in Education, Nursing & Midwifery, Social Work and International Social Welfare & Social Policy.

4. Faculty of Medical Sciences: The faculty runs undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes in Public Health, Medical Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physiotherapy, Healthcare Management and Hospital Management.

5. Faculty of Arts, Law & Social Sciences: The faculty runs undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes in Art, Drama, English Language, Criminology, Fashion Design, Film & TV Production, Film Studies, Media Studies, History, Graphic Design, Law, Music, Philosophy, Performing Arts, Photography, Public Service, International Relations, Creative Writing, Intercultural Communication, Sociology, Printmaking and Publishing.

Anglia Ruskin has over 18,000 students studying on its campuses and over 12,000 students at UK and overseas partners. 83% of the students on – campus are home / UK students, 4% are from the EU whilst 12% are international non – EU students.

2.6.9 International Student Recruitment at Anglia Ruskin

International student recruitment is an important aspect of Anglia Ruskin's vision and strategy. In the institution's 2015 – 2017 strategy, Goal 7 is: "3,000 of our campus – based students will be from outside the EU and we will educate 20,000 students off – site" (Anglia Ruskin, 2014). The university currently receives about 9,000 applications annually from international students from outside the European Union and has about 2,000 campus – based students from outside the European Union.

At Anglia Ruskin, international student recruitment is the responsibility of the International Office which is headed by the Pro Vice Chancellor, Corporate and International Development Services. The university has three regional recruitment teams whose heads report directly to the PVC:

1. South Asia, Africa, USA, Canada & South America: This team is headed by a Regional Director and consists of International Officers for East Africa & Pakistan, USA, Bangladesh & Sri Lanka and Latin America and a Senior International Manager for West Africa.

2. Asia, Russia, Middle East, North Africa & Central Middle East: This team is headed by a Regional Director and consists of Senior International Managers for East Asia, South East Asia and Middle East, Central Asia & Russia and an International Officer for Japan, South Korea, Taiwan & Norway.

3. UK & Non – EU Europe: This team is headed by the International Liaison Manager and consists of International Officers for EU & Turkey and UK & EU, Erasmus Co–ordinator / Study Abroad Adviser and an International Liaison Officer.

The Senior International Manager / International Officer for each market is responsible for coordinating the university's international student recruitment activities in that region. This requires them to devise and implement appropriate marketing strategies to create awareness about the university and generate applications from prospective students and work with local recruitment partners / agents to convert into enrolments for each intake. This normally involves regular visits to the market to meet prospective students, attend exhibitions, fairs & school visits and support the activities of local recruitment partners. The main responsibilities of International Office recruitment staff are:

- To develop and implement an annual recruitment marketing action plan to successfully recruit students to agreed targets in allocated key markets and undertake the necessary faculty liaison necessary to ensure that such plans support faculty plans.

- To arrange and carry out frequent visits to the designated region in order to give presentations, participate in promotional events, counsel prospective students, set up conversion interviews with recruitment partners, regional offices and partner institutions and make specific course offers to applicants in order to achieve agreed recruitment targets.

- To identify market development strategies and opportunities, build new productive recruitment links and manage existing ones with educational institutions, recruitment partners and other institutions.

- To negotiate and manage agreed contracts overseas and lead on progression and partnership negotiations in designated markets.

- To prepare and contribute to high quality publicity and marketing materials in various formats and utilise social and new media in order to promote the

university's courses to a wide range of audiences globally. Also needs to identify in – country marketing tools to support recruitment from the designated market and manage their implementation and activities in collaboration with appropriate colleagues.

The main promotional methods used by international student recruitment staff are:

- Fairs / Exhibitions: The British Council organises a number of UK University Exhibitions in major cities around the world which provides opportunities for UK universities to meet with hundreds and thousands of prospective students. Participation at these events enable the university to meet with prospective students, parents and teachers / career advisers in order to provide them with information about courses, fees, accommodation, facilities, scholarships and career opportunities. There are also a number of other exhibitions / fairs organised by major student recruitment agents and other marketing organisations in the sector.

- School / University Visits: International Office staff visit schools and universities to deliver presentations on the university and provide information to prospective students about studying in the UK. These are normally institutions that run internationally recognised qualifications like the Cambridge Advanced Level and other qualifications that students need to meet the entry criteria.

- Advertising: The University runs advertising campaigns in many markets to raise awareness about Anglia Ruskin and the courses that are available to international students. Advertising tools used include newspapers / magazines, billboards, the Internet and radio.

- Social Media: The University uses websites and applications that allow users to create and share content and participate in social networking to promote its courses internationally. Social media tools used include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & Instagram.

- Recruitment Partner / Agent Office Visits: This is when International Office staff visit the offices of the university's agents to meet with prospective students during an overseas trip. In preparation for such visits, the agent will invite current applicants and other contacts that are interested in studying in the UK to attend in order to find out more information about the university. The university

usually supports the agent's activities by paying for local advertising to promote the sessions.

- In – Country Staff Support: In major markets like China, India & Nigeria, the university employs a number of local in – country staff that work from home or are based in the offices of trusted recruitment partners. They act as local points of contact for prospective students, provide advice & support throughout the application process and support the activities of local recruitment partners. They also enable the university to follow up applicants effectively in order to improve the conversion rate and recruit good numbers of students.

2.6.10 Anglia Ruskin & the African Student Recruitment Market

Africa is an important region for international student recruitment at Anglia Ruskin. 29% of the on – campus students at the university are from African countries. With 372 enrolled students, Nigeria is the leading source of international students for the university and Nigerian students constitute 18.8% of the international student population. The diagrams below show the top ten nationalities of international students and a breakdown of the international student population at the university by region:

Anglia Ruskin University Top Ten Non - EU Students Nationalities
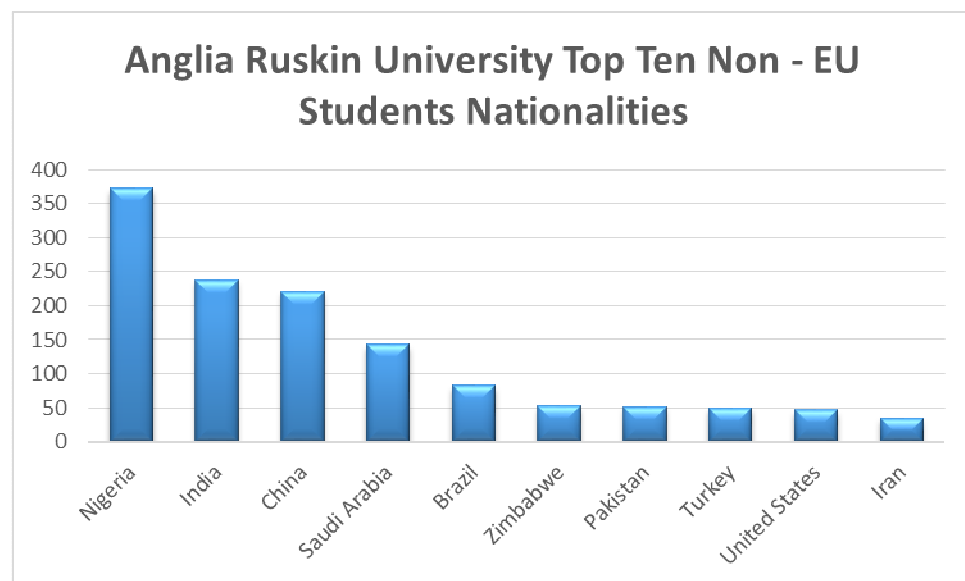
Figure 2.6: Top ten Non – EU student nationalities at Anglia Ruskin University 2014 (Anglia Ruskin, 2014)
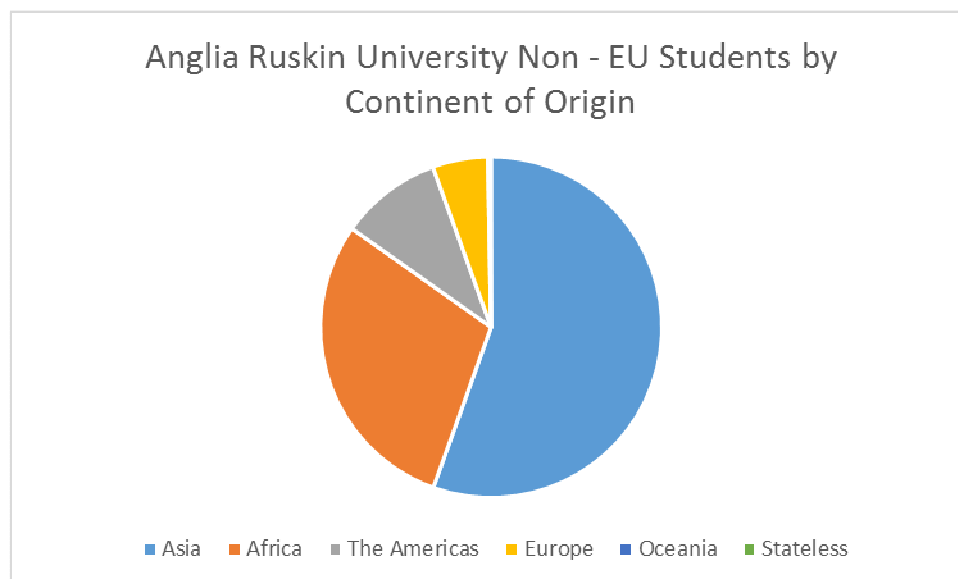
Figure 2.7: Anglia Ruskin University Non – EU students by continent of origin 2014 (Anglia Ruskin, 2014)

The university's student recruitment activities in the region is managed by a Senior International Manager with responsibility for West Africa (Nigeria & Ghana) and an International Officer with responsibility for Eastern & Southern Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mauritius, Zimbabwe & Zambia). They develop and implement an annual recruitment marketing action plan to successfully recruit students to agreed targets in their respective regions. The university also contracts the services of three In – Country Representatives to support the activities of key recruitment partners and provide advice / guidance to applicants in Nigeria. The use of in – country staff is a major aspect of the university's strategy and enables the university to maintain the constant market presence needed to effectively support the conversion of applicants into enrolled students. In – country staff work exclusively to increase awareness of the university's brand in the market and are line – managed by the Senior International Manager with responsibility for the market. They counsel prospective students and process applications for prospective students at the offices of the recruitment partner where they are based. They also provide advice and practical support to direct applicants.

2.6.11 The Process of Joining the University

These are the different stages that a prospective international student goes through in order to become a student at the university:

1. Application: The first stage of the process is when the student completes and submits an application to join the university. Most international students apply through an agent or use the online application facility on the university's website. Some prospective undergraduate students apply through UCAS.

2. Application Decision / Offer: All non – EU applications are processed by the International Admissions Team based at the Chelmsford Campus. International Admission Officers check all submitted applications to ensure that the applicant has provided the information and documentation required for them to make a decision. If the Admission Officer is satisfied that the applicant meets the university's entry requirement, they issue a conditional offer of a place at the university by email. The offer is normally conditional on payment of a minimum initial tuition fee deposit of £4,000, provision of evidence that the student can support themselves financially during the first year of their studies and provision of any outstanding application information / documents. The International Admissions Team aims to provide a decision on all applications within 2 – 3 days.

3. Acceptance: When the student receives the offer letter from the university, they are given about 2 – 4 weeks to communicate acceptance of the offer. Most applicants receive offers from more than one university and have to decide at this stage which offer to accept. Applicants usually communicate their acceptance by email or by returning the acceptance page of the application documents. The Marketing Communications Team at the International Office communicate regularly with offer holders in order to encourage them to accept their offers and join the university.

4. Payment: This is the stage at which the student commits to the university by paying part or all of their tuition fee. It is the strongest indication that the applicant is truly interested in joining the university. In some markets, as little as 10% of applicants get to this stage of the process.

5. Unconditional Offer: When the applicant has paid the tuition fee deposit and fulfilled all the other conditions of the offer, the International Admissions Team issues an Unconditional Offer / Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS). This is the main document that the applicant needs to apply for the UK Student Visa that they need to be able to travel to the UK to start their studies at the university.

6. Visa Application: At this stage, the applicants submits an application for a UK Student Visa that will grant them entry to the UK to join the university. The visa application process requires prospective students to submit their credentials, evidence of maintenance funds for the first year of their course in the UK and the Unconditional Offer / Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) from the university. Some applicants are also required to attend a credibility interview to answer questions that will enable UK Visa & Immigration to confirm that they are genuine students and are not just trying to exploit the system. This is a critical stage in the process of joining the university and the stage where the advice / support of local agents / recruitment partners and in – country staff is most valuable. Agents & in – country staff help applicants to complete their online visa application forms, book credibility interviews, check their documents and have also been known to coach them for the credibility interviews.

7. Visa Application Decision: This is the stage at which the student receives a decision about their visa application from the local British Embassy. Visa application processing times range from 5 days to 60 days depending on location. The move to a points – based system has increased the level of transparency and made it much easier for applicants to understand what is required to apply for a UK Student Visa successfully. Most students receive a positive decision and those that are refused a visa are entitled to request an administrative review within a month of the decision if they feel that there was an error on the part of UK Visa & Immigration. Local agents & in – country staff provide applicants with support at this stage of the process and have been known to help students to successfully overturn visa refusals. Students that are unable to obtain a student visa to travel to the UK are usually entitled to a refund of the tuition fee paid to the university.

8. Arrival, Welcome & Orientation: This stage of the process is managed by the University's International Student Advice Service and is aimed at providing all the essential elements that international students need to make a successful start to life at the university. New international students are advised to arrive on a particular day in order to be able to use the university's airport pick – up service. They are collected by coach from the major international airports and transported to the university's campuses in Cambridge, Chelmsford & Peterborough. The first day of the International Orientation Programme includes

sessions on studying in the UK, sports & social facilities, working & health entitlements, food & shopping, UK culture & customs, travel & transport, finding a part – time job and opening a UK bank account. They also get campus / city tours and a number of social events that enables them to meet other students. The second day of the event includes a number of activities at the faculty designed to welcome the students and prepare them for academic life.

2.6.12 Conclusion

The discussion of recent developments and the main trends in the UK HE sector makes it easy to understand the importance of the topic to institutions in the sector. The next chapter will examine the current literature in the subject area and identify the gap in knowledge that the study intends to fill.

3 CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) in their study of the factors motivating international student choice found that word – of – mouth referral is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use. They stated that parents, relatives and agents that have graduated from a particular institution and enjoyed the experience are likely to recommend it to others. A British Council (2013) study into the decision-making process for prospective international students in Nigeria identified the main sources of influence on the decision to study overseas as employer (53.1%), parents (17.3%) & Agents (4.9%). Recommendation from family members, friends & acquaintances who have also studied overseas is one of the most important factors that influence the decision of international students about destinations & institutions (Krampf & Heinlein, 1981; Turner, 1988; Bourke, 2000).

This chapter will examine the current general and specific literature that is available in the subject area and identify the knowledge gap that the study intends to fill. It will include a discussion of the work of other researchers on the subject of international student decision-making. This is because a good understanding of the importance of the research topic in the field of marketing will enable readers to appreciate the contribution to knowledge that will be made by the research study. The main purpose of the study is to explore the use of interpersonal sources (teachers, career advisers, friends & relatives, agents, university reps, etc.) in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa. The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

This research questions are being asked because they are not already covered by existing literature. This chapter will show how the research questions on the use of interpersonal sources in UK Higher Education decision-making relate to the field of marketing. It will discuss the marketing concept and its application in UK Higher Education, consumer behaviour as a branch of marketing, consumer decision-making process in UK Higher Education, international student decision-making and the role of interpersonal influences in the decision-making process. It will discuss the current literature in the subject area and identify the specific knowledge gap that the study intends to fill.

3.1 What is marketing?

Contrary to popular belief, marketing is not just another interchangeable word for selling, advertising or other strategies used to persuade people to try, buy or use products that they do not really want. According to Reynolds & Lancaster (2005), there is often confusion amongst marketing academic and practitioners over the precise meaning of the term.

3.1.1 Definition of marketing

Over the years, marketing has been defined in different ways:

Kotler et al (2008, pp. 7) defined marketing as "a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they want through creating and exchanging products and value with others".

Dibb et al (2006, pp. 7) defined marketing as "individual and organisational activities that facilitate and expedite satisfying exchange relationships in a dynamic environment through the creation, distribution, promotion and pricing of goods, services and ideas".

Kotler et al (2013, pp. 5) defined marketing as "the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships to capture value from customers in return".

The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements

profitably" (CIM, 2016). According to Bakare (2012, pp. 4) the CIM definition contains several key points that are important in understanding the concept of marketing:

1. Marketing is a management process: As something that managers do in the course of running a business on a daily basis, marketing requires the application of management skills in analysis, planning, implementation and control.

2. Marketing identifies customer needs: It involves using market research to find out who the customers are so that companies can tailor their products and services to meet their needs.

3. Marketing anticipates customer needs: Marketing involves not just monitoring customer needs and trends, but understanding them well enough to develop product and services that will satisfy them well into the future.

4. Marketing satisfies customer needs: It is about giving customers exactly what they want, at the right price, in the right place and at the right time. Customer satisfaction refers to the extent to which a product's perceived performance matches a buyer's expectations (Kotler et al, 2013).

5. Marketing fulfils customer requirements profitably: Marketing activities should be conducted in such a way that the organisation's profitability or other objectives are achieved.

3.1.2 Marketing philosophies

Marketing management is about designing strategies that will enable an organisation to build profitable relationships with customers. Marketing philosophies guide the development of these strategies in terms of the weight that should be given to the interests of customers, the organisation and the society. Kotler et al (2013, pp.10) outlined five alternative concepts under which the organisation design and implement their marketing strategies:

1. The Production Concept: This is "the idea that customers will favour products that are available and highly affordable and that the organisation should therefore focus on improving production and distribution efficiency" (Kotler et al, 2013, pp. 10). This is one of the oldest business orientations and was predominant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the primary purpose of all business and industrial activity was thought to be production.

2. The Product Concept: This is "the idea that consumers will favour products that offer the most quality, performance and features and that the organisation should

therefore devote its energy to making continuous product improvements" (Kotler et al, 2013, pp. 10). Under the product concept, marketing activities are focussed on delivering technologically superior products to customers.

3. The Selling Concept: This is "the idea that consumers will not buy enough of the firm's products unless it undertakes a large – scale selling and promotional effort" (Kotler et al, 2013, pp. 10). The concept affirms that in a highly competitive business environment, it was not just enough to produce quality goods as efficiently as possible, the organisation needs to persuade or force customers to buy them. The concept is normally used for goods or services that buyers do not normally think of buying (like insurance) and involves tracking down prospects and using aggressive techniques to convince them of the benefits of buying the product.

4. The Marketing Concept: This is the idea that "achieving organisational goals depends on knowing the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions better than competitors do" (Kotler et al, 2013, pp. 10). Organisations that develop and perform their production and marketing activities with the identification and satisfaction of the needs of the buyer as the driving force are said to be marketing oriented. Their motivation is to find wants and meet them rather than create products and sell them (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). According to Dibb et al (2008), a marketing - oriented organisation devotes resources to understanding the needs and buying behaviour of customers, competitors' activities and strategies, market trends and external forces in order to ensure that its activities and capabilities are properly aligned to this market intelligence. Marketing orientation is an approach to doing business that places customers and their needs at the heart of what the organisation does (Brassington & Pettit, 2006). It implies that employees in every department and at all levels within the organisation need to consider customer needs at every stage of operation.

5. The Societal Marketing Concept: This is "the idea that a company's marketing decisions should consider consumers' wants, the company's requirements, consumers' long – term interests and society's long – term interests" (Kotler et al, 2013, pp.11). Companies that employ this concept attempt to deliver value to customers in a way that maintains or improves the well – beings of both the consumer and the society.

An understanding of the different marketing philosophies is relevant to the research questions for this study because the marketisation of the UK HE sector has led many institutions to move from a product or production orientation to a marketing orientation.

3.1.3 Products & Services

The bundle of benefits that a company offers to the market can be products or services. A product is "anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need". (Kotler et al, 2013, pp. 238). A service is an "act or performance that creates benefits for customers by bringing about a desired change in – or on behalf of – the recipient" (Lovelock & Wright, 2002, pp. 6). It is a satisfaction or benefit offered for sale that is intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Kotler et al (2013) emphasised the importance of considering the special service characteristics when designing marketing programmes for them. These characteristics are intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability.

3.1.4 The marketing mix

After understanding the nature of customers and their needs & wants, the organisation needs to act on that information by developing and implementing marketing activities that will deliver something that is valuable to customers. The marketing mix represents the process through which an organisation's ideas about its marketing activities are turned into reality. McCarthy's 1987 definition of the marketing mix in terms of product, price, place and promotion has been widely criticised as incomplete because it pigeonholed everything into four basic categories, had an internal orientation and lacked personalisation (Blythe, 2009). The addition of three more Ps (people, process and physical evidence) by Booms & Bitner in 1981 covered the extra elements that are present in service industries which now dominate the bulk of products in modern society. The 7P model of the marketing mix is widely accepted as representing the main components of an organisation's marketing activities:

1. Product: This refers to the bundle of benefits that the supplier offers to the purchaser (Blythe, 2009). It includes everything related to the creation, development and management of what the organisation offers to the consumer. According to Kotler & Keller (2011), products can be goods, services, events, experiences, persons, places, properties, organisations, information or ideas.

2. Price: This refers to the total cost to the customer of acquiring the product (Blythe, 2009). It includes both monetary and non – monetary costs and is seen as the most flexible element of the marketing mix. Price is of strategic importance to marketers because of its direct relationship with sales volume, sales revenue and profits (Bakare, 2012).

3. Place: This traditionally referred to the location where the exchange takes place. However, with the development of electronic channels of distribution, it has become a dynamic area of marketing.

4. Promotion: This is the means of meeting the information needs of customers and includes all the communication activities of marketing; especially advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling (Blythe, 2009).

5. People: This component of the marketing mix refers to individuals involved in the process of delivering the service and providing customer satisfaction (Blythe, 2009). It has become important in the marketing of service products because the skills, ability and responsiveness of the personnel involved in creating and delivering the service significantly affects the level of customer satisfaction.

6. Process: This refers to the set of activities which lead to delivery of the product benefits and together produce customer satisfaction (Blythe, 2009). Marketers have to manage this component to ensure that the time involved in preparing the product or delivering the service is in line with customer expectations.

7. Physical evidence: This refers to the physical aspects of the service delivery or tangible proof that service has been delivered (Blythe, 2009). In service situations, this will relate to the ambience of the hotel in which you stay, the aircraft in which you fly and the lecture theatre in which you learn.

3.2 Marketing in the UK Higher Education Sector

A clear understanding of the application of the marketing concept in UK Higher Education should provide useful background for the discussion of consumer behaviour and consumer decision-making process which is required to properly address the research questions for this study.

Gibbs (2002) observed that most educational institutions now recognise that they need to market themselves in a climate of increasing global competition and substantial

literature on the transfer of the practices and concepts of marketing from other sectors to Higher Education is now available. Durkin et al (2012) noted that the concept of marketing for universities has grown in importance in the UK since the re-designation of the polytechnics to universities in 1992 and the resulting increase in sectoral competition which highlighted the need to create more distinct brand identities in order to attract and retain students in both the domestic and international markets.

Maringe & Gibbs (2009, pp. 162) defined university marketing as "an underlying cultural and organisational disposition to position the customer at the centre of all decisions in the critical tripartite university business of teaching, research & service". This is an organisational strategy aimed at keeping customers happy regarding the way the university executes its core business. A key aspect of this is finding out what and how to teach effectively to any group of students by thoroughly understanding them in terms of how they learn most efficiently and how they prefer to be taught (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Ivy (2008) stated that when universities offer degrees that satisfy student needs, distribute the tuition using methods that match student expectations, provide the data on which they can make informed decisions about qualification choices and price those programmes at a level that students see as providing value, courses are more likely to be filled. The role of marketing in student recruitment has increased during the past few years due to a rise in the number of degree choices and institutions from which prospective students can choose. The resulting competition has increased the need for institutions to differentiate themselves in order to attract the right quality and quantity of students.

Using Levitt's earlier work, Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003) outlined the three separate and distinct levels that make up the universities' offerings as the core, tangible and augmented product. The core benefit is not the degree itself, but the benefits that a degree can provide in terms of employment, status and lifestyle. At the second level, tangible attributes include the physical layout of the campus, library, computer and sports facilities. At the third level, the augmented product is made up of intangible attributes such as careers / employability services, library membership and financial support for students. Students will not be satisfied if these factors are not in place.

3.2.1 Higher education as a service

Nicholls et al (1995) in a study of marketing in higher education observed that it is now generally accepted that the marketing of services is sufficiently different to deserve separate treatment. By their nature, higher educational services cannot be touched, tasted or possessed; leading to customer difficulty in evaluating quality of the offering. The service is inseparable from its source; meaning that production and consumption takes place simultaneously. Higher education services are perishable since they cannot be stored; last semester's course vacancy cannot be sold in this semester. It is also difficult to control their quality as they are difficult to standardise.

Higher education as a pure service is characterised by a greater amount of interpersonal contact, complexity, divergence and customisation than other service businesses (Cubillo et al, 2006). In higher education, quality may vary significantly according to different circumstances: from year to year, class to class, student to student, lecturer to lecturer and even within the same institution. In higher education, service quality has different meanings for different consumers (Cubillo et al, 2006).

Higher education is a complex entity because it is a highly intangible service that requires developing relationships with multiple stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, employers, tutors, professional bodies and the government) over relatively long periods of time (Moogan, 2010).

3.2.2 Market orientation in Higher Education

Ross et al (2013) defined market orientation as the ability to learn about customers and competitors in order to respond to trends and also be aware of and respond to environmental influences in the sector. Naver & Slater (1990) described market orientation as comprising three dimensions; namely customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter – functional coordination. Customer orientation involves developing an understanding of the needs of current and future customers in order to achieve long – term customer satisfaction. For HE institutions, this involves developing an understanding of why international students seek to study overseas and being aware of the current and anticipated future economic development in international student source countries. Competitor orientation involves developing a good understanding of the short – term and long – term strengths and weaknesses of current and potential competitors. Inter – functional coordination involves designing a structure where the

creation of superior value for target customers is the responsibility of the entire institution rather than a single department.

3.2.3 Characteristics of educational services

Mazzarol (1998, pp. 164) used the framework developed by Lovelock (1983) to describe educational services as having the following characteristics:

1. The nature of the service act: Education is a people – based service that involves largely intangible actions and is directed at the minds of people.

2. The relationship with the customer: Education involves lengthy and formal relationships with students and continuous delivery of the service.

3. The level of customisation and judgement in service delivery: Education services can be customised to varying degrees. Mass lectures are significantly more standardised than small tutorials or individual supervision which can be highly customised. The educational service provider also exercises a high level of judgement in meeting the needs of individual students. The variability of service delivery can make it difficult for management to ensure that the same quality of service is being enjoyed by all consumers.

4. The nature of demand relative to supply: The demand for education as a service is subject to narrow fluctuations over time. The supply of places can be difficult to manage with significant limitations placed on the availability of staff and physical resources.

5. The method of service delivery: Educational services normally involve the student coming to the institution at a physical location to complete their programme. However, in recent years, modern technology has made it possible for the service to be delivered through distance learning and some institutions have even established offshore teaching programmes that bring the service closer to the customer.

3.2.4 The Marketing Mix in Higher Education

Identifying stakeholder expectations and satisfaction towards higher education is the starting point for universities in designing effective marketing strategies (Filip, 2012). Kotler & Fox (1995) identified the main university stakeholders as being classified into sixteen major publics. They are current students, prospective students, faculty, parents of students, administration & staff, alumni, suppliers, competitors, government

agencies, business community, mass media, foundations, trustees, accreditation organisations, local community and the general public (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Marketing strategies in the higher education sector usually starts with the identification of consumer needs regarding the structure and types of programmes. An institution's identity is formed based on the nature and quality of its educational programmes and their degree of differentiation in relation with competing academic offers (Filip, 2012). An effective marketing strategy should result in higher education programmes being designed, developed, tested, piloted, provided and refined in cooperation with consumers and other stakeholders (Kotler & Fox, 1995).

Ivy (2008) described the marketing mix as a set of controllable marketing tools that an institution can use to produce the response that it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that a university can do to influence the demand for its services. Brown et al (2009) identified the three segments that universities seek to recruit as school leavers, mature and international. Ivy (2008) used the 7P approach to outline the various components of the marketing mix for higher education:

1. The product: This is the complex bundle of benefits that is being sold to the customer to satisfy his / her needs. As students normally pay universities for the services they receive and ultimately the degrees that they are awarded, the qualification obtained is the product. The curriculum of the degree is central to the product element and must be appropriately developed and adapted to the needs of the students (Ivy, 2008).

2. The price: This component of the marketing mix refers to the tuition and other fees charged for the degree that is being studied at the university. Tuition fees not only affect the revenues that a university derives from enrolment on a course, but also affects the students' perception of the quality of the programme. This is especially true in the MBA sector of the industry. Thus pricing policy must consider the specific target profile and effect on overall university image, because some consumers perceive more expensive services as adding substantial value (Ivy, 2008).

3. The place: This is the distribution method that the institution adopts to deliver the tuition to students in a manner that meets their expectations. It is designed to create service availability in terms of time and geographical distribution of teaching and learning (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Recent technological developments

have enabled universities to increase service availability by delivering programmes by distance learning through the post, email, Internet, video conferencing, block release and podcasts. This has helped many institutions to gain market share and reach those consumers who perceive geographic or time difficulties in physically attending university courses.

4. The promotion: This includes all the tools that universities use to provide prospective students with information on its offerings and maintain dialogue with other stakeholders (Ivy, 2008). Due to the wide variety of publics with which a university needs to communicate, it employs a number of tools, including advertising, publicity, public relations and sales promotional efforts.

5. The people: This element includes all the employees of the university that come into contact with current and prospective students at the university (Ivy, 2008). In a marketing orientated university, all academic, administrative and support staff have a role to play in ensuring that the service delivered meets and exceeds the expectations of students. Due to the inseparable nature of educational services, the skills and professionalism of tutors have a decisive influence on students' satisfaction with existing programmes (Filip, 2012).

6. The physical evidence: These are the tangible components of the service offering that are used by the target market to evaluate the quality of its services (Ivy, 2008). They range from the appearance of buildings, library facilities and grounds to the quality of teaching materials and the user – friendliness of the institution's website. An institution's facilities help to increase the tangibility of its offerings and are often the most visible issues perceived by students in their intention to differentiate between various universities (Filip, 2012).

7. The Process: This element refers to the way things happen and includes all of the administrative and bureaucratic activities that students undertake during their time at the university (Ivy, 2008). They include processing of identity cards at registration, dissemination of results, applications for accommodation and appointment systems for personal tutorials. Every aspect of the process must meet or exceed the student's satisfaction for service delivery to be successful.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) suggested that the flow of information to prospective students should be substantially increased to help them make effective decisions and offer them control over the decision – making process. They identified the three key

promotional elements for international education as advertising in the mass media, personal selling and publicity & professional promotion.

Many educational institutions have used newspaper, radio, TV, billboard and other types of mass media advertising to project images of their students, buildings and facilities. The use of testimonials in such advertising improves understanding and may help prospective students better evaluate the institution's offerings. Whilst mass media advertising has been used successfully by several institutions in their home markets over the years, it has not been as successful in attracting international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Most institutions tend to depend more on Internet marketing as a more effective and efficient means of reaching prospective international students.

In the education sector, personal selling is the use of university staff to provide information & advice to prospective students at open days, exhibitions, school visits and other events in order to convince them to choose the institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). It can also be seen in the use of overseas recruitment agents who advise prospective students on their study destinations and earn a commission from institutions for successful enrolments. Despite the controversies surrounding the use of recruitment agents to promote international education, they are seen as an important source of information and support for prospective students. They assist prospective students by providing advice and information on courses and institutions, providing practical support in the completion of documentation and arranging travel & accommodation. Their ability to provide face-to-face communication about the relative merits of particular institutions and facilitate the student decision-making process by guiding them through the substantial quantity of issues to be considered demonstrates their value in the international student recruitment process. Hulme et al (2013) in a survey of the African students enrolled on a university programme found that all of them had been recruited via the services of an agent.

Publicity entails the use of 'generic' promotion strategies to increase market awareness of the supplier country and is usually carried out by government agencies (like the British Council) or collaborative groups of institutions like the Russell Group (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Professional promotion refers to promotional activities undertaken by

individual institutions to raise their own profile or desirability in specific markets. They include presentations by staff to prospective students, provision of prospectuses & information booklets and student word of mouth referrals. Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) suggested that personal sources of information such as word of mouth referrals are needed to overcome some of the perceived risks associated with the complexity and intangibility of international education.

According to Gibbs & Knapp (2012, pp. 4), there are four key areas that suggest that the appreciation and use of marketing process can significantly help the future provision of education. These issues partly explain the reasons why marketing and student recruitment have become much more important to UK higher education institutions:

1. The complexity of the offering: Degree programmes represent an educational experience for the student, who is simultaneously a consumer of that experience.
2. The complicated social roles of institutions: The independence of faculties make it difficult to add value to some programmes through changes in practice without significant resource investment.
3. The increasing importance of financial performance: Institutions must shape their market offerings in order to attract investment in the form of tuition fees, grants, research funding and donations.
4. An approach to the market that sees students as informed consumers: The essence of the marketing process is to realise that students are no longer a homogeneous group. Institutions must understand their differing consumer needs and adapt to them.

Gibbs & Knapp (2012) felt that higher education institutions need to plan and execute the marketing mix in order to create exchanges that satisfy individual and institutional objectives. Marketing has to influence the level, timing and composition of demand in ways that help institutions to achieve their strategic objectives (Gibbs & Knapp, 2012).

Despite the obvious benefits of the application of the marketing concept to higher education, some writers have highlighted potential problems. Newman & Jahdi (2009) suggested that the application of the marketing mix to higher education has had some negative consequences and that the marketing rhetoric does not always match the educational reality. Naude & Ivy (1999) argued that higher education is unable to fulfil

the customer retention goal of marketing because the percentage of students that remain loyal to an institution and stay on to pursue postgraduate courses is too small to be the focus of an institution's marketing strategy. They also highlighted the extent to which institutions must balance the need of the marketplace with the need to preserve academic integrity and freedom.

3.2.5 Who is the consumer?

The identification of the consumer in higher education is an important starting point in the discussion of the consumer decision-making making process and the importance of the role of interpersonal sources in the process.

The consumer is traditionally seen as the person that buys products or services for personal consumption. Solomon (2013) defines the consumer as "a person who identifies a need or desire, makes a purchase, and then disposes of the product during the three stages of the consumption process". Gibbs & Knapp (2012) claimed that the question of who is the consumer of higher education is complex. Although the education experience is undertaken by the student, he or she may not be the one that selects the institution and may also not be the one that pays for it. If the needs of the society are taken into consideration, the student may also not be the only beneficiary of the education product. Parents & family members are other possible consumers; especially as they often constrain the choice of institution and substantially underwrite the costs (Gibbs & Knapp, 2012). Naude & Ivy (1999) observed that at the simplest level institutions can regard students as their customers because they are the ones that have entered into the relationship with the institution. Pursell (2000) observed that the abolition of grants to students, followed by the introduction of student loans to cover fees may have encouraged the student-as-customer mentality which has become predominant in the sector. Durkin & McKenna (2011) stated that whether classified as customers or not, the changes to the UK funding structure mean that students will now be paying to a greater extent for a service and that universities will be service providers in the commercial sense. This view has been strengthened by the introduction of various customer benchmarks like the National Student Survey, the International Student Barometer and a range of online fora which allow current students to share their views about institutions. The results of these customer benchmarks are known to influence the commercial awareness and decisions of prospective students.

Mark (2013) observed that the student-as-customer mentality has made some universities to adopt a customer focus by promoting greater student input, increased accessibility of faculty and a curriculum that properly serves the needs of students. Finney & Finney (2010) noted that it highlights students as significant stakeholders in their education and pushes administrators to consider such issues as scheduling classes at times convenient for students, scheduling courses often enough to meet student demand and offering a sufficient number of course topics. The model advocates positive faculty behaviours such as honouring office hours, responding promptly to students' questions and increasing accessibility.

Despite the introduction of deferred fees in UK higher education there has been much debate amongst marketing academics and practitioners about the positive and negative aspects of the 'student as customer' concept. Mark (2013) argued that higher education is so completely separate and distinct from the business world that it simply cannot measure success and failure in the same way. This is partly because educators have a more principled mission that does not depend on some bottom – line profit. Rejection of the student-as-customer model also stems from a rejection by many universities of the philosophy that 'the customer is always right' or that universities must pander to the short-term demands of students in order to ensure satisfaction (Mark, 2013). McGhee (2015) argued that calling students customers superficially appears to empower them, but in fact disempowers them by restricting how they are treated and how they perceived themselves. He stated that seeing students as customers in the traditional sense restricts our perception of them, the potential for relationship with the university and the kind of help from which they would benefit. Newman & Jahdi (2009) stated that if students are led to see themselves as customers, they are likely to perceive any failure on the course as a failure not of their own ability to meet the reality of the demands of the course but of the institution, the staff or the course itself. The general consensus is that students can be more helpfully regarded as 'consumers' rather than 'customers' as there appears to be no other service encounter where the quality of the outcome of the service delivered depends as much on the efforts of the consumer (Durkin & McKenna, 2011).

Maringe & Gibbs (2009) stated that despite the three fundamental freedoms of the university (to teach what they want, to whom they want and in the way they want), one of the new lessons that universities are learning from the commercial world today is how to develop a customer perspective. This customer perspective is one in which the interests and needs of students are central to the organisation, whilst keeping in perspective the needs and interests of other groups such as employers, government, alumni, parents and funding agencies (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). They outlined some basic principles for developing a sound customer orientation in the university sector.

Although universities should not pander to every student's need and expectation, they should be aware of them and endeavour to meet them in a way that demonstrates institutional sensitivity (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). This requires an understanding of who they are, in terms of demography, geographical distribution and psychographic qualities; what do they like and dislike about the institution and its programmes; the knowledge and skills that they expect to gain through studying at the institution; what they expect to learn on the programmes and how they expect to be taught; their reasons for studying at the institution and their needs and expectations on completion of the programme.

Students' expectations and perceptions of service quality need to be managed (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Institutions should devise mechanisms for capturing, analysing and reporting data about customer expectations of the service quality. This can be achieved by involving current and potential students in interpreting the data and exploring its possible implications. Managing student expectations require data capture and analysis software and human capability to manage the process on an ongoing basis; involvement of students to explore jointly and realistically the implications of the data collected as part of the process; a realistic trade-off of quality expectations that incorporates the opinions of both groups, in a way that does not compromise the programme, course standards or reputation of the institution and creating a system for keeping key student and staff constituencies, including other interested groups, informed about the outcomes of the surveys and research.

Student satisfaction should be at the heart of the educational service delivery (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). It is the extent to which their expectations, in their raw or modified

form, are either met or exceeded by their experience. University staff must have a good understanding of the variables that are closely associated with university student satisfaction and actively design and create ways by which these expectations would be delivered (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). They suggested that university student satisfaction is more closely associated with issues like teaching delivery and the enthusiasm of tutors; being exposed to a wide range of teaching and learning styles; experiencing real – world scenarios as part of learning; enjoying learning at the university and having fun at the same time; having the perception that the assessment system is fair and rigorous; having the perception and experience of being valued and respected; a service delivery system that meets its contractual obligations effectively and efficiently and the use of assistive and appropriate technology.

Bejou (2005) noted that while some in the higher education sector find it difficult to accept the idea of students as consumers that is what they are in reality. In today's competitive market, institutions are sellers offering courses, a degree and a rich alumni life. Students are buyers who enrol on programmes, apply for graduation and make donations as alumni. As long as these ongoing transactions are satisfactory to both parties, the relationship will endure to the benefit of everyone (Bejou, 2005).

The three broad market segments targeted by UK universities are high school leavers interested in undergraduate degree programmes, local mature students who mostly study post – experience programmes, part – time and international students for undergraduate & postgraduate programmes (Veloutsou et al, 2005). High school leavers represent the most attractive and sustainable segment of the market (Veloutsou et al, 2005). The intensity of competition for prospective students in the sector has led to an interest in the decision-making process of the specific groups of applicants.

3.3 Consumer Behaviour

This section will explain the concept of consumer behaviour as a useful background to the discussion of the consumer decision-making process. Consumer behaviour is important to the research questions for this study because consumer decision-making is an aspect of consumer behaviour. An understanding of the importance of consumer decision-making as an aspect of consumer behaviour will enable readers to appreciate the contribution that the study will make to knowledge in the subject area.

3.3.1 What is Consumer Behaviour?

Kotler et al (2008) defined consumer behaviour as the buying behaviour of individuals and households that buy goods and services for personal consumption. Solomon (2013) defines it as the study of processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences in order to satisfy needs and desires. The study of consumer behaviour involves looking at what influences individuals to behave in particular ways when obtaining products, using them and disposing of them (Blythe, 2009).

3.3.2 Approaches to the study of consumer behaviour

Over the years writers have suggested different typological classifications of the approaches adopted in the study of consumer behaviour (Bray, 2008). The five main approaches are (Bray, 2008):

1. Economic man: This approach suggests that a consumer would have to be aware of all the available consumption options, be capable of correctly rating each alternative and be available to select the best course of action.

2. Psychodynamic approach: This view argues that behaviour is subject to biological influences through instinctive factors which act outside of conscious thought. It argues that behaviour is determined by biological drives, rather than individual cognition or environmental stimuli.

3. Behaviourist approach: This approach includes a family of philosophies that claim that behaviour is explained by external events and that the thoughts, actions and feelings of organisms can be regarded as behaviours. These behaviours are seen to be caused by factors external to the individual.

4. Cognitive approach: This approach ascribes observed action to intrapersonal cognition and acknowledges an influential role of the environment and social experience. Consumers actively seek and receive environmental and social stimuli as informational inputs to aid internal decision-making.

5. Humanistic approach: These are new approaches that attempt to further understand specific aspects of behaviour by seeking to explore concepts introspective to the individual consumer rather than describe processes.

The cognitive models have been most popular, are well covered in generic Consumer Behaviour textbooks and portrayed as providing the best explanation of consumer

decision-making. The use of the approach by many writers to explain consumer behaviour in the UK higher education sector makes it appropriate for this study into the decision-making of African students regarding UK higher education. Knowing how prospective students make their decisions has become increasingly important for competing and surviving in the post-16 marketplace. Gaining insights into the main dimensions of buyer behaviour is important for marketers, managers and policy formulators in UK higher education (Moogan & Baron, 2003).

3.3.3 Characteristics affecting consumer behaviour

Although marketers cannot control the factors that affect consumer behaviour, they must understand and take them into account in order to be successful. The products and services that consumers purchase are significantly influenced by their cultural, social, personal and psychological characteristics.

- Culture: This refers to the set of basic values, perceptions, wants and behaviours learned by a member of society from family and other institutions (Kotler et al, 2008). Each culture contains smaller subcultures like nationalities, religions, racial groups and geographical regions. Most societies also have social classes; which are divisions whose members share similar values, interests and behaviours.

- Social factors: Consumer behaviour is also strongly influenced by a person's membership or reference group, their social role and their status (Kotler et al, 2008). Membership groups are groups to which a person belong and usually have a direct influence on their behaviour. Reference groups act as indirect point of comparison or reference in forming attitudes or behaviour. An individual's role or status in the groups to which they belong also influence their behaviour as consumers. Their role refers to the activities that they are expected to perform according to the persons around them, whilst their status refers to the general esteem given to the role by society.

- Personal factors: Personal characteristics such as the individual's age & life cycle stage, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, personality and self – concept also affect their buying decisions (Kotler et al, 2008). Family life cycle refers to the stages through which individuals in families might pass as they mature over time. Occupation refers to the nature of an individual's job and

normally determines the type of certain products (like clothes) that they buy. Economic situation relates to the amount of money available to the individual to spend and is normally linked to their occupation. Lifestyle refers to an individual's pattern of living as expressed in their activities, interests and opinions. Personality refers to an individual's unique psychological characteristics that enable them to respond consistently to their environment. Self – concept is the mental picture that people have of themselves.

- Psychological factors: Motivation, perception, learning and beliefs & attitudes are psychological factors that influence an individual's buying choices (Kotler et al, 2008). Motivation is the internal energy – giving force that directs an individual's activities towards satisfying a need or achieving a goal (Dibb et al, 2008). Perception refers to the way individuals select, organise and interpret information to produce meaning. Learning refers to changes in an individual's behaviour caused by information and experience. Beliefs are specific ideas or thoughts that an individual holds about something. Attitudes are "an individual's enduring evaluation, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards an object or activity" (Dibb et al, 2008).

Thus the consumer's choice in any particular situation results from the complex interplay of cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. Although the marketer cannot influence many of these factors, a proper understanding of them will enable the organisation to identify interested buyers and devise products and marketing messages to serve their needs better (Kotler et al, 2008).

3.3.4 Types of Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumers engage in decision-making behaviour when they make decisions about many products and services on a daily basis. The amount of time and effort that buyers expend in the decision-making process varies from situation to situation and from consumer to consumer depending on the nature of the product or service being purchased (Kotler et al, 2008). According to Kotler et al (2008), consumer decisions can be classifies into three broad categories:

- Routine Response Behaviour: This behaviour is practiced in situations where consumers are buying frequently purchased low – risk items that require very

little search and decision effort. Typical examples include bread, milk or a pack of sugar.

- Limited Decision-making: This behaviour is practised in situations where consumers buy products occasionally and when they need to obtain information about an unfamiliar brand in a familiar product category. This usually involves a moderate amount of time for information gathering and deliberation before taking a decision. Typical examples include a new computer game for a teenager.

- Extensive Decision-making: This most complex decision – making behaviour is required when a purchase involves unfamiliar, expensive, high risk or infrequently bought products or services. In such situations, the consumer uses a number of criteria to evaluate alternative brands and takes time to seek information and compare alternative brands before making the purchase decisions. Examples include cars, homes and foreign holidays.

The process of choosing which university to attend is a typical extensive decision-making situation that requires a significant amount of information and involves a significant amount of risk.

3.4 Consumer Decision-Making

This section will discuss the concept of consumer decision-making and its importance to the marketing activities of UK higher education institutions. It will discuss the work of other researchers on consumer decision-making in the sector and highlight the knowledge that is already available on the importance of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process for international students. This discussion will lead to the identification of the specific focus of the study and the knowledge gap that the study intends to fill.

3.4.1 Models of consumer decision-making

Kotler's "black box" was the simplest and one of the earliest theoretical forms of consumer decision models. It provided a simplified model that was focussed on exogenous variables and avoided any supposition associated with identifying processes and variables embedded in the minds of consumers (Lye et al, 2005).

According to Kotler et al (2008), the six questions in the buyer's black box are an excellent way of analysing consumer behaviour. They are: what do consumers buy; where do they buy; when do they buy; why do they buy; how do they buy and who buys.

Marketers must understand the answers to these questions in order to successfully predict how customers are likely to respond to the various marketing efforts their company might use (Kotler et al, 2008). According to Kotler et al (2008) the starting point for analysing consumer behaviour is the stimulus – response model of buyer behaviour (shown below):
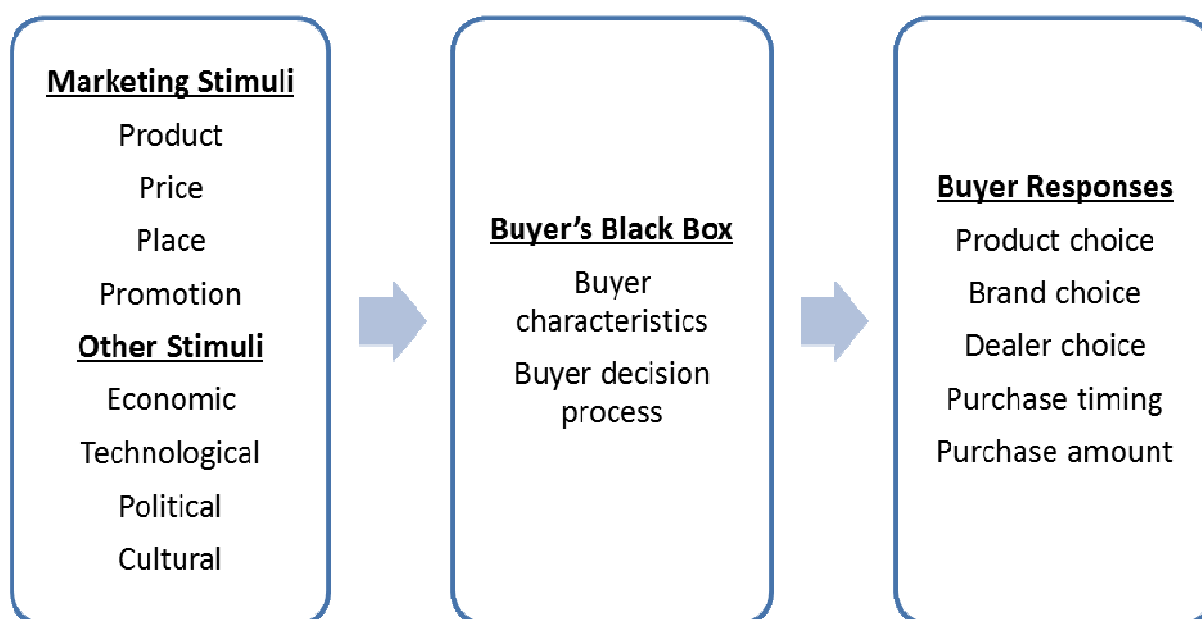
Figure 3.1: Stimulus – response model of buyer behaviour (Source: Kotler et al, 2008)

The model shows that marketing and other stimuli enter the consumer's 'black box' and produce certain responses. Marketing stimuli consist of the marketing mix (4 Ps or 7 Ps) and other major forces and events in the buyer's environment including economic, technological, political and cultural. These inputs enter the buyer's black box, where they are turned into a set of observable behaviour responses like product choice, brand choice, dealer choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. The marketer's task is to understand how the stimuli are changed into responses inside the consumer's black box which consists of the buyer's characteristics and his / her decision process (Kotler et al, 2008). The buyer's characteristics determine how he or she receives and reacts to the stimuli and the decision process affects the buyer's behaviour.

The early integrated models of consumer decision-making were mainly attempts to unpack the black box to provide an understanding of the internal consumer decision-making process for marketing purposes (Lye et al, 2005).

3.4.2 The Consumer Decision Process (CDP)

According to Solomon (2013) a purchase decision is composed of a series of stages that results in the selection of one product over competing options. Jobber (2010) states that how consumers buy may be regarded as a decision – making process beginning with the recognition that the problem exists. Blackwell et al (2006) described the consumer decision process (CDP) model as "a roadmap of consumers' minds that marketers and managers can use to help guide product mix, communication and sales strategies. The model was originally developed by Professors Engel, Kollat and Blackwell at the Ohio State University to analyse how individuals sort through facts and influences to make logical and consistent decisions. No one buys a product unless they have a problem, a need, or a want, and the model shows how people solve the everyday problems that cause them to buy and use all kinds of products (Blackwell et al, 2006).

The CDP model shows that consumers typically go through seven major stages when making decisions about products & services (Blackwell et al, 2006). These stages are:

1. Need recognition: The individual realises or recognises that something is missing in their life.

2. Search for information: The individual embarks on a search for information and solutions to satisfy the unmet need.

3. Pre – purchase evaluation of alternatives: The individual considers a number of possible alternatives for fulfilling or meeting the need.

4. Purchase: The individual select the appropriate product and pays for it.

5. Consumption: The individual uses the product for the purpose of fulfilling the need.

6. Post – consumption evaluation: The individual considers whether the product actually satisfied the need or not and whether they experienced any problems from its purchase and consumption.

7. Divestment: The individual disposes of the product, its packaging and any residue left from consuming the product.

According to Engel et al (1995) the main advantages of consumer decision-making models are: the possibility to illustrate visually what happens as variables and circumstances change; provides conceptual frames of reference that logically indicate the interrelationship of variables for research purposes; offer the possibility to understand different consumer decision processes and marketing strategies; and plays an important part in the establishment of theory.

Mohammadi & Mohamed (2011) outlined some of the objections against grand models like Engel et al:

- Consumers are not all rational people who spend a considerable amount of time to search information, evaluate alternatives and then choose the greatest product that best satisfy their need.

- Grand models generalise the decision-making process for any consumer process. Not all consumers go through extensive five or seven stages of decision-making.

- Grand models might be complicating a process that is quite straightforward as consumers probably proceed through the decision-making process much quicker than is suggested by traditional consumer decision-making models.

- Consumers are not always in ideal situations where they have all the required information for the evaluation stage. In many situations missing information and ill-defined possibilities force consumers to choose an alternative approach.

Debates about whether all customers pass through these seven stages and the popularity of the CDP concept over the years has led to the development of much more simplified versions that could be easily applied to a wider range of marketing situations. Marketers have realised that a proper understanding of the stages in the decision – making process can enable them to discover why people are or are not buying products and what can be done to get them to buy more or to buy from specific suppliers.

Kotler et al (2008) described the process that buyers pass through to reach a buying decision as comprising of five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behaviour. This simplified model implies that consumers pass through all five stages with every purchase; but with more routine purchases, consumers can skip or reverse some of the stages (Kotler et al, 2008).
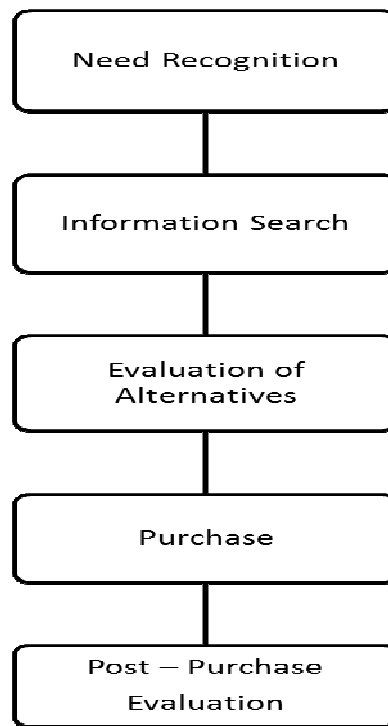
Figure 3.2: Consumer Decision-making Process (Source: Kotler et al, 2008)

1. Problem / Need recognition: The individual recognises a problem or need when there is a difference between a desired state and an actual condition (Dibb et al, 2008). According to Blythe (2009) a need is felt when there is a divergence between the person's actual state and their desired state. The extent of the difference between the two states usually determines the level of motivation the individual feels to do something about the problem, and this will in many cases be influenced by a number of external factors. Need recognition can occur if the individual runs out of a product, buys a product that does not adequately satisfy their needs or realises that he or she has a new need or desire (Solomon, 2013). It has also become possible over the past few decades for marketers to use the marketing mix to bring a problem to the consumer's attention (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006).

2. Information search: Information search is the process by which an individual surveys the environment for appropriate data in order to make a reasonable decision (Solomon, 2013). At this stage the individual identifies alternative ways of solving the problem. An internal search involves a review of relevant information from the individual's memory and would include potential solutions, methods of comparing solutions and reference to personal experiences

and marketing communications (Jobber, 2010). An external search is normally undertaken if a satisfactory solution is not found during the internal search. According to Kotler et al (2008), the consumer can obtain information from several external sources including personal sources (family, friends & neighbours), commercial sources (advertising, salespeople and the Internet), public sources (mass media & consumer – rating organisations) and experiential sources (handling, examining and using the product). The main aim of this stage is to build up the awareness set – that is, the array of brands or alternatives that may provide a solution to the problem. According to Brassington & Pettit (2006), in the process of choosing a university, many overseas students seek advice from friends who may have studied at various institutions to narrow down the number of options to consider.

3. Evaluation of alternatives: The first step in the process of evaluation is to reduce the awareness set to a smaller set of brands for serious consideration (Jobber, 2010). The evoked set are those brands that the consumer seriously considers before making a purchase. When evaluating this shortlist of brands, the buyer establishes criteria for comparing the products according to the characteristics or features that he or she wants or does not want (Dibb et al, 2006). The buyer also assigns a certain salience, or level of importance to each criterion, according to their personal requirement. The buyer then uses the criteria and their salience to rank each brand in the evoked set by comparing the brands with each other as well as with the criteria. Further information search may be necessary if the evaluation process does not produce a brand that the buyer wishes to purchase. Jobber (2010) stressed that a key determinant of the extent to which consumers evaluate a brand is their level of involvement. This is the degree of perceived relevance and personal importance accompanying the brand choice.

4. Purchase decision: This is when the individual chooses which product or brand to purchase; mainly based on the outcome of their evaluation of the alternatives (Kotler et al, 2008). According to Kotler et al (2008), although the consumer's purchase decision will be to buy the most preferred brand, two factors can come between the purchase intention and the purchase decision. These factors are the attitudes of others and unexpected situations. The level to which another person's attitudes will affect an individual's choice will depend both on the strength of the other person's attitude towards the buying decision and the

individual's motivation to comply with that person's wishes. Unexpected situation factors can include loss of job or income and change in the individual's spending priorities at that period in their lives. In the absence of these factors, the individual will purchase the product or brand that they have chosen.

5. Post-purchase behaviour: This is the stage at which the buyer evaluates the product to determine whether he or she needs to take further action based on the extent to which the performance meets their expectation (Kotler et al, 2008). Satisfaction occurs when consumers' expectations are matched by perceived product performance and dissatisfaction occurs when experiences and performance fall short of expectations (Blackwell et al, 2006). The level of satisfaction will generally determine whether they make a complaint, communicate with other prospective buyers or purchase the product in future. The extent to which they are angered by the outcome of a purchase also determines how they will behave in the future (Dibb et al, 2006). The recent growth in the number of websites with customer reviews on different products and services has significantly increased the importance of this stage to marketers.

Although the consumer buying decision process has proved popular with most marketers, there are a number of issues with the model (Dibb et al, 2006). Firstly, the purchase of the product is only one stage in the entire process. This is because the process usually begins several stages and in some situations several months or years before the purchase itself. Secondly, contrary to the diagrammatic representation, not all decision processes lead to a purchase. It is also possible for the individual to stop the process at any time or follow a sequence of stages that is different from the diagram. Finally, some consumer decisions do not always include all the five stages in the model. Although people involved in extensive decision - making usually go through all stages of the process, those engaged in routine response behaviour and limited decision – making will omit certain stages.

The researcher's decision to use Kotler's five – stage consumer decision-making process for this study into the decision-making of African students in UK higher education is based on the fact that there is general consensus amongst researchers in the sector that the model adequately reflects the stages that prospective students go through

in choosing a university. Major studies that use Kotler's model include Moogan & Baron (2003), Rudd et al (2012), Brown et al (2009), Moogan et al (1999), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Moogan (2011) and Moogan et al (2001).

3.4.3 Consumer Decision-making in the UK Higher Education Sector

In recent years higher education institutions have become increasingly interested in the factors underlying student choices, mainly as a result of recent government policies aimed at increasing marketisation in the sector (Manthorpe et al, 2010). There is still a lot to learn about how potential students attend to, absorb and store data in order to arrive at logical and rational decisions on choice of college / university (Moogan et al, 1991). Research into student consumer behaviour and market intelligence is needed in order to improve the information on segmentation in the sector (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Considering the time spent and the complexity and variety of the choices involved, the decision on which university to attend can only be classified as extensive problem solving.

Extensive or extended problem – solving decisions entail a high degree of information search and close examination of alternative solutions using many choice criteria (Jobber 2010). The search for information focusses not only on which brand or model to purchase, but also on where to make the purchase. Jobber (2010) stated that extended problem solving is usually associated with three conditions: the alternatives are differentiated and numerous; there is an adequate amount of time available for deliberation; and the purchase has a high degree of involvement. Jobber (2010) also cited the work of Laurent & Kapferer (1985) who identified the four factors that affect involvement as:

1. Self-image: Involvement is likely to be high when the decision potentially affects the individual's self – image.

2. Perceived risk: Involvement is likely to be high when the perceived risk of making a mistake is high.

3. Social factors: Involvement is likely to be high when social acceptance is dependent upon making a correct choice.

4. Hedonistic influences: Involvement is likely to be high when the purchase is capable of providing a high degree of pleasure.

Thus it is not difficult to see why the decision on which university to attend is best classified as extensive problem solving.

Foskett & Hemsley – Brown (2001) stated that potential applicants must choose a higher education 'package' in relation to a number of choice fields. These are the nature of the course in terms of subject content and approach to teaching and learning; the location of the programme in terms of the institution or organisation through which the programme is delivered; the mode of participation, in terms of the choice between full – time and part – time or between classroom and other modes of delivery; socio – economic decisions relating to the direct costs of higher education participation and the long – term economic and social benefits of a university degree and personal lifestyle decisions relating to the short – term and long – term implication of participating in higher education.

An examination of the features of the UK university application process highlights the challenges faced by typical consumers (prospective students) of higher education in this extensive problem – solving situation (Moogan et al, 1999). Most prospective undergraduate students initially select five institutions when they submit their applications in October or January (depending on choice of university and course); eight to eleven months prior to possible entry. They are then forced to narrow their choices to two institutions (firm & insurance) about three to four months before the date of entry. As most of them do not know what their examination grades will be until about six weeks before the start date, they are making decisions based on obtaining the required grades in their examinations. Whilst they are making these decisions about what and where to study, they will not be able to experience university life until they obtain a definite place and enrol at that particular institution (Moogan et al, 1999). In the unfortunate event that the student fails to meet the conditions of both offers they may choose to go through 'clearing', which involves ringing up different universities in the hope of finding a place on a suitable course. Brown et al (2009) stated that the variety of decision influences (fees & cost of living, career prospects, post – university debt and institutional reputation) all conspire to emphasise the fact that university choice is a high involvement decision with a significant level of perceived risk.

At a basic level, the complexity of the UK system for securing a place on an undergraduate degree programme and the relationship between the university and the prospective student is not really one of a simple purchase based on a rational or structured decision-making process. Briggs & Wilson (2007) stated that the picture of students as 'autonomous choosers' who make decisions on whether to apply for university and which university to attend can be challenged. James (1999) stated that some students have no choice because the institution selects them, they don't select the institution. Other studies describe the student – choice decision-making as a complex process influenced by numerous factors including cost, information, access, academic achievement and life & school experience. However, based on the fact that about 45% of Advanced Level grades are predicted correctly (Hayward et al, 2005) and a good proportion of other applicants eventually make the decision on which university to attend, there is reasonable basis for treating the UK higher education sector as a market in which prospective students as consumers make rational decisions about which university to attend.

3.4.2.1 International Students Decision-making

Cubillo et al (2006) proposed a theoretical model of international students' decision – making process that had purchase intention as an independent variable that depends on five factors. The conscious or unconscious consideration of these five factors by the prospective student determines their final choice. The five factors identified are personal reasons, the effect of country image, the effect of city image, the institution image and the evaluation of the programme of study (Cubillo et al, 2006).

- Personal reasons relate to the specific core benefits that students expect from the programme (Cubillo et al, 2006). This comprises of the need for personal improvement and the recommendation / advice of family members, friends and tutors. The main personal factors influencing students' decisions include future job / earnings prospects, higher status, enhance career prospects and the need to improve language skills.

- Country image effect refers to the picture, reputation and stereotype that consumers attach to products or services of a particular country (Cubillo et al, 2006). The aspects of country image include cultural distance, social reputation, academic reputation, development level, cost of living, immigration procedures, time to obtain the degree and opportunity of working during the course.

- City image effect refers to the perception of prospective international students about the environment in which the service will be produced and consumed (Cubillo et al, 2006). Aspects of city image include city dimension, cost of living, linguistic proximity or distance, safety / security, social facilities, international environment and university environment.

- Institution image refers to the composite of opinions, ideas and impressions that prospective students have of the institution (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Aspects of the institution's image include the institution's prestige, ranking position, brand reputation, academic reputation, research reputation, quality reputation, expertise of teaching staff, campus atmosphere and campus facilities.

- Programme evaluation refers to the attitude of prospective students towards specific programmes in terms of their suitability compared to programmes being offered by other institutions (Cubillo et al, 2006). The aspects of programme evaluation include international recognition, programme suitability, programme specialisation, quality programmes, total cost and recognition by future employers.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) outlined the three distinct stages through which international students move when making decisions about overseas higher education.

At stage one, the student makes the decision to study internationally rather than locally (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This decision is said to be influenced by a number of push factors within the home country. Push factors operate within the source country and initiate an individual's decision to undertake international study (Pimpa, 2003). McMahon (1992) identified the main 'push' factors as the level of economic development within the source country, its relative engagement with the world economy, the emphasis placed on education in the source country and the availability of appropriate education opportunities locally. Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) identified the factors as the perception that an overseas course of study is better than a local one, difficulty in gaining entry to particular study programmes locally, unavailability of the programme that the student wants to study in the home country, a desire to gain a better understanding of western culture and an intention to migrate after graduation. In their study of the decision-making of African students in UK higher education, Maringe & Carter (2007) identified the most significant push factors as economic, political and lack

of local capacity within countries of origin. Economic factors relate to the prevailing level of economic stagnation or decline in the home countries and the desire of students to escape poverty and human degradation. Political factors relate to political instability in many parts of Africa and the challenges of building a good life under such circumstances. Some students are also pushed out of their countries on account of inadequate higher education capacity to meet demand for places in existing home institutions. After making the decision to study overseas prospective students must select a host country. The British Council Student Insight Report for Nigeria identified the important factors being considered by prospective higher education students in the decision to study overseas as better quality of education / course overseas, to improve career prospects and cultural experience of living overseas (British Council, 2013).

At stage two, the student makes the decision about the country or destination in which to study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). "Pull" factors that make one host country more attractive than another become more important at this stage. They operate within a host country to make the country relatively attractive to international students. Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) suggested that six factors influence the selection of the host country. These factors provide a framework for understanding the influences that motivate a student's selection of a host country:

- Knowledge and awareness: This is the students' level of knowledge and awareness about the destination country as a place to study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). It is influenced by the overall availability of information on the host country as a study destination and the ease with which students can obtain this information. The host country's reputation for quality and the recognition of its qualifications in the prospective student's home country also form part of this factor.
- Recommendations: This is the importance of the influence that personal recommendations or referrals from parents, relatives, friends and other gatekeepers have on the prospective students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).
- Cost issues: This is the importance of the cost of fees, living expenses, travel costs and social costs on the decision of the overseas student in selecting a particular host country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). The presence of an established group of international students in the host country and the availability of part – time work are also considered under this heading.

95

- Environment: This is the importance of the student's perceptions about the study climate in the host country, including its climate and lifestyle (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

- Geographical proximity: This is the importance of geographic and time proximity of the potential destination country to the student's home country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001).

- Social links: This is the importance of the presence of family or friends that are already studying or living in the potential destination country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Potential students also consider whether family and friends have previously studied in the host country.

Maringe & Carter (2007) identified a number of pull factors that make the UK an attractive study destination for African students. Firstly, African students believe strongly that UK higher education qualifications enjoy international recognition and that acquiring it will be a lifetime investment and opportunity. Secondly, the application process is simple and straightforward compared to the US university application process. Thirdly, African students appreciate the excellent teaching and learning environments in the UK higher education sector and exposure to an international educational experience. The British Council Student Insight Report for Nigeria (2013) identified the important factors being considered by prospective higher education students in the decision about study destination as quality of education, internationally recognised qualification, career prospects, university reputation and opportunity for employment while studying.

At stage three, the student selects an institution at which to study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) found that the most important issue for international students at this stage was whether their qualifications on graduation would be recognised. The other variables that were found to be important to international students are the quality and reputation of the institution, the institution's links or alliances with other institutions familiar to the student, the quality of the institution's staff, the alumni base and its word of mouth referral process, its existing international student population and whether the institution is willing to recognise the student's previous qualifications (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Daily et al (2010) found that the factors that were most important to international students pursuing a business degree in the US are post –

graduation employment opportunities, availability of financial aid and reputation of the institution. Maringe & Carter (2007) identified the pull factors for African students at the institutional and course programme level as course availability, post qualification employment data, post qualification progression data, institutional research / teaching profile, labour market data and accommodation costs and availability. They noted that for African students applying from home countries, choice of institution is not as important as the decision to come to the UK due to positive brand association through which UK higher education appears to be based on the Oxbridge perception. The British Council Student Insight Report for Nigeria (2013) identified the important factors being considered by prospective higher education students in selecting an institution as quality of the course, career prospects, low tuition fees and institution reputation.

3.4.4 The Decision-making Process

Higher education decision-making is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices and models of decision-making have been developed around their purchase behaviour (Maringe, 2006). Chapman (1986) applied buying behaviour theory to education suggesting that in selecting a subject of study or institution, students and their parents pass through a number of uniquely definable stages. The stages are pre – purchase behaviour, search behaviour, application stage, choice decision and registration. The first stage involves early thoughts about their futures as students passively register the existence of information about higher education to which they are exposed. At the second stage, students have already made a shortlist of potential providers and begin to use a variety of information sources to make up their minds whilst looking for data relating to a wide range of decision criteria. At the third stage, applicants submit their applications to the selected institutions. The fourth stage marks the acceptance of the offer from the institution by the student. Many students tend to hold multiple offers at this stage. At the fifth stage, the applicant turns up at the institution for registration. However, some students turn down the offer within the first few days of arriving at the institution.

Several studies including Moogan et al (1999), Moogan & Baron (2003) and Brown et al (2009) applied Kotler's five stage model to evaluate the decision-making process that prospective students go through in the process of choosing a university. A discussion of

some of the previous work that has been done will provide a good context for evaluating the role of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process:

Stage 1: Problem Recognition

At this stage, a gap exists between the ideal state and the actual state. The ideal state is the position the prospective student would like to be in and the actual state is their current perception of their present situation. They must therefore decide whether or not to fill this gap. The larger the disparity between these two states, the greater the level of motivation, ability and opportunity, then the more likely they are to act (Moogan et al, 2001). This is the stage at which young people recognise the need for higher education. Brown et al (2009) stated that when students identify a university course as their next goal, the problem recognised is that of making the best possible choice that will allow them to achieve their goals. Moogan et al (1999) outlined these goals as being both personal benefits (including meeting friends & independence) and intellectual benefits (including increased knowledge, intended career & well – paid jobs). Moogan & Baron (2003) observed that students will only fill the gap if it appears attractive to them and if their choices are within their reach. They found that earnings capacity was ranked in first position in terms of priorities whilst social life was seen to be the least influential, except for high achieving students who emphasised that the social aspect of university were of interest to them. They also stated that the desired earnings capacity will only be achieved if the student perceives the benefits of extending their education to outweigh the costs of doing so. The impact which parents, especially those with relatively wealthy backgrounds can have on the decision of their offsprings to continue studying was also recognised as strong. They noted that an increasing number of middle – class parents that have attended university want the same for their children. This is especially true in situations where parents are paying the fees (Clarke & Brown, 1998) and often cause students to start thinking about their education earlier than those whose parents have no experience of university education. In their study of the factors influencing the decisions of academically successful post – 16 students, Whitehead et al (2006) found that anticipating enjoying student life, training for a particular career and responding to encouragement to go into higher education were the main motivations for students.

Stage 2: Information Search

This is the stage at which young people use a variety of sources to gather the information required to make the right decision regarding their university education. They may search for information from within their memory and / or externally from outside sources. Most of them will have no previous experience of higher education, so in order to make the best possible choice they will research the sector by whatever means available (Moogan et al, 2001). Moogan (2011) found that information searches on higher education institutions commenced within the first year of post – 16 education, with more than 65% actively looking for information before starting upper sixth form. Veloutsou et al (2005) found that the main information requirements of final year (year 13) students were: the perceived university's offerings & reputation, the opportunities to develop a social life and accommodation. Moogan et al (1999) found that at the initial stage, prospective students are mainly interested in evaluations of course content, location, reputation and entrance requirements. Both Moogan et al (1999) and Veloutsou et al (2005) confirmed that prospective students use information gained from word of mouth, parents & friends to test out the social and educational benefits offered by universities. Wasmer et al (1997) found that information can become more credible if it is accessed through current students or staff when at the institution. Although league tables have become much popular in recent years, Bowden (2000) found that the range of methodologies and variables used by the main producers negated their benefits to prospective students as they do not provide the key information that will assist them with making informed choices about where to study. Briggs (2006) found that in most cases students' perceptions of universities are more important than their league table positioning.

Veloutsou et al (2005) outlined the three groups of information sources that applicants use when selecting a university:

- Controllable sources of information: These are the wide range of communication devises that universities employ in their effort to reach and influence potential students (Veloutsou et al, 2005). Universities bombard high school pupils, tutors & career advisers with printed promotional material including glossy prospectuses, brochures and promotional DVDs. Open days are also organised for prospective students and their parents. Universities also participate in international education exhibitions where they provide information to

prospective international students in their home country. The university's website on the Internet is an important means for geographically remote students to access university and course information.

- Non – controllable sources of information: These are the wide range of other sources from which prospective students obtain information about higher education institutions (Veloutsou et al, 2005). Informal sources including family, friends, counsellors / career advisers, teachers and university admission officers represent a significant source of reliable information for potential students during the decision-making process. Various national and international news media also provide a great deal of information regarding both institution and degree selection criteria. The league tables published by various organisations are also being consulted by applicants and their parents.

- Partly controllable & partly non – controllable sources of information: Web – based sources include a number of sources that are partly controllable and partly non – controllable (Veloutsou et al, 2005). Whilst universities have control over the information displayed on their websites and on other sites that they use for promoting their programmes, the information displayed on most other sites that are used by students & alumni to air their views on their university experiences are non – controllable.

The table below provides a summary of findings from some previous studies:

Study	Focus / Respondents	Information sources
Moogan (2011)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Prospectuses, university websites, UCAS handbook, faculty leaflets & league tables
Moogan & Baron (2003)	UK Higher education: students at FE colleges	Prospectuses, library materials, HE career fairs & Internet
Brown et al (2009)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Prospectuses, open days, league tables & Internet
Moogan et al (1999)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Prospectuses, career advisers, UCAS handbook, open days & word of mouth (parents & friends)
Dawes & Brown (2003)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Prospectuses, UCAS handbook, open days, course brochures, friends, career teachers, university websites, HE career fairs, university staff, family members,

		independent university guides & university staff visits
Manthorpe et al (2010)	UK Higher education: applicants for social work programmes	University websites, friends / relatives, careers websites, specialist magazines, careers booklet, newspaper specialist supplements, careers staff & open days
Briggs & Wilson (2007)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Prospectuses, open days, word of mouth, website, league tables, careers service, careers teachers, careers convention, newspaper features and peer influence
Donaldson & McNicholas (2004)	UK postgraduate market: first year postgraduate students	Word of mouth, open evening, prospectuses, websites, course information leaflets, directories and faculty information booklets
British Council (2013)	UK & Overseas Higher Education: Prospective students in Nigeria	Internet, British Council, institution's websites / prospectus, exhibitions & search engines.

Table 3.1: Information sources used by prospective HE students

Previous studies found that the sources from which prospective students obtained information about UK university education are prospectuses, university websites, friends/relatives, careers websites, league tables, career services, career teachers/advisers, word of mouth, open days/evenings, careers conventions, newspapers, courses information leaflets/brochures, directories, faculty information booklets, university staff, independent university guides, careers booklets, UCAS handbook, Internet, exhibitions, search engines, British Council and library materials.

Moogan & Baron (2003) stated that the prospectus is the starting point for many students and that there was an increased chance of students reading prospectuses that seem colourful and interesting. They ranked university prospectuses as the most important source, followed by library materials (UCAS books & leaflets) and HE career fairs. Dawes & Brown (2003) also cited university prospectuses & UCAS handbook as most important, followed by open days and course specific brochures. Brown et al (2009) cited the Internet as the most important source, followed by prospectuses, university open days and league tables. This was supported by the work of British Council (2013) which also cited the Internet as the most important source of

information for prospective international students. Manthorpe et al (2010) cited university websites as the most commonly consulted source of information, whilst Moogan et al (1999) identified word of mouth as a frequent source of information, with parents and friends often being consulted. There seems to be general agreement about the importance of the prospectus as a major source of information for prospective UK higher education students, with international students getting access to it through the university website.

Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives

At this phase, the student considers the competing sets of brands and their features. This involves allocating a level of importance to each alternative which will be affected by individual differences as well as environmental differences (Moogan et al, 2001). For prospective UK undergraduates, this is an extensive process of cross – referencing data from various sources in order to limit their choices to two as required by the UCAS system. Moogan et al (1999) found that this stage took about two months and was difficult for prospective students because of the sheer number of universities & variety of courses, the amount of information to read, the issues associated with living away from home, lack of experience at making choices and lack of assistance. It often incorporates students assessing different institutions' characteristics by visiting them in order to be sure that they are making the right choice. Brown et al (2009) found that the process was undertaken in markedly different ways depending on the student's desired course and/or career orientation. Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) highlighted the challenge that applicants experience in trying to determine how good a particular course is in a sector where every institution presents themselves as outstanding in their promotional literature. When institutions look similar on paper, then potential students will adopt a search satisfying strategy and choose the one that satisfies some of their major needs (Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004). Through the process of information gathering the prospective student forms a clearer picture of the main available choices and eliminates certain alternatives in order to move towards making a choice among the few remaining alternatives which form the evoked set. Only institutions that form part of the evoked set have any chance of being selected.

The table below provides a summary of previous findings on the most important factors that influence the decisions of prospective university students:

Study	Focus / Respondents	Most Important Factors
Moogan (2011)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Teaching quality, course content, reputation & research quality
Moogan & Baron (2003)	UK Higher education: students at FE colleges	Course content, location & reputation
Brown et al (2009)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Course of study, university open days & location
Moogan et al (1999)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Location, course content, grade requirements & university facilities
Manthorpe et al (2010)	UK Higher education: applicants for social work programmes	Reputation for teaching, academic reputation & location
Maringe (2006)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Programme (course of study), price, place (location) & prominence (reputation)
Daily et al (2010)	US Business Schools: International students	Post – graduation employment, availability of financial aid & reputation of institution
Mazzarol & Soutar (2002)	Australian Higher Education: International students	Recognition of qualifications, quality/reputation of institution, international strategic alliances of institution, quality of staff, alumni base & existing international student population.
Maringe & Carter (2007)	UK Higher Education: African students	Course availability, post – qualification employment & progression, research / teaching profile, labour market data & accommodation costs / availability
British Council (2013)	UK & Overseas Higher Education: Prospective students in Nigeria	Quality of the course, career prospects, low tuition fees & institution reputation.

Table 3.2: Most important factors that influence the decisions of prospective university students

Based on these studies, the most important factors that prospective UK undergraduate students consider in the choice of a university are course of study / content, location and reputation. Teaching quality, research quality, open days and grade requirements are also considered by prospective students. The two most recent studies (Moogan, 2011 & Manthorpe et al, 2010) indicate that academic reputation and teaching quality are becoming much more important to prospective students than location. It will be

interesting to see whether this trend which might be connected to getting the best degree for the fees paid continues under the new funding regime.

For international students research conducted in the US & Australia (Daily et al, 2010 and Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) found that reputation & quality of institution, career prospects, recognition of qualifications, availability of financial aid (cost) and international student population are some of the factors being considered at this stage. The findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) & British Council (2013) which indicate that the most important factors for African students are course availability & quality, career prospects, institution's reputation and costs are broadly in line with this.

Stage 4: Purchase Decision

At this stage potential UK undergraduate students receive responses from all their universities and decide on their firm and insurance choices. They then decide on which offer to accept when their results are released in mid / late August. Brown et al (2009) found that three new factors influenced the decision – making process at this stage: post – application visit day experiences, responses from universities and the role of scholarships & bursaries. This supports the findings of Moogan et al (1999) who also cited the importance of post – application visit days. They found that many prospective students noted the open – days' organisation, structure and personnel as creating the biggest impression. Visit days were seen as important by prospective students because they provided an opportunity to talk to lecturers and to assess the "character" of the institution and the extent to which they might feel comfortable studying there (Brown et al, 2009). The receipt of the initial offer was found to be significant to prospective students by Brown et al (2009). All the respondents in their study agree that the excitement and relief associated with this communication had often led them to accept the initial offer as their first choice.

For international students who are normally still in their home countries at this stage of the decision-making process, there is very little previous research available on the factors that they consider at this stage. The various fairs / exhibitions organised by the British Council and other organisations in major cities overseas can provide an opportunity for them to meet with faculty & marketing personnel from different UK

universities to obtain the information that they need to make their decision on where to study.

Stage 5: Post purchase behaviour

This is perhaps the most complex and subjective stage of the process as it involves evaluating the university experience to decide whether further action needs to be taken based on levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Vrontis et al (2007) observed that although the needs and wants of consumers are diverse, the fundamental question of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is very similar. The evaluation was said to be subjective and differentiated by the greater relative weight placed on the shopping & product experience, and the social & aesthetic factors. They noted the importance of the mass word – of – mouth effect, especially through the increasing number of Internet sites that provide users' evaluations of their university experiences. This is another area where there is currently very little research evidence available on the behaviour of international students.

Although Brown et al (2009), Moogan et al (1999 & 2001) and Moogan & Baron (2003) provide some evidence for the efficacy of the application of Kotler's model to decision-making in the higher education sector, there are still a few issues with its use. Brown et al (2009) observed that students aiming for the top universities will engage in greater levels of search and use different criteria. There are also very few studies that outline the extent to which candidates interested in different courses exhibit different choice behaviours. The increasing importance of studying close to home (Manthorpe et al, 2010) to reduce costs might also mean that some students spend little time on the process and choose from a much smaller number of alternatives. Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) observed that postgraduates do not always behave like rational consumers by engaging in extensive information search and evaluation. They found that in practice postgraduates did not collect published information on many courses and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each, but tended to already have a course in mind or to choose from just two. Those who criticise consumer behaviour disagree with the assumption that all decision-making is rational and based on careful information processing. Chisnall (1997) suggest that considering decision-making as a rational and sequential process is an oversimplification. Solomon (2002) suggest that many young people do not have the patience and discipline to consider information so

meticulously in the decision-making process and that for many chance factors play a major role in choosing their destinies.

3.4.5 Interpersonal Influences in the Decision-making Process

Arnould et al (2005:585) defined interpersonal influence as "altered thinking or behaviour as a result of other's accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communications". The influence may be conscious or unconscious, but may also occur accidentally. It recognises the fact that even when people do not intend to, most of their actions and words stimulate something in the minds of others. Interpersonal influence acknowledges that it is through communication with others that people develop, cultivate, share, expand and reshape their ideas and behaviours. It touches on many arenas of everyday lives and has been recognised as one of the most potent factors affecting human behaviours. Arnould et al (2005) identified several points about interpersonal influence:

- It can be either intentional or accidental, verbal or nonverbal
- Knowledge about interpersonal processes comes from many sources, including people's own observations and experiences
- People are all personally vulnerable to influence processes
- People are influenced by others, partly because it makes their lives more efficient, more comfortable, easier and more successful.

In a study into the role of interpersonal sources in external search, Price & Feick (1984) found that knowledgeable friends, relatives or acquaintances are more capable of being providers of impartial, current, digested and interpretable information than any other single source. This is especially the case where the costs of a poor decision are high and the product / service in question is complex. The incentive to use the judgement of a knowledgeable interpersonal source in such situations is substantial. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) observed that for complicated services like international education interpersonal influence and recommendation from family members are among the most important sources of information and encouragement.

Several studies acknowledge the role and importance of interpersonal sources (friends, parents, teachers, careers officers, family members, university representatives, etc.) in the process of making decisions about higher education; especially at the information search and evaluation of alternative stages. Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) found that impersonal information sources such as advertising in the mass media are not as

important as personal sources, especially course tutors. They identified the most important sources of information as word – of – mouth from tutors, family & friends, alumni & open evening. They concluded that students will seek endorsements from trusted sources when choosing a university, especially from current or ex – students as such recommendations create tangibility for the university and its benefits. Dawes & Brown (2003) found that the largest group of information sources used by prospective students were friends, careers teachers, brothers / sisters & parents. Durkin & McKenna (2011) observed that at a general level prospective students showed relatively low awareness of university advertising and relied heavily on family & friends for information on higher education offerings. Nicholls et al (1995) in their study of the marketing of MBA programmes also found that personal recommendation was the main source of information for prospective students.

Moogan & Baron (2003) identified interpersonal sources as influencers on the decision-making process of choosing what to study and where to attend because prospective students are often inexperienced individuals still living at home and attending school with neither well – defined choice criteria nor any knowledge of the various brands available. Friends, parents, subject teachers and careers officers can all influence the decisions of prospective students. Moogan et al (1999) found that the evaluation of alternatives stage incorporated discussions with trustworthy individuals such as subject teachers, parents and friends in order to check what the universities offered in terms of educational and social benefits. They stated that "the acquisition of word of mouth information acts as a risk reducing strategy for those embarking on higher education, which by nature requires a great deal of involvement with the student as consumer.

Study	Focus / Respondents	Interpersonal Influences
Durkin & McKenna (2011)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Friends & family
Nicholls et al (1995)	UK Higher education: MBA students	Personal contacts
Moogan (2011)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Teachers, family & friends
Moogan et al (1999)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Parents & friends
Dawes & Brown (2003)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Friends, career teachers, siblings, mother & father
Manthorpe et al (2010)	UK Higher education: applicants for social work programmes	Friends & family members
Donaldson & McNicholas	UK postgraduate market: first	Course tutors, family &

(2004)	year postgraduate students	friends and alumni
Maringe (2006)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Teachers & parents

Table 3.3: Interpersonal influences for prospective university students

Previous studies found that the interpersonal sources that were most influential for prospective university students in the process of making their decision are friends, family members/parents/siblings, teachers/course tutors, career teachers, personal contacts and alumni. Whilst all these and other studies acknowledge the importance of interpersonal sources, they disagree on the issue of which source is most important. Maringe (2006) identified teachers as the most important influencers of the student's decision and parents as the least important. This view is supported by Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) who also cited word of mouth from tutors as the most influential. Moogan et al (1999) found word of mouth from parents a much more frequent source of information than friends. Moogan (2011) found that teachers & family / friends were equally important as sources of information in the decision-making process. The findings of Dawes & Brown (2003) supports a previous study by Riggs & Lewis (1980) that individual student choices were most strongly influenced by friends rather than by the views of school teachers & parents.

3.4.5.1 Interpersonal Influences for International Students

Choosing to study in a foreign country is a high risk decision for many students and would be classified as requiring 'extensive problem solving' (Maringe & Carter, 2007).

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) in their study of the factors motivating international student choice found that word – of – mouth referral is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use. They stated that parents and relatives that have graduated from a particular institution and enjoyed the experience are likely to recommend it to their children, other family members and friends. Recruitment agents who have graduated from particular institutions also tend to make good advocates for that institution. They found that the decision to study abroad was frequently a family decision that involved several decision makers, with parental influence particularly strong among undergraduate students. In their study of Taiwanese students' decision – making regarding Australian higher education, Chen & Zimitat

(2006) found that the most important factor shaping the students' intention to study in Australia relate to beliefs, but intentions to study in the United States are influenced mostly by family and peers. Rudd et al (2012) found that Chinese students listened to friends' advice when making their decision to study at a Business School in the UK. They are influenced by the friends' own experience of western university life and the stories they were told about other people's experiences. Family members were also involved in the decision-making process. Recommendation from family members, friends & acquaintances who have also studied overseas is one of the most important factors that influence the decision of international students about destinations & institutions (Krampf & Heinlein, 1981; Turner, 1998; Bourke, 2000). Pimpa (2003) found that expectation from parents & siblings had a great impact on the decision of Thai students to study abroad. The impact from family members was found to be multidimensional in the sense that it influences other choices in international education beyond the decision to study abroad and the choice of university. A study by Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003) into the international marketing of British education concluded that the best promotional strategies for attracting international students into the UK from respondents' countries are interpersonal sources; especially alumni, friends and relatives.

Study	Focus / Respondents	Interpersonal Influences
Chen & Zimitat (2006)	Australian Higher Education: Taiwanese students	Family & friends
Bhati & Anderson (2012)	Overseas Study Destination: Indian Students	Agents
Pimpa (2003)	Influence of Family on Student Choices: Thai students	Family members
Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003)	UK Higher Education: International students in the UK	Alumni, friends & relatives
Rudd et al (2012)	UK Higher Education: Chinese students	Friends & family members
Mazzarol & Soutar (2002)	International Students Destination Choice: Students from Indonesia, Taiwan, India & China	Parents, family members & alumni
Maringe & Carter (2007)	UK Higher Education: African Students	Friends, teachers, informal agencies & family members
Hulme et al (2013)	UK Higher Education: African students	Agents
British Council (2013)	UK & Overseas Higher Education: Prospective students in Nigeria	Family members, friends, career advisors & agents.

Table 3.4: Interpersonal influences for prospective international students

Previous studies identified the most influential interpersonal sources for prospective international students applying to UK higher education institutions as family members/relatives, friends, agents, career advisors, informal agencies, teachers and alumni. Bhati & Anderson (2012) identified the important role played by agents in the decision – making process of Indian students aspiring to study abroad, with 26% of them having relied on the advice of agents in selecting the course, the university and the study destination. They found that 73% of the respondents had sought the assistance of an education agent in India to help with their decision – making process in choosing an institute to study as well as a destination. In a survey of the African students enrolled on a programme at a UK university, Hulme et al (2013) found that all of those who responded had been recruited via the services of an agent. Almost all of them had been put in contact with an agent by a friend or colleague. All the students acknowledged the importance of the role of the agent in the admission process.

A British Council (2013) study into the decision-making process for prospective international students in Nigeria identified the main sources of influence on the decision to study overseas as employer (53.1%), parents (17.3%) & Agents (4.9%). The main sources of recommendation on institution included family members, friends, career advisors & agents. A recent study into the decision-making process for international students in UK higher education identified family members and agents as the most influential sources for Nigerian undergraduates (UK HE International Unit, 2015). In their study of the choice & decision-making of African students in UK higher education, Maringe & Carter (2007) acknowledged the importance of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process. Students who were already in the country referred to networks of influence including teachers and friends who told them good things about their chosen institutions. Those coming to study in the UK for the first time relied on informal agencies in their home country as well as British Council offices and embassies. Family members who had previously studied in the UK were also influential in the decision-making process. They identified friends' recommendations as the most powerful influence in the decision of those coming to study in the UK for the first time.

3.5 Specific Focus of the Study

This section explains the specific focus of the study and identifies the knowledge gap that the study intends to fill.

Although several previous studies have highlighted the role of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process, there is no consensus on which specific source is most important. Some of the studies (Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Dawes & Brown, 2003 and Morgan, 2011) only cite the use of interpersonal sources at the information search stage along with other sources like prospectuses, university websites and UCAS handbook. Three of the most recent studies (Moogan et al, 1999; Moogan & Baron, 2003 and Maringe, 2006) that highlighted the role of interpersonal sources in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process do not agree on which of the sources is most important. All three studies were also conducted before the introduction of variable tuition fees (2006/7 academic year) which heralded the full marketisation of the UK higher education sector. There are currently no available research studies on the role of interpersonal sources in the evaluation of alternative stage of the decision-making process for prospective students who are having to pay tuition fees of up to £9,000 as recommended by the Browne Report.

The five studies that examined the role of interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for potential UK international students identified the main influencers as alumni, friends, family members, teachers, career advisers and agents. The most recent studies (Rudd et al, 2012; Hulme et al, 2013; British Council, 2013 & UK HE International Unit, 2015) identified friends, family members, agents and career advisers as the main influencers. Only four of the six studies were focussed on Africa, with two of them being focussed on the Nigerian market for UK higher education. One of the other two studies (Hulme et al, 2013) only focussed on the role of student recruitment agents and did not examine the role of other interpersonal sources on the decisions of African students. Maringe & Carter (2007) is the only study that provides some insight into the choice and decision-making of African students and it was based on four focus group interviews of 28 African students in two UK universities. The breakdown of the countries of origin of the respondents for the study is also not representative of the countries of origin of African students in recent years as 48% of the participants were from the Southern African region, 22%

from West Africa, 21% from East Africa and 4% from North Africa. The study was not specifically focussed on the role of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process and did not explain the ways in which the few interpersonal sources identified influence the decision of prospective students.

The conceptual framework for this study was adapted from Moogan & Baron's 2003 study which had examined a number of variables at the problem recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives stages of the decision-making process for UK sixth formers interested in higher education. The study examined sources of information, length of search and feelings about the process at the information search stage and choice influencers, problems and attributes considered at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

```
┌─────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────┐
│   Information    │ ══════> │  Evaluation of   │
│     Search       │         │   Alternatives   │
└────────┬─────────┘         └────────┬─────────┘
         │                            │
┌────────┴─────────┐         ┌────────┴─────────┐
│   Sources of     │         │     Choice       │
│   Information    │         │   Influencers    │
└────────┬─────────┘         └────────┬─────────┘
         │                            │
┌────────┴─────────┐         ┌────────┴─────────┐
│ Length of Search │         │   Problems &     │
│  & Feelings about│         │   Attributes     │
│     Process      │         │   Considered     │
└──────────────────┘         └──────────────────┘
```
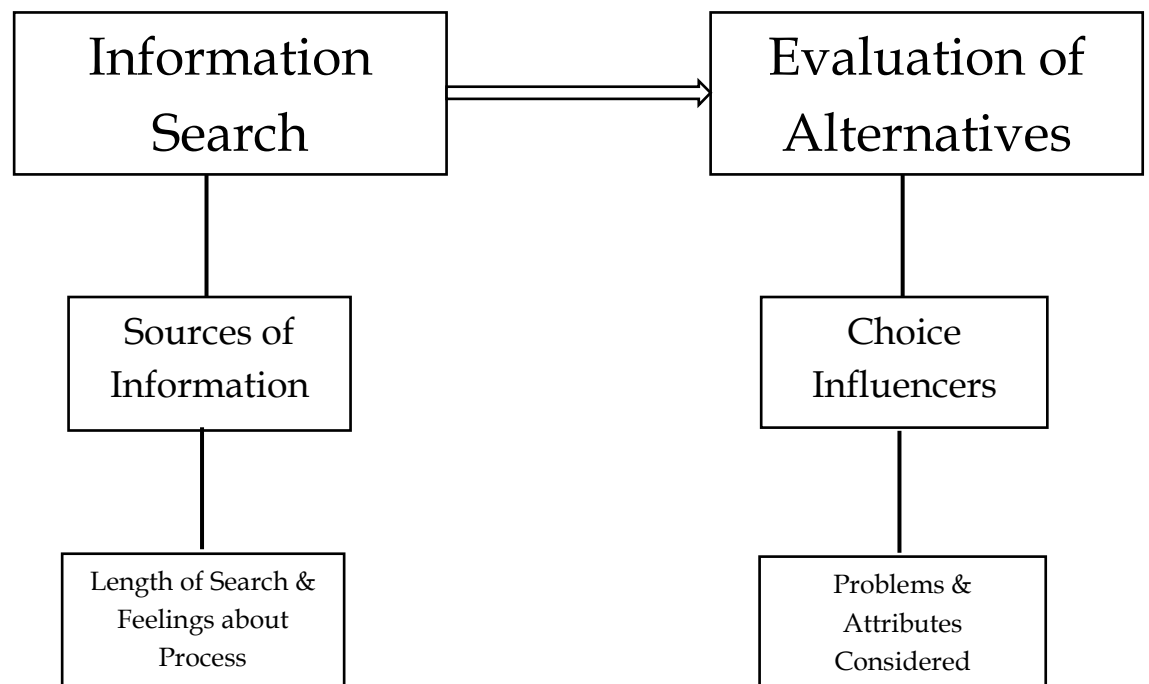
Figure 3.3: Information search and evaluation of alternatives stages of Moogan & Baron's quantification & significant differences summary format. Source: Moogan & Baron (2003)

Unlike Moogan & Baron (2003), this study will examine the sources of information at the information search stage and the most influential interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for African students. It

will then identify the specific ways in which these interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students regarding university choice.

The conceptual framework below provides a description of current knowledge about what happens at the information search and evaluation of alternative stages of the decision-making process for African students interested in UK higher education. It will also explore the different ways in which the most influential interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students.

```
┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
│    Information       │ ═══════════▶ │   Evaluation of     │
│      Search          │              │    Alternatives     │
└─────────────────────┘              └─────────────────────┘
          │                                     │
┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
│    Sources of        │              │    Influencers       │
│    Information        │              │ Teachers, Friends,   │
│   Very little         │              │ Informal Agencies &  │
│   knowledge           │              │ Family Members       │
│   available           │              │                      │
│   (GAP)               │              └─────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────┘                          │
                                      ┌─────────────────────┐
                                      │    Attributes        │
                                      │    Considered        │
                                      │  Course of study,    │
                                      │   Reputation,        │
                                      │  Employment /        │
                                      │  Progression &       │
                                      │  Accommodation       │
                                      │    Costs             │
                                      └─────────────────────┘
```
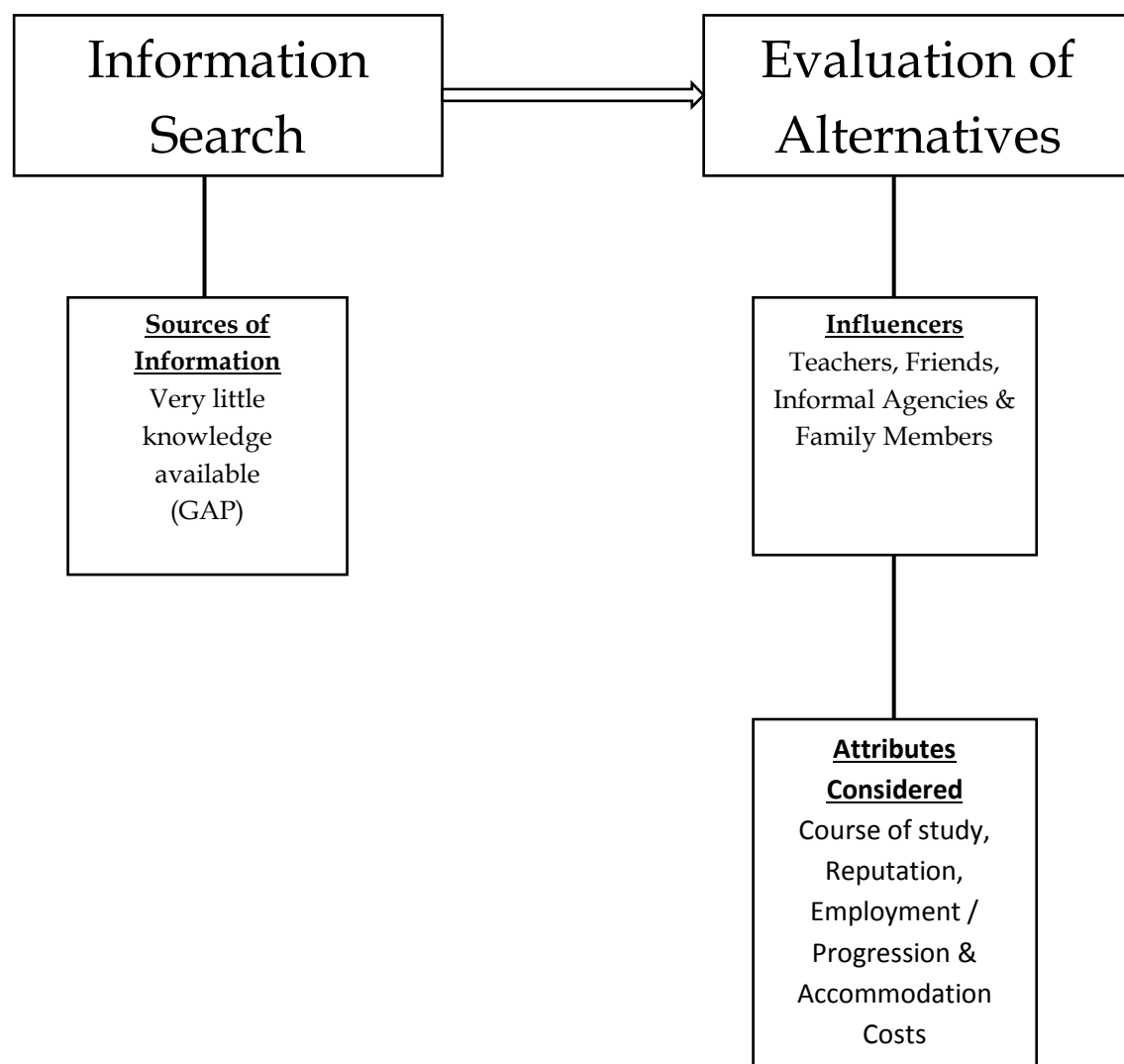
Figure 3.4: Current conceptual framework of information search & evaluation of alternative stages of decision-making process for African students

The second conceptual framework outlines the ways in which the most influential interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process:
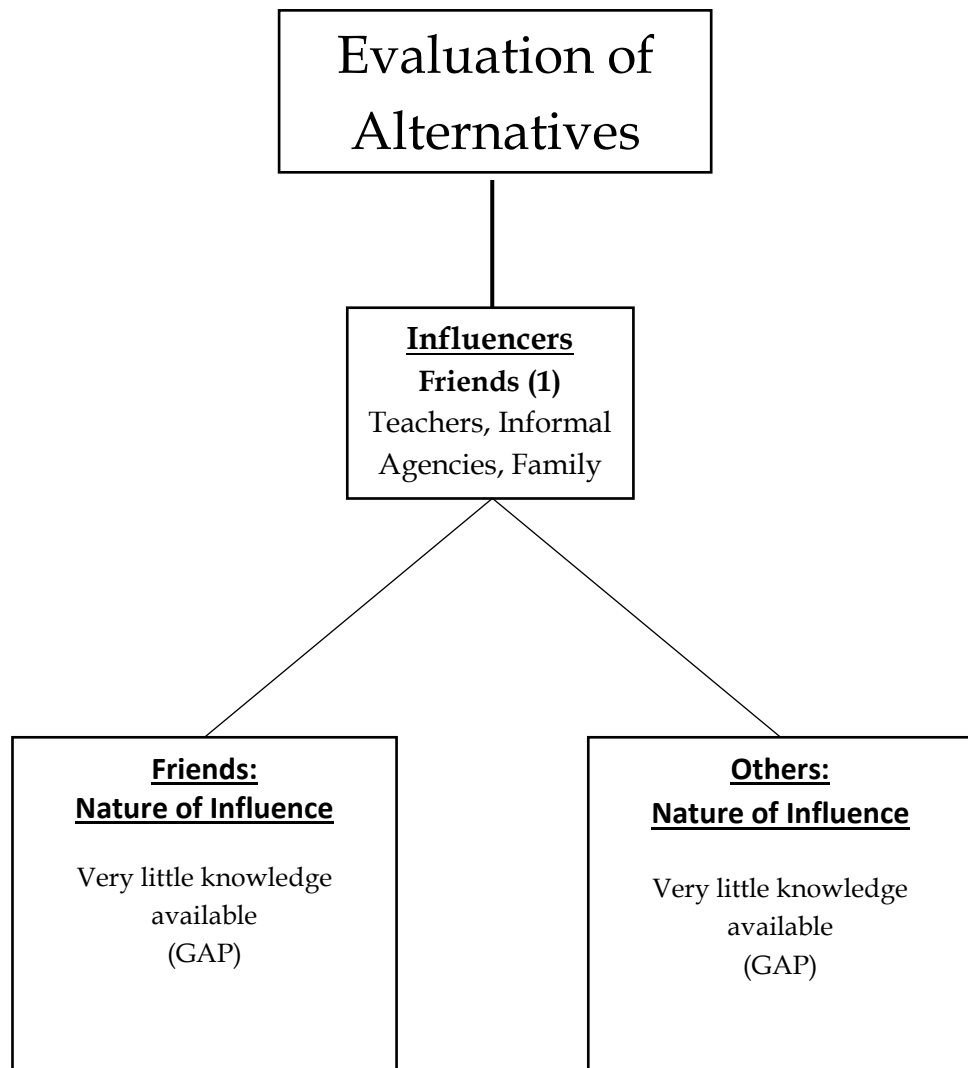
Figure 3.5: Current conceptual framework of the ways in which interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students

The identification of the specific interpersonal sources that are most influential in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK higher education students from Africa and the nature of their influences are the main gaps in knowledge that the research aims to fill. The study will identify which sources are most influential and also explain the specific ways in which interpersonal sources

influence the decisions of prospective African students. The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

At the moment, apart from the Maringe & Carter (2007) study, almost nothing seems to be available about the choice and decision-making of African students who choose to study in the UK. What is known about influencers and attributes considered are all based on this one study which was conducted a long time before the UK higher education market in the region became a significant source of international students for the sector.

In recent years international students' higher education decision- making has become a high stakes process as UK institutions become more aggressive in their efforts to attract them. As African countries like Nigeria become major sources of international students, strategic planners in UK universities require more evidence in order to devise effective strategies. Proper analysis of consumer behaviour and determining factors in the decision-making process of African students will allow educational institutions interested in attracting these students to strengthen their image, try to eliminate weaknesses and thus increase their chances of being chosen as the preferred institution. A good understanding of African students' decision-making processes can also create a sound basis for developing curriculum programmes that will address the real rather than the perceived needs of students from the region.

3.6 Limitations & Conclusion

The researcher encountered several limitations in conducting the literature review. The limitation on the word count for the study means that whilst the researcher might have wanted to review all available material on the subject, there was only enough space to review those that are most relevant. There might also be relevant knowledge that is not in the available literature that the researcher was able to access under the subject headings that were used in the literature searches. The researcher has also only used materials that could be accessed through the university library, online databases and other methods used to conduct the literature search.

The discussion of the general and specific literature available in the subject area provides an understanding of the way in which the study relates to current knowledge and highlights the knowledge gap that the research intends to fill. The next chapter will discuss the various research methods that are available and identify the specific methods that will be employed for the study.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the researcher's approach to methodology, examine the various research methods available, identify the ones that are used in this study, highlight the reason(s) for choosing them and explain the ways in which they are used. It will provide details of the practical steps that the researcher has taken in order to achieve the research objectives.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the use of interpersonal sources (teachers, career advisers, friends & relatives, agents, university reps, etc.) in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa.

The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

A discussion of research philosophies will be followed by sections on research strategies, research methods, research tools, data analysis and ethical considerations. Section 7 explains the entire process of collecting and analysing the data for the study. The final section provides clear justifications for the research approach employed for the study.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Saunders et al (2012) defined research as something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way in order to increase their knowledge. Research philosophy is about the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in

relation to research. Research paradigms are frameworks that guide how research should be conducted based on people's philosophies and the assumptions they hold about the world and the nature of knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Every research is based on a particular vision of the world, uses a certain method and proposed results aimed at predicting, prescribing, understanding, constructing or explaining something (Thietart, 2001). A proper recognition of these presuppositions enables researchers to control their research approach, increase the validity of their results and ensure that the knowledge produced will be cumulative.

According to Easterby – Smith et al (2012), there are three main reasons why an understanding of philosophical issues is important in research. Firstly, it helps to clarify research designs by considering what kind of evidence is required, how it is to be gathered & interpreted and how this will provide good answers to the research questions. Secondly, it helps the researcher to recognise the designs that are most suitable by indicating the limitations of particular approaches. Thirdly, it helps the researcher to identify and create designs that may be outside his or her past experience and also adapt research designs according to the constraints of different subject or knowledge structures.

The discussion of research philosophy in this chapter will examine the different ways in which researchers see the world and identify the worldview that is most relevant to the study. This is important because the researcher's worldview determines the research strategies and methods that can be employed and the ways in which the data collected can be used.

4.1.1 Epistemological Considerations

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It examines its nature, validity, value, methods and scope. It provides ways of deciding what counts as knowledge and what counts as evidence or proof. It is about what constitutes knowledge and the processes through which knowledge is created (Quinlan, 2011). Epistemological questioning is important to serious research, as through it researchers can establish the validity and legitimacy of their work (Thietart & Wauchope, 2001). It is about the best ways of enquiring into the nature of the world. The central debate in epistemology is about whether or not the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and

ethos as the natural sciences. Every research study is based on a certain vision of the world, uses a specific method and proposes results aimed at predicting, prescribing, understanding, constructing or explaining.

Epistemological positions are being discussed in this section because many writers believe that it has a decisive influence over the design that a researcher will be able to implement. Thietart et al (2001) observed that the relationship between research design and epistemological positioning is by no means simple, and that the association of qualitative methods and constructivism on one hand and quantitative methods and positivism on the other represents an oversimplification of this relationship. They argued that research approaches are not systematically attached to a particular paradigm and that methods no longer belong to the discipline or the paradigm in which they were engendered, but are rather procedures whose use is left to the discretion of the researcher.

The main epistemological positions are:

Positivism: Positivism rests on the assumption that social reality is singular, objective and unaffected by the act of investigating it (Collis & Hussey, 2009). It is based on the belief that reality is independent of us and the goal is the discovery of theories based mainly on observation and experiments. Proponents of this approach believe that the social world exists externally and that its properties should only be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition. Easterby – Smith et al (2012) outlined the main philosophical assumptions of positivism:

- Independence: The observer must be independent of what is being observed
- Value – freedom: The choice of what to study and how to study it, are determined by objective criteria rather than by human beliefs and interests
- Causality: Social sciences should focus on identifying causal explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour
- Hypothesis & deduction: Science proceeds through a process of hypothesizing fundamental laws and then deducing the types of observations that will demonstrate whether they are true or false
- Operationalization: Concepts should be identified in ways that enable facts to be measured quantitatively

- Reductionism: Problems are better understood if they are reduced to the simplest possible elements

- Generalization: It is necessary to select random samples of sufficient size, from which inferences may be drawn about the wider population

- Cross – sectional analysis: Such regularities can be most easily identified by making comparisons of variations across samples.

Scientists following this research tradition assume that observable facts are objective because they are external and tend to collect significant amounts of data upon which to base generalizable propositions that can be tested and that can provide material for the development of laws. Collis & Hussey (2009) outlined some of the main criticisms of positivism. They argued that it is not possible to separate people from the social contexts in which they operate; people cannot be understood without their perceptions of their own activities; the highly structured nature of the research design imposes constraints on the results and may ignore other relevant findings; researchers are not objective because they are part of what they observe; they also bring their own interests and values to the research and capturing complex phenomena in a single measure is misleading.

Interpretivism: This is the term given to the view of writers who have been critical of the application of the scientific model to the social world and who share the view that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation. It is based on the assumption that social reality is in our minds and is subjective and multiple. Unlike positivism, it focusses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining interpretive understanding and adopts a range of methods that seek to describe, translate and come to terms with the meaning rather than the frequency of phenomena in the social world (Collis & Hussey, 2009). It advocates the need for the researcher to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors. With interpretivism the social world is constructed and is given meaning subjectively by people, the researcher is part of what is observed and research is driven by interest (Blumberg et al, 2011).

Interpretivist researchers attempt to understand subjective realities and offer interpretative explanations which are meaningful for the participants of the research and sometimes generate surprising findings beyond the current level of scientific

knowledge. It implies that the social world is observed by finding out what meanings people give to it and interpreting these meanings from their viewpoint. It also implies that social phenomena can only be properly understood by looking at the totality of the situation. Interpretivist research requires the researcher to dig into the processes of subjective interpretation and acknowledge the specific motivations and interests of the participants. Researchers holding this epistemological position do not attach a great deal of importance to the generalizability of findings.

Jancowicz (2005) outlined the basic assumptions of positivism and interpretivism:

Positivism	Interpretivism
Phenomena can be analysed in terms of variables	Phenomena can be analysed in terms of issues
Data can be collected by a dispassionate outside observer	Data can be collected by participants and observers, all with varying degrees of involvement and detachment
The evidence enables the researcher to distinguish what is true from what is untrue and therefore agree on the real reasons for the phenomena	Truth cannot be determined in any absolute way, but available evidence is used towards a consensus. Researchers will sometimes agree to defer or conclude that truth is undecidable
The purpose of enquiry is to build theories, which are general statements which validly explain phenomena	The purpose of enquiry is to gain sufficient understanding in order to predict future outcomes
When theories have been developed sufficiently, they should be applied for productive purposes	There is no need to apply theories; as understanding and prediction are already theory – in – action, as they were deduced from action.

Table 4.1: Basic assumptions of positivism and interpretivism (Source: Jankowicz, 2005)

The interpretivist perspective is highly appropriate for business and management research; especially in the fields of organisational behaviour, marketing and human resource management. It is the most appropriate perspective for the current study which examines the decision – making process for prospective international students in UK higher education. It is the only perspective that will enable the researcher to enter the social world of the research subjects in order to understand their world from their point of view and obtain the information required to provide answers to the research questions.

4.1.2 Ontological Considerations

Ontology is concerned with the study of being, the nature of being and our ways of being in the world (Quinlan, 2011). Ontological considerations raise questions about the assumptions that researchers make about the way the world operates and the commitment to particular views. The central question is whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions developed from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The two main ontological positions are frequently referred to as objectivism and constructionism:

Objectivism: This is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is external to and independent of individuals and confront us as external facts that are beyond our control. It portrays the position that social entities exist as a meaningful reality external to those social actors concerned with their existence (Saunders et al, 2012). In the case of organisations, they are seen as having an almost tangible reality of their own which is separate or external to the individuals and groups that are actors within them.

Constructionism: This is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Social phenomena and categories are not only created through the perceptions and actions of the affected social actors, they are also in a constant state of change. Thus it is necessary to study the details of a situation in order to properly understand what is happening and the reality occurring behind what is happening (Saunders et al, 2012).

The constructionist position is the most appropriate approach for the current study which examines the decision – making process for prospective international students in UK higher education. The role of the researcher in this situation is to seek to understand the subjective reality of the students in order to be able to understand their motives, actions and intentions in a meaningful way.

4.2 Research Strategy

This section will identify the different research strategies that are available to the researcher, assess the suitability of each strategy for the research study and explain the

rationale for the choice of mixed methods as the right research strategy for this study. It will also discuss the specific decisions taken by the researcher on the application of the strategy to the collection and analysis of data. This is because it is important to show that the research strategy employed for the study is appropriate and consistent with the research culture in the subject area.

A research design is a framework for the collection & analysis of data and provides a general plan of the process that the researcher will use to provide answers to the research questions. It constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data and helps the researcher in the allocation of his limited resources by posing crucial choices (Blumberg et al, 2011). According to Bryman & Bell (2011), the choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process. These include the importance attached to expressing causal connections between variables; generalising to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the study; understanding behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context and having a temporal understanding of social phenomena and their interconnections (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The research strategy is the methodological link between the research philosophy and the all - important decision about the specific methods that will be used to collect and analyse data. The different research strategies that are available for answering the research questions are:

4.2.1 Experiment

An experimental study is used to investigate the relationship between variables, where the independent variable is deliberately manipulated in order to observe the effect on the dependent variable (Collis & Hussey, 2009). They are particularly associated with the physical sciences where the practice of formulating and testing hypotheses through carefully designed and controlled tests on materials and non – human life forms is the norm. Experiments are conducted in a systematic way in a laboratory or natural setting in order to study the likelihood of a change in an independent variable causing a change in another, dependent variable. In a typical experiment, the researcher will manipulate the independent variable (for example quality of lighting) in order to observe the effect on the dependent variable (for example the productivity of operatives in a factory).

Experiments use predictions, known as hypothesis rather than research questions, because the researcher anticipates whether or not a relationship will exist between the variables.

Experiment is discussed as a research strategy in this section because a true experiment is often used as a yardstick against which non – experimental research is assessed. Whilst true experiments tend to be strong in internal validity, it is necessary to manipulate the independent variable in order to determine whether it does in fact have an influence on the dependent variable. Experiment is not considered a suitable research strategy for this study because the independent variables involved (interpersonal sources) cannot be manipulated.

4.2.2 Survey

This is a research strategy in which data is collected predominantly by questionnaire or by structured interview from a number of individuals and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to detect patterns of association. It is a positivist methodology designed to collect primary or secondary data from a sample, with a view to analysing them statistically and generalising the results to a population (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Surveys are quite popular because they allow the collection of standardised data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way and allow easy comparison of the data collected. The survey strategy is perceived as authoritative by most people and is both comparatively easy to explain and to understand (Saunders et al, 2012). Although the data collected through this strategy is unlikely to be as wide – ranging as those collected by other research strategies, the data can be used to suggest possible reasons for specific relationships between variables and to produce models of these relationships. The main methods for collecting survey data are self – completed Internet, postal & delivery / collection questionnaires and interviewer - completed telephone questionnaires & structured interviews.

Although the survey research strategy will not be employed as the principal means of gathering data for this study, a research tool that falls under the strategy will be used as part of the mixed methods research strategy that will be employed. The study will use a self – completed questionnaire to collect information that will enable the researcher to

provide answers to some of the research questions. The decision not to employ the survey research strategy as the principal method for gathering data for the study is based on the inability of the strategy to provide information about underlying processes and detailed explanations of the behaviour of respondents that is required to provide answers to one of the research questions.

4.2.3 Case Study

The case study methodology is used to explore a single phenomenon in a natural setting using a variety of methods to obtain in – depth knowledge and understanding (Collis & Hussey, 2009). It is widely used in business research and is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. The case may be a specific organisation, department, group of workers, process, event, person or other phenomenon. The strategy is usually relevant where the researcher wants to develop a rich understanding on the context of the research and the processes being implemented. According to Yin (2003) the research aims not only to explore certain phenomenon, but also to understand them within a specific context. Also, the research does not start with a set of questions and notions about the limits within which the study will take place (Yin, 2003). Finally, the research uses multiple methods for collecting data, which may be both quantitative and qualitative (Yin, 2003).

With this method, the case is an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth understanding of it (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The case study strategy was not seen as ideal for the study because the research is not focussed on gaining in – depth knowledge and understanding about a specific case, but on providing answers to specific research questions.

4.2.4 Ethnography

This methodology is used when a researcher wants to conduct an in-depth examination of a culture (Quinlan, 2011). A major aspect of ethnography involves the researcher being immersed in a setting and becoming part of the group under study in order to understand the meanings and significances that people give to their behaviour and that of others. Ethnography uses participant observation in an attempt to enable the researcher to interpret the social world in the same way as the members of that particular world do. Research involving the use of ethnography is normally conducted

over a long period of time in a clearly defined natural setting and involves direct participation in the activities taking place. Although ethnography has been used by business researchers in the past, it is not considered an ideal research strategy for this study because it will not provide the most practical means for the researcher to gather the data required to address the research questions.

4.2.5 Action Research

This is an emergent and iterative process of enquiry that is designed to provide solutions to real organisational problems through a participative and collaborative approach, which uses different forms of knowledge and which will have implications for participants and the organisation beyond the research project (Saunders et al, 2012). It is based on the philosophical assumption that the social world is constantly changing and the researcher and the research are part of this change. It is about entering into a situation, attempting to bring about change and monitoring the results. Action research strategies are aimed at promoting organisational learning to promote practical outcomes by identifying issues, planning action and evaluating action.

Action research usually takes place within a single organisation and is therefore similar to a case study approach in many of its procedures (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The planning stage involves identifying the objectives of the process and how they may be achieved. The phase of action is usually implemented and its effects observed and reflected on before modifying the entire plan, as required. The close working relationship that is required between the researcher and the client organisation is similar to that of a problem – solving consultancy project, with both parties working together on analysing the results of the study and publishing the research report. As a case study based approach, this research strategy was also not considered ideal for the research study.

4.2.6 Grounded Theory

This methodology is used when the specific focus of the research is on building theory from data and is very useful when researching phenomenon about which little is known (Quinlan, 2011). It refers to a situation in which theory is grounded in or developed inductively from a set of data. It was developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as a reaction to positivist studies to analyse, interpret and explain the meanings that social

126

actors construct to make sense of their everyday experiences in specific contexts. The strategy can be used to develop theoretical explanations of social interactions and processes by generating theory grounded in data produced from the accounts of social actors. It is an inductive approach that enables the researcher to collect and analyse data simultaneously, whilst developing analytical codes as these emerge from the data in order to reorganise these data into categories (Saunders et al, 2012).

Easterby – Smith et al (2012) noted that the methods of grounded theory have been developed mainly within educational and health settings where access to data and cases is relatively flexible and easy. The challenges of getting access within commercial organisations and the lack of freedom for researchers to select their samples on theoretical grounds makes it difficult to apply the strategy in its pure form in management research. The nature of this study makes grounded theory an unsuitable research strategy.

4.2.7 Archival Research

This is the use of administrative records and documents as the principal source of data for a research study (Saunders et al, 2012). All research that make use of data contained in administrative records can be referred to as secondary data analysis because the data were collected for a different purpose. In situations when these data are used in an archival research strategy they are analysed because they are part of the organisation's daily activities and are therefore part of the reality being studied rather than having been collected originally as data for research purposes. As a research strategy, it can be used for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research and enables the researcher to address research questions which focus on the past or changes over time. The use of the strategy is constrained by the nature of administrative records and documents available and it is important for researchers to establish this and design their study to make the best use of available data.

Scott (1990, pp. 6) outlined four criteria for assessing the quality of documents as authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. Authenticity relates to whether the evidence is genuine and of unquestionable origin. Credibility relates to whether the evidence is free from error and distortion. Representativeness relates to whether the

evidence is typical of its kind, and, if not, whether the extent of its untypicality is known. Meaning relates to whether the evidence is clear and comprehensible.

Although archival research will not be used as the principal research strategy in this study, the researcher will be using data from application forms completed by prospective international students at a UK university to support information obtained from other sources. The application forms completed by prospective international students applying to the university are an important part of students' records and meet Scott's four criteria for assessing the quality of documents.

4.2.8 Mixed Methods

This is a research strategy that combines qualitative and quantitative research in the same study. Tashakkori & Creswell (2007, pp.207) defined mixed method as "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches". It is a research method in which the researcher combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson et al, 2007). Cresswell & Clark (2011) described mixed methods as a research strategy where the researcher collects and analyses both qualitative and quantitative data based on research questions, integrates the two forms of data concurrently by combining them sequentially or embedding one within the other and gives priority to one or both forms of data. It also involves using the procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a research study, applying these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses, and combining the research procedures into specific designs that directs the plan for conducting the study (Cresswell & Clark, 2011).

An important characteristic of truly mixed methods research is that they involve the integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings at some stage of the research process. Integration can happen during data collection, analysis or at the interpretive stage of the research process.

Bryman (2006) outlined a number of rationales for combining both qualitative and quantitative research in the same study:

1. Triangulation or greater validity: This refers to the traditional belief that quantitative and qualitative research can be combined to triangulate findings so that they may be mutually corroborated.

2. Offset: This is the idea that the research methods associated with both quantitative and qualitative research have their own strengths and weaknesses. Combining both methods enables the researcher to offset their weaknesses by drawing on the strength of both.

3. Completeness: This is the notion that researchers can provide a more comprehensive account of the subject area by using both quantitative and qualitative research.

4. Process: Quantitative research provides an account of structures in social life whilst qualitative research provides sense of process.

5. Different research questions: This is the argument that quantitative and qualitative research can each be used to answer different research questions.

6. Explanation: This refers to situations when one can be used to help explain the findings produced by the other.

7. Unexpected results: This is the suggestion that both methods can be fruitfully combined when one generates surprising results that can only be understood by employing the other.

8. Instrument development: This refers to situations in which qualitative research is used to develop questionnaire and scale items in order to generate better wording or more comprehensive closed answers.

9. Sampling: It is possible for one approach to be used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases.

10. Credibility: This is the suggestion that employing both approaches enhances the integrity of findings.

11. Context: The combination can be rationalised in terms of qualitative research providing contextual understanding along with either generalizable, externally valid findings or broad relationships among variables uncovered through a survey.

12. Illustration: This is the use of qualitative data to illustrate or provide examples of quantitative findings. This is often referred to as putting "meat on the bones" of "dry" quantitative findings.

13. Utility or improving the usefulness of findings: This is the idea that combining both approaches will be more useful to practitioners. It is quite prominent among articles with an applied focus.

14. Confirm and discover: This means using qualitative data to generate hypotheses and using quantitative research to test them within a single study.

15. Diversity of views: This means combining researchers' and participants' perspectives through quantitative and qualitative research respectively, and uncovering relationships between variables while also revealing meanings among participants through qualitative research.

16. Enhancement or building upon research findings: This means making more of or augmenting either quantitative or qualitative findings by gathering data using a qualitative or quantitative research approach.

The main rationale for employing mixed methods in this study are completeness, explanation, credibility, illustration and the need to address different research questions:

- Completeness: The application of both quantitative and qualitative research to the study of the interpersonal sources that are most influential in the decision-making process for prospective international students in UK higher education provides the researcher with a much more comprehensive account of the subject area.

- Explanation: This refers to the fact that the information gathered from the in-depth interviews will provide detailed explanations for the findings generated by the survey and archival research.

- Credibility: The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods for the study significantly enhances the integrity of the findings.

- Illustration: The information obtained from in-depth interviews provide examples and illustrations that will increase understanding of the survey results.

- Different research questions: The information required to address the first three research questions were obtained from the findings of the survey and archival research. The answer to the fourth research question come from information generated through the in-depth interviews.

Scandura & Williams (2000) emphasised the importance of researchers assessing the methods they employ because the impact of management studies depends on the

appropriateness and rigour of the research methods chosen. McGrath (1982) stated that it is impossible to conduct an unflawed study because any research method chosen will have inherent flaws and the choice of that method will limit the conclusions that can be drawn. The best way to conduct an effective study in this situation is to obtain corroborating evidence from a variety of research methods. The main reason for using mixed methods for this study is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative findings enable the researcher to forge an overall or negotiated account of the findings that is not possible through the application of any single method. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) concluded that the methodological plurality of mixed methods research can add insights and understandings that might be missed when only a single method is used and may produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches has the potential to provide a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone, by incorporating the strengths of both methodologies and reducing some of the problems associated with singular methods (Molina – Azorin, 2011). Several recent studies (Bryman, 2006 & Molina – Azorin, 2011) suggest that mixed methods research has acquired credibility in the field of business studies and is being employed on a fairly regular basis. Molina – Azorin (2011) concluded that the fact that mixed methods journal articles received more citations than non – mixed methods studies may be explained by the value that these mixed methods articles add to management research.

Cresswell & Clark (2011) outlined the four key decisions that are involved in choosing an appropriate mixed method design for a research study. The decisions are the level of interaction between the strands, the relative priority of the strands, the timing of the strands and the procedures for mixing the strands.

4.2.8.1 The level of interaction between the strands
This refers to the extent to which the qualitative and quantitative strands are kept independent or interact with each other in the research process. This is one of the most critical decisions in designing a mixed method study and the two options for a relationship are:
- Independent: This is a situation when the quantitative and qualitative strands are implemented in a way that keeps them separate from each other. The researcher

keeps the quantitative and qualitative research questions, data collection and data analysis separate, only to mix them when drawing conclusions during the interpretation at the end of the study. This is the option that is most suitable and is employed in this study. The research questions, data collection and data analysis for the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews are kept separate, only to be mixed at the interpretation stage of the study.

- Interactive: This is a situation where direct interaction exists between the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. The methods can be mixed at the research questions, data collection or data analysis stages and in many different ways. This option is not being employed for this study because the research question being addressed by the qualitative research tool (in-depth interviews) is different from those being addressed by the quantitative research tool (questionnaire).

4.2.8.2 The priority of the quantitative and qualitative strands

The researcher needs to make explicit & implicit decisions about the relative importance of the quantitative and qualitative strands within the research design. Priority indicates the relative importance of the quantitative or qualitative methods used to answer the research questions. The three possible options are:

- Equal priority: This is when both methods play an equally important role in addressing the research problem.
- Quantitative priority: This is when a greater emphasis is placed on the quantitative methods whilst the qualitative methods are used in a secondary role. This is the option that is employed in this study. The quantitative method (survey) provides the data required to answer three of the research questions whilst the qualitative method provides the data required to answer one research question.
- Qualitative priority: This is where greater importance is placed on the qualitative methods and the quantitative method is used in a secondary role.

4.2.8.3 The timing of the quantitative and qualitative strands

The researcher needs to make decisions regarding the temporal relationship between the quantitative and qualitative strands within a research study. The decision relates to the time the quantitative and qualitative data sets are collected and the order in which the

results from the two sets of data are used within the study. There are three options relating to timing within mixed method designs:

- Concurrent timing: This happens when both the quantitative and qualitative strands are implemented during a single phase of the research study.

- Sequential timing: This happens in situations where the researcher implements the strands in two distinct phases, with the collection and analysis of quantitative (or qualitative) data occurring after the collection and analysis of qualitative (or quantitative) data.

- Multiphase combination timing: This happens in situations where the researcher implements multiple phases that include sequential and/or concurrent timing during the research process. This timing method is employed for this study and is appropriate because the implementation of one phase is not in any way affected by the implementation of the other. In this study, the collection of data through the survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews are implemented in multiple phases. The researcher collected data through the survey questionnaire in two phases and then collects data through the in-depth interviews. The data collected are then analysed separately around the same period of time.

4.2.8.4 Where and how to mix the quantitative and qualitative strands

The researcher also needs to decide the appropriate approach for mixing the two approaches within the mixed method design. Brannen (2005) noted that drawing upon data across the quantitative / qualitative spectrum can occur at all phases of the research process: shaping the ideas at the start of the enquiry, influencing the process of analysis or at the later stage conclusions are drawn by the researcher. Mixing refers to the interrelationship or level of integration between the study's quantitative and qualitative strands. The 'point of interface' is the stage or point within the research process where the quantitative and qualitative strands are mixed. Mixing can occur at a number of points within the research process:

- Mixing during data analysis: This is when the quantitative and qualitative strands are mixed during the stage of the process when the two sets of data is analysed by the researcher. The researcher analyses the data from both strands and merges them through a combined analyses.

- Mixing during data collection: This happens when the qualitative and quantitative strands are mixed during the stage of the process when the

researcher collects a second set of data. The researcher mixes the data by using a strategy of 'connecting' where the result of one strand builds to the collection of the other type of data. The connection occurs when the results of the first strand is used to shape the collection of data in the second strand by determining aspects of the data collection process.

- Mixing at the level of design: This happens when the quantitative and qualitative strands are mixed during the larger design stage of the research process. Mixing at this level can happen within a traditional quantitative or qualitative research design, an emancipatory theory, a substantive social science theory or the overall programme objective.

- Mixing during interpretation: This is a situation where the quantitative and qualitative strands are mixed during the final step of the research process, after both sets of data have been collected and analysed by the researcher. The conclusions reached by the researcher will reflect what was learned from the combination of results from the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. This is the mixing method that is most appropriate for this study. The data collected through the survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews are analysed before being mixed at the interpretation stage.

4.2.8.5 Arguments for & against mixed methods

Based on a study of several publications, Easterby – Smith et al (2012) outlined the arguments for and against the use of mixed methods as a research strategy:

Arguments for Mixed Methods	Arguments against Mixed Methods
- Increases the confidence & reliability of results - Increases validity - Stimulates creative & inventive methods - Can uncover deviant dimensions - Can help synthesis & integration of theories - May serve as a critical test of competing theories - Can combine confirmatory & exploratory research at the same time - Presents greater diversity of views - Provides stronger inferences	- Replication is difficult - The research design must be relevant to the research question - They provide no help if you are asking the wrong questions - They take up more resources than single method studies - Their use requires a competent overall design - The researcher needs to be skilled in the use of both methods - It is not always helpful if one method simply provides window dressing for the other.

Table 4.2: Arguments for & against Mixed Methods (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012, pp.63)

The use of a mixed method design provides completeness, explanation, credibility, illustration and enables the researcher to effectively address the different research questions. The combination of qualitative and quantitative findings also enables the researcher to forge an overall or negotiated account of the findings that is not possible through the application of a single method. Molina – Azorin (2011) argued that mixed methods can answer questions that other methodologies cannot, provide better inferences and provide the opportunity for presenting a greater diversity of divergent views. Mertens (2005) noted that many researchers have used mixed methods because it seemed intuitively obvious to them that its use would enrich their ability to draw conclusions about the problem being studied. Niglas (2004) observed that the results from the use of different methods to investigate a phenomenon provide mutual confirmation that increases confidence in the validity of the results.

4.3 Research Methods

A research method is "a systematic and orderly approach taken towards the collection and analysis of data so that information can be obtained from those data" (Jancowicz, 2005, pp.220). Every aspect of empirical work is directed towards gathering and presenting data from which the information required to answer the research questions can be easily and simply derived.

Whilst the review of existing literature provided general information on the decision-making process for UK higher education, it did not provide the specific information required to address the research questions. This section will discuss the methods that are available to the researcher and assess the suitability of the different methods. Research methods generally fall under two headings; quantitative research and qualitative research.

4.3.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research entails the collection of numerical data, is said to be objective and situated within a framework of positivism (Quinlan, 2011). Quantitative data are normally precise, can be captured at various points in time and in different contexts and are associated with a degree of positivist methodology that usually results in findings with a high degree of reliability (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

Although quantitative research is usually associated with a deductive approach where the focus is on using data to test theory, it may also incorporate an inductive approach where data are used to develop theory. It examines relationships between variables which are measured numerically and can be analysed using a range of statistical techniques (Saunders et al, 2012). Quantitative research such as experiments often incorporates controls to ensure the validity of data. Due to the standardisation of the data collection method, it is important to ensure that questions are expressed clearly so that they are understood in the same way by all respondents. The application of probability sampling techniques ensures generalizability of the research findings.

The main research strategies associated with quantitative research are experiments, structured observations and survey research through the use of questionnaires or structured interviews. Researchers tend to use reliability, construct validity, internal validity and external validity to assess the quality of studies conducted with this strategy:

- Reliability: This is concerned with the issue of consistency of measures. It addresses the issue of whether data collection methods and analytical procedures would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or by a different researcher. The threats to reliability include participant error, participant bias, researcher error and researcher bias. The existence of these threats mean that the researcher needs to be methodologically rigorous in the way they devise and conduct their research in order to avoid threatening the reliability of the findings and conclusions. It is also important to report every part of the study in a fully transparent way so that others can judge for themselves and be able to replicate the study if they wish to do so.

- Construct validity: This refers to the extent to which the research measures actually measure what the researcher intends them to assess. Where questions are designed for questionnaires or interviews, it relates to the extent to which the measurement questions actually measure the presence of those constructs that the researcher intends to measure in the process of achieving the objectives of the study.

- Internal validity: The internal validity of a study is established when the study demonstrates a causal relationship between two variables. In a questionnaire – based survey, this will happen where a set of questions can be shown

statistically to be associated with an analytical factor. Researchers attempt to overcome challenges with internal validity by finding other relevant evidence that supports the answers provided by the questionnaire – based survey.

- External validity: This relates to the extent to which the findings of a research study can be generalised to other relevant settings or groups. External validity will normally depend on the extent to which the respondents that form the sample for the study are representative of the general population or the other settings or groups.

The main objectives of quantitative researchers reflect the epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Bryman & Bell (2011) outlined the main preoccupations of quantitative researchers as measurement, causality, generalization and replication. Quantitative researchers are preoccupied with measurement because it allows them to precisely describe small differences between people in terms of the characteristics in question, provides a consistent yardstick for making such distinctions and provides the basis for more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between different concepts. Quantitative researchers are concerned with explaining why things are the way they are. This feature of the natural sciences is the motivation for the work of many quantitative researchers. Quantitative researchers want to be able to claim that their findings can be generalized beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted. Significant effort is put into designing studies that are based on representative samples so that the researcher can say that the results can apply to individuals other than those who responded in the study. In line with the philosophy of the natural sciences, quantitative researchers also regard the ability to replicate as an important ingredient of their activities. This is why they take time to clearly spell out their procedures so that they can be replicated by others, even though in most cases the research is not actually replicated by anyone else.

Bryman & Bell (2011) outlined the following criticisms of quantitative research:

- Those undertaking quantitative research fail to distinguish people and social institutions from 'the world of nature'.
- The measurement process used in quantitative research possesses an artificial and spurious sense of precision and accuracy.

- The reliance of quantitative research on instruments and procedures hinders the connection between research and everyday life.
- The analysis of relationships between variables provides a static view of social life that is independent of people's lives.

4.3.2 Qualitative Research

This is a research strategy that is used for the collection and analysis of non-numerical data that usually represent feelings, thoughts, ideas and opinions. The data collected through qualitative research are usually transient, understood only within context and are associated with an interpretive methodology that usually results in findings with a high degree of validity (Collis & Hussey, 2009). According to Hesse – Biber (2010), the approach aims to understand how individuals make sense of their social world. It is committed to multiple views of social reality whereby the respondent becomes the "expert" as it is his or her view of reality that the researcher seeks to interpret. It is associated with an interpretive philosophy because researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied (Saunders et al, 2012).

Qualitative research generally focuses on understanding participants' meanings and the relationships between them, using a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures to develop a conceptual framework (Saunders et al, 2012). It uses non – probability sampling to collect non – standardised data during research processes that are naturalistic and interactive. Thus the success of the researcher depends not only on gaining physical access to participants but also on building good relationships and demonstrating sensibility to gain cognitive access to their data. Qualitative researchers are much more inclined than their quantitative counterparts to provide a great deal of descriptive details when reporting the outcomes of their research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). They are concerned not only with description, but also with explanation.

The main research strategies associated with qualitative research are action research, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, unstructured interviews, critical incident technique, protocol analysis, diary methods, observation and focus groups. Over the years there has been a lot of debate amongst qualitative researchers about the relevance of the standards used to assess the quality of quantitative research

(reliability, construct validity, internal validity and external validity) to assessment of qualitative studies. Several writers have suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to criteria that are different to those used by quantitative researchers. Lincoln & Guba (1985) & Lincoln & Guba (1994) suggested that it is necessary to specify methods of assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to validity and reliability. They proposed that the quality of qualitative studies should be assessed on trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness comprises of four criteria:

- Credibility: This criterion is similar to internal validity and refers to the fact that the feasibility of the account that a researcher arrives at will determine its acceptability to others. This requires the researcher to ensure that the study is conducted according to the canons of good practice and the findings submitted to respondents or participants for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world.

- Transferability: This criterion is similar to external validity and refers to the extent to which the researcher provides rich accounts or thick descriptions of their study in order to provide others with a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of the findings to other situations.

- Dependability: This criterion is similar to reliability and refers to the need to establish the merit of the research study by adopting an 'auditing' approach. This requires the researcher to ensure that complete and accessible records are kept of all phases of the research process so that peers can act as auditors to assess the degree to which theoretical inferences can be justified.

- Confirmability: This criterion is similar to objectivity and refers to the need to ensure that the researcher has acted in good faith and has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the study and the findings deriving from it.

Authenticity comprises of five criteria:

- Fairness: This refers to the extent to which the research fairly represents different viewpoints among members of the social setting.

- Ontological authenticity: This refers to the extent to which the research helps members to arrive at a better understanding of their social situation.

- Educative authenticity: This refers to the extent to which the researcher help members to better appreciate the perspectives of other members of their social setting.

- Catalytic authenticity: This refers to the extent to which the research has acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances.

- Tactical authenticity: This refers to the extent to which the research has empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action.

The main objectives of qualitative researchers reflect the epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Unlike quantitative researchers that are influenced by the natural sciences, qualitative researchers are influenced by interpretivism.

Bryman & Bell (2011) highlighted the following criticisms of qualitative research:
- Qualitative research is too subjective: This is because qualitative findings rely too much on the researcher's often unsystematic views about what is significant and also upon the close relationships that they frequently strike up with respondents.

- Qualitative research is difficult to replicate: Qualitative research is difficult to replicate because it is unstructured and mostly reliant upon the researcher's ingenuity.

- Problems of generalization: The findings from most qualitative studies cannot be generalized because the respondents interviewed & cases examined are not normally representative of the population.

- Lack of transparency: This is because it is sometimes difficult to establish what the qualitative researcher actually did and how they arrived at the conclusions.

4.3.3 Contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research
Based on a study of the work of several writers, Bryman & Bell (2011) outlined some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research:

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Uses numbers	Uses words
Point of view of researcher	Point of view of participants
Researcher is distant	Researcher is close
Theory & concepts are tested	Theory & concepts emerge from data
Presents a static image	Presents events as they unfold
Highly structured process	Unstructured process
Findings are generalizable	Attempts to understand specific contexts
Uses hard, reliable data	Uses rich, deep data
Focus on macro variables	Focus on micro variables
Concerned with people's behaviour	Concerned with the meaning of actions
Conducted in artificial settings	Conducted in natural settings

Table 4.3: Contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research (Source: Bryman & Bell, 2011)

As stated in the previous section, the research strategy employed in this study is mixed methods. It combines the use of a qualitative research tool (in-depth interviews) with the use of a quantitative methods tool (survey). This approach was selected because of its ability to provide a much more complete picture of the issues relating to the research questions and to uncover aspects that might be missed through the application of a single method. It also has the potential to significantly increase confidence in the validity and reliability of the results of the study.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods or techniques are particular step – by – step procedures that you can follow in order to gather data and analyse them for the information they contain (Jancowicz, 2005). They represent the options that are available to the researcher for the collection of the specific data required to effectively address the research questions. The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

Researchers need to employ the tools that are most appropriate to the kind of questions they wish to ask, the kind of environment they are operating in and the kind of research question they have adopted. This section will examine the methods that are available to the researcher, identify the methods that will be used and provide justifications for the choice of methods.

4.4.1 The main research tools that are associated with quantitative research

- Experiments: Experiments allow the evaluation of casual relationships among variables. It enables the researcher to control the conditions so that one or more variables can be manipulated in order to test a hypothesis (Zikmund, 2003). In an experiment, the researcher manipulates the independent or explanatory variable and then observes whether the hypothesised dependent variable is affected by the intervention. They differ from other research methods in terms of the degree of control the researcher has over the research situation. The effectiveness of experiments as a research tool is judged by two main measures – internal validity and external validity. Internal validity relates to whether the experiment conducted was the sole cause of the changes observed in the dependent variable. External validity refers to the ability to generalise beyond the data of an experiment to other subjects or groups in the population being studied.

- Survey / Questionnaire: This is "a tool for collecting primary data in which a sample of respondents are asked a list of carefully structured questions chosen after considerable testing, with a view to eliciting reliable responses" (Collins & Hussey, 2009, pp.192). They can be administered by post, by telephone, online, face – to – face, through group distribution and through individual distribution.

- Structured Interviews: Involves collecting primary data by questioning a sample of interviewers to find out what they think, do or feel. The researcher asks a predetermined set of questions, using the same wording and order of questions for each respondent as specified in the interview schedule (Kumar, 2014). The questions are usually closed questions, each with a set of predetermined

answers. They can be conducted face – to – face, by telephone or by other electronic means. The interview schedule is a written list of questions that have been thoroughly pre – tested for use by the interviewer. A major advantage of the tool is that it provides uniform information which can be easily compared because each interviewee is asked the same set of questions. Although it requires fewer interviewing skills than unstructured interviewing, there is a limit to the amount of data that can be gathered.

- Structured Observation: This is a non – verbal means of obtaining primary data where the researcher has pre – defined ideas about what they are looking for. The researcher attempts to systematically record behaviour along predefined aspects by observing what respondents are doing, rather than asking them what they are doing. It is often used to complement questioning. Unlike participant observation, the observer does not get involved in the activities being studied. The two main forms of structured observation are direct and indirect observation (Blumberg et al, 2011). Direct observation happens when the observer is physically present and personally monitors what is happening. Indirect observation happens when the recording is done by mechanical, photographic or electronic means. A major advantage of structured observation is that it largely eliminates respondent bias, as long as the respondent does not change his or her behaviour while being observed. Like other forms of observation, structured observation raises a number of ethical issues.

4.4.2 The main research tools that are associated with qualitative research

- Unstructured Interview: This is a type of interview where the questions have not been prepared beforehand, but evolve during the course of the interview session. The questions asked by the researcher are usually open – ended, with probes to explore the interviewee's answers in more depth. They are particularly useful in situations where the researcher is studying a wide – ranging problem area and needs to detect and identify the issues relevant to understanding the situation (Blumberg et al, 2011). They are often called qualitative interviews or in-depth interviews.

- Critical Incident Technique: This is "a technique in which respondents are asked to describe in detail a critical incident or number of incidents that are key to the research questions" (Saunders et al, 2012, pp.668). A critical incident is an event

where the consequences are so clear that the respondent has a definite idea about its impact. The technique allows the researcher to collect important facts about the behaviour of respondents in defined situations in an objective manner. It does not have a rigid set of rules, but a flexible set of principles that can be modified and adapted according to the circumstances (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

- Protocol Analysis: This is "a data collection method that is used to identify a practitioner's mental processes in solving a problem in a particular situation, including the logic and methods used" (Collis & Hussey, 2009, pp.148). The method is used to find out how people behave and think in a particular situation, especially in solving a complex problem. The studies are usually small and tend to involve fewer than a dozen participants. It is a complex research tool that requires the researcher to devise a realistic problem, address the fundamental issues and define the scope of the study.

- Diary Method: This is a method for collecting written data where selected participants are asked to keep records of relevant information in diary forms over a specific period of time. The diary is used to record what people do and how they think and feel about it. Robson (2002) argued that they are tantalizingly attractive because they appear on the surface to provide the means of generating substantial amounts of data with minimal effort on the part of the researcher. The researcher employing this tool will ask participants to record relevant information in diary form or in booklets over a period of time. The method can be used by management practitioners to measure the frequency of certain activities so that they can improve work processes. The method offers the advantage of allowing the views of different diarists to be recorded and compared. A major disadvantage of the method is that the process of setting up a diary involves considerable time and effort and the availability of participants who can express themselves well in writing.

- Unstructured Observation: This is a data collection method that can be used in a laboratory or natural setting to observe and record the action and behaviour of people. It is conducted in situations where the researcher does not know what aspects of elements of the action or the phenomenon should or could be observed (Quinlan, 2011). Observation is viewed as scientific inquiry when it is conducted specifically to answer research questions, is systematically planned and executed, uses proper controls, and provides a reliable and valid record of

what happened (Blumberg et al, 2011). Non – participant observation is where the researcher observes and records what people say and do without being involved. The subjects of the research might not be aware that they are being observed, especially when the observation is being done through mechanical equipment like CCTV cameras and traffic counters. Participant observation is where the researcher is fully involved with the participants and the subject being researched. The data collection method is used by researchers to obtain a detailed understanding of the values, motives and practices of the individuals being observed. Observation is an effective method for collecting data from subjects that cannot easily articulate themselves and allows researchers to capture events as they occur within their natural environment. Apart from the inability of the researcher to control the variables being observed in their natural setting, observation as a data collection method raises issues about ethics, objectivity, visibility, the technology used to record what people say and do, and the impact the researcher might have on those being observed.

- Focus Groups: This is a method for collecting data that combines interviewing and observation by allowing selected participants to discuss their reactions and feelings about a phenomenon, under the guidance of a group leader. It is a group interview that concentrates on a specific issue or phenomena by encouraging discussion amongst participants and the sharing of perceptions in an open and tolerant environment. Most focus group researchers are interested in revealing how the group participants view the issues with which they are confronted and tend to provide a fairly unstructured setting for the extraction of their views and perspectives. The technique allows the researcher to develop an understanding of why people feel the way they do by allowing participants to bring out issues in relation to a topic that they deem to be important and significant. Barbour (2005, pp.742) stated that "any group can be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction". Focus groups can be quite useful in developing knowledge of a new phenomenon, generating propositions from the issues that emerge, developing questions for a survey and obtaining feedback on the findings of research in which the focus group members had participated (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Inglis (1992) stated that focus groups can be helpful in developing a deeper, layered understanding of how respondents may think about a particular topic, what

factors are important and what terminologies would be appropriate for inclusion in questionnaires and interview questions.

An understanding of the research tools available and the dominant tools employed by other researchers that have undertaken research in the subject area provides an indication of the most appropriate research tools for this study. The research design will use in-depth interviews and self – completion questionnaires that will be administered through a quantitative survey of first year African international students in a UK university to collect the data required to answer the research questions. The next section contains detailed descriptions of both tools and the reasons for their selection.

4.4.3 In-depth Interviews

An interview is a form of direct communication in which an interviewer asks respondents questions in a face – to – face situation (Zikmund, 2003). It is a data collection method in which a sample of interviewers are asked questions about what they think, do or feel. In a semi – structured interview, the researcher will have a list of themes and some key questions that need to be covered, although the way that they are used may vary from one interview to the other. Unstructured / in-depth interviews are much more informal with the researcher using questions that have not been prepared beforehand but generally evolve during the course of the interview. In-depth interviews are usually open – ended and allow the researcher to use probes to explore the interviewee's answers in more depth. They provide an opportunity for the researcher to probe interviewees deeply in order to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and secure vivid, accurate and inclusive accounts that are based on their personal experiences. Although the researcher has a clear idea of the issues that they need to explore, they do not come to the interview session with a predetermined list of questions. Instead they give the interviewee the opportunity to talk freely about events, behaviour and beliefs in relation to the subject area.

Easterby – Smith et al (2012) suggested that in-depth interviews are appropriate in the following situations:
- When it is important to understand the constructs that the respondent uses as a basis for his or her opinions and belief about a particular situation

- When the aim of the interview is to develop an understanding of the respondent's 'world' so that the respondent might influence it
- When the step – by – step logic of a situation is not clear
- When the subject matter is highly confidential or commercially sensitive
- When the interviewee may be reluctant to be truthful about the issue other than confidentially in a one – to – one situation

In-depth interviews are being employed in this study because the step – by – step logic of the decision-making process is not clear and it is important to understand the constructs that the respondent uses as a basis for their opinions and beliefs about the issue being studied. Stokes & Bergin (2006) concluded that individual in-depth interviews would appear to be more appropriate for research situations where there is a specific well – defined issue to investigate which requires a detailed understanding of consumer perspectives. They found that interviews are free from group pressures and demonstrated the ability to get under the surface and expose important attitudinal data. The method has also been used successfully in major research studies in the subject area by other researchers.

The researcher selects individuals who can provide information on the research topic and made contact with them in order to discuss different aspects of the study, to seek their informed consent, to explain their expected involvement and to decide the most convenient time and place to conduct the interviews. Collis & Hussey (2009) observed that interviews are very time – consuming and might give rise to problems with recording the questions and answers, controlling the range of topics and analysing the data. The ability to change the questions raised and matters explored from one interview to the other needs to be balanced with the need to stay focussed on the research objectives / questions.

Easterby – Smith et al (2012) outlined some important practical issues involved in conducting interviews that may affect the outcome of the interview and of which the researcher should be aware:

1. Obtaining trust: This is an important element in ensuring that the interviews provide the information that the researcher requires to address the research questions. Failure to develop trust usually results in interviewees simply

resorting to telling the researcher what they think he or she wants to know. A relationship of trust will create an environment where the interviewee will be comfortable enough to provide sincere answers to the researcher's questions.

2. Social interaction: The questions that the researcher may ask and the answers that an interviewer will provide often depend on the level of social interaction between the parties. Developing a good rapport helps to build the level of social interaction required to conduct a good interview.

3. Using appropriate language: The researcher needs to use a language that is comprehensible and relevant to the people being interviewed. It is not a good strategy to use too many theoretical concepts or words that might be difficult for interviewees to understand.

4. The location of the interview: The interview should be conducted in setting that is quiet, private and convenient for the interviewee.

5. Recording interviews: Recording the interviews with a tape recorder aids the listening process and gives the opportunity of an unbiased record of the conversation. Good quality audio recording is also important for accurate transcripts and enables the researcher to be able to re – listen to the interview in order to hear things that might have been missed out at the time. The interviewer's consent will be required to record the interview and is only normally withheld in studies involving confidential or sensitive personal information.

Having considered the issues outlined above in designing the process for conducting the in-depth interviews, the researcher used the following different questions types during the interviews in order to ensure that interviewees provide the information required to address the research questions:

- Introductory questions: These are general questions that are used to get the interview started and establish a rapport with the interviewee.

- Direct questions: These provide information on how interviewees assess a situation from their perspective and might ask them to describe their opinion or feeling.

- Follow – up questions: These are used to ask the respondent to elaborate further on a given question or to clarify whether they have understood them correctly.

- Interpreting questions: These are used to confirm that the researcher has interpreted the information provided correctly.

- Specifying questions: These questions require the interviewee to elaborate on the answer and to offer more information.

- Probing questions: They are used in response to what the interviewer has said in order to gain greater understanding of the issue.

- Structuring questions: These are used in situations when the researcher feels that a subject has been sufficiently covered and want to move on to something else.

- Silence or Pausing: Can be used as an important way of letting the interviewer know that the researcher wants to hear more about a subject.

Zikmund (2003) outlined the following advantages of personal interviews:

- Opportunity for feedback: They provide the opportunity for the researcher to provide feedback in clarifying any issues that respondents have about the questions or instructions.

- Probing complex questions: They also provide an invaluable opportunity to obtain detailed information from the respondent by probing.

- Length of interview: In situations where the research questions would have required a lengthy questionnaire, interviews are much more effective at gathering data.

- Complete questionnaires: Compared to other methods, social interaction between the researcher and a respondent in a personal interview increases the likelihood that the respondent will provide answers to all the questions asked.

- Props & Visual Aids: Interviews provide the opportunity for the researcher to use visual aids and props that might make it easier for the interviewee to understand certain questions and provide the right answers.

- High participation: Although some people are reluctant to participate in a survey, the presence of an interviewer normally increases the proportion of people willing to complete the interview.

Zikmund (2003) & Blumberg et al (2011) outlined the following disadvantages of personal interviews:

- High Cost: Personal interviews are normally more expensive to conduct than mail, internet and telephone surveys. The follow – up process can also be labour - intensive.

- Lack of anonymity of respondent: Respondents may be reluctant to provide personal, confidential or sensitive information because they are not anonymous.

- Time: The researcher needs to spend a much longer period of time in the field collecting data.

- Expertise: The effective uses of interviews require highly trained interviewers.

- Global considerations: Willingness to participate in interviews varies considerably around the world. This makes it more difficult to use the method in some parts of the world.

A major issue in conducting in-depth interviews is the decision about the number of interviews to conduct. The general belief is that saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work and that data collection should continue until data saturation is reached. Data saturation is the point in the research process when additional interviews do not necessarily provide new information on the research topic. It is the point at which the key themes being extracted from the narratives are simply replicating the themes that have been previously identified by the researcher (Cameron & Price, 2009). Guest et al (2006) found that data saturation had for the most part occurred by the time they had analysed twelve interviews and new themes emerged infrequently beyond this point. They concluded that the more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner data saturation will be reached.

As this study is focussed on the decision-making of international students from Africa regarding UK higher education, sixteen face – to – face in-depth interviews were conducted with African students that enrolled at the university in September 2014 in order to get a good understanding of the roles played by different interpersonal sources during the decision – making process and the ways in which the different groups of interpersonal sources influenced their decision to join the university. The researcher developed a series of questions based on the research objectives and conducted a pilot study to ensure that the questions were easy to understand and provided the information required to obtain answers to the research questions. To determine the sample of the African student population to be interviewed, a probability sampling method was used.

The researcher emailed the selected students to invite them to participate in the study. They were asked to provide their contact telephone numbers so that the researcher can contact them to provide more details about the study and arrange a suitable time to meet with them to conduct the interview. The researcher received responses from eighteen respondents and was able to conduct interviews with sixteen of them. Most of the interviews were conducted in study rooms at the libraries on the university's two campuses. At the interview sessions, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, provided the students with the information sheet (see Appendix 2) on the study and asked them to sign two copies of the participant consent form before the interviews. A copy of the signed participant consent form was given to every interviewee to keep. The researcher also obtained the permission of every interviewee to use a Dictaphone to record the interview to facilitate the transcription process and reduce the need to take notes during the interview. The questions (see Appendix 3) developed were used by the researcher during the interviews, along with other questions which were used to seek clarification on the answers provided by respondents. Most of the interview sessions lasted between ten and twenty minutes.

4.4.4 Survey / Questionnaire

Surveys involve the structured collection of data from a sizeable population through the use of a questionnaire. A questionnaire is "a list of carefully structured questions, which have been chosen after considerable testing with a view to eliciting reliable responses from a particular group of people" (Collis & Hussey, 2009, pp.191-192). They are an effective means of asking large numbers of people what they think, feel or do in order to provide the information required for the researcher to address the research questions. Questionnaires are usually self – administered but can also be used over the telephone or face to face. The researcher also needs to choose a sample of people on which the questionnaire will be administered from the target population. Cameron & Price (2009) recommend the use of questionnaires in the following situations:

- When the researcher has limited resources and needs to gather large amounts of data from a lot of people
- When the researcher has clear and specific research questions and knows what information is required to address them

- When the researcher has a clear and specific group of appropriate respondents that can be accessed and are likely to be willing and able to respond honestly to the questionnaire

- When the researcher has the ability to write questions which are self – explanatory and will be easily understood by respondents

Apart from the fact that the questionnaire survey method has been used effectively by other researchers to gather data in the subject area, the study also fulfils the conditions outlined by Cameron & Price (2009).

Before designing a questionnaire, the researcher needs to identify the variables about which data is required in order to address the research questions. Dillman et al. (2008) outlined three types of data variables that can be collected through questionnaires. All three types of data have been collected through the questionnaire designed for this study:

- Opinion variables: These variables record how respondents feel about something or what they think or believe is true or untrue about an issue.

- Behaviour variables: These variables provide data on what people did in the past, do in the present and will do in the future.

- Attribute variable: These variables provide data about the respondent's personal characteristics and are normally used to explore how opinions and behaviour differ between groups of respondents and to ensure that the data collected are representative of the total population. Attribute variables include information on age, gender, nationality, & course of study.

4.4.4.1 Designing the Questions

Kumar (2014) & Easterby – Smith et al (2012) outlined some principles for formulating effective questions:

- Always use simple and everyday language

- Each question should express only one idea

- Do not use ambiguous questions

- Avoid questions with jargons and colloquialism

- Do not ask double – barrelled questions

- Avoid leading questions

- Do not ask questions that are based on presumptions
- Avoid the use of negatives in questions.

4.4.4.2 Pre – testing the Questionnaire

Pre – testing is an important stage in questionnaire design and entails the critical examination of the questions in the questionnaire by respondents. The aim is to identify any problems in the way that questions are worded, the appropriateness of the meaning being communicated, whether different respondents interpret a question differently and whether the respondents' interpretation is the same as what the researcher is trying to convey.

A questionnaire containing eleven questions (See Appendix 1) was designed and printed double sided on A4 paper by the researcher in order to collect the data required to achieve the research objectives. During the process of designing the questionnaire, the survey instrument was tested twice on 31 students from the same region as the study population. The questionnaire contained questions about the age group, gender, nationality & course level of respondents, the information sources used in the process of finding a UK university, how they found out about the university, main reason for choosing the university and the interpersonal sources that were influential in their decision-making. Question 11 was an open question about the ways in which the interpersonal sources influenced their decision to choose the university and was included to enable respondents to provide more details about the nature of the influence.

4.4.4.3 Choosing an appropriate distribution method

Questionnaires can be administered by post, by telephone, online, face – to – face, through group distribution and through individual distribution.

- By Post: For questionnaires administered by post, the questionnaire and covering letter are posted to the population of the sample along with a prepaid envelope for returning the completed questionnaire. A well – written covering letter that will convince respondents to complete and return the questionnaire is essential to ensure a high level of response with this method. Follow – up activity is also often required to encourage those that have not responded within the stipulated time to complete and return the questionnaire. The main advantage of the method is that the cost per respondent is low for large samples compared

with any method that requires face – to – face contact with individuals (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012). A major disadvantage is that response rates can be quite low as there is usually no personal contact with the respondent in order to encourage them to cooperate.

- By Telephone: With this method, people that are selected to be part of the sample are interviewed on the telephone by a trained interviewer. It is a valuable method in situations where the design of the research project requires contact with respondents that are geographically dispersed or where the researcher is based in a different part of the world. This method can provide better access to hard – to – reach respondents through repeated callbacks and reduce completion time for the survey process. On the other hand, response rates are generally lower than for personal interviews and some target groups can be difficult to reach by telephone.

- Internet / Online: This involves the use of web – based tools (like Survey Monkey) to create a questionnaire which is usually emailed to potential respondents. The preliminary results are then collated by the software and can be exported into sophisticated data analysis tools (like SPSS) for analysis. The method enables the researchers to customise the survey and make it easy for respondents to complete. The Internet allow researchers to reach otherwise inaccessible respondents at very low cost and collect a large amount of data within a short period of time. On the other hand, the method does not allow for respondents to be probed for further explanation, often produces low response rates and requires an up – to – date database of email addresses.

- Face – to – Face: This involves the presentation of questionnaire to respondents in the streets, at their homes, in their offices or any other convenient location. It is a relatively time – consuming and expensive process as the researcher has to travel to meet prospective respondents. The face – to – face method usually results in fairly high response rates and enables the researcher to collect comprehensive data. Lengthy questionnaires can also be administered where the interview is conducted in locations that are convenient for the respondent.

- Individual distribution: This method is used in circumstances where the survey population or sample are situated in one location, making it possible for the researcher to distribute and collect the questionnaire individually. It is a popular method for conducting surveys in public places like restaurants, gyms, train

stations and on buses. If properly designed and implemented, the method can be effective in targeting the most appropriate sample. If poorly designed, the researcher might encounter problems with sample bias.

- Group distribution: This method is only suitable in situations where the survey is being conducted in a single location or in a small number of locations. It is appropriate when there is an opportunity for the researcher to assemble the members of sub – groups or the sample in the same room at the same time. The researcher can then explain the purpose of the survey and how to complete the questionnaire, whilst being available to answer any queries that they might have during the process. When properly designed, it is a convenient, low – cost method for administering questionnaires and produces a high number of usable questionnaires. If poorly designed and implemented, sample bias can result in the collection of unreliable data.

The questionnaire for this study was administered through group distribution. This method is appropriate because the survey was conducted in a small number of locations. This method is convenient, cost – effective and generated a high number of usable questionnaires.

The questionnaire was administered through group distribution at the four welcome events organised for African students that joined the university in January 2014 and September 2014. The events were held within six weeks of enrolment at the university and provided an opportunity for the researcher to explain the purpose of the survey and how to complete the questionnaire to the students. The researcher was also available to answer any questions. The welcome events were selected as the best opportunity for administering the questionnaires because it was one of the very few events at the university that brought a good number of newly enrolled African students together in the same place. The questionnaires were self – administered by the respondents in the traditional way (using pen and paper). This was an appropriate method given the sample population, method of sampling, nature of the research questions and the sample size. Although about 110 questionnaires were distributed to the students, only 80 of those returned were usable. The 80 usable questionnaires represent 34% of the 236 African students that joined the university in January & September 2014. The reasonably high response rate is mainly due to the use of the welcome events to distribute the

questionnaire to the survey population. The completed questionnaires were checked, numbered and coded by the researcher in preparation for analysis.

Bryman & Bell (2011) evaluated the self – completion questionnaire in relation to other methods and identified the following advantages & disadvantages:

Advantages	Disadvantages
- Cheaper to administer - Quicker to administer - Absence of interviewer effects - No interviewer variability - Convenient for respondents	- Cannot prompt respondents - Cannot probe respondents to elaborate answers - Cannot ask many questions that are not salient to respondents - Difficulty of asking a lot of questions - Questionnaire can be read as a whole - Do not know who answers - Cannot collect additional data - Lower response rates - Greater risk of missing data

Table 4.4: Advantages & disadvantages of self – completion questionnaires (Source: Bryman & Bell 2011)

4.4.5 Sampling

Sampling is a major step in quantitative research due to the fact that for most research questions it is not possible to collect data from an entire population. Sample refers to the subset of the population from which evidence is gathered (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012). Sampling is the process of selecting a small number of cases (a sample) from a bigger group (the population) as the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group (Kumar, 2014). Although the focus of the study is to find answers to the research question as they relate to the total study population rather than the sample, the researcher employs the process of sampling in an attempt to estimate what is likely to be the situation in the total study population. Saunders et al (2012) suggest that sampling provides a valid alternative to a census when it would be impracticable for the researcher to survey the entire population, when the available budget constrains the researcher from surveying the entire population and when time constraints prevents the researcher from surveying the entire population.

Although it is possible to collect data from every international student at the university for this study, the cost and time required might be substantial. Sampling allows the researcher to collect data from a certain proportion of students and use the evidence to draw conclusions about the population. Sampling is equally important where interviews, observation and other data collection methods are used. The main benefits of sampling rather than a census include lower cost, greater accuracy of results and greater speed of data collection (Blumberg et al, 2011). Saunders et al (2012) claim that the organisation of data collection is more manageable as fewer people are involved and the smaller number of cases for which the researcher needs to collect data means that more time can be spent designing and piloting the means of collecting the data. The fewer number of data to be prepared for analysis also means that the results can be available more quickly.

4.4.5.1 Probability Sampling

This is a sampling technique in which the chance of each case being selected from the population is known. The bias inherent in non – probability sampling procedures is eliminated because the selection process is random. The main types of probability sampling are:

- Simple random sampling: This is a sample selected in such a way that each unit of the population has an equal chance of being selected. It is a straightforward process that involves only one stage of sample selection. In small scale research studies, a sample can be selected by drawing names or numbers out of a fish bowl, using a spinner, rolling dice or turning a roulette wheel. In large studies, printed random numbers tables or computers can be used to draw up a list of random numbers as a basis for selecting a sample. Although the method is easy to use, the researcher requires a sampling frame to work from.
- Systematic sampling: This is a method where sample units are selected from the sampling frame at a uniform rate (for example, every twentieth item from a chosen start point in a list of names). This method relies on the population list being organised randomly, so that selecting the sample in a systematic way does not produce bias by reducing the chances of some cases being selected. It is simple to draw a sample with this method. However, increased variability may be introduced if sampling interval is related to a periodic ordering of the population.

- Stratified sampling: This is a method where the population is divided into mutually exclusive groups and a random sample taken from each group. The results may be weighted and combined in some situations. This method ensures that the resulting sample will be distributed in the same way as the population in terms of the stratifying criterion. However, the method is only really feasible in situations when the information required to identify the members of the population in terms of the stratifying criterion is available. The amount of work required to identify members of the population for stratification purposes makes the method uneconomical in most situations.

- Cluster sampling: This method involves making a random selection from a sampling frame that contains groups of units rather than individual units. It is based on the ability of the researcher to divide the sampling population into groups and then select elements within each cluster (Kumar, 2014). Depending on the level of the clustering, sampling may be conducted at different levels. This method is economically more efficient than simple random sampling and provides an unbiased estimate of the population parameters if properly applied. However, it often produces lower statistical efficiency due to sub – groups being homogeneous rather than heterogeneous.

To determine the sample of the African student population to be interviewed, a probability sampling method was used. The researcher used stratified sampling by dividing the African students into different nationalities and taking a random sample from each nationality. The number of respondents selected from each nationality was proportional to the size of the group of students of that nationality enrolled at the university in September 2014. A breakdown of the nationalities of the 122 African students enrolled at the university in September 2014 is shown in the table below along with the sample size (total of 20) used for the survey. The Research Randomizer at http://www.randomizer.org/ was used to select the sample.

Country	Number of Students	Proportion	Sample Size	Sample
Nigeria	72	59%	12	4, 14, 19, 24, 25, 27, 31, 37, 45, 51, 56 & 68
Kenya	12	10%	2	3 & 5
Zimbabwe	9	7%	1	5
Libya	5	4%	1	2
Zambia	4	3%	1	2
Mauritius	4	3%	1	2
Ghana	4	3%	1	2
Egypt	3	3%	1	1
Others	9	7%		
Total	122		20	

Table 4.5: A breakdown of nationalities, proportions and sampling.

The students that were numbered in the position selected by the Randomizer on the list of enrolled students for the intake (grouped by nationality) were selected to participate in the in-depth interviews. The stratified sampling method was used in order to ensure that the resulting sample will be distributed in the same way as the African student population in terms of nationality and to ensure that every member of each of the major nationalities had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study. Statistically this increases the likelihood of getting responses that are representative of the African student population at the university.

4.4.5.2 Non – Probability Sampling

This is a sampling technique where the chance of each case being selected is not known. They are normally used when either the number of elements in a population is unknown or cannot be individually identified. They can never provide the researcher with the same level of confidence as probability based sampling does when drawing inferences about the population of interest from a specific sample (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012). The main types of non – probability sampling are:

- Judgemental sampling: This method involves selecting respondents who possess specific characteristics which the researcher believes are representative of the population as a whole. The researcher selects the sample to fulfil a purpose or selects those that can provide the best information needed to achieve the objectives of the study. This method can be extremely useful in constructing a historical reality, describing a phenomenon or describing something about which

only a little is known. However, the bias due to expert belief may make the sample unrepresentative.

- Snowball sampling: This method involves the respondent suggesting other cases for selection because they are similar to themselves. Initial respondents can be selected by probability samples and asked to identify other people that can provide the information required. It is a useful technique in situations where the researcher knows very little about the group or organisation being studied and needs to make contact with a few people, who can then direct them to other members. It is difficult to use the method when the sample becomes fairly large.

- Quota sampling: This method involves giving interviewers quotas of different groups of people to be questioned. The population is divided up into categories (like male / female, age groups, etc.) and then selection continues until a sample of a specific size is achieved within each category (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012). The objective of the method is to ensure that each of the categories is adequately represented in the sample. It is a very cost – effective way of selecting a sample. However, it introduces bias in the researcher's classification of subjects and the resulting sample is not a probability one.

- Convenience sampling: This method involves selecting cases that are most easily available for inclusion in the sample. It involves choosing the nearest and most convenient persons to act as respondent, with the process continuing until the required sample size is reached (Robson, 2002). The sample is guided primarily by the convenience of the researcher, which might be easy accessibility, geographical proximity, known contacts or being part of a specific group. Researchers generally use this method to obtain a large number of completed questionnaires quickly and economically. Although they are not proper probability samples and it is impossible to guarantee that any sample achieved represents a specific population that may be of interest, their value depends on the purpose for collecting the data (Easterby – Smith et al, 2012).

The time / cost constraints and operational difficulties in the application of most of the methods discussed above made convenience sampling the most practical option for the collection of data for the survey. Saunders et al (2012) argued that samples ostensibly chosen for convenience often meet purposive sampling criteria that are relevant to the research aim. The group of students that completed the questionnaire for this study can

160

be described as typical of international students from their respective countries and as capable as any other in terms of their ability to provide the information required to address the research questions. Bryman (1989) stated that in the field of business & management, convenience samples are very common and indeed more common than probability – based samples.

The structure of the population and the availability of the information required to identify the members of the population in terms of a stratifying criterion made stratified sampling the ideal choice for the in-depth interviews. The researcher also wanted to generate responses that were fairly representative of the African student population at the university by using a probability sampling method.

4.5 Data Analyses

Data analysis is the ability to break down data and to understand the nature of the component parts and the relationship between them (Saunders et al, 2012). It is a challenging and often complex stage of the research process, but must be done properly in order to produce research results that will be valid and reliable.

4.5.1 Analysing Qualitative data

Qualitative data usually comes in the form of narratives, images, drawings, maps, cartoons, paintings, photographs or video clips. Most qualitative researchers grapple with the challenge of condensing highly complex and context – bound information into a format which tells a story in a way that is fully convincing to others. The complexity of qualitative data analysis requires reorganising data for interpretation through different stages of transformations that the data undergoes from their original form as the interviewer speaks to their transcription form and their division into segments during data analysis (Beck, 2003). Unlike quantitative data analysis, there are very few widely accepted rules and standards for analysing qualitative data. The specific approaches available for analysing qualitative data include:

- Grounded theory method: This is "a methodology in which a systematic set of procedures is used to develop an inductively derived theory about phenomena" (Collis & Hussey, 2009, pp.179).

- Template analysis: This is a method that involves creating and developing a hierarchical template of data codes or categories that represents themes revealed in the data collected and the relationships between these.

- Analytical induction: This method involves the intensive and iterative examination of a number of strategically selected cases in order to identify the cause of a phenomena.

- Narrative analysis: This is "the collection and analysis of qualitative data that preserves the integrity and narrative value of data collected, thereby avoiding their fragmentation" (Saunders et al, 2012, pp.676).

- Content analysis: This is a systematic method that enables the researcher to draw reasonable conclusions from the frequency and nature of themes identified in the data. It sometimes involves converting selected items of qualitative data into numerical data for analysis.

Saunders et al (2012) proposed a generic approach that provides an adequate means of analysing the data collected through interviews and focus group. This method is beneficial because it enables the researcher to comprehend the large & disparate amounts of data collected, integrate related data, identify key themes for further investigation, develop or test theories based on obvious relationships and draw or verify conclusions. The main stages involved in the generic approach are:

1. Categorise data: This involves identifying categories to which the researcher will subsequently attach meaningful portions of the original data. This will allow the researcher to rearrange the original data into analytical categories.

2. Unitise data: This involves attaching relevant portions (units) of the data to the appropriate categories or headings that have been devised. This process will be guided by the research objectives / questions and should reduce the data and rearrange it into a more manageable form.

3. Recognise relationships & develop categories: The process of generating categories and reorganising the data enables the researcher to engage in data analysis. This analysis continues with the search for key themes and patterns of relationships in the rearranged data.

4. Develop testable propositions: Testable propositions are developed as the researcher seeks to reveal patterns within the data and to reorganise the

relationships between categories. Any apparent connections must be tested to be able to establish the existence of an actual relationship.

Content analysis was identified as the most appropriate method for analysing the data collected through the in-depth interviews conducted as part of this study. The process involves analysing the contents of the interview transcripts in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by the respondents. The method is appropriate for this study because the research question is best answered by analysing the data generated through the in-depth interviews in a thematic way. The research question being addressed with the data from the in-depth interviews is also specific and sufficiently focussed for the researcher to be able to extract them from the key themes to be searched for in the text. Kumar (2014) identified the steps involved in using content analysis as:

1. Identify the main themes: This involves carefully going through the descriptive responses given by the respondents to each question in order to understand the meaning they communicate. From these responses the researcher will develop broad themes that represent these meanings and use the themes as the basis for analysing the text of the in-depth interviews.

2. Assign codes to the main themes: Whether or not the researcher assigns a code to a main theme is dependent upon whether or not the researcher wants to count the number of times a theme has occurred in an interview. The researcher will write out the main themes and assign a code to each of them, using numbers or keywords to identify them.

3. Classify responses under the main themes: After identifying the themes, the researcher will go through the transcripts of all the interviews and classify the responses or contents of the notes under the different themes.

4. Integrate themes and responses into the text of your report: After identifying the responses that fall within different themes, the researcher needs to integrate them into the text of the report. This involves using the main themes that emerge from the study during the discussion, using verbatim responses to maintain the true feel of the responses or counting how frequently a theme occurred and providing a sample of the responses.

The extent to which content analysis can be described as objective depends on the nature of the analysis conducted by the researcher (Cameron & Price, 2009). In situations where the researcher simply counts up the number of times a word is used or runs the data through a computer system which does this on the researcher's behalf, some level of objectivity is assured. Cameron & Price (2009) outlined some limitations of content analysis:

- The chosen categories can limit the informational content of the analysis, so the researcher needs to be aware that their conclusions should not go beyond the sample of the text that has been analysed.

- The researcher must be aware that the value of their analysis will depend upon the coding categories that are used. They need to be clear, appropriate and comprehensive.

- The researcher must ensure that the terms used must not be easily confused or conflated with others. They must be appropriate and relate specifically to the core focus of the study.

- Although the method can be applied to a whole range of texts, the findings relate only to the context of the particular research study. The conclusions drawn from the interview transcripts have to be limited to the population from which the text is sampled and not generalizable to the wider population.

The in-depth interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the responses were grouped under six main headings. The headings are process (the decision-making process), information sources used (information sources used in the decision-making process), important factors considered (factors considered in choosing a UK university), options considered (the options considered during the decision-making process), decision-making process (how the student arrived at the decision to choose the university) and most influential interpersonal sources (the interpersonal sources that were most influential during the decision-making process).

The researcher used the steps identified by Kumar (2014) to analyse the qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews:

1. Identify the main themes: The researcher carefully went through the descriptive responses given by the respondents in order to understand the meaning they were trying to communicate. From these responses the researcher developed

broad themes that represented these meanings and used the themes as the basis for analysing the text of the in-depth interviews. The table below shows the themes identified for the interpersonal sources that were most influential during the decision-making process and the themes identifies for each source on the nature of their influence:

Main themes (interpersonal sources): Parents, friends, family members & agents
Themes for agents: • Information & practical support during the application process • Encouragement, responsiveness & personalised service during the application process • Career guidance & counselling • The right solution for the student • A good quality UK institution. **Themes for parents:** • Quality of education / institution • Career prospects • Funding / affordability • Parental guidance **Themes for friends:** • Advice & guidance based on previous, current or intended study at the university • The need to maintain contact or study together **Family members:** • Advice & guidance based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK • Counsel & guidance

Table 4.6: Example of main themes identified for most influential interpersonal sources

2. Assign codes to the main themes: The researcher read through the interview transcripts and used coloured highlighter pens to identify the parts of the text for different respondents that related to the themes identified for most influential interpersonal sources and the nature of their influence. The colour-coding made it easier for the researcher to pull together the responses that related to each theme identified for the different influential interpersonal sources.

3. Classify responses under the main themes: After identifying the responses related to the different themes, the researcher went through the transcripts of all the interviews and classified the contents of the notes under the different themes

for the nature of each interpersonal sources' influence on the decision-making process. .

4. Integrate themes and responses into the text of your report: After identifying the responses that fell within different themes, the researcher collated, summarised and integrated them into the text in the Presentation of Findings section of the report. Verbatim responses are used to maintain the true feel of the responses and provide a sample of the responses. The themes and responses are also used as part of the evidence in the Discussion of Findings section of the report.

Content analysis was identified as the most appropriate analytical approach for the study because of its ability to extract the answers to the research questions for the study in a thematic way from the data generated through the in-depth interviews.

4.5.2 Analysing Quantitative Data

Quantitative data can be analysed through the application of a body of methods and theory known as 'statistics'. These methods enable the researcher to analyse and interpret the data that has been collected in order to obtain the information required to provide answers to the research questions and address the research objectives. Although quantitative data analysis begins after the data have been collected, it is important for the researcher to be fully aware of the techniques available at a fairly early stage. This is because the techniques have to be appropriately matched to the types of variable that have been created through the research. The size and nature of the sample for the study can also impose limitations on the kinds of techniques that can be used by the researcher.

Zikmund (2003) provided an overview of the stages in the data analysis process for quantitative research:

- Editing: This is the process of preparing the data for coding and transfer to data storage by checking and adjusting the data for omissions, legibility and consistency. The aim of editing is to ensure completeness, consistency and reliability of the data collected.

- Coding: This is the process of identifying and classifying the answers with numerical scores or other character symbols in preparation for the transfer of the

survey data to computers. Codes are numerical symbols used for interpreting, classifying and recording data.

- Data entry: This is the process of transferring the data gathered for the research study onto a computer system. Research studies using self – administered web surveys or computer – assisted telephone interviewing allow responses to be automatically stored and tabulated as they are collected and can reduce the clerical errors that often occur during the editing and coding process.

- Data analysis: This is the process of transforming the raw data into the information required to address the research questions. The interpretation of the data can be done through descriptive analysis, univariate analysis, bivariate analysis and multivariate analysis. Descriptive analysis entails the transformation of the data into a form that will make them easy to understand and interpret by providing descriptive information. Univariate analysis assesses the statistical significance of a hypothesis about a single variable. Bivariate analysis is used for the investigation of two variables using tests of differences or measures of association between two variables at a time. Multivariate analysis allows the researcher to simultaneously investigate more than two variables.

The data collected through the self – completion questionnaire was entered into SPSS Version 20 which has the ability to perform a range of statistical tests and also generate tables, charts and graphs that can be used to present the data. The objective of the data analysis process is to provide descriptive and inferential statistics that will enable the researcher to properly address the research questions. Descriptive statistics help to summarise, describe and display quantitative data, whilst inferential statistics help to draw conclusions about a population from quantitative data relating to a random sample. Inferential statistics enable the researcher to reach conclusions that extend beyond the data and are used to infer, based on the study of a sample of a population, what the entire population might think or do (Quinlan, 2011).

Most of the data collected through the self – completion questionnaires are categorical rather than numerical data. Categorical data are those whose values cannot be measured numerically but can be classified into sets according to the characteristics identified or placed in rank order. Numerical data refers to data whose values can be measured or

counted numerically as quantities. The table below shows some of the ways in which the data can be presented for analysis:

Data Type	Data Presentation
To show one variable so that any specific value can be read easily	Table / frequency distribution
To show the frequency of occurrences of categories or values for one variable so that highest and lowest are clear	Bar chart or pictogram
To show the trend for a variable	Line graph or bar chart
To show the proportion of occurrences of categories or values for one variable	Pie chart or bar chart
To show the distribution of values for one variable	Frequency polygon
To show the interdependence between two or more variables so that any specific value can be read easily	Contingency table / cross – tabulation
To compare the frequency of occurrences of categories or values for two or more variables so that the highest & lowest are clear	Multiple bar chart
To compare the trends for two or more variables so that conjunctions are clear	Multiple line graph or multiple bar chart
To compare the proportions of occurrences of categories or values for two or more variables	Comparative pie charts or percentage component bar chart
To compare the distribution of values for two or more variables	Multiple box plot
To compare the frequency of occurrences of categories or values for two or more variables so that totals are clear	Stacked bar chart
To compare the proportions and totals of occurrences of categories or values for two or more variables	Comparative proportional pie charts
To show the relationship between cases for two variable	Scatter graph / scatter plot

Table 4.7: A summary of data presentation by data type (Saunders et al, 2012, pp.489).

The data from the questionnaires were entered into an SPSS Version 20 file created by the researcher and checked for errors. The researcher then used descriptive analysis on SPSS to transform the data into different forms so that they can be easily interpreted and understood when reported in the presentation of findings section. The low number of respondents and the broad groupings of responses to most of the questions made it difficult for the researcher to use inferential statistics to draw sensible conclusions from the quantitative data collected through the survey.

The researcher was later advised to combine some of the answer groupings in order to be able to conduct more sophisticated analysis of the data to provide better insight into the issues being examined by the study. The researcher combined the four age groups into two and also combined several similar groups of answers on initial information source, reason for choosing the university and most influential interpersonal source in

order to restructure the data for further analysis. This enabled the researcher to cross-tabulate some of the responses and conduct Chi – square tests.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is the study of morality or right behaviour and addresses the issue of how to conduct research in a responsible way. It refers to the standards of behaviour that guide the conducts of the researcher in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of their work or are affected by it (Saunders et al, 2012). Although social norms indicate the type of behaviour that a person should adopt in a particular situation, the norms of behaviour that are applied will allow for a range of ethical positions. Ethics not only addresses the question of how to use methodology in a proper way to conduct sound research but also deals with the issue of how the available methodology may be used in the right way (Blumberg et al, 2011). This is because conducting research sometimes requires the researcher to compromise between what methodological theories recommends and what is feasible from a practical point of view. The way that the research is conducted also needs to be morally defensible in the eyes of all stakeholders.

The two dominant philosophical standpoints on research ethics are deontology and teleology. The deontological view is based on following rules that have been established to guide the researcher's conduct. According to this view, the ends never justify the use of means that are questionable on ethical grounds. On the other hand, the teleological view argues that the decision about whether an act of conduct is justified or not should be determined by its consequences and not by a set of predetermined rules. Business researchers with this view believe that the morality of the means has to be judged by the ends served. The conduct of this research study is based on the deontological view and all activities are guided by the research regulations of Anglia Ruskin University.

In an attempt to overcome potential ethical dilemmas many professional bodies and organisations have devised codes of ethics containing a list of principles to guide the conduct of their members. Bell & Bryman (2007) conducted a content analysis of the ethical principles of nine professional social sciences associations and identified ten major principles in research ethics. These principles will be used to identify some of the ethical issues that are relevant in this study:

1. Harm to participants: This is the potential to cause harm through the research process and the need to ensure the physical and psychological well - being of participants. It can take the form of embarrassment, stress, discomfort, pain or conflict and may be caused by using research methods in intrusive or zealous ways. In the conduct of this study, the researcher prevented potential harm to participants by ensuring that assurances about confidentiality and anonymity were not violated.

2. Dignity: This is the requirement to respect the dignity of participants. The conduct of any type of research entails social responsibility and obligations to those who participate in or are affected by it. The rights and dignity of all persons was recognised and respected in the conduct of the study.

3. Informed consent: This is the need to ensure fully informed consent of research participants. Securing informed consent from participants require the researcher to fully disclose the procedures of the proposed survey or other research design before requesting permission to proceed with the study. In conducting this study, the researcher provided information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach fully informed, considered and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion. Students participating in the in-depth interviews were provided with a participant information sheet, asked to sign a consent form and given the right to decline to answer any question asked or withdraw their participation at any point during the interview.

4. Privacy: This is the need to protect privacy of research subjects. This is important not only in retaining the validity of research but also in protecting respondents. The right to privacy is something that most people see as important and violation of it in the name of research is generally seen as unacceptable. It is connected to many of the other principles discussed; especially confidentiality and anonymity.

5. Confidentiality: This is the requirement to ensure confidentiality of research data. Every respondent that participated in the in-depth interviews was given the guarantee of confidentiality. The respondents' confidentiality will be protected by restricting access to participant identification, restricting access to data instruments and non – disclosure of data sub – sets or any other information that can be used to identify individual respondents.

6. Anonymity: The anonymity of participating individuals or organisations should be protected. The individuals that participated in the study will remain anonymous and the data that they provided will be processed to make it non – attributable. When confidentiality and anonymity are assured, reliability of data is likely to be enhanced (Saunders et al, 2012).

7. Deception: This is the potential for deception through the research process. This happens when research participants are only told part of the truth or when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is. Deception as an act is inappropriate for this study and contrary to the university's research regulations.

8. Affiliation: This is the need to declare any professional or personal affiliations that may influence the research. Although the researcher is currently employed as Senior International Manager at the university's International Office, this relationship does not in any way influence the research study. All the respondents were aware of the researcher's position at the university.

9. Honesty & transparency: This is the need for openness & honesty in communicating information about the research to all stakeholders. The researcher will be honest and transparent in communicating the findings of the study to all interested parties.

10. Misrepresentation: This is the need to avoid misleading, misunderstanding, misrepresenting or false reporting of the research findings. The researcher will maintain objectivity during every stage of the interview in order to ensure that the findings are not misrepresented.

The research design and research tools proposed for this study enabled the researcher to fulfil all these ethical requirements. Although there might be issues relating to power relations as the research involves first year international students, the researcher does not currently lecture at the university and thus does not have a significant amount of ability to unduly influence the students.

4.7 Data Collection & Analysis

The main objectives of this study are to identify the interpersonal sources that are used by prospective African students in the process of choosing a UK university, assess the importance of interpersonal sources in the decision-making process, identify the

interpersonal sources that are most influential and explain the ways in which those sources influence the students' decisions. The three research tools employed by the researcher in order to achieve the objectives are archival research, survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

Anglia Ruskin University was selected as the ideal source for the data to be used for the study for a number of reasons. Firstly, as a post-1992 university, the institution operates in the most competitive sector of the UK higher education industry where institutions must devise creative marketing strategies in order to attract international students. Also, the choice of the institution, which was the researcher's employer for most of the period of the study, enables the researcher to demonstrate clear contributions to professional practice that will be valued by the institution.

4.7.1 Archival Research

Archival Research was used to collect information that was already available about how enrolled students that joined the university in January 2014 & September 2014 found out about the course/university. This method was employed as part of the data collection process because some of the data that was already available in the university could be used to answer the first research question about the interpersonal sources from which prospective students obtain the information required to make decisions about which university to choose. The researcher obtained a list of the students that enrolled at the university in January & September 2014 and examined the application forms completed by them to collect the information that they provided about how they found out about their courses and the university. The information was collected from the answer that the students had provided to a question on the application form that asked how they found out about the course/university. The researcher obtained the answers provided to the questions by 178 out of the 236 African students (75%) that enrolled at the university in January & September 2014. The researcher was unable to locate the application forms for some of the rest of the applicants and the others did not provide an answer to the question on where they found out about the course.

The answer provided by each student was entered on the list of enrolled students obtained by the researcher and transferred onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that enabled the researcher to obtain a summary of the data collected. The Microsoft Excel

software was then used to generate a pie chart and bar chart that summarised the data for presentation in the findings section of the thesis.

4.7.2 Survey Questionnaire

A questionnaire containing eleven questions (See Appendix 1) was designed and printed double sided on A4 paper by the researcher in order to collect the data required to achieve the research objectives. The questionnaire was administered through group distribution at the four welcome events organised for African students that joined the university in January 2014 and September 2014. The completed questionnaires were checked, numbered and coded by the researcher in preparation for analysis. The data from the questionnaires were entered into an SPSS Version 20 file created by the researcher and checked for errors. The researcher then used descriptive analysis on SPSS to transform the data into different forms so that they can be easily interpreted and understood when reported in the presentation of findings section.

4.7.3 In-depth Interviews

Sixteen face – to – face in-depth interviews were conducted with African students that enrolled at the university in September 2014 in order to get a good understanding of the roles played by different interpersonal sources during the decision – making process and the ways in which the different groups of interpersonal sources influenced their decision to join the university. The researcher used stratified sampling by dividing the African students into different nationalities and taking a random sample from each nationality. The researcher emailed the selected students to invite them to participate in the study. The researcher received responses from eighteen respondents and was able to conduct interviews with sixteen of them. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the responses were grouped under six main headings. Content analysis was used to identify the main themes that emerged from the responses given by each respondent under the different headings.

4.8 Conclusion

The researcher undertook primary research to gain additional insights into the use of interpersonal sources by prospective international students of African origin in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for UK higher education. Although the review of existing literature provided general information on the decision-

making process for UK higher education, it did not provide the specific information required to address the research questions. The intention of the researcher is not only to improve understanding of the subject area but to link this understanding to the deployment of appropriate marketing communication strategies by institutions that are recruiting students from these markets.

The use of a mixed method design provides completeness, explanation, credibility, illustration and enables the researcher to effectively address the different research questions. The combination of qualitative and quantitative findings also enables the researcher to forge an overall or negotiated account of the findings that is not possible through the application of a single method. Archival research through the analysis of the application forms of the African students enrolled at the university enabled the researcher to use data that was already available to provide some insights for the study. Due to the normal constraints of time and cost a survey seemed the most appropriate tool that would enable the researcher to gather data on the characteristics of the sample and their opinion on the topic. The administration of the survey at the Welcome Events for African students enabled the researcher to get a response from one out of every three African students that joined the university in 2014.

Sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the population in order to gather the data required to provide answers to the final research question about the ways in which interpersonal sources influence students' decisions at the evaluation of alternatives stage. The research tool was selected because of its ability to provide the rich data required to generate the information required to effectively address the research question. The table below shows that both tools have been used successfully by researchers in the past to effectively gather the data required to develop understanding of various issues in the subject area:

Study	Focus / Respondents	Research Tools
Moogan (2011)	UK Higher education: first year university students	In-depth interviews & self – completion questionnaires
Moogan & Baron (2003)	UK Higher education: students at FE colleges	Self – completion questionnaires
Brown et al (2009)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Focus groups
Moogan et al (1999)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Group interviews / discussions & self – completion questionnaire

Dawes & Brown (2003)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Self – completion questionnaire
Manthorpe et al (2010)	UK Higher education: applicants for social work programmes	Online survey, group discussion & interviews and focus groups
Briggs & Wilson (2007)	UK Higher education: first year university students	Self – completion questionnaire
Donaldson & McNicholas (2004)	UK postgraduate market: first year postgraduate students	Qualitative interviews and self – completion questionnaires
Maringe (2006)	UK Higher education: sixth form pupils	Self – completion questionnaire
Dawes & Brown (2003)	UK Higher Education: first year university students	Interviews and survey
Binsardi & Ekwulugo	UK Higher Education: international students	Survey, in-depth interviews and archival research

Table 4.8: Research tools used by other researchers in the subject area

The quantitative data gathered through the survey was analysed with SPSS Version 20 and the different types of data generated are presented. The qualitative data gathered through the in-depth interviews was analysed using content analysis and data generated is also presented along with other findings.

Bryman & Bell (2011) identified the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of business and management research as reliability, replicability and validity. The extent to which the study fulfils these requirements will determine the perception of the quality of the research outcomes by all stakeholders. Reliability relates to whether the data collection techniques and analytical procedures employed in the study would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or if they were replicated by another researcher. This is a challenging issue to address, especially in the light of threats like participant or researcher errors and bias.

Validity relates to the integrity of the conclusions that are generated by the study. Internal validity addresses the question of whether a conclusion that incorporates a relationship between two or more variables actually holds water (Bryman & Bell, 2011). External validity relates to the question of whether the results of the study can be generalized beyond the specific research context. In addressing the issue of internal validity, the researcher ensured that the research design includes a sufficient number of perspectives as reflected by previous studies in the subject area. Although, it is difficult to guarantee the reliability of the study, the researcher has provided sufficient detail

about the research design to provide the best opportunity for others to conduct similar studies in future. Every effort has been made to eliminate or reduce participant or researcher errors & bias.

Whilst the sample is not sufficiently diverse to allow inferences beyond the UK higher education sector, the results of the study can be reasonably generalised to other post – 92 UK universities recruiting the same calibre of students from the main African countries represented by the respondents.

The next chapter will present the main findings from the implementation of the research plan. It will outline the information gathered through archival research, survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

5 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the main findings from the research study will be outlined and explained.

5.1 Introduction

The main purpose of the study is to explore the use of interpersonal sources (teachers, career advisers, friends & relatives, agents, university reps, etc.) in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa.

The main research questions are:

1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

As the information required to answer the research questions was gathered through the use of archival research, survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews, it is important to establish the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative research data and how they will be used in the study.

Although drawing upon data across the quantitative / qualitative spectrum can occur at all stages of the research process, the quantitative & qualitative data for this study were collected & analysed separately; with both strands being mixed at the interpretation stage. The quantitative data from the archival research and survey questionnaires are used to address the first two research questions. Quantitative data from the survey questionnaire is used to address the third research question. The answers presented by the researcher to these research questions are based purely on the quantitative data. The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews is used to provide answers to the fourth

research question which identifies the ways in which the different interpersonal sources influence the decisions of prospective international students. Excerpts from answers provided by respondents to the open-ended question in the survey questionnaire are used to support the responses provided by interviewees. Thus the qualitative data is used to provide explanations on why and how the main interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

The conclusions reached in the study will reflect what was learnt from the combination of results from both the quantitative and qualitative strands with the former providing `hard evidence' and the latter providing explanations.

5.1.1 Archival Research

This involved the collection of information about how applicants found out about the university. The researcher analysed the application forms completed by the African students enrolled at the university in January & September 2014 intakes to collect the information that they provided about how they found out about their courses and the university. The information was collected from the answer that the students had provided to a question in Section 10 of the application form which states: "Please tell us where you found out about this course?" The corresponding question on the online application form states: "Please tell us where you learned of this course". The researcher was able to get access to the applications forms completed by most of the students. The researcher obtained the answers provided to the questions by 178 out of the 236 African students (75%). The researcher was unable to locate the application forms for some of the rest of the applicants and the others did not provide an answer to the question on where they found out about the course. A full breakdown of the nationalities of the students is shown below:

Nationality	No. of Students
Nigerian	121
Kenyan	11
Zimbabwean	9
Libyan	6
Zambian	6
Egyptian	5
Mauritian	4
Ghanaian	2
Ugandan	2
Tanzanian	2
Ivorian	2
Cameroonian	1
Botswanan	1
Beninese	1
Ethiopian	1
Sierra Leonean	1
Angolan	1
Swazi	1
Sudanese	1
TOTAL	**178**

Table 5.1: Archival research nationalities of African students

A diagrammatic representation of their nationalities is shown below:
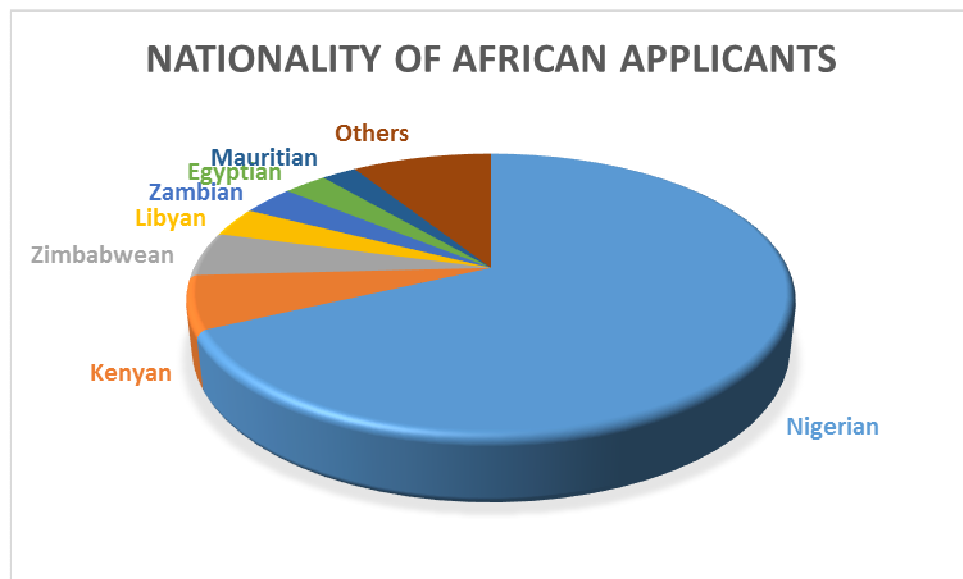
Figure 5.1: Archival research nationalities of African students

68% of the applicants are Nigerians, 6% are Kenyans, 5% are Zimbabweans, 3% are Libyans, 3% are Zambians, 3% are Egyptians, 2% are Mauritians and the remaining 9% are from 12 other African countries.

5.1.2 Survey

The questionnaires distributed to some of the African students that joined the university in January & September 2014 was completed by 80 students. The 80 usable questionnaires represent 34% of the 236 African students that joined the university in January & September 2014. A full breakdown of the nationalities of the students is shown below:

Nationality	No. of Students
Nigerian	60
Kenyan	3
Zimbabwean	3
Zambian	2
Mauritian	2
Ghanaian	1
Ugandan	3
Tanzanian	2
Cameroonian	1
Algerian	1
Sierra Leonean	1
Not Stated	1
TOTAL	**80**

Table 5.2: Questionnaire survey nationalities of African students

A diagrammatic representation of their nationalities is shown below:
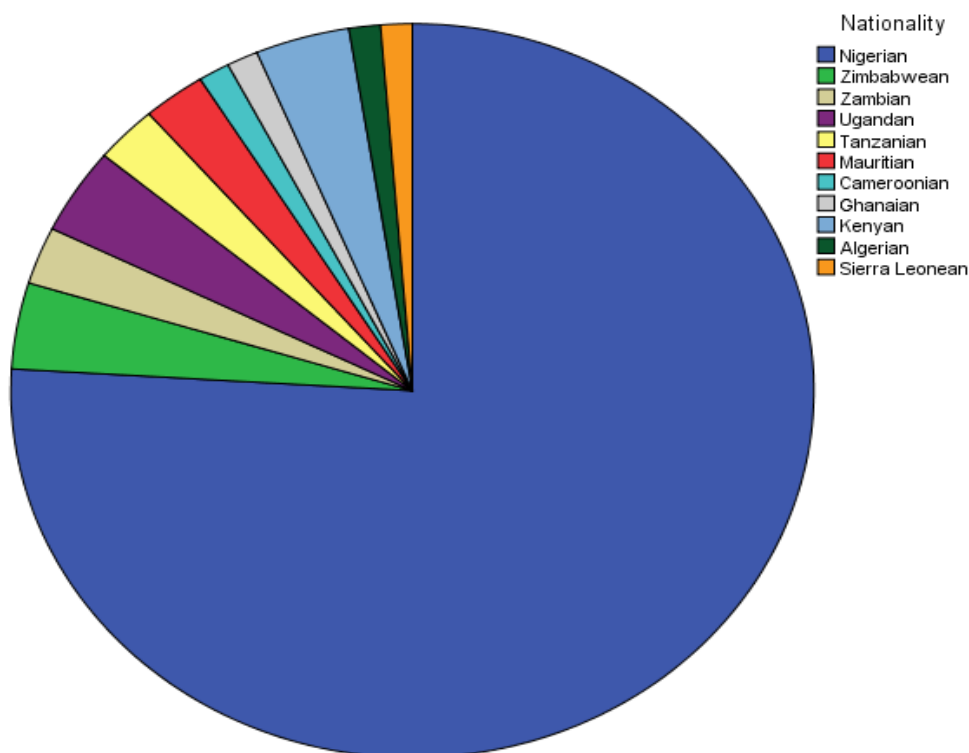
Figure 5.2: Questionnaire survey nationalities of respondents

75% of the respondents are Nigerians, 4% are Kenyans, 4% are Zimbabweans, 4% are Ugandans and the remaining 13% are from 7 other African countries.

The group includes 36 males (45%) and 44 females (55%) as shown by the diagram below:
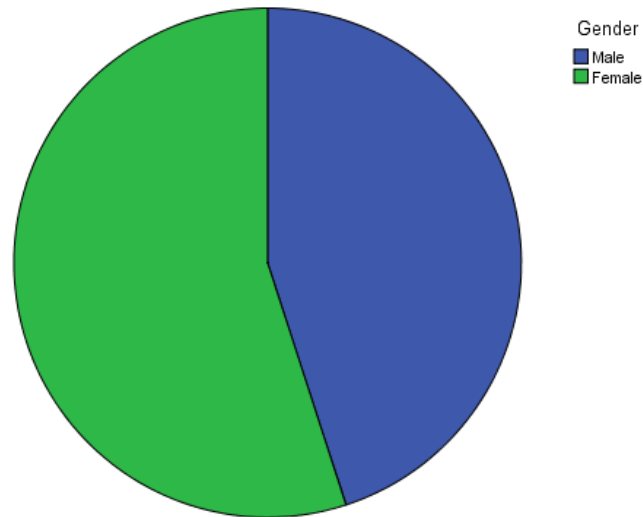
Figure 5.3: Gender breakdown of respondents

The group includes 12 students aged 17 – 21 (15%), 23 students aged 22 – 25 (29%), 32 students aged 26 – 35 (40%) and 10 students aged over 36 (13%) as shown by the diagram below. Three students did not provide an answer to the question on age group.
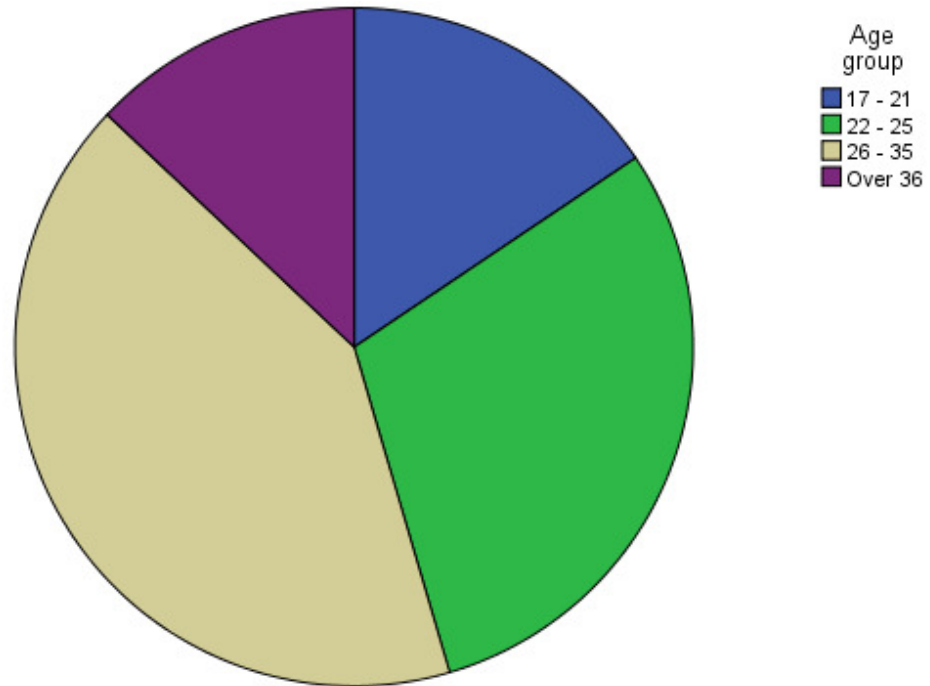
Figure 5.4: Age groups of respondents

The group includes 44 Postgraduate students (55%) and 36 Undergraduate students (45%) as shown by the diagram below:
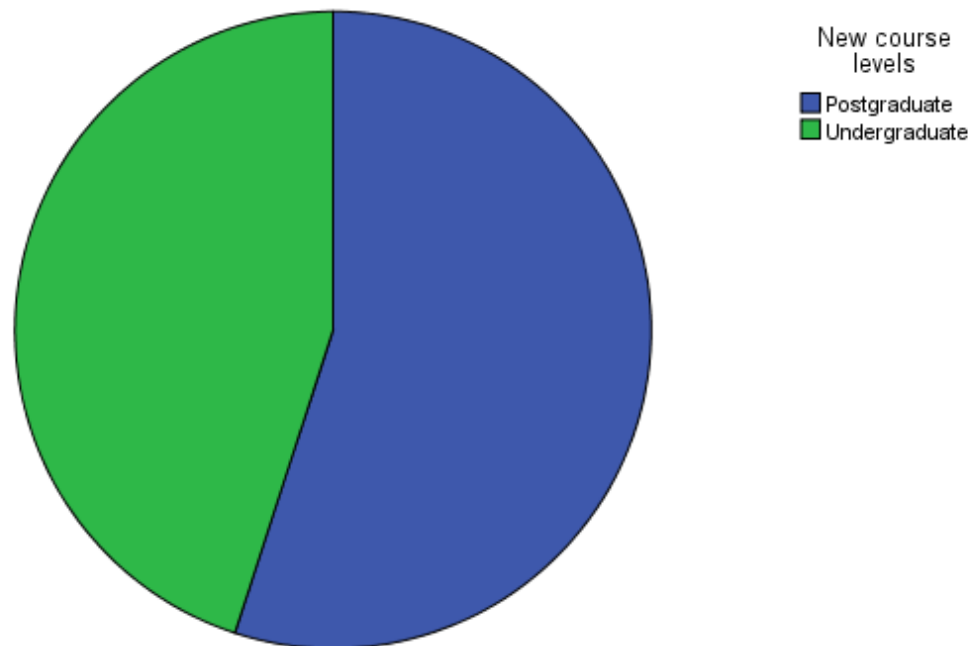
Figure 5.5: Breakdown of respondents by course level

5.1.3 In–depth Interviews

The researcher conducted in–depth interviews with sixteen African students that enrolled at the university in September 2014 in order to gather the data required to

provide answers to the final research question about the ways in which interpersonal sources influence students' decisions. The table below provides some demographic information about the interviewees:

Number	Sex	Nationality	Level	Age
1	Male	Nigerian	Bachelors	22
2	Female	Nigerian	Bachelors	35
3	Male	Zimbabwean	Bachelors	19
4	Female	Kenyan	Bachelors	24
5	Male	Nigerian	Masters	29
6	Male	Nigerian	Bachelors	29
7	Female	Kenya	Bachelors	22
8	Male	Nigerian	Masters	25
9	Male	Nigerian	Bachelors	28
10	Male	Nigerian	Masters	37
11	Male	Nigerian	Bachelors	23
12	Female	Mauritian	Bachelors	20
13	Female	Ghanaian	Bachelors	29
14	Female	Nigerian	Bachelors	28
15	Female	Nigerian	Masters	24
16	Male	Zambian	Masters	28

Table 5.3: Demographic data for in-depth interview participants

5.2. Research Question One

What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

The purpose of this question is to identify the range and types of interpersonal sources from which African students obtain information in the process of choosing a UK university.

5.2.1 Archival Research

The researcher conducted an analysis of the application forms completed by 178 African students enrolled at the university in January & September 2014 to collect the information that they provided about how they found out about the university. 70 students (39%) found out about the course from agents, 43 students (24%) obtained the information from the website, 26 students (15%) obtained the information through personal recommendation, 8 students (5%) found out about the course from search engines, 11 students (6%) were current/previous students, whilst 20 students (11%) found out about the course from other sources. The other sources from which students found out about their courses include newspaper adverts, online advert, school/college,

exhibition/fair, careers officer/adviser, tutor's recommendation, UCAS and employer. A diagrammatic representation of the results is shown below:
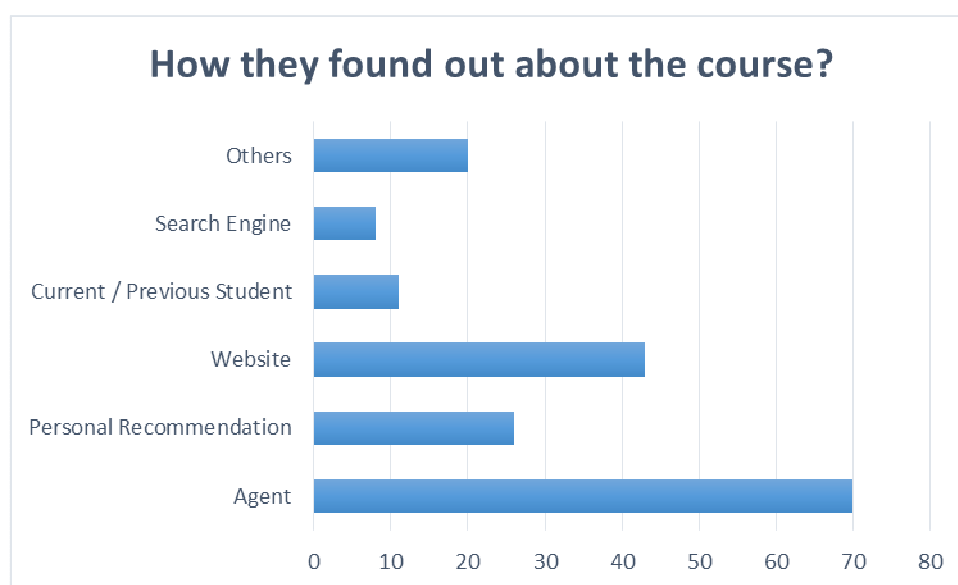

Figure 5.6: How enrolled students found out about the course / university

Based on the results of the archival research, the range of interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose are agents, personal recommendation, current/previous student, employers, tutors and career officers/advisers.

5.2.2 Survey

The questionnaires distributed to African students that joined the university in January & September 2014 were completed by 80 students. Question 5 is "Which information sources did you use in the process of finding a UK university?" Respondents were asked to tick all that apply from a list that included university prospectus/brochure, university website, UCAS handbook, university fair/exhibition, Internet search engine, career tutor/teacher, university open day, parent/family members, friends, university staff, agent/local representative, newspaper, university league table and other. The aim of the question was to identify the different sources used by the students in the process of finding a UK university and assess the extent to which interpersonal sources were used. Only responses that indicated that the student used at least one interpersonal source were included in the analysis. Responses that indicated only non – interpersonal

sources were counted in the first category as not having used an interpersonal information source during the process. This simplified the process of coding and analysing the data.

A breakdown of the responses shows that 32 students (40%) did not choose any interpersonal sources, 23 students (29%) used agents, 12 students (15%) used friends, 4 students (5%) used family members, 3 students (4%) used agents & friends, 2 students (3%) used family members & agents, 1 student (1%) used university staff & agent, 1 student (1%) used agent & tutor, 1 student (1%) used agent, friend & tutor and 1 student (1%) used family members, friends and university staff. The diagram below shows a breakdown of the responses on interpersonal sources:
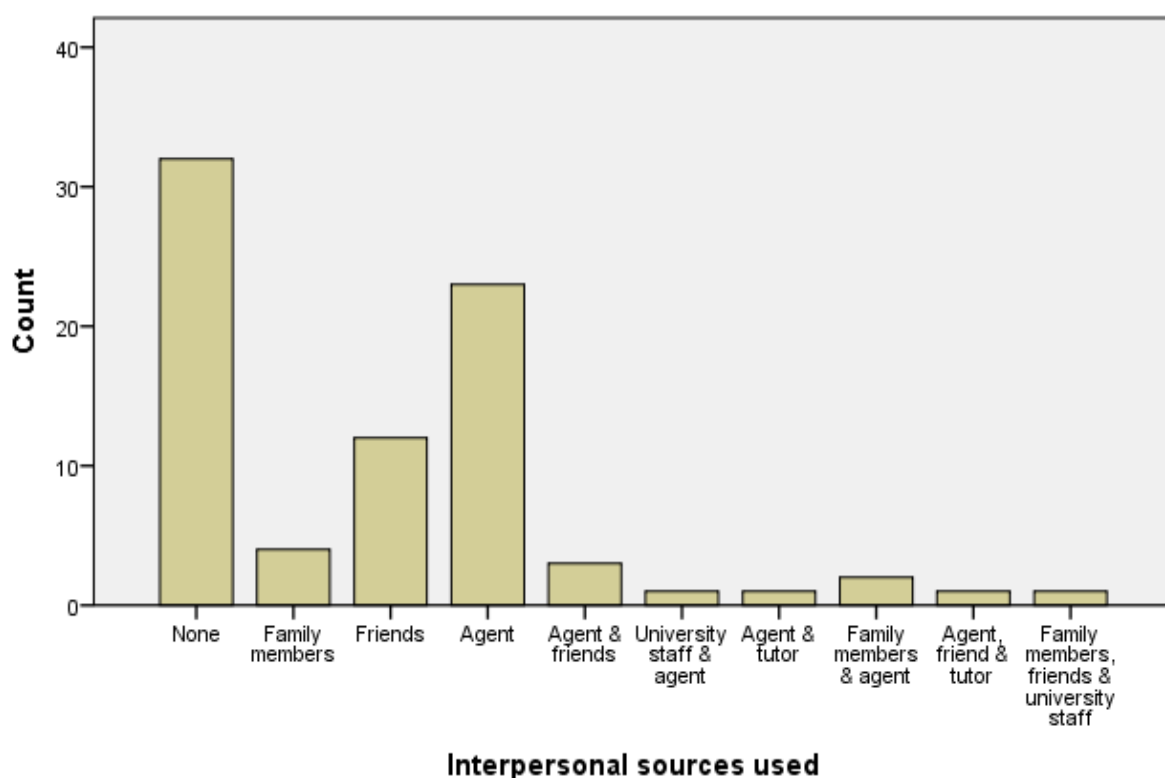
Figure 5.7: Interpersonal sources used by respondents

Based on the results of the survey, the range of interpersonal sources from which prospective African students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose are agents, family members, friends, university staff and career tutors/teachers. 60% of respondents confirmed the use of interpersonal sources during the process of searching for a UK university.

The results of the archival research and survey indicate that the interpersonal sources from which prospective African students obtain the information required to make decisions on which UK university to choose are agents, personal recommendations from friends & family members, university staff, career tutors, teachers / tutors, current/previous students and employers. The data indicates that the most popular interpersonal source from which African students obtain the information about UK university education is agents.

5.3 Research Question Two

How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

The purpose of this question is to assess the extent to which information obtained from interpersonal sources affects the decision of African students about UK higher education. One way of doing this is to find out what proportion of the students found out about the course/university from interpersonal sources rather than other sources.

5.3.1 Archival Research

The researcher's analysis of the application forms completed by 178 African students enrolled at the university in January & September 2014 revealed that 70 students (39%) found out about the course from agents, 26 students (15%) obtained the information through personal recommendation and 11 students (6%) were current/previous students. This means that at least 107 students (60%) found out about the course from interpersonal sources (agents, personal recommendation & current/previous students):

How they found out about the course?
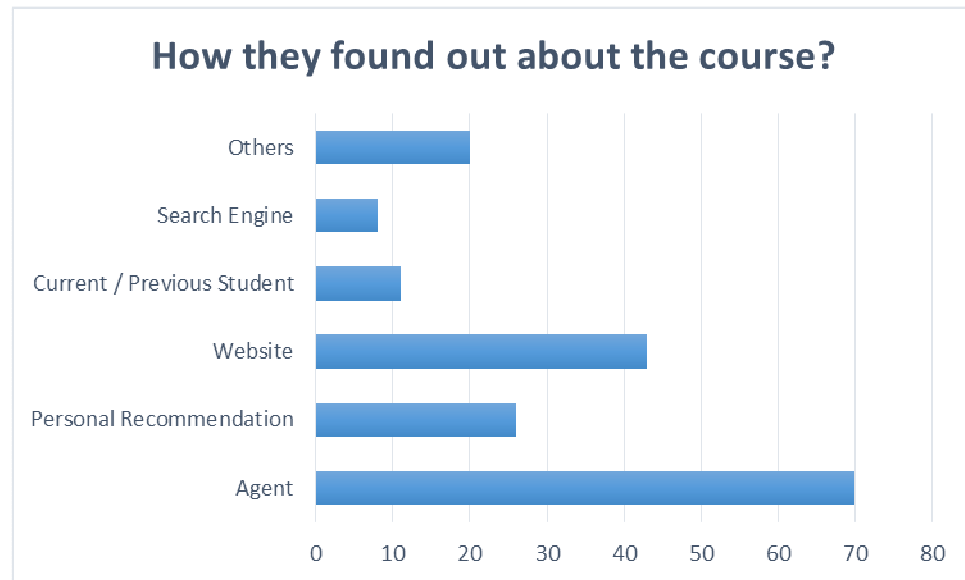
Figure 5.8: How enrolled students found out about the course/university

The results of the archival research indicate that the information obtained from interpersonal sources are more important than information from non - interpersonal sources (website, prospectus, exhibitions, newspaper adverts, etc.) in the decision-making process. The archival research shows that at least 60% of students found out about the course from interpersonal sources (agents, personal recommendation & current/previous students) as against 40% from other sources (website, search engine & others).

5.3.2 Survey

Question 6 of the questionnaire is "How did you first find out about Anglia Ruskin University?" Respondents were asked to tick only one option from university prospectus/brochure, university website, UCAs handbook, university fair/exhibition, Internet search engine, career tutor/teacher, university open day, parent/family member, friends, university staff, agent/local representative, newspaper, university league table and other. A breakdown of the answers show that 20 students (25%) found out about the university from agents, 19 students (24%) found out from friends, 5 students (6%) found out from family members and 1 student (1%) found out from a tutor/teacher. Overall, 45 students (56%) found out about the university from interpersonal sources (agent, friends, family members & tutor/teacher), 26 students (32%) found out about the

university from other sources (Internet search engine, website, fair / exhibition, newspaper, prospectus & other) and 9 students (11%) did not provide an answer.
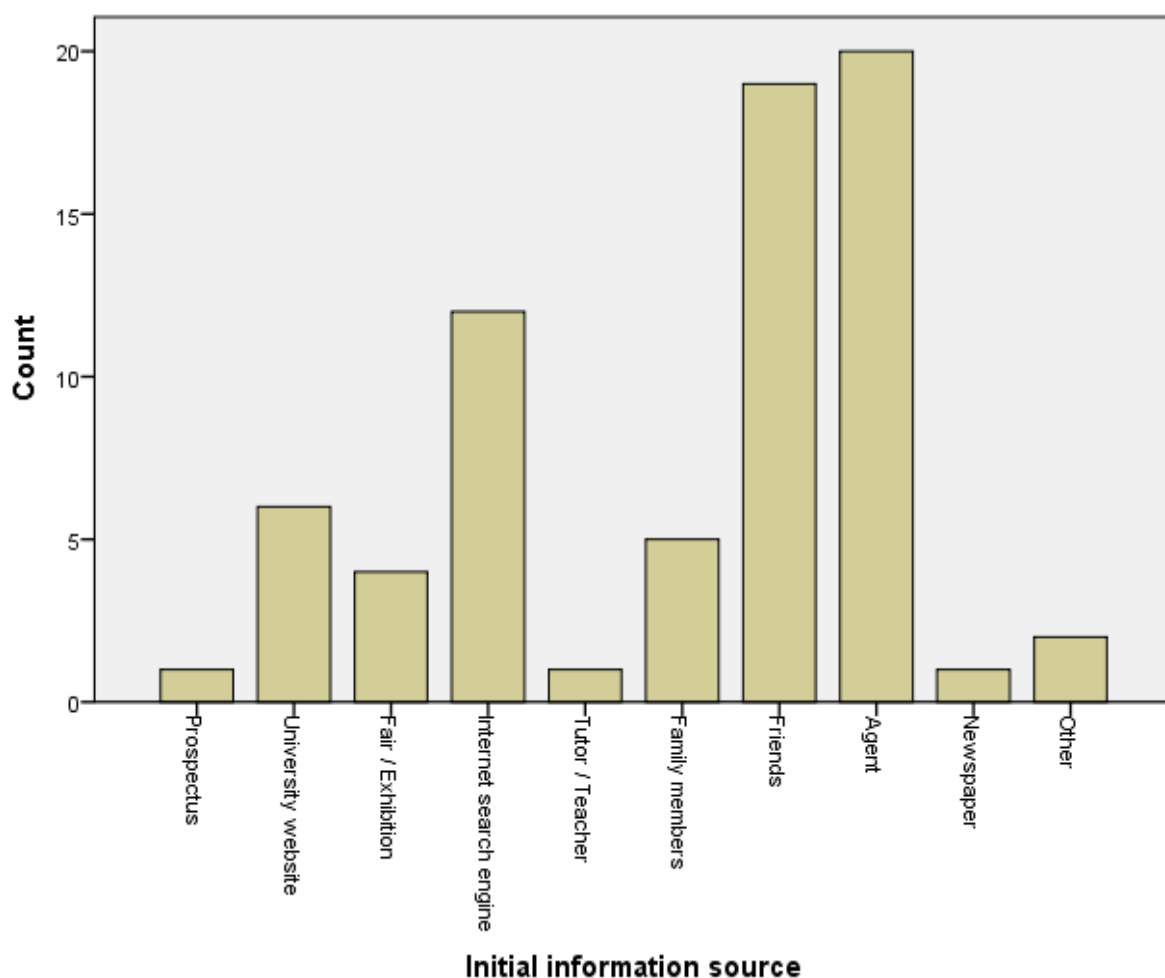
Figure 5.9: How respondents found out about the university

The evidence provided by the survey results on the source of the information about the course/university indicate that 56% of them obtained the information from interpersonal sources, whilst 32% obtained the information from non - interpersonal sources. Information obtained from interpersonal sources is shown as being much more important than information obtained from other sources in finding out about the university that the students eventually chose as the one in which they would enrol. This indicates that prospective students are more likely to enrol at an institution that they discovered as a result of interaction with an interpersonal source.

5.3.3 In-depth Interviews (supporting evidence)

The importance of the information obtained from interpersonal sources (agents, friends, family members and university staff) is reflected in the statements provided by interviewees during the in – depth interviews. Interviewees explained how they found out about the university from agents, friends, family members and university staff and how the information led them to apply to the university.

5.3.3.1 Agents as information source

"I did some online research and could not make a decision because there are loads of universities. Then I visited their **(agent)** offices and then they gave me brochures and told me about the universities and advised me on the one to choose. I was able to take a look at the universities and go through their brochures." – Interviewee 11, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"We used the Internet and the **agent** gave us a lot of leaflets and told us about the procedures involved. We found information on the website and in the leaflets. We relied on the information provided by the **agents** because they are experts in helping people to come to study in the UK. The **agents** were really involved, communicated with the university and provided all the information we required." – Interviewee 12, Female Bachelors student from Mauritius

5.3.3.2 Friends as information source

"I did my research on the Internet and asked the **friend** how the school was, which kind of school and compared the universities. The **friend** came first and then I went to the Internet to find out more about the school. I got information about courses offered, the facilities and how international students are treated from the **friend**. The **friend** studied at Anglia Ruskin." – Interviewee 4, Female Bachelors student from Kenya

"I checked online for different universities and was considering some others. I got information about the different universities, their processes and things I need to do in order to get admission. I got the **recommendation** for ARU from a **friend**, I then checked the website and saw that they had my course and I met the requirement. I got admission with another university in Wales and I tried to check the two together and found that ARU is better for me." Interviewee 5, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"I had to decide based on the 2 / 3 admissions that I had which one to choose and there were a couple of other factors to put into consideration. I spoke to **friends** that had studied here and were now back in Nigeria. Many of them said that ARU is a well-known institution." – Interviewee 6, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.3.3.3 Friends & agents as information sources

"I heard about Anglia Ruskin from my **friend** that came here and decided to go on the Internet to research about it. I then saw it being offered as one of the alternatives at the **agent's** and decided to choose it. I used my **friend** when I was still in the final year in high school and used the **agent** soon after I finished my A' levels and was waiting for my result. They helped me out in the whole process until the beginning of the term when I came here. My **friend** told me about the facilities and that it is a good university to study in and my **agent** gave information on the fees, course that I am doing and my parents found it to be affordable." – Interviewee 3, Male Bachelors student from Zimbabwe

"I went through an **agent** and they made it easy for me. My **friend** told me about Anglia Ruskin University and gave me the contact details for the **agent**. I went to them and told them the school that I wanted. My **friend** said that Anglia Ruskin is a very good school (top ten) and the **agent** also confirmed this." – Interviewee 15, Female Masters student from Nigeria

5.3.3.4 Family members as information sources

"My **brother – in – law** did a course in Mental Health at Anglia Ruskin in Cambridge, so the choice of Anglia Ruskin was a simple one. He said that it is a good school and my **sister** had also done some short course here as well, so they recommended this school. I just went online and started the application process by filling out the application form. For other information, I called and they guided me though the steps." – Interviewee 13, Female Bachelors student from Ghana

"I went online first to look for universities and found Anglia Ruskin. I then spoke to my aunty and she said that she did her masters degree here. Me and my brother went through some of the options two or three times and decided that

Anglia Ruskin will be a better place and we needed to talk to someone based here." – Interviewee 14, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.3.3.5 Agents & university staff as information sources

"I also went to **Global Education (agents)** to ask their opinion if they know of any better choice, especially in Cambridge. The lady there told me that she had dealt with a lot of applicants for Anglia Ruskin and she thinks it's a nice university, but I can go search others……. **Global Education (agent)** put me through and the **university rep** also interviewed me and put me through. That was a strong support because I realised that the university has interest in helping students to gain admission. The patient process with the **university rep** and **Global Education** also helped. I got information online about the classes and university. With **Global Education**, there was a sense of confidence they had about the university. The **rep** reinforced everything and gave detailed information about the university and the process and everything. For me, the **rep's involvement** made it easier for me and convinced me that this is a better option. – Interviewee 2, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.3.3.6 Friends, agents & university staff as information sources

"My first point of contact was a **friend** that I was working with who was studying at Anglia Ruskin University. She mentioned good things about the school and that they have something for me. I also looked at the fees to see if they are affordable and found out that it was something I could work out. I got in contact with an **agent** recommended by my friend. The **agent** was very helpful and took me through all the process of application until the very last stage. I also attended an exhibition conducted by the **University's representative** and the In – Country Rep." – Interviewee 10, Male Masters student from Nigeria

Fourteen out of the sixteen students interviewed confirmed the importance of interpersonal sources during the process of gathering information about UK higher education options.

The results from the archival research and survey, and supporting evidence from the in-depth interviews clearly show that information obtained from interpersonal sources are

much more important than that obtained from other sources in the decision-making process for African students in UK higher education. Although many of the students acknowledged the role of the Internet in providing information about the university during the early stages of their information search, the challenges of internet connectivity in many African countries makes it difficult for prospective students to rely on it as the primary means of communicating with and processing applications for UK institutions. The information that motivated most of them to choose the university was provided by friends, agents, family members and university staff. The following statements clearly illustrate the vital role played by interpersonal sources in the student's search for information during the decision – making process:

*"With **Global Education**, there was a sense of confidence they had about the university…… For me, the **rep's involvement** made it easier for me and convinced me that this is a better option.* – Interviewee 2, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"She (friend) mentioned good things about the school and that they have something for me." – Interviewee 10, Male Masters student from Nigeria

*"He (family member) said that it is a good school and my **sister** had also done some short courses here as well, so they recommended this school."* – Interviewee 13, Female Bachelors student from Ghana

*"I had a **friend** over here who gave me several universities to choose from. He referred me to ARU and to the **agent**."* – Interviewee 7, Female Bachelors student from Kenya

*"My **friend** told me about the facilities and that it is a good university to study in….."* – Interviewee 3, Male Bachelors student from Zimbabwe

"He (friend) told me that there is another university that is better off than the one that I was chasing." – Interviewee 9, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

*"We relied on the information provided by the **agents** because they are experts in helping people to come to study in the UK."* – Interviewee 12, Female Bachelors student from Mauritius

*"I went to the **agent** and told them what course I was willing to do and they told me the universities that were available and provided my course. This was one of the universities that turned up…… I was not previously aware of Anglia Ruskin University."* – Interviewee 16, Male Masters student from Zambia

5.4 Research Question Three

Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

The purpose of this question is to identify the interpersonal sources that had the most influence on the students' decision at the stage when they had obtained information about different institutions and had to decide which one to choose. The question is an attempt to find out who made them choose Anglia Ruskin University as the most suitable institution from the options that they were considering.

5.4.1 Survey

Question 10 of the questionnaire is "Which of the following interpersonal sources was most influential in your decision to study at Anglia Ruskin University?" The options provided to students were career tutor/ teacher, parents, family members, friends, university staff, agent, lecturers and other.

A breakdown of the answers show that 23 students (29%) felt that agents were most influential, 21 students (26%) felt that parents were most influential, 6 students (8%) felt that family members were most influential, 6 students (8%) felt that friends were most influential, 6 students (8%) felt that career tutors/teachers were most influential, 4 students (5%) felt that university staff were most influential, 4 students (5%) felt that their lecturers were most influential and 6 students (8%) felt that others were most influential. The diagram below shows the relative importance of the different interpersonal sources:
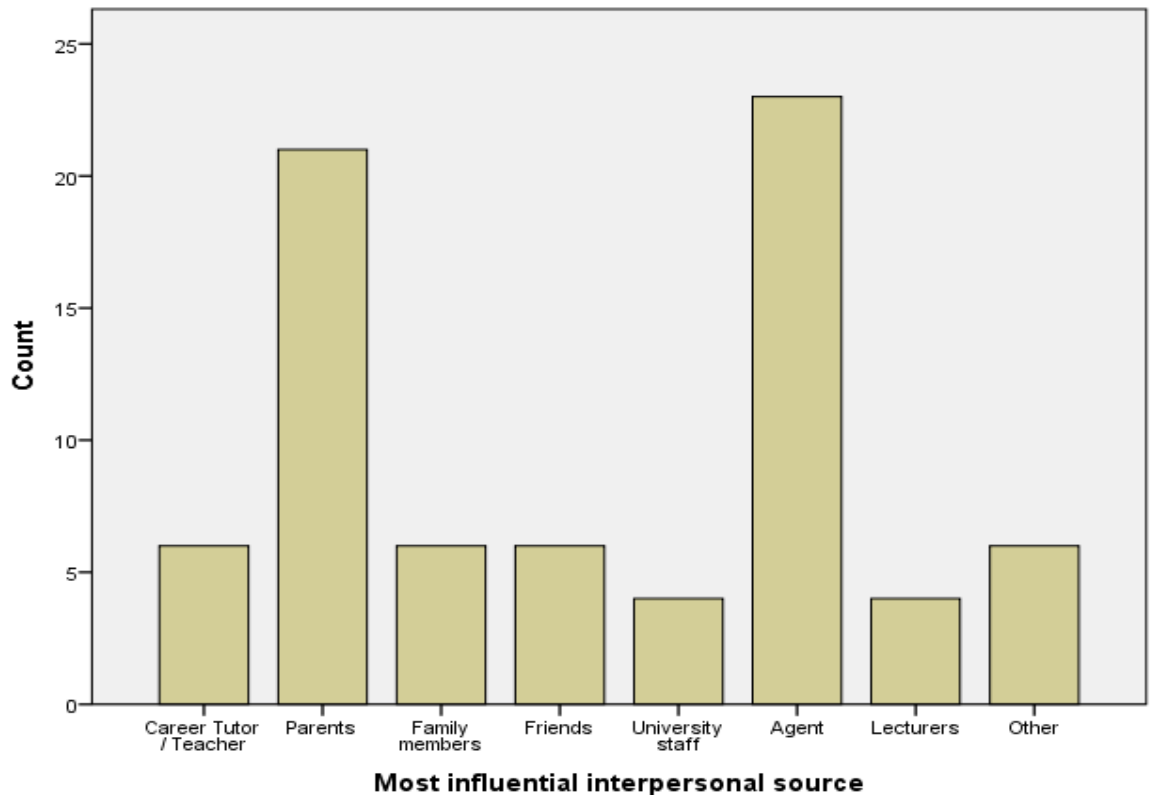
Figure 5.10: Breakdown of responses on the most influential interpersonal source

The results show that agents are clearly the interpersonal source that had the most influence on the decision of the students to choose Anglia Ruskin University. They also show that those with whom the students had close personal relationships (parents, family members and friends) had a high level of influence on their decision-making.

A closer look at the data reveals some interesting points:
Firstly, parental influence (Influence 2) on the choice of institution seems to decrease as students grow older. This can be seen from the diagrams below:
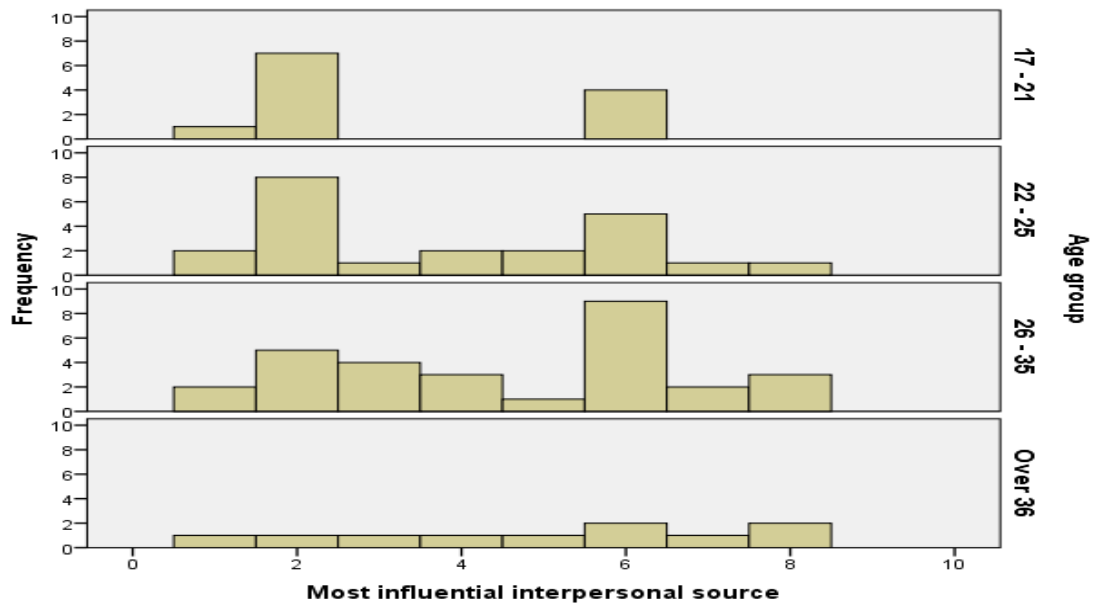
Figure 5.11: Breakdown of responses on the most influential interpersonal source by age group
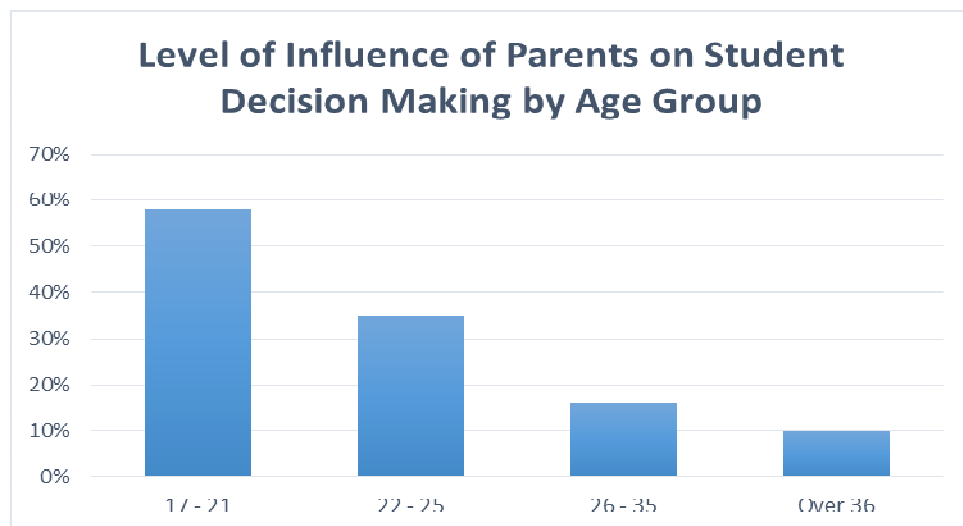
Figure 5.12: Level of influence of parents on student decision-making by age group

The level of influence of parents on the decision of students seems to be greatest amongst the 17 – 21 age group and tends to reduce as the student gets older. Parents were most influential in the decision-making for 7 out of the 12 students aged 17 – 21 (58%) compared to 8 out of the 23 students aged 22 – 25 (35%), 5 out of the 32 students aged 26 – 35 (16%) and 1 out of the 10 students aged over 36 (10%).

Secondly, relatives (parents & family members) are much more influential in the decision-making of female students than in the decision-making of male students. This can be seen from the diagram below:
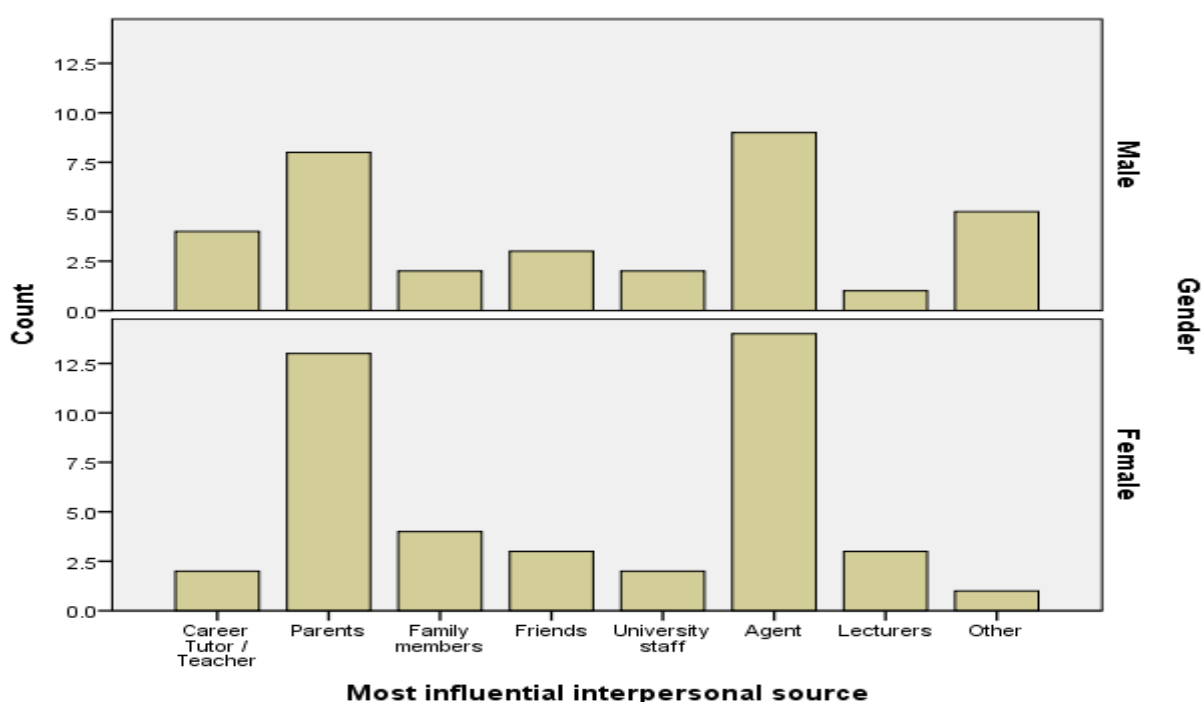
Figure 5.13: Breakdown of responses on the most influential interpersonal source by gender

The level of influence of relatives (parents & family members) on the decisions of female students seems to be greater than the level of their influence on the decisions of male students. Relatives were most influential in the decision-making for 17 out of the 44 female students (39%) compared to 10 out of the 36 male students (27%) that completed the survey.

Thirdly, although agents are the most influential of all the interpersonal sources, they are only most influential amongst the 26 – 35 age group. This can be seen from the diagram below:
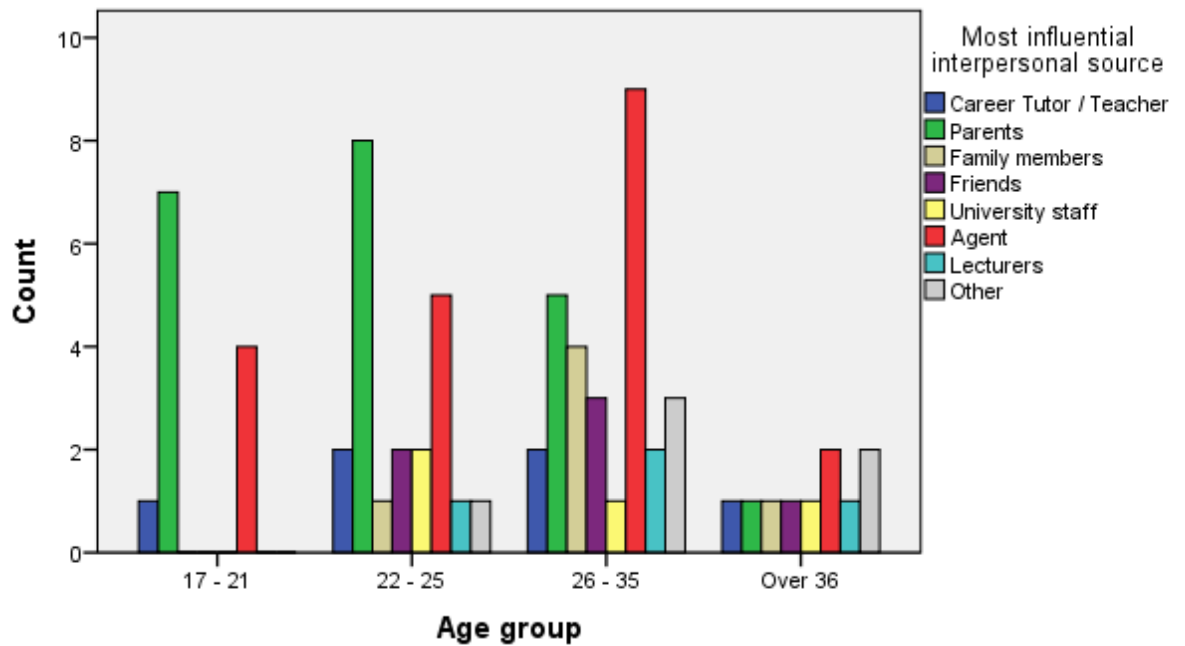
Figure 5.14: Breakdown of responses on the most influential interpersonal source by age group

In the 17 – 21 and 22 – 25 age groups parents are the most influential of all the interpersonal sources. In the 17 – 21 age group, 7 out of 12 respondents (58%) were influenced by parents and in the 22 – 25 age group 8 out of 23 respondents (35%) were influenced by parents. In the over 36 age group, agents have the same level of influence (20%) as other sources on the decisions of students on the choice of university. Based on this observation, it is likely that one of the main reasons why the results indicate that agents are the most influential interpersonal source overall is because more students (40%) fall into this age group than any of the others. Thus in situations where a high proportion of the students are aged 17 – 25, it is likely that parents will emerge as the most influential.

The high level of influence exerted by parents on the decisions of the 17 – 21 & 22 – 25 age groups is consistent with the fact that most of these students are likely to still be living at home and will also be completely dependent on their parents for funding. In most African cultures, respect for parents is sacrosanct. This can be seen from the response of one of the interviewees:

> "The culture where I come from is not one of those where you challenge your parents. Your parents at the end of the day are the ones that make the final decisions in the home. If they say we are here to provide you with the funds,

there is an opportunity and you should take it, there is really no room to say I don't want to take it or I feel this is what I need to do. If that's what they say, it has to be done that way". – Interviewee 16, Male Masters student from Zambia.

5.4.1.1 Reasons for Choosing Anglia Ruskin University

Question 8 of the questionnaire is "What was your main reason for choosing to study at Anglia Ruskin University?" Respondents were asked to choose only one option from location, reputation, course of study, price/cost, course content, entry requirement, facilities, links with employers and other. The answer to this question can provide valuable insight and shed some light on why certain interpersonal sources might be more influential on the student's decision to choose Anglia Ruskin University.

A breakdown of the answers show that 31 students (39%) chose the university because their preferred course of study was available, 10 students (13%) chose the university because of its reputation, 8 students (10%) chose the university because of its facilities, 5 students (6%) chose the university because of the course content, 5 students (6%) chose the university because of the entry requirements, 4 students (5%) chose the university because of the price/cost, 2 students (3%) chose the university because of links with employers, 1 student (1%) chose the university because of its location and 1 student (1%) chose the university for other reasons. 13 students (16%) did not provide a valid answer to the question. The diagram below shows the relative importance of the different factors:
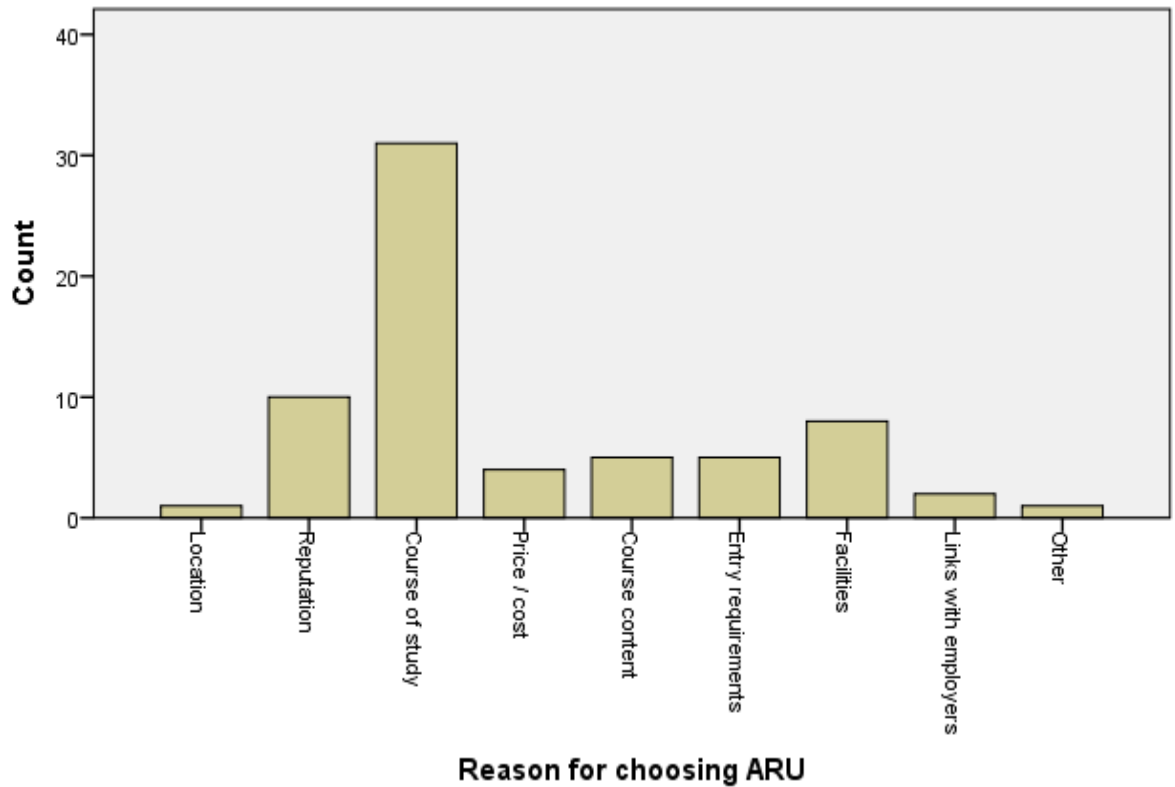
Figure 5.15: Breakdown of responses on the reason for choosing the university

The most common reasons cited by students that provided valid answers for choosing the university are course of study (46%), reputation (15%) and facilities (12%). Overall, 53% of those that provided valid answers chose the university because of factors related to the availability and content of the course.

During the in-depth interviews, many of the interviewees also cited factors relating to the availability and content of the course as most important in their decision to choose the university.

5.4.1.1 Chi – square tests for independence

The Chi – square test for independence is used to explore the relationship between two variables and compares the observed frequencies or proportions of cases that occur in each of the categories with the values that would be expected if there was no association between the two values being measured. In order to be able to apply the test properly, the researcher had to combine some of the categories of the responses for age groups and most influential interpersonal sources. This is because one of the conditions for the proper application of the chi – square tests is that the value of the cells should be 5 or more in at least 80% of the cells and no cell should have a value of less than 1.

199

The 17 – 21 & 22 – 25 age groups were combined to form the 17 – 25 age group and the 26 – 35 and over 26 age groups were combined to form the 26 & over age group. 35 respondents (44%) are in the 17 – 25 age group, 42 respondents (52%) are in the 26 & over age group and 3 respondents (4%) did not indicate their age group.

For the response to question 10 on the most influential interpersonal source, the responses provided were combined to form three groups; namely family/friends, agent/university staff and tutors/others. 33 respondents (41%) chose family/friends, 27 respondents (34%) chose agent/university staff, 16 respondents (20%) chose tutors/others and 4 respondents (5%) did not provide a response.

The Chi – square test for independence was used to explore the relationship between gender and most influential interpersonal source in order to compare the observed frequencies or proportions of cases that occur in each of the categories with the values that would be expected if there was no association between the two variables. The output from SPSS Version 20 is shown below:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.597[a]	2	.273
Likelihood Ratio	2.595	2	.273
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.873	1	.171
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.16.

See contingency table in Appendix 7. The test statistic of 2.597 is lower than the critical value of the chi – square distribution which is 5.99 at 5% level of significance. This means that there is no significant association between the gender of the respondents and the interpersonal source that is most influential in their decision to choose the university. Hemsley – Brown & Oplatka (2015) in their systematic review of university choice found that males and females tend not to differ across a wide range of choice factors.

The test was used to explore the relationship between course levels and most influential interpersonal source in order to compare the observed frequencies or proportions of cases that occur in each of the categories with the values that would be expected if there was no association between the two variables. The output from SPSS Version 20 is shown below:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.399[a]	2	.497
Likelihood Ratio	1.407	2	.495
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.365	1	.243
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.58.

See contingency table in Appendix 6. The test statistic of 1.399 is lower than the critical value of the chi – square distribution which is 5.99 at 5% level of significance. This means that there is no significant association between the course level of the respondents and the interpersonal source that is most influential in their decision to choose the university.

The test was also used to explore the relationship between the new age groups (17 – 25 and 26 & over) and most influential interpersonal source in order to compare the observed frequencies or proportions of cases that occur in each of the categories with the values that would be expected if there was no association between the two variables. The output from SPSS Version 20 is shown below:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.358[a]	2	.308
Likelihood Ratio	2.403	2	.301
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.273	1	.132
N of Valid Cases	73		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.45.

See contingency table in Appendix 5. The test statistic of 2.358 is lower than the critical value of the chi – square distribution which is 5.99 at 5% level of significance. This

means that there is no significant association between the age groups of the respondents and the interpersonal source that is most influential in their decision to choose the university.

5.5 Research Question Four

In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

The purpose of this question is to identify the different ways in which the main interpersonal sources influence the student's decision about which university to choose at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

5.5.1 Survey & In-Depth Interview

Question 11 of the questionnaire is "In what ways did the person / persons indicated in Q10 above influence your decision to choose Anglia Ruskin University?" Respondents were provided with four blank lines to write their answers. Interviewees were also asked to explain the ways in which the interpersonal source that was identified as most influential made them choose Anglia Ruskin University during the decision-making process.

The ways in which the main interpersonal sources influenced the decisions of respondents and interviewees are discussed under different groups & themes below:

5.5.1.1 Agents (Information & practical support during the application process)
Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing them with a lot of relevant information about the course/institution and supporting them during the application process. This can be seen from some of their comments:

> "They gave me guidance, advice and all the support I needed" – Respondent 15, Female Masters student from Zambia
> "Getting into a university from my home country is sometimes difficult, but through the agent I got the admission and my visa easily" – Respondent 29, Female Masters student from Tanzania

"The agent gave me excellent support and gave me the prospectus for Anglia Ruskin University. I went through it and that's when I made a decision to come to Anglia Ruskin. They helped me with my application from there on" – Respondent 68, Male Bachelors student from Zimbabwe

"The agent helped make my application process so much easier" – Respondent 80, Female Bachelors student from Zambia.

5.5.1.2 Agents (Encouragement, responsiveness and personalised service during the application process)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing encouragement, being responsive and providing practical support that is tailored to meet the personal needs of the student during the application process. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"At a time I was totally discouraged by the delays, but the local agent kept on checking on me, giving me the relevant options and at last it was successful" – Respondent 2, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"He was very supportive, encouraging, always ready to assist at all times, always concerned and calling to know the update, even until the last day" – Respondent 8, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"The in – house (in – country) representative was helpful, friendly and prompt" – Respondent 10, Female Masters student from Nigeria

"He was extremely supportive and informative" – Respondent 76, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.5.1.3 Agents (Career guidance & counselling)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing quality career advice that helps them to understand how the course being offered by the university will enable them to achieve their career goals. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"I was given excellent counselling on which path to enrol based on my choice of career" – Respondent 41, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"By telling me about the university and how it can help me achieve my career" – Respondent 18, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"By letting me understand how good the school is and making me know I will achieve my aim at the university and help my career prospects" – Respondent 23, Male Masters student from Nigeria

5.5.1.4 Agents (The right solution for the student)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution as the right solution to the student's requirement or the need that the student is trying to meet. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"I needed a top – up in Public Health with a January start and the agency suggested Anglia Ruskin University" – Respondent 9, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

"The agent influenced my decision to choose Anglia Ruskin in many ways; namely low tuition fees when compared with other UK universities that offer the same programme and entry requirements" – Respondent 31, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"They had the course and module that I wanted to study, the price was affordable and the staff were fast in giving an unconditional offer" – Respondent 43, Male Masters student from Nigeria

5.5.1.5 Agents (A good quality UK higher institution)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution to the student as a good quality UK higher education provider. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"Consistently convincing me of the efficacy of the university towards impacting standard knowledge to its students" – Respondent 21, Female Masters student from Nigeria

"Agent provided proof of high employability of Anglia Ruskin graduates and profile of university" – Respondent 67, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"She told me of all the good facilities at ARU. This was especially important because my course is laboratory – based" – Respondent 77, Male Bachelors student from Zimbabwe

"I will give credit to the agent as the most influential in the process because if I had not known that they were there I would not have pursued coming here as

much as I did. They influenced the decision by talking about how I will get a very good qualification and talked about the employability. They gave me the prospectus and books to provide more information. The information they gave me was what was in the books. I trusted in their advice because they seemed like they had helped a number of people to go to the university and I believed that they could do the same for me." – Interviewee 3, Male Bachelors student from Zimbabwe

5.5.1.6 Parents (Quality of education / institution)

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution to the student as a good quality UK higher education provider. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My parents know that in Sierra Leone education standard has dropped and getting the right tutor and study materials is difficult. With recommendations from few family friends they asked me to check on the requirement and asked me to apply" – Respondent 1, Male ACCA student from Sierra Leone

"They both said the standard of education in Anglia Ruskin University is really high, including other universities in the UK" – Respondent 45, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"Because I did my first degree in Limkokwing University Malaysia in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University, so my parents advised me to continue cos it seems a very good school and has the best education" – Respondent 74, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.5.1.7 Parents (Career Prospects)

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by advising them that studying at the institution will equip them with knowledge, skills and qualifications that will improve their career prospects. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"Because it will be better for my future" – Respondent 26, Female Masters student from Nigeria

"They advised that exposure would give me a better chance at getting a good job and be more experienced" – Respondent 50, Female Bachelors student from Kenya

"My mother was very supportive of my acquiring a degree when I told her about Anglia Ruskin University UK" – Respondent 51, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.5.1.8 Parents (Funding / Affordability)

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by advising them to choose an institution with a low / reasonable level of tuition fees and living costs. UK university education is an expensive luxury which most African parents cannot afford. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My parents, especially my mother, told me to go to this particular university mainly for the fee which is cheaper compared to other universities" – Respondent 72, Female Bachelors student from Mauritius

"I did a Diploma in Hospitality and Anglia Ruskin was offering a degree in Tourism. I was advised that the two courses are related and so I decided to choose it because my parents also considered it as cheaper" – Respondent 73, Female Bachelors student from Kenya

"Apart from me, my parents were most influential. I did a Diploma, so they advised me to take the course that is related to it. They advised me on the school and were the ones who were comparing the school for me. They told me to choose ARU because it was not as expensive as the others and was low on cost. I trusted their decision because I know that they want the best for me." – Interviewee 4, Female Bachelors student from Kenya

5.5.1.9 Parents (Parental Guidance)

Some parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing wise counsel / guidance based on the information that they have and the alternatives available to their children. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My parents more or less made the decision for me to come here. I have a high level of trust in them when it comes to their judgement. They are almost always right" – Respondent 52, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

"My mum was so supportive and the advice she gave me helped me a lot in choosing Anglia Ruskin University" – Respondent 70, Male Bachelors student from Uganda

"They helped me look through the universities I had singled out for possible decision and advised me on the university they thought was best for me" Respondent 78, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

"My parents already trusted me to come to the UK and allowed me to make my own decision. I informed them of my decision and they allowed me to proceed. They asked me about accreditation / recognition of the programme and how good the university is in my subject area. No one else was involved apart from me and my parents." – Interviewee 11, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"It was really my mum's decision. I just said okay to what she decided. I wasn't really deciding for myself. It was what she wanted. I really wanted to have a British degree, it did not really matter to me which university I went to. I just wanted a British degree because it is well recognised. I would have loved to go to Manchester, but she said go to Anglia Ruskin. She used information on the website to inform her decision and read what people were saying about the university online. There were also her friends, whose children have studied at different universities in the UK. She asked them how it was like. I did some research by looking at the university website and tried to find out if there were any other Mauritian students studying at the university. The course is the best course at the university." – Interviewee 12, Female Bachelors student from Mauritius

5.5.1.10 Friends (Advice & guidance based on previous, current or intended study at the university)

Friends influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing information and advice based on their knowledge or experience of studying at the university. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My friend was most influential in my decision to choose ARU. He provided information on the course requirement, location and environment. I checked all the information for myself on the website and saw that they are okay for me. I trusted my friend because he finished here and we had served together (Youth Service) in Nigeria. If my friend did not study here, maybe I would not have heard about Anglia Ruskin." – Interviewee 5, Male Masters student from Nigeria

"My friend that has studied here was most influential in my choice of Anglia Ruskin as the university at which to study. He influenced me by persuading me and letting me know that I needed a much lower amount of money (initial deposit) to enrol on the programme. He provided me with information about some of the activities that students are involved in (Mission Croatia), provided contact details for the International Admissions Office" – Interviewee 9, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

"My friend was most influential in the process of choosing the specific university. She has been here, at other schools and shared her experience of Anglia Ruskin University. I came across some Anglia Ruskin students working in Lagos and we had a discussion. I saw the way they integrated themselves into the health set up and noticed that they are better polished. I realised that there was something different about them and that they had gone through some kind of training that had improved their organisational and other skills. I trusted in their advice because they have been there, they have done that and they are better for it." – Interviewee 10, Male Masters student from Nigeria

5.5.1.11 Friends (The need to maintain contact or study together)

Friends also influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by emphasising the need to maintain contact or study together at the same institution. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"She made me to understand what I stood to benefit here as I have many other students from my former school already here who can help me if I have difficulties, ARU also has the extra thing that I desired (ONP) and that we can both come to study the programme together. She convinced me by giving me the telephone number & BBM Pin for a school mate that was already here and I chatted with her. She showed me the offer letter from the institution and also gave me the website address for ARU. I trusted in her advice because her opinion was evidence – based." – Interviewee 6, Male Bachelors student from Nigeria

"My friend was most influential in my decision to choose Anglia Ruskin. She is always disturbing me. She told me that Anglia Ruskin is one of the best and knows how to treat international students. She actually begged me to come here so that she will not be lonely here. I just wanted the school because my friend is

there and I trusted in her opinion because we are good friends." – Interviewee 15, Female Masters student from Nigeria

5.5.1.12 Family members (Advice & guidance based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK)

Family members influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing information and advice based on their knowledge or their experience of studying at the university or at another UK institution. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My family was most influential in my decision to choose ARU. My husband influenced my decision by encouraging me to make the decision. During the visit to the university, he noticed that the university is well structured and the way the course structure was explained by the course leader was good. I trusted in his decision because he had studied in the UK and had high standards. My cousin had also studied in the UK and said that I would enjoy a UK university." – Interviewee 2, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

"My sister was most influential during the process. She influenced my decision from the beginning. She influenced my decision by being willing to give me all the support that I needed, like paying my fees. You need to consider the financial aspect because without it you can't start anything. She was willing to pay for my fees. Since that was sorted, I knew the other processes would be easy. She said her husband and other friends graduate from here and she also mentors other students that study here as evidence that Anglia Ruskin is a good choice. I did not do much research by myself but read something that talked about the school being one of the top universities in the UK." – Interviewee 13, Female Bachelors student from Ghana

5.5.1.13 Family members (Counsel & guidance)

Some family members influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing wise counsel / guidance based on the information that they have and the alternatives available. This can be seen from some of their comments:

"My brother was most influential during the process of choosing a university. He influenced my decision more in terms of faith; I believe in what he tells me, he is always a good person to take advice from and always puts me through

when I am going through something that I don't understand. He influenced my decision by saying that he has been seeing other schools, but he thinks Anglia Ruskin is good for me for the best education I want. He finds out so many things about Anglia Ruskin when he goes online. He provided information about the reputation of the university, environment, concentration and library facilities. I trusted in his advice because I believe he will never lead me wrong. My aunty in the UK gave me the additional information I needed during the process." – Interviewee 14, Female Bachelors student from Nigeria

5.6 Conclusion

The data collected through archival research, survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews provide the answers below to the research questions for the study:

Research Question One: What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

Answer: The information sources from which African students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose are agents, parents, family members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers.

Research Question Two: How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

Answer: Information obtained from interpersonal sources is more important than information obtained from other sources. Information from interpersonal sources was found to be much more important than information from other sources during the decision-making process. The archival research data shows that at least 60% of the enrolled students found out about the course from interpersonal sources (agents, personal recommendation & current/previous students) as against 40% from other sources (website, search engine & others). The survey results indicate that 56% of respondents found out about the university from interpersonal sources as against 32% from other sources.

Research Question Three: Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

Answer: The interpersonal sources that are most influential on the students' decisions at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process are agents and parents. Friends and family members were also identified as quite influential. Chi – square tests for independence showed that there is no significant association between the gender, course levels & age groups and the sources identified as most influential in the decision to join the university.

Research Question Four: In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

Answer: Agents influence the decisions of prospective students by providing information & practical support during the application process, by providing encouragement & a personalised service during the application process, by providing career guidance & counselling, by providing the right solution for the student and by presenting the university as a quality UK institution. Parents influence the decisions of prospective students by presenting the university as a quality UK institution, by advising them that studying at the institution will improve their career prospects, by advising them to choose an institution with reasonable levels of tuition fees & living costs and by providing wise counsel based on the available alternatives. Friends influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on their experience of studying at the university and by emphasising the need to maintain contact or study together at the same institution. Family members influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK and by providing wise counsel based on the alternatives available & the information that they have.

In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed and analysed in the light of the current knowledge in the field of UK higher education international student decision-making.

6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The study has been exploring the use of interpersonal sources in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa.

The main findings of the study are:

1. The information sources from which African students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose are agents, parents, family members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers.

2. Information obtained from interpersonal sources is more important than information obtained from other sources.

3. The interpersonal sources that are most influential on the students' decisions at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process are agents and parents. Friends and family members were also identified as quite influential.

4. Agents influence the decisions of prospective students by providing information & practical support during the application process, by providing encouragement & a personalised service during the application process, by providing career guidance & counselling, by providing the right solution for the student and by presenting the university as a quality UK institution. Parents influence the decisions of prospective students by presenting the university as a quality UK institution, by advising them that studying at the institution will improve their career prospects, by advising them to choose an institution with reasonable levels of tuition fees & living costs and by providing wise counsel based on the available alternatives. Friends influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on their experience of studying at the university and by emphasising the need to maintain contact or study together at the same institution. Family members influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK and by providing wise counsel based on the alternatives available & the information that they have.

These findings will now be discussed in the light of current literature on the subject area.

6.2. Interpersonal sources used by prospective African students

The data collected through archival research and survey questionnaires identified the interpersonal sources from which African students obtain information on UK university education as agents, parents, family members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers. The table below highlights previous studies that had acknowledged the use of these sources by prospective higher education students:

Interpersonal Source	Previous Studies
Agents	Bhati & Anderson (2012), Hulme et al (2013), British Council (2013), UK HE International Unit (2015)
Parents	Moogan et al (1999), Dawes & Brown (2003), Maringe (2006), Mazzarol & Soutar (2002),
Family members	Dawes & Brown (2003), Manthorpe et al (2010), Durkin & McKenna (2011), Moogan (2011), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Chen & Zimitat (2006), Pimpa (2003), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Rudd et al (2012), Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), Maringe & Carter (2007), British Council (2013), UK HE International Unit (2015)
Friends	Moogan et al (1999), Dawes & Brown (2003), Manthorpe et al (2010), Briggs & Wilson (2007), Durkin & McKenna (2011), Nicholls et al (1995), Moogan (2011), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Chen & Zimitat (2006), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Rudd et al (2012), Maringe & Carter (2007), British Council (2013),
University staff	Dawes & Brown (2003),
Career tutors	Moogan et al (1999), Dawes & Brown (2003), Manthorpe et al (2010), Briggs & Wilson (2007), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), British Council (2013),
Teachers/tutors	Moogan (2011), Maringe (2006), Maringe & Carter (2007),
Current/previous students	Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Mazzarol & Soutar (2002),
Employers	British Council (2013)

Table 6.1: Previous studies that acknowledged the use of interpersonal sources by prospective higher education students

Several studies found that prospective UK higher education students use information from interpersonal sources during the decision-making process. Moogan et al (1999) observed the use of word of mouth from parents and friends. Dawes & Brown (2003) cited the use of friends, career teachers, university staff and family members.

Manthorpe et al (2010) identified the use of friends/relatives and careers staff. Both Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) and Briggs & Wilson (2007) noted the use of word of mouth during the process of obtaining information about UK higher education.

A number of international studies also acknowledged the use of information from interpersonal sources in the process of making decisions about which university to choose. Chen & Zimitat (2006) observed the use of family and friends by Taiwanese students in the decision-making process for Australian higher education. Bhati & Anderson (2012) found that Indian students used information from agents when making decisions about overseas study destination. Pimpa (2003) found that Thai students used information from family members in the process of choosing an overseas university. Rudd et al (2012) found that Chinese students used information from friends and family members in the process of choosing a UK Business School. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) found that students from Indonesia, Taiwan, India & China used information from parents, family members & alumni in the process of making decisions about study destinations. Maringe & Carter (2007) found that African students used information from friends, teachers, informal agencies and family members in the process of choosing a UK university at which to study. Hulme et al (2013) found that African students used information from agents in the process of applying to UK universities. British Council (2013) found that Nigerian students interested in studying in UK universities use information from family members, friends, education agents, career advisors, current students, alumni and university staff during the decision-making process.

The identification of agents, friends, family members, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers as the range of interpersonal sources from which prospective African students obtain information about UK higher education during the decision-making process confirms the findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) and British Council (2013). The data indicates that the most popular interpersonal source from which African students obtain information about UK university education is agents. Unlike Maringe & Carter (2007) the researcher did not find any evidence of the use of informal agencies by African students that enrolled at the university in January & September 2014. It is possible that the growth in the number and use of student recruitment agents since 2007 when the Maringe & Carter study was

conducted has encouraged most students to use well established agents with track records of successfully enrolling students at reputable UK universities.

6.2.1 Implications

The main implication of this finding is that UK universities interested in recruiting students successfully from the region will have to devise strategies that will enable them to use interpersonal sources as communication / promotional channels. Institutions need to find out what these interpersonal sources know and think about them and devise appropriate strategies for correcting any misconceptions and wrong impressions. Most importantly, they will need to develop a good network of knowledgeable and experienced agents that will provide prospective students with the information that they need to consider the institution as a possible option for UK university education. They also need to obtain reliable intelligence on the social media platforms that are being used by prospective students so that they can join the conversations taking place. Appropriate messages about the institution and its activities need to be composed and fed to and through the networks that these interpersonal sources use. The use of current students & alumni as ambassadors in their countries of origin to enable them to reach more prospective students in the region also needs to be considered.

6.3 Importance of information obtained from interpersonal sources

The data collected through archival research and survey questionnaires indicate that information obtained from interpersonal sources like agents, parents, family members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers are very important in the decision-making process for African students. The researcher arrived at this conclusion by finding out what proportion of the students found out about the course/university that they eventually chose as the one in which they would enrol from interpersonal sources rather than from other sources. This observation means that prospective African students are more likely to enrol at an institution that they discovered as a result of interaction with an interpersonal source.

Based on existing literature on the subject, this was what the researcher expected to find. A number of other previous studies have acknowledged the importance of information obtained from interpersonal sources during the decision-making process for higher education. Moogan et al (1999) observed that for sixth form pupils making

decisions about UK higher education, evaluation of alternatives incorporated discussions with trustworthy personnel such as subject teachers, parents and friends. Nicholls et al (1995) in a study into the decision-making of UK MBA students found that 53% of respondents listed personal contacts as being the main source of information and 89% sought some personal advice during the process. They noted that the recommendation of people who had done the course previously was particularly important. Foskett & Hemsley-Brown (2001) emphasised the importance of information from parents, teachers, career teachers and siblings in the decision-making of young people about UK higher education. Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) in a study into the decision-making of UK postgraduates found that impersonal sources of information such as advertising in the mass media are not as important as personal sources, especially course tutors. The postgraduates considered word of mouth from tutors, family, friends and alumni to be important in the decision-making process. Durkin & McKenna (2011) in a study into the decision-making of sixth form pupils about UK higher education found that all the respondents showed relatively low awareness of any university advertising and relied heavily on friends and family members for information on potential higher education offerings. In a study of UK undergraduate students choosing a university, Dawes & Brown (2003) found that the largest group of information sources used by the respondents is classified as personal/non-commercial and include friends, schools' career teachers, brothers/sisters, mothers and fathers.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) noted that interpersonal sources of information rather than media advertising are needed to overcome some of the difficulties being experienced in promoting overseas higher education. Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003) in a study into the international marketing of British education found that the best promotional strategies include the use of alumni, friends and relatives. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) in their study into the factors influencing host country selection by international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, China & India found that word of mouth from friends and relatives is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use. In their study of the decision-making of African students in UK higher education, Maringe & Carter (2007) identified the information sources used by the students as friends, teachers, informal agencies and family members; with friends being the most important.

The finding that information obtained from interpersonal sources are much more important than that obtained from other sources in the decision-making process for African students in UK higher education supports the work of Maringe & Carter (2007), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003) and Mazzarol & Soutar (2002). The main reason for this finding is that many of the other information sources that prospective students normally use during the process of finding a UK university are not available to most prospective African students. The table below contains information about the availability of the most common information sources used by prospective UK higher education students in African countries:

Information Sources	Availability in African Countries
University prospectuses	Generally not available
University websites	Available online, but Internet accessibility is limited
UCAS handbook	Not available
Faculty leaflets	Not available
League tables	Available online, but Internet accessibility is limited
University open days	Not normally open to overseas based applicants
Career advisers	Generally not available
Independent university guides	Generally not available
University staff visits	Limited number of visits to a few major cities
University Fairs/exhibitions	Small number of fairs in a few major cities
Specialist magazines	Generally not available
British Council offices	Available only in major cities
Word of mouth (family members, friends, alumni, etc.)	Available to most prospective students
Agents	Available in most major cities

Table 6.2: Availability of common information sources in African countries

University prospectuses, UCAS handbooks, library materials and university open days that have been cited by many previous studies as the most important sources of information are generally not available to prospective international students in African countries. University fairs/exhibitions that provide prospective students with the opportunity to meet with university staff and obtain information about UK higher education are only held in the major cities of a few African countries. The events are organised by the British Council and major international student recruiters and normally run a few times in major cities each year.

Although many of the students acknowledge the role of the Internet in providing information about the university during the early stages of their information search, the challenges of internet connectivity in many African countries makes it difficult for prospective students to rely on it as the primary means of communicating with and processing applications for UK institutions. The speed of the Internet connectivity in some African countries is so slow that web pages time out or load so slowly that many users simply give up after ten minutes of trying. The high cost of Internet access and regular power outages makes it difficult for prospective students to rely on it as the main source of information about UK higher education. The cultural gap between most African countries and the UK also makes it difficult for many prospective students to understand some of the information provided on university websites and communicate effectively with the institution through this medium.

The information that motivate African students to choose a UK university is mostly provided by friends, agents, family members and university staff. In many cases, it is the interpersonal sources like agents, friends and university staff that they come into contact with that enables them to get access to university prospectuses, faculty leaflets, UCAS handbook and other materials that provides them with information about the university. The interpersonal sources help to explain the information in the published materials and provide the practical support required during the application process.

6.3.1 Implications

The main implication of this finding for UK universities is that they need to ensure that the right information is available to the main interpersonal sources from which students are likely to find out about their institution (agents, friends and family members). Whilst the university has a good level of control over the information available to agents, it has very little direct control over the information available to friends and family members. The university needs to provide adequate training to recruitment partners in order to ensure that they have a good understanding of the range of courses offered by the university and accurate information about other issues that are important to prospective students. The university should also endeavour to deliver excellent student experience for every enrolled student who are or will soon become the friends and family members that prospective students will turn to when they need information about where to study in the UK. There are also implications for the allocation of marketing spend on different

promotional activities like exhibitions, billboard advertising, radio advertising and newspaper/magazine advertising. Institutions might have to examine their spending on activities/media that are not proven to attract prospective students from the region in order to focus more on effective promotional activities and better training/support for key recruitment partners. The thousands of pounds spent on newspaper/magazine advertising, billboards, radio advertising and other promotional activities that generate few applications or those that do not eventually convert to enrolments will need to be reviewed.

The main implication for agents is that they need to develop a good reputation within their markets and promote their services extensively so that prospective students can see them as the main source of information on UK university education. They also need to invest in promotional activities that will increase awareness of their operations and achievements within their local communities. In many markets their most valuable promotional tools will be satisfied customers who go on to become effective advocates for them.

6.4 Most influential interpersonal sources

The survey results show that agents and parents are the interpersonal sources that had the most influence on the decision of the students to choose Anglia Ruskin University. The study also shows that those with whom the students had close personal relationships (parents, family members and friends) are quite influential in the process of choosing a UK university. For many African students, a close-knit circle of family, relatives and friends influence the decision on which UK university to choose.

As a local repository of information on overseas study and the most important initial information source (based on archival research and survey data), the agent is one of the two interpersonal sources (agents & university representatives) that benefit financially from the student's decision. Influencing students' decisions for financial gain is the primary role of most agents in the international student recruitment process and they are generally good at doing that. The agent is also seen as instrumental in enabling students to fulfil their need for UK university education by providing them with their desired course of study and facilitating the university admission and UK student visa application process. This perceived matchmaking and facilitation ability also makes

many respondents to see the agent as the most influential party in their decision to study at the university. In the absence of any other influential interpersonal source, many prospective students from a part of the world where the level of exposure to information about UK university education is relatively low will succumb to the strong influence of aggressive agents.

The observation that agents and parents are the most influential interpersonal sources mean that they are the ones that determine the university at which the student eventually enrols. The study confirms the findings of Durkin & McKenna (2011), Nicholls et al (1995), Moogan (2011), Moogan et al (1999), Dawes & Brown (2003), Manthorpe et al (2010), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) and Maringe (2006) about the influence of parents, friends and family members in the decision-making process for UK higher education. However, it does not confirm the findings of Maringe (2006), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004) and Moogan (2011) about the strong influence of teachers in the decision-making process. This must be because most teachers in African countries do not possess sufficient knowledge about UK higher education to be seen as the right sources of advice by prospective students.

The study also confirms the findings of Chen & Zimitat (2006), Pimpa (2003), Rudd et al (2012) and Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) about the influence of family members and friends on the decisions of international students about overseas higher education. The findings of Bhati & Anderson (2012) on the influence of agents in the decision-making of prospective students about overseas education was also confirmed by the study. The study partly confirms the findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) about the importance of friends and family members in the decision-making of African students about UK university education. Some of the comments from in-depth interview respondents support Maringe & Carter's (2007) assertion that friends' recommendation was a most powerful influence in the decision of African students coming to study in the UK. The researcher found very little evidence on the influence of teachers which was acknowledged in the Maringe & Carter (2007) study. The study found sufficient evidence to support the findings of Hulme et al (2013) on the important role played by recruitment agents in the African market and the need for institutions to work with them in order to achieve their objectives. As current literature indicates the influence of family and friends in the decision-making process, the researcher was not surprised by

the identification of parents as one of the two most influential interpersonal sources. The identification of agents as most influential was completely unexpected as most of the existing literature did not indicate this. A recent study into the decision-making process for international students in UK higher education also identified family members and agents as the most influential sources for Nigerian undergraduates (UK HE International Unit, 2015).

Although the Chi – square tests conducted by the researcher did not confirm that the relationship between the age groups of the students and the most influential interpersonal source was significant, the survey data had indicated a clear relationship. Parents were most influential in the decision-making for 7 out of the 12 students aged 17 – 21 (58%) compared to 8 out of the 23 students aged 22 – 25 (35%), 5 out of the 32 students aged 26 – 35 (16%) and 1 out of the 10 students aged over 36 (10%). A high level of influence of parents on the decisions of younger students (under 25s) is consistent with most African cultures where respect for parents is sacrosanct and most of the students will be completely dependent on their parents for funding. This is clearly expressed in the statement of Interviewee 16, who said that "The culture where I come from is not one of those where you challenge your parents. Your parents at the end of the day are the ones that make the final decisions in the home". The strong influence of parents on the decisions of younger students is consistent with the findings of Moogan et al (1999), Dawes & Brown (2003) and Maringe (2006) who explored the decision-making of sixth formers and first year undergraduates. The existence of this difference has significant implications for the marketing of degree foundations and bachelors degree programmes that are usually targeted at younger students. Marketing messages and the information contained in promotional materials needs to be designed to address the needs and concerns of not only the prospective student but also their parents. As the main decision makers / influencers parents need to be convinced that the institution is the right one for the young person before supporting their decision.

Although the Chi – square tests conducted by the researcher did not confirm that the relationship between the course level of the students and the most influential interpersonal source was significant, the indication that there is a relationship between age and most influential interpersonal source means that a relationship should exist. The fact that most undergraduate students tend to fall into the 17 – 21 age group means that

the relationship is likely to be similar to the one that seems to exist for age group and most influential interpersonal source. However, the survey data for this study did not indicate that the relationship is as pronounced as expected because some of the undergraduate students that participated in the study are enrolled on degree top-up programmes designed for nursing diploma / HND holders who have returned to higher education after several years of work experience and tend to fall into the higher age brackets. None of the previous studies in the subject area has explored the relationship between course levels and most influential interpersonal source. Where such a relationship exists the implications are likely to be the same as those discussed above for parental influence.

Although the Chi – square tests conducted by the researcher did not confirm that the relationship between the gender of the students and the most influential interpersonal source was significant, the survey data had indicated a clear relationship. This relationship is more pronounced when the other sources are compared against relatives (parents & family members). Relatives were most influential in the decision-making for 17 out of the 44 female students (39%) compared to 10 out of the 36 male students (27%) that completed the survey. None of the previous studies in the subject area has explored the relationship between gender and most influential interpersonal source. This relationship will be much easier to explore in a study with a much larger sample of respondents that have provided a wider range of quantitative data that can be analysed with inferential statistics.

The most common reasons cited by survey respondents that provided valid answers for choosing the university are course of study (46%), reputation (15%) and facilities (12%). Overall, 53% of those that provided valid answers chose the university because of factors related to the availability and content of the course. Other factors mentioned during the in-depth interviews include cost/price, recognition of qualifications, career prospects, living/accommodation costs, life skills and locations. The study confirmed the findings of the British Council Student Insight Report for Nigeria (2013) which identified the important factors being considered by prospective higher education students in selecting an institution as quality of the course, career prospects, low tuition fees and institution reputation. It also confirms the findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) that the pull factors for African students at institutional and course programme level

include course availability, post qualification employment opportunities, institutional research / teaching profile, and accommodation costs/availability.

The main implication of course availability being the main factor that influenced the decision of the respondents to choose the university is that in many situations students are choosing courses before choosing universities. It is only the universities that offers the courses that students are interested in that stand the chance of being selected by them. Hemsley – Brown & Oplatka (2015) in their systematic review of university choice found that the course or subject of study is important and most students are unlikely to compromise on this despite other factors. Maringe & Carter (2007) had noted that for African students applying from home countries, choice of institution is not as important as the decision to come to the UK due to positive brand association through which UK higher education appears to be based on the Oxbridge perception. Any university that wants to attract a good number of students from the region needs to be aware of the courses/subjects that most prospective students are interested in and ensure that they are made available. Students' focus on course availability rather than other factors opens them up to the influence of aggressive agents who might suggest any university that offers the course as the ideal institution for the student.

6.4.1 Implications

The main implication of agents being the most influential interpersonal source is that universities that intend to be successful in the region must work with the leading student recruitment agents in the major markets like Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe & Libya. As many of these leading agencies normally represent scores of UK institutions, universities must provide financial or other incentives for these agents to push their brands rather than those of competitors when prospective students are interested in the courses that they offer. Financial incentives normally take the form of higher commission rates, bonuses for meeting recruitment targets and funds for marketing activities. Other incentives include regular participation at agents' exhibitions, UK trips / training events for directors & staff and placement of dedicated university representatives at the agents' offices. Universities also need to develop very close relationships with recruitment partners and support their activities in every possible way.

The main implication of parents being one of the most influential interpersonal sources is that universities have to ensure that promotional tools (website & marketing materials) contain information that address issues that are important to parents and meet the information needs that they have during the decision-making process. Whilst prospective students are interested in information about entry criteria, teaching methods, campus atmosphere, sports facilities, clubs/societies and social events, many parents are interested in information about career options, accommodation, tuition fees & payment plans, safety of campus environment, international student support and post – study employment opportunities. Their high level of influence in the decision-making process should encourage institutions to focus more on providing information that will convince parents that they are the right place of study for their child.

6.5 How interpersonal sources influence the decisions of prospective African students

The qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews provide valuable insights into the different ways in which the most influential interpersonal sources (agents, parents, friends and family members) influence the decisions of African students in the process of choosing a UK university. This is supported by data collected through the open – ended question in the survey questionnaire. The qualitative data is used in the study to explain why and how the main interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students about UK higher education. The observations from this part of the study cannot really be compared to the general literature on the subject because the researcher was unable to find any previous study that explored the ways in which agents, parents and friends influence the decisions of prospective international students.

6.5.1 Agents

As the most important source of information about UK university education, agents play an important role in the international student recruitment process. They help to increase access to overseas education markets by converting interests from prospective students (and their parents) into actual placements in institutions abroad (Krasocki, 2002). In most African countries, students and parent use agents to process applications for UK higher education because they lack the knowledge and understanding of overseas education systems. Even in situations where students or their parents manage to secure a place on a UK university programme on their own, they lack the confidence or ability to

complete the necessary formalities, especially the increasingly complex UK student visa application process, without the help of an experienced agent. The role that they play in the decision-making process is similar to that observed by Bhati & Anderson (2012), who noted that 26% of Indian students relied on the agents' advice in choosing courses, universities and study destinations. In Africa reputable agents have become valuable to UK institutions because they offer a cost-effective means of increasing outreach and recruiting from regions where many institutions are unable or unwilling to visit.

Although Huang et al (2014) observed that the use of agents can be resource demanding and potentially cause damage to an institution's reputation, the potential reward in the form of increased tuition fees revenue from the students recruited has motivated many universities to increase their use in the region. UK universities find it necessary to use agents because: they are indispensable in establishing an institution's foothold in a new market; they provide a permanent presence in many areas where it would be too expensive for university staff to be based; they operate where it would be difficult for an international officer to travel; they are on the ground to provide valuable market intelligence and can potentially supply a lucrative stream of enrolments for the institution (Hulme et al, 2013). The expansion of the activities of international consultancies/recruitment agencies in Africa reflect the higher returns that these organisations can generate in the region. Hulme et al (2013) observed that the use of agents ensures a continuing presence in relatively volatile African markets where UK higher education institutions are reluctant to commit to long-term investment. Their ability to access areas that are restricted for international visitors and convert initial enquiries to enrolments efficiently makes them indispensable in the student recruitment process for the region. Many African markets are seen as 'face-to-face' markets where prospective students will only commit to an institution after they have met a representative or agent that can properly explain what is on offer and clarify any issues that they have. The high rates of commission that institutions are willing to pay successful agents reflect the precarious nature of their work and their ability to secure student supply in increasingly competitive and unstable markets. The brokerage role played by agents in the student recruitment process ensures that the markets continue to expand despite challenges because all the actors are motivated to maximise profits (Hulme et al, 2013).

6.5.1.1 Agents (Information & practical support during the application process)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing them with a lot of relevant information about the course/institution and supporting them during the application process. The information provided increase the interest of students in the institution and makes it easier for the agent to convince them that the institution is the right one for them. The availability of practical support during the application process to the university and during the UK Student Visa application process also encourages students to choose an institution that the agent represents or recommends as most agents do not provide support for students applying to other institutions.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide agents with a wide range of up – to – date marketing materials to enable them to promote their brands effectively to prospective students. They also need to provide adequate training to their staff on the university's programmes, admission process and selling points. Agents require regular updates on developments within the institution so that they can provide accurate information to prospective students.

6.5.1.2 Agents (Encouragement, responsiveness and personalised service during the application process)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing encouragement, being responsive and providing practical support that is tailored to meet the personal needs of the student during the application process. For many African students, the lead time between applying for a UK university course and enrolling on one can be years rather than months. The ability of the agent to provide encouragement and practical support to enable the student overcome any challenges that they might be facing during the process can influence the student to choose the institution that the agent represents or recommends to them.

The main implication of this is that universities must endeavour to select agents with qualified, trained & experienced staff and good reward structures. Universities can also provide customer service training to improve the ability of the agents' staff to deliver high quality service to prospective students. The placement of trained university in –

country representatives in the offices of major recruitment partners will also help the university to effectively support applicants during the application process.

6.5.1.3 Agents (Career guidance & counselling)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing quality career advice that helps them to understand how the course being offered by the university will enable them to achieve their career goals. This demonstrates a strong interest in the student's personal success and influences the student to choose the institution that the agent represents or recommends to them.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide training and clear information on the career options available for different courses to the agents' staff. Information on the employability support available at the university can also improve the ability of agents to provide career advice to applicants.

6.5.1.4 Agents (The right solution for the student)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution as the right solution to the student's requirement or the need that the student is trying to meet. The ability of the agent to convince the student that the institution that is being recommended offers the programme that they are interested in, charges affordable tuition fees, requires a low tuition fee deposit, has lower entry requirements, is able to issue an offer of admission within a short period of time or meets any other requirement that is important to them at that point in time persuades them to see the institution being offered as the right one.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide financial and other incentives to agents to encourage them to push their brands rather than those of competitors when prospective students have a need that can be met by the courses that the university offers. Sponsored regular training trips to the university in the UK provide agents with real – life experience of the university that improves their ability to sell it to prospective students. Regular research into the specific needs of prospective students in major markets will enable an institution to tailor their offerings, marketing activities and processes to meet their main needs.

6.5.1.5 Agents (A good quality UK higher institution)

Agents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution to the student as a good quality UK higher education provider. Most applicants based in African countries have little knowledge about the UK higher education sector and the quality of UK universities. Applicants and their parents mostly rely on local recruitment agents for information on studying in the UK and the quality of different institutions. The plethora of league tables and university rankings has complicated the process of selecting a quality UK university for many international applicants. Thus the ability of the agent to convince the student that the institution that is being recommended is a quality UK university by providing appropriate evidence plays a major role in persuading the student to choose the institution as the right one for them.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide detailed information to agents about the quality of its programmes and its achievements. They should provide a list of the main selling points for the most popular programmes. Agents should also receive regular updates on significant achievements; like awards, Research Excellence Framework (REF) results, improved university league table positions, etc. Opportunities to experience the university campus for themselves can make the quality of the institution more real to agents & their staff and make it much easier for them to communicate this to prospective students.

6.5.2 Parents

In many African cultures parents play an important role and are believed to be the teachers and directors of the young. Among the Igbos in West Africa, it is said that "he who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle". African traditionalists believe that oracles give infallible truths, thus the elders (especially parents) are believed to say the truth and their words and instructions are heeded to for the promotion of good behaviour among the young. Parents are influential in the decision-making process for many African students planning to enrol in UK higher education. This is especially true for younger students who are still living at home and dependent on their parents to provide the funds required for their overseas study.

6.5.2.1 Quality of education / institution

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by presenting the institution to the student as a good quality UK higher education provider. Some African parents have studied in the UK, worked in the UK or visited the UK whilst others have obtained information from friends & relatives about the quality of UK university education and/or specific institutions in the UK. They influence the decisions of their children on the choice of UK university by providing parental advice based on their knowledge and experience. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) found that parents and relatives who have graduated from a particular institution and enjoyed the experience are likely to recommend it to their children.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide the detailed information that is required for parents to assess the quality of their programmes on their websites and in marketing materials. An understanding of what parents in the region see as the characteristics / qualities of a good UK university will enable institutions to tailor the information provided to meet their need. An information for parents section on the international web pages and in the international prospectus with a list of reasons to choose the university should be a good starting point. Applicants can also be encouraged to bring their parents/guardians to meet with university staff during country visits so that they can discuss with them and answer any questions that they might have.

6.5.2.2 Career Prospects

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by advising them that studying at the institution will equip them with knowledge, skills and qualifications that will improve their career prospects. This is particularly important due to the high rate of graduate unemployment in many African countries and the challenges that local graduates face in securing decent jobs. A UK university degree is seen as a reliable ticket to a good job and a bright future which is what every parent wants for their children.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide detailed information about career options for different courses, case studies of recent graduates / alumni, graduate starting salaries, post – study work options, placement opportunities, post – graduation employment rates and employability support. Case studies of alumni from different

countries in the region along with stories about how their education helped them to develop successful careers will also be helpful. This will provide parents with the information that they need to assess the likely career prospects of their children that are thinking of enrolling at the university.

6.5.2.3 Funding / Affordability

Parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by advising them to choose an institution with a low / reasonable level of tuition fees and living costs. UK university education is an expensive luxury which most African parents cannot afford. Most of those that manage to obtain the funds to send their children overseas want to get the best education at a reasonable cost. For this reason they tend to advise their children to opt for good quality UK institutions that charge low tuition fees and are located in regions where the living costs are reasonable. The parental advice is quite influential because in many cases parents are the ones that make the student's UK university education possible by providing the funds required.

The main implication of this is that universities should endeavour to set tuition fees at reasonable levels and provide detailed information on fees, scholarship opportunities, living costs and payment plans. Information sheets that show the breakdown of tuition fees and living costs in the local currency can make it easier for parents to understand the financial implications of their decisions.

6.5.2.4 Parental Guidance

Some parents influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing wise counsel / guidance based on the information that they have and the alternatives available to their children. It is customary in many African countries for young people to seek advice from parents when they are making important decisions about their future; especially if they are still living at home or financially dependent on their parents. The advice provided in such situations is usually based on the knowledge / experience of parents or their best judgement after analysing the information presented by the student on the alternatives that they are considering or are available to them. Whatever the advice provided, parents are generally seen as committed to steering their children in what will be the best direction for their lives.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide detailed information in their marketing materials on the different issues that are of interest to parents so that they can easily compare the institution with others and provide appropriate guidance to their children during the decision-making process. They should also provide African applicants and their parents with the opportunity to attend open days / university events in order to experience the university during the decision-making process. Virtual campus tours should be available on the university's website for those that are unable to travel to the UK to attend open days. Video clips with enticing photographs of the campus and positive feedback from current students will also be helpful to parents.

6.5.3 Friends

Friends are those with whom the student has developed a relationship of trust and play a major role in the decision-making process for many African students. Maringe & Carter (2007) found that friends' recommendation was a most powerful influence in the decision-making of African students coming to the UK to study for the first time.

6.5.3.1 Advice & guidance based on previous, current or intended study at the university

Friends influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing information and advice based on their knowledge or experience of studying at the university. Those that are currently studying at the university provide information about entry requirements, location, environment, campus experience and fees/living costs. Those that have completed their studies and returned to their home country share their positive experiences and the ways in which the education has improved their knowledge / skills and improved their career prospects. Rudd et al (2012) found that half of the Chinese students interviewed had listened to friends' advice during the decision-making process and were influenced by the friends' own experience of western university life or stories those friends told them about other people's experience. The close relationship of most friends to the prospective student provides the basis for the high level of confidence in the reliability of the advice / guidance provided; especially if they have first-hand experience of studying at the institution.

The main implication of this is that universities should endeavour to deliver excellent learning and student experiences for every enrolled student who are or will soon become the friends that prospective students will turn to when they need information about where to study in the UK. The university should also continually engage with its alumni who should be encouraged to serve as advocates in their respective communities.

 6.5.3.2 The need to maintain contact or study together

Friends also influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by emphasising the need to maintain contact or study together at the same institution. This is sometimes the case with those that are currently studying at the institution or those that are planning to do so in the near future. Those that are currently studying at the university provide information about entry requirements, location, environment, campus experience and fees/living costs to their close friends and former classmates to encourage them to join them. Those that are planning to join the university share the information that they have with classmates and close friends in order to encourage them to come along and maintain the bond of friendship that they already have.

The main implication of this is that universities should endeavour to deliver learning and campus experiences that will encourage students to spread positive word of mouth about the university and encourage their friends to come and join them. A student referral scheme that rewards current students in subtle ways can also motivate them to encourage friends to apply and enrol at the university.

6.5.4 Family members

Family members typically include siblings, spouses & other relatives and can be quite influential in the decision-making process for African students; especially if the student is dependent on them for funding or any other form of practical support needed to make their desire a reality. In many African cultures husbands are almost as influential as parents and elder siblings also tend to command a high level of respect. Pimpa (2003) found that family members can influence Thai students' choices of international education in several ways. Rudd et al (2012) observed that for one third of Chinese

interviewees that participated in their study, family members helped to make the decision about UK business schools.

6.5.4.1 Advice & guidance based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK

Family members influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing information and advice based on their knowledge or their experience of studying at the university or at another UK institution. Those that have completed their studies share their positive experiences and the ways in which the education has increased their knowledge / skills and improved their career prospects. Maringe & Carter found that family members' previous experience of the UK was a significant aspect of the choice process for African students. The close relationship of family members to the prospective student provides the basis for the high level of confidence in the reliability of the advice / guidance provided. Their advice can be quite influential if they are instrumental in making the student's UK university education possible by providing financial support.

The main implication of this is that universities should endeavour to deliver excellent learning and student experiences for every enrolled student who are or will soon become the family members that prospective students will turn to when they need information about where to study in the UK. Graduating students should be encouraged to invite family members to graduation ceremonies to experience the university environment. Universities should also continually engage with its alumni who should be encouraged to serve as advocates in their respective communities and encourage their children & family members to enrol at the university. Tuition fee discounts for the children and family members of alumni will also make a difference.

6.5.4.2 Counsel & guidance

Some family members influence the decisions of prospective students at the evaluation of alternatives stage by providing wise counsel / guidance based on the information that they have and the alternatives available. The advice provided in such situations is usually based on the knowledge / experience of the family member or their best judgement after analysing the information available to them.

The main implication of this is that universities must provide detailed information in their marketing materials on the different issues that are of interest to family members so that they can easily compare the institution with others and provide appropriate guidance during the decision-making process. Universities should also encourage positive word of mouth from alumni and current students on the various social media platforms available. Effective management of the university's exposure on social media networks can become a low-cost way of raising its profile and attracting prospective students.

7 CONCLUSION

This study was designed to explore the use of interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students from Africa. The marketisation of the UK higher education sector and the increasing importance of international student recruitment to the survival of many universities has made international student decision-making a hot topic in the sector. Like many other business organisations, universities want to understand the buying behaviour of prospective students in order to be able to influence their choice.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

One of the main aims of research at doctoral level is to make a significant contribution to what is already known and what has been previously written about the subject area. The table below shows some of the ways that the study has added knowledge to the existing literature in the subject area:

|	New Knowledge	Concept
1.	New Knowledge	Identification of agents as the most important source of information on UK higher education for a reasonably large sample of African students
2.	New Knowledge	Provision of data to prove that interpersonal sources are more important than other sources in the provision of information to African students
3.	New Knowledge	Identification of agents & parents as the most influential sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for African students in UK higher education
4.	New Knowledge	Identification and discussion of some of the ways in which agents, parents, friends and family members influence the decision of African students about institution choice at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process

Table 7.1: Contribution to knowledge

There are at least four findings from the study that adds knowledge to the existing literature in the field of international student decision-making:

1. The identification of agents as the most important source of information on UK higher education for prospective African students based on the collection of data on different information sources is a significant contribution to existing literature.

2. The provision of data to prove that interpersonal sources are more important than other sources in the provision of information to prospective African students is also a significant contribution to existing knowledge. The study also demonstrates that interpersonal sources are more important in the region because most of the other sources that home students use in the process of finding a UK university are either not available to African students or only available to a small proportion that are based in major cities.

3. The identification of agents and parents as the most influential interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for African students in UK higher education is an important contribution to existing literature by a study that is primarily focussed on this objective and based on data from a group of respondents/interviewees that is fairly representative of the population of African students in UK higher education.

4. The identification and discussion of the specific ways in which agents, parents, friends and family members influence the decision-making of African students about institution choice at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process is a significant contribution to knowledge. The study has not only identified the most influential interpersonal sources, it has also identified the ways in which they influence the decisions of African students about UK higher education.

7.2 Contribution to Professional Practice

One of the ways in which the professional doctorates differ from other doctorate programmes is that the researcher is also expected to make a significant contribution to developing professional practice within the field of study. There are several ways in which this study in the field of international student recruitment contributes to the development of professional practice:

1. The identification of agents as the most important source of information about UK higher education highlights the need to recruit, train, equip, empower, support, motivate and incentivise reputable agents in the major recruitment markets in the region so that they can effectively support the activities of UK higher education institutions.

2. The provision of data that proves that interpersonal sources are more important and more effective than other sources in the provision of information to students

in the region highlights the need to review promotional strategies, activities and spending in order to ensure that they are focussed on delivering good quality applications that will produce the enrolments that universities desire.

3. The identification of agents and parents as the most influential interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for students in the region highlights the need to support & incentivise agents to recommend the university to students. It also highlights the need to provide the right type of information to parents and to be more focussed on convincing them as influential decision makers.

4. The identification and discussion of the main ways in which parents, agents, friends and family members influence the decisions of African students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process provides practitioners with an understanding of the complexity of the decision-making process and insights into the different ways in which they can influence the outcome in favour of their institutions.

7.3 The Novelty of the Study

This study builds theory in the area of UK higher education international student decision-making by identifying the information sources used by prospective African students, confirming the importance of interpersonal sources, identifying the most influential interpersonal sources and highlighting the main ways that interpersonal sources influence decision-making.

The conceptual framework below provides a description of current knowledge about what happens at the information search and evaluation of alternative stages of the decision-making process for African students interested in UK higher education:

```
┌─────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────┐
│  Information     │ ═══════════════>   │  Evaluation of  │
│  Search          │                    │  Alternatives   │
└────────┬────────┘                    └────────┬────────┘
         │                                       │
┌────────┴────────┐                    ┌────────┴────────┐
│   Sources of    │                    │   Influencers   │
│   Information    │                    │ Teachers, Friends,│
│   Very little    │                    │ Informal Agencies &│
│   knowledge      │                    │ Family Members  │
│   available      │                    │                 │
│   (GAP)          │                    └────────┬────────┘
└─────────────────┘                              │
                                        ┌────────┴────────┐
                                        │   Attributes    │
                                        │   Considered    │
                                        │  Course of study,│
                                        │  Reputation,    │
                                        │  Employment /   │
                                        │  Progression &  │
                                        │  Accommodation  │
                                        │  Costs          │
                                        └─────────────────┘
```
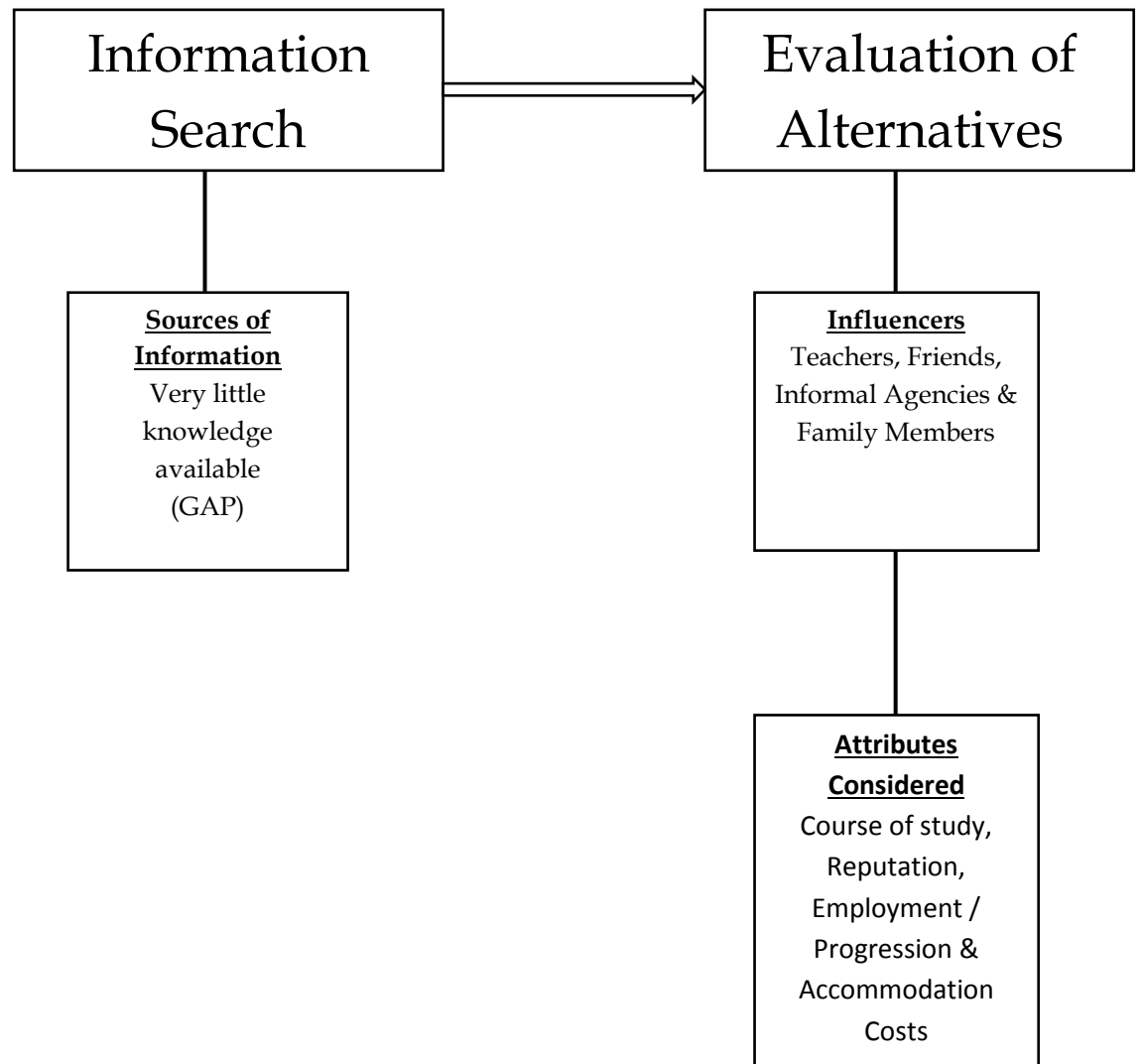
Figure 7.1: Current conceptual framework of information search & evaluation of alternative stages of decision-making process for African students

Based on the findings of this study, the revised conceptual framework below provides a description of what happens at the information search and evaluation of alternative stages of the decision-making process for African students interested in UK higher education:
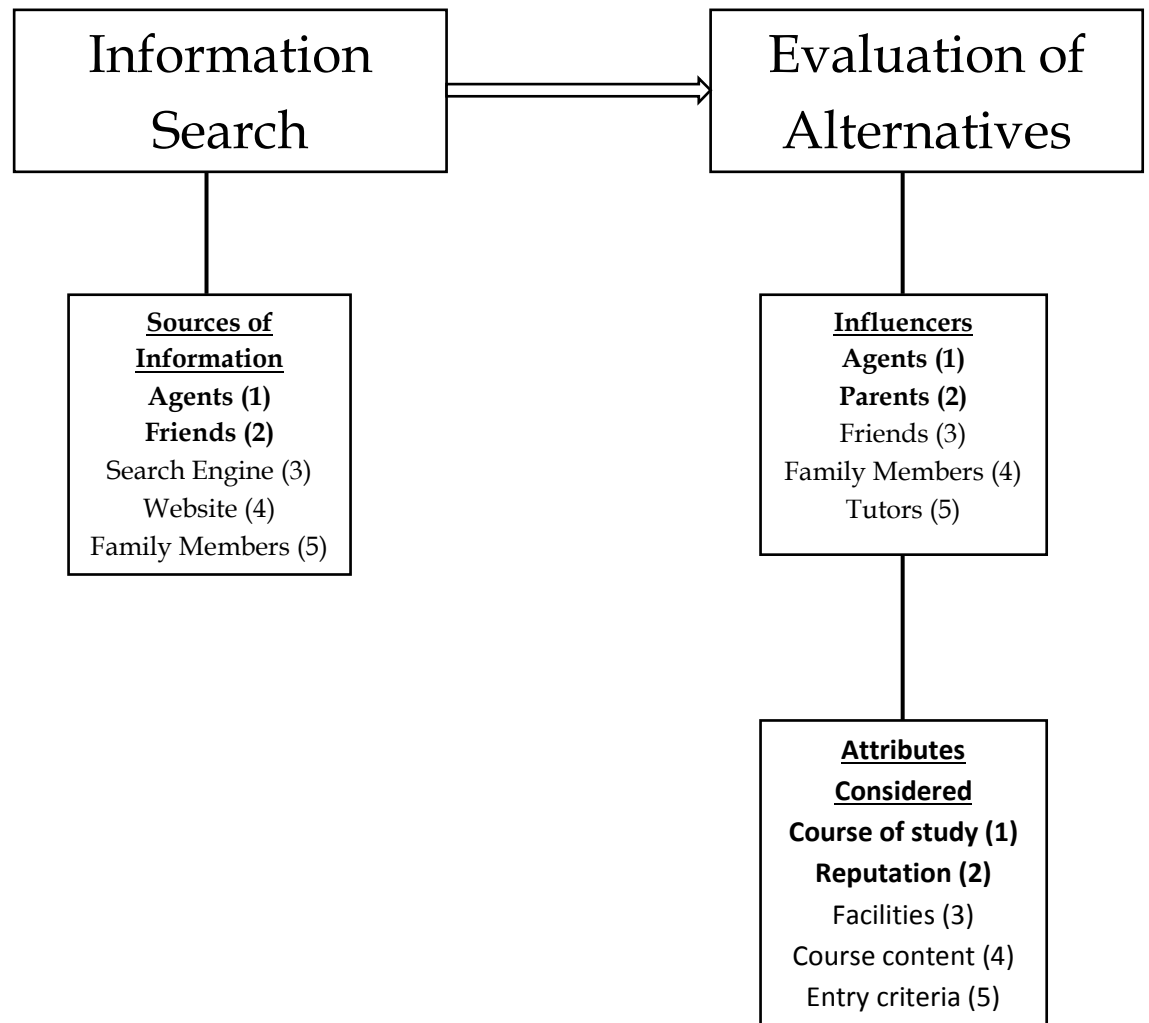
Figure 7.2: Revised conceptual framework of information search & evaluation of alternative stages of decision-making process for African students

The market has grown significantly since 2007 when the Maringe & Carter study was conducted and the amount of information available to prospective students and their parents has increased with the development of the Internet and other information sources. The changes to the funding regime in UK higher education has increased the rate of marketization and the need for universities to improve their marketing activities in order to attract more international students. The network of recruitment agents has also become much more established with a high proportion of prospective students using their support and specialist visa advice during the application process. Some of these factors must be responsible for the change in the decision-making process for prospective African students.

The second conceptual framework outlines current knowledge about the ways in which the most influential interpersonal sources influenced the decisions of African students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process:

```
           ┌─────────────────────┐
           │   Evaluation of     │
           │    Alternatives     │
           └─────────────────────┘
                      │
           ┌─────────────────────┐
           │   Influencers       │
           │   Friends (1),      │
           │  Teachers, Informal │
           │   Agencies, Family  │
           └─────────────────────┘
              /              \
  ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
  │    Friends:      │   │    Others:       │
  │ Nature of Influence │ │ Nature of Influence │
  │                  │   │                  │
  │ Very little knowledge │ │ Very little knowledge │
  │     available    │   │     available    │
  │      (GAP)       │   │      (GAP)       │
  └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
```
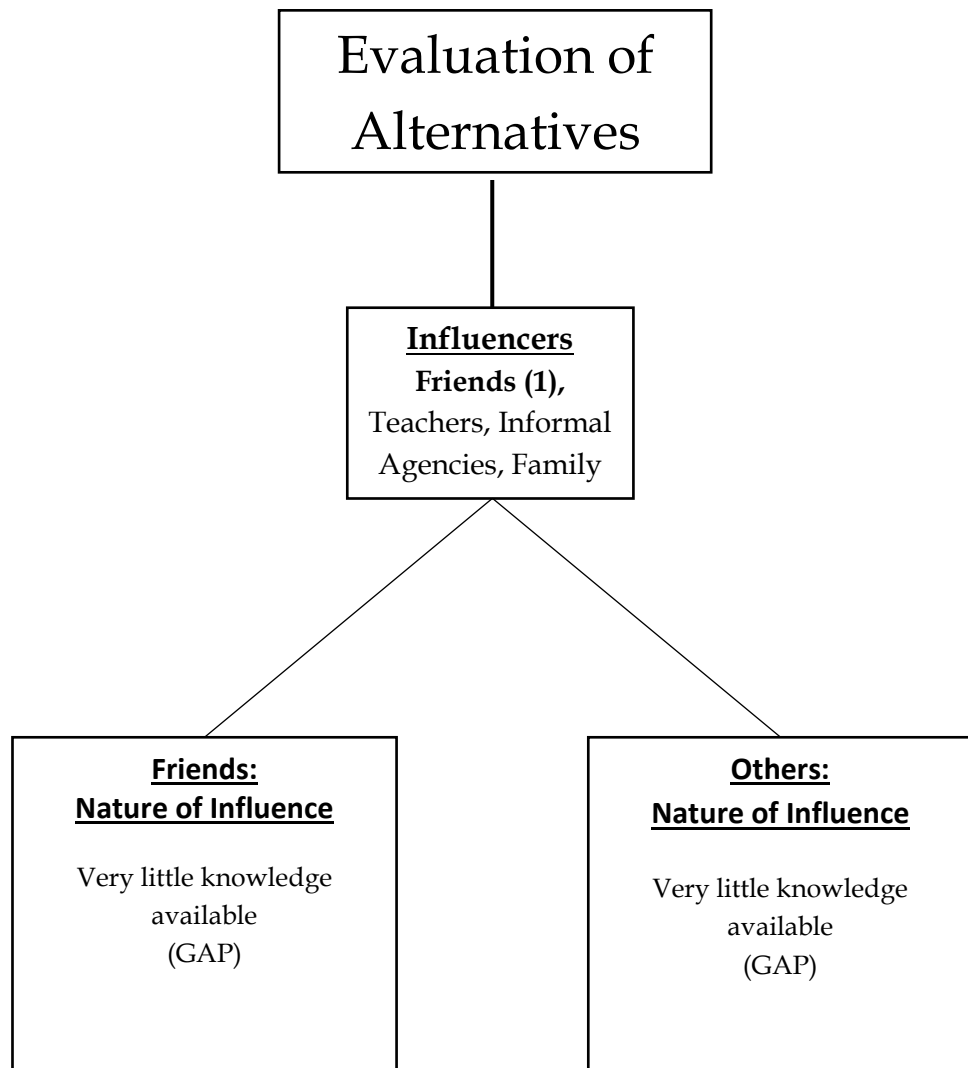
Figure 7.3: Current conceptual framework of the ways in which interpersonal sources influenced the decisions of African students

The revised version of the second conceptual framework outlines what was found about the ways in which the two most influential interpersonal sources influence the decisions of African students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process:

240
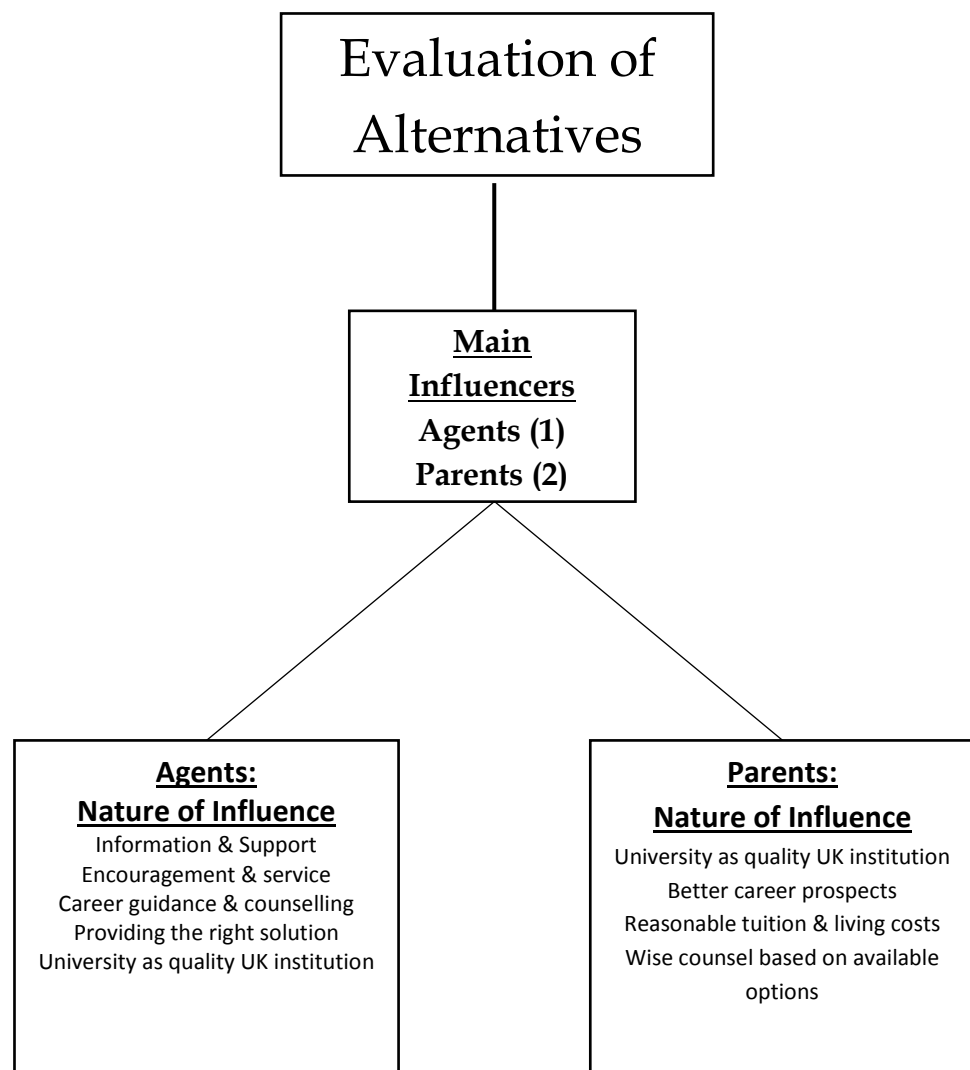
Figure 7.4: Revised conceptual framework of the ways in which agents & parents influence the decisions of African students

The identification of agents and parents as the most influential sources in the decision-making process for African students and the explanation of the ways in which they influence the choice of prospective students is significant for the UK higher education sector in many ways:

- Firstly, Africa as a continent is an important source of international students for UK higher education with 35,535 students enrolled in 2012/13 (British Council, 2014). The British Council expects Nigeria, the leading market for international student recruitment in Africa, to overtake India and become the second leading source of postgraduate students for the sector with 29,000 enrolled students by 2024 (British Council, 2014). With demand for UK higher education in India

falling by about 50% during the past few years, Africa, especially Nigeria, has become an important market for UK universities and information about student decision-making will be essential for the development of effective marketing strategies.

- Secondly, despite the high demand for UK higher education in China and India, there are a small number of UK institutions that are heavily reliant on the African market for international students. Nigeria is the leading source of international students for Anglia Ruskin University and accounts for 29% of non – EU students at the university. The information provided by this study on the decision-making of African students will enable institutions like Anglia Ruskin to improve the effectiveness of their marketing strategies and secure their market share as other players begin to strengthen their activities in the region. The tuition fees income derived from the recruitment of African students has become an important source of revenue for such institutions as the government continues to reduce direct funding for universities.

- Finally, universities that recruit a high proportion of their international students from Africa will find it difficult to keep some of their programmes running unless they maintain and increase the numbers recruited from the region. The information provided by this study will enable them to improve the effectiveness of their marketing strategies in order to achieve this. African students make up as much as 85% of the student population on programmes like the MSc Public Health, MSc Engineering Management, MSc International Relations and BSc International Nursing Studies (Top-Up) at Anglia Ruskin University. It will be difficult for the university to continue to run such programmes without the development and implementation of effective marketing strategies based on knowledge of the decision-making process of prospective students.

7.4 Research Findings

The main research questions outlined at the beginning of the study are presented along with the empirical findings below:

Q1. What are the interpersonal sources from which prospective international students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose?

A1. The information sources from which African students obtain the information required to make decisions on which university to choose are agents, parents, family

members, friends, university staff, career tutors, teachers/tutors, current/previous students and employers.

Q2. How important is information obtained from interpersonal sources in the decision-making process?

A2. Information obtained from interpersonal sources is more important than information obtained from other sources.

Q3. Which interpersonal sources are most influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

A3. The interpersonal sources that are most influential on the students' decisions at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process are agents and parents. Friends and family members were also identified as quite influential.

Q4. In what ways do interpersonal sources influence the decision of prospective international students at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process?

A4. Agents influence the decisions of prospective students by providing information & practical support during the application process, by providing encouragement & a personalised service during the application process, by providing career guidance & counselling, by providing the right solution for the student and by presenting the university as a quality UK institution. Parents influence the decisions of prospective students by presenting the university as a quality UK institution, by advising them that studying at the institution will improve their career prospects, by advising them to choose an institution with reasonable levels of tuition fees & living costs and by providing wise counsel based on the available alternatives. Friends influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on their experience of studying at the university and by emphasising the need to maintain contact or study together at the same institution. Family members influence the decisions of prospective students by providing advice based on previous or current study at the university or in the UK and by providing wise counsel based on the alternatives available & the information that they have.

The study confirms the findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) and British Council (2013) about the sources from which prospective African students obtain information about UK higher education. Unlike Maringe & Carter (2007) the study found that the most influential sources in the decision-making process for prospective African students are parents and agents. This position is supported by a recent study into the decision-making of international students in UK higher education which identified family members and agents as the most influential sources for Nigerian undergraduates (UK HE International Unit, 2015). The study builds on existing knowledge in the subject area by highlighting significant differences in the way that African students approach the decision-making process compared to their counterparts from other regions. The identification of the main ways in which agents, parents, friends and family members influence the decisions of prospective African students about UK higher education is a significant contribution to knowledge.

The findings provide UK higher education institutions with additional insights into the decision-making process and a much clearer understanding of the ways in which the activities of the main influencers affect the decisions of prospective students. This knowledge will enable them to devise marketing strategies that will ensure that resources, support and information are directed towards stakeholders that are in the strongest position to influence prospective African students on their behalf. Whilst it is impossible to generalise the results of the study to all UK universities, the nature of the findings are such that they should be relevant and represent vital knowledge to most universities in the post – 92 sector. These universities recruit similar calibre of African students onto undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in similar subject areas as those offered at Anglia Ruskin. The international student recruitment and marketing strategies employed by such institutions are also quite similar to those used by Anglia Ruskin.

The findings of the study can be broadly generalised to most post – 92 universities in the UK higher education sector because, like Anglia Ruskin, these universities are highly dependent on the recruitment of good numbers of international students for their survival and tend to recruit reasonable numbers from the region.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

1. Due to the small sample size and the type of information collected, the researcher was unable to apply sophisticated inferential statistics in order to conduct univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses on the survey data. Most of the analyses conducted on the survey data are descriptive in nature.

2. The findings of the study might not explain the decision-making behaviour of students from North Africa. This is because only one North African student completed the questionnaire and none participated in the in-depth interviews.

3. The relatively small size of the sample and the fact that a non – probability sampling method was used to select survey respondents limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond Anglia Ruskin University.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research into the subject area should explore the decision-making process and influencers for prospective UK higher education students from different regions of the world. There is a need to compare the process and influencers for students from the UK, EU countries and other major markets like China, India & Nigeria.

7.7 Conclusion

The study has provided valuable insights into the decision-making process for African students that adds to the knowledge currently available in the subject area and enables higher education marketing practitioners to better influence the decisions of prospective students.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adcroft, A., Teckman, J. and Willis, R., 2010. Is higher education in the UK becoming more competitive? *International Journal of Public Sector Management,* [e-journal] 23 (6), pp.578-588. Available through: Primo,.

2. Altbach, P., Reisberg, L. & Rumbley, L., 2009, *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution – Executive Summary*, Paris: UNESCO.

3. Anglia Ruskin University, 2014, *Our History. Anglia Ruskin University* [online]. Available at: < http://www.anglia.ac.uk/about-us/our-history> [Accessed 7 January 2015].

4. Anglia Ruskin University, 2014. *Management Structure: Corporate Management Team Members*. [leaflet] November 2014 ed. Cambridge: Anglia Ruskin University.

5. Anglia Ruskin University, 2014. *Structure: Corporate Marketing, International & Development Services*. [leaflet] June 2014 ed. Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University.

6. Anglia Ruskin University, 2014. *Top 20 Non-EU Recruiting Countries for Anglia Ruskin University*. [report] May 2014 ed. Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University.

7. Anglia Ruskin University, 2013. *Job Description: International Officer*. [document] December 2013 ed. Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University.

8. Anglia Ruskin University, 2012. *Anglia Ruskin University Recruitment Agent Handbook*. [booklet] March 2012 ed. Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University.

9. Anglia Ruskin University, 2012, *Corporate Plan 2012 – 2014*, Cambridge: Anglia Ruskin University.

10. Arnould, E., Price, L. & Zinkhan, G., 2005. *Consumers.* [e-book] 2nd ed.. ed. Boston, Mass.] ; London: Boston, Mass. ; London: McGraw-Hill. Available through: Primo.

11. Asaad, Y., Melewar, G., Cohen, J.M.T. and Balmer, J.M.T., 2013. Universities and export market orientation: An exploratory study of UK post-92 universities. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning,* [e-journal] 31 (7), pp.838-856. Available through: Primo,.

12. Bakare, R., 2012, *CIM Introductory Certificate in Marketing Study Text*, London: BPP Learning Media.

13. Bakare, R., 2012, *CIM Professional Certificate in Marketing Study Text: Marketing Information & Research*, London: BPP Learning Media.

14. Barber, M., Donnelly, K. & Rizvi, S., 2013, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*, Institute for Public Policy Research.

15. Barbour, R.S., 2005. Making sense of focus groups. *Medical education,* [e-journal] 39 (7), pp.742-750. Available through: Primo,.

16. Bartunek, J.M., Rynes, S.L. and Duane Ireland, S.L., 2006. What makes management research interesting, and why does it matter? *Academy of Management Journal,* [e-journal] 49 (1), pp.9-15. Available through: Primo,.

17. Baskerville, S., MacLeod, F. & Saunders, N., 2011, *A Guide to UK Higher Education and Partnerships for Overseas Universities, UK Higher Education & Europe Unit Research Series/9*, July, London: BIS.

18. Beck, C., 2003, Initiation into qualitative data analysis, *Journal of Nursing Education*, Vol. 42 (5), pp.231-234.

19. Bejou, D., 2005, Treating Students Like Customers, *BisEd*, March/April, pp.44-47

20. Bell, E. and Bryman, A., 2007. The ethics of management research: An exploratory content analysis. *British Journal of Management,* [e-journal] 18 (1), pp.63-77. Available through: Primo,.

21. Bell, L. & Stevenson, H., 2009. *Future of Higher Education Policy, Pedagogy and the Student Experience.* [e-book] London: Continuum International Publishing. Available through: Primo.

22. Bhati, A. and Anderson, R., 2012. Factors Influencing Indian Student's Choice of Overseas Study Destination. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* [e-journal] 46, pp.1706-1713. Available through: Primo,.

23. Binsardi, A. and Ekwulugo, F., 2003. International marketing of British education: research on the students' perception and the UK market penetration. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning,* [e-journal] 21 (4), pp.318. Available through: Primo,.

24. Blackwell, R., Miniard, P. & Blackwell, R., 2006. *Consumer behavior.* [e-book] Mason, Oh. : Thomson Higher Education. Available through: Primo.

25. Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. & Tight, M., 2010. *How to research.* [e-book] 4th ed.. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press. Available through: Primo.

26. Blumberg, B., Cooper, D. & Schindler, P., 2011. *Business research methods.* [e-book] 3rd European ed.. London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education. Available through: Primo.

27. Blythe, J., 2009. *Principles and practice of marketing.* [e-book] 2nd ed.. Andover: South-Western Cengage Learning. Available through: Primo.

28. Bohm, A., Follari, M., Hewett, A., Jones, S., Kemp, N., Meares, D., Pearce, D. & Van Cauter, K., 2004, *Forecasting International Student Mobility: A UK Perspective*, London: British Council.

29. Bolton, P., 2013, *HE in England from 2012: Funding & Finance, House of Commons Library Standard Note*, SN/SG/6206, 21 January.

30. Bourke, A., 2000, A model of the determinants of international trade in higher education, *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 110-38.

31. Bowden, R., 2000, Fantasy higher education: university and college league tables, *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 41-60.

32. Brannen, J., 2005. Mixing methods: The entry of qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research process. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice,* [e-journal] 8 (3), pp.173-184. Available through: Primo,.

33. Brassington, F., 2006. *Principles of marketing.* [e-book] 4th ed.. Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall. Available through: Primo.

34. Bray, J., *Consumer Behaviour Theory: Approaches & Models [pdf].* Available at: http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/10107/1/Consumer_Behaviour_Theory_-_Approaches_%26_Models.pdf [Accessed on 20 May 2015].

35. Briggs, S., 2006. An exploratory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice: the case of higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher Education,* [e-journal] 31 (6), pp.705-722. Available through: Primo,.

36. Briggs, S. and Wilson, A., 2007. Which university? A study of the influence of cost and information factors on Scottish undergraduate choice. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* [e-journal] 29 (1), pp.57-72. Available through: Primo,.

37. British Council, 2014, *A Review of Student Digital Usage: Five major markets*, The British Council.

38. British Council, 2014, *Postgraduate Student Mobility Trends to 2024*, The British Council.

39. British Council, 2014, Higher Education Student Data. [online] Available at: <https://hesadata.britishcouncil.org/report> [Accessed 26 December 2014].

40. British Council, 2013*, Country Snapshot: Nigeria 2013,* The British Council.

41. British Council, 2013, *Country Brief: Nigeria*, The British Council.

42. British Council, 2013, *Megatrends: The Future of International Education*, The British Council.

43. British Council, 2013, *The Future of the World's Mobile Students to 2024*, The British Council.

44. British Council, 2013, *Broadening Horizons: Breaking through the barriers to Overseas Study*, Hong Kong: The British Council.

45. British Council, 2012, *The Shape of Things to Come: Higher Education Global Trends & Emerging Opportunities to 2020*, The British Council.

46. British Council, 2011, *Impact of Visa Changes on Student Mobility & Outlook for the UK*, The British Council.

47. Brown, C., Varley, P. and Pal, J., 2009. University course selection and services marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning,* [e-journal] 27 (3), pp.310-325. Available through: Primo,.

48. Brown, R., 2013. *Everything for sale? : the marketisation of UK higher education.* [e-book] London: Routledge. Available through: Primo.

49. Brown, R., 2010. *WHAT FUTURE FOR UK HIGHER EDUCATION?* [e-]. Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley.2008:7 Available through: Primo,.

50. Browne, J., 2010, *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An independent review of Higher Education funding & student finance*. [pdf]. Available at: http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/corporate/docs/S/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf [Accessed on 1 April 2013].

51. Bryman, A. & Bell, E., 2011. *Business research methods.* [e-book] 3rd ed.. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available through: Primo.

52. Bryman, A., 2007. Barriers to Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research. *Journal Of Mixed Methods Research,* [e-journal] 1 (1), pp.8-22. Available through: Primo,.

53. Bryman, A., 2006. Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done? *Qualitative Research,* [e-journal] 6 (1), pp.97-113. Available through: Primo,.

54. Bryman, A., 1989. *Research methods and organization studies.* [e-book] Unwin Hyman. Available through: Primo.

55. Cameron, S. & Price, D., 2009. *Business research methods: a practical approach.* [e-book] London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available through: Primo.

56. Chapman, R., 1986, Toward a Theory of College Selection: a Model of College Search and Choice Behavior, *in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 13, eds. Richard J. Lutz, Provo,* UT: Association for Consumer Research.

57. Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2016, What is Marketing? [online]. Available at: <http://www.cim.co.uk/more/getin2marketing/what-is-marketing> [Accessed 17 March 2016}

58. Chen, C. and Zimitat, C., 2006. Understanding Taiwanese students' decision-making factors regarding Australian international higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 20 (2), pp.91-100. Available through: Primo,.

59. Cheng, J.H.S. and Marsh, H.W., 2010. National student survey: Are differences between universities and courses reliable and meaningful? *Oxford Review of Education,* [e-journal] 36 (6), pp.693-712. Available through: Primo,.

60. Chisnall, P., 1997, *Marketing Research*, 5th ed., Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

61. Clarke, G. & Brown, M., 1998, Consumer attitudes to the higher education application process, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 8(4) pp. 83-96.

62. Clough, P. & Nutbrown, C., 2002, *A Student's Guide to Methodology*, London: SAGE

63. Collis, J. & Hussey, R., 2009. *Business research: a practical guide for undergraduate & postgraduate students.* [e-book] 3rd ed.. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Available through: Primo.

64. Costa, M., 2011. HIGHER EDUCATION: Universities enrol for a marketing masterclass. (University of Exeter). *Marketing Week,* [e-journal], pp.14. Available through: Primo,.

65. Crace, J. & Shepherd, J., 2007, *The right prescription?*. [online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/jul/24/highereducation.tuitionfees> [Accessed 19 December 2015].

66. Creswell, J. & Clarke, V., 2011. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* [e-book] 2nd ed.. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications. Available through: Primo.

67. Creswell, J.W., 2007. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* [e-book] CA: Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Available through: Primo.

68. Cubillo, J.M., Sanchez, J. and Cervino, J., 2006. International Students Decision-Making Process. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 20 (2), pp.101-115. Available through: Primo,.

69. Daily, C.M., Farewell, S. and Kumar, G., 2010. Factors influencing the university selection of international students. (Report). *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal,* [e-journal] 14 (3), pp.59. Available through: Primo,.

70. Dawes, P. & Brown, J., 2003, Factors affecting the size of the awareness, consideration and choice sets: a study of UK undergraduate students choosing a university, *University of Wolverhampton Working Paper Series 2003*, No. WP0001/03.

71. Department for Education & Skills, 2003, *The Future of Higher Education 2003,* London: DFES.

72. Department of Business Innovation & Skills, 2011, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, June 2011, London: BIS.

73. De Vita, G. and Case, P., 2003. Rethinking the internationalisation agenda in UK higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* [e-journal] 27 (4), pp.383-398. Available through: Primo,.

74. Dibb, S., Simkin, L., Pride, W. & Ferrell, O., 2008, *Marketing: Concepts & strategies*, 6th European Edition, Hampshire: Cengage.

75. Dibb, S., 2006. *Marketing: concepts and strategies.* [e-book] 5th European ed. / Sally Dibb ... [et al.].. ed. Boston, Mass. ; Abingdon: Houghton Mifflin. Available through: Primo.

76. Dillman, D., Smyth, J. & Christian, L., 2008, *Internet, Mail & Mixed-Mode Surveys: The tailored design method*, 3rd edition, New Jersey: John Wiley.

77. Donaldson, B. and Mcnicholas, C., 2004. Understanding the postgraduate education market for UK- based students: a review and empirical study.

International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, [e-journal] 9 (4), pp.346-360. Available through: Primo,.

78. Downey, H.K. and Ireland, R.D., 1979. Quantitative Versus Qualitative: Environmental Assessment in Organizational Studies. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* [e-journal] 24 (4), pp.630-637. Available through: Primo,.

79. Durkin, M. & McKenna, S., 2011. INFORMING THE MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO YOUNGER PEOPLE. *Irish Marketing Review,* [e-journal] 21 (1), pp.41-49. Available through: Primo,.

80. Durkin, M., Cummins, D. and McKenna, S., 2012. Emotional connections in higher education marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 26 (2), pp.153-161. Available through: Primo,.

81. Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P., 2012. *Management research.* [e-book] 4th ed. / Mark Easterby-Smith, Richard Thorpe and Paul Jackson.. ed. Los Angeles, Calif.; London: SAGE. Available through: Primo.

82. Engel, J., Blackwell, R. & Miniard, P., 1995. *Consumer behavior.* [e-book] 8th. ed. Fort Worth Dryden Press. Available through: Primo.

83. Fielden, J., 2007, *Global Horizons for UK Universities*, London: The Council for Industry & Higher Education.

84. Fielding, N., 2010. Mixed methods research in the real world. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* [e-journal] 13 (2), pp.127-138. Available through: Primo,.

85. Filip, A., 2012. Marketing Theory Applicability in Higher Education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* [e-journal] 46, pp.912-916. Available through: Primo,.

86. Finney, T. & Finney, R., 2010, Are students their universities' customers? An exploratory study, *Education + Training*, Vol 52 (4), pp.276-291

87. Fisher, W.P. and Stenner, A.J., 2011. Integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches via the phenomenological method. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches,* [e-journal] 5 (1) Available through: Primo,.

88. Foskett, N. & Hemsley-Brown, J., 2001. *Choosing futures: young people's decision-making in education, training, and careers markets.* [e-book] London New York: London New York Routledge. Available through: Primo.

89. Gallagher, S. & Garrett, G., 2012, *From University Exports to the Multinational University: The Internationalization of Higher Education in*

Australia and the United States. [online] Available at: <http://ussc.edu.au/ussc/assets/media/docs/publications/120801_MNUdraft_GallagherGarrett.pdf > [Accessed 25 May 2015].

90.   Gibbs, P. & Knapp, M., 2012, *An Educator's Guide to Promoting Courses, Departments & Institutions,* London: Kogan Page.

91.   Gibbs, P., 2002. Higher education as a market: a problem or solution? *Studies In Higher Education; Stud.High.Educ.,* [e-journal] 26 (1), pp.85-94. Available through: Primo,.

92.   Greenaway, D. and Haynes, M., 2003. Funding higher education in the UK: The role of fees and loans. *Economic Journal,* [e-journal] 113 (485), pp.F150-F166. Available through: Primo,.

93.   Gronroos, C., 1990, *Service Management & Marketing: Managing the moments of truth in Service competition*, Mass: Lexington Books.

94.   Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. 1994, Competing paradigms in qualitative research, In Denzin, N & Lincoln, Y (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117), London: Sage.

95.   Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L., 2006. How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods,* [e-journal] 18 (1), pp.59-82. Available through: Primo,.

96.   Haynes, G., Mccrone, T. and Wade, P., 2013. Young people's decision-making: the importance of high quality school-based careers education, information, advice and guidance. *Research Papers In Education,* [e-journal] 28 (4), pp.459-482. Available through: Primo,.

97.   Hayward, G., Sturdy, S. & James, S., 2005, *Estimating the reliability of predicted grades*, UCAS Report.

98.   HEFCE, 2014, *Global Demand for English Higher Education: An Analysis of International Student Entry to English Higher Education Courses*, April 2014/08a, Bristol: HEFCE.

99.   HEFCE, 2013. *Recent history of higher education in England*. [online] Available   at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/about/intro/abouthighereducationinengland/> [Accessed 22 February 2013]

100. HEFCE, 2013. *About Higher Education in England*. [online] Available at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/about/intro/abouthighereducationinengland/historyofheinengland/> [Accessed 22 February 2013].

101. HEFCE, 2013, *Higher Education in England: Impact of the 2012 Reforms*, March 2013/03, Bristol: HEFCE.

102. HEFCE, 2009, *A Guide to UK Higher Education*, September 2009/32, Bristol: HEFCE.

103. Hemsley-Brown, J. & Oplatka, I., 2015, University Choice: What we know, what we don't know and what do we still need to find out?, *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol 29, Iss. 3.

104. Hemsley-Brown, J., 2012. 'The best education in the world': Reality, repetition or cliché? International students' reasons for choosing an English university. *Studies in Higher Education,* [e-journal] 37 (8), pp.1005-1022. Available through: Primo,.

105. Hemsley-Brown, J. and Oplatka, I., 2006. Universities in a competitive global marketplace: A systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing. *International Journal of Public Sector Management,* [e-journal] 19 (4), pp.316-338. Available through: Primo,.

106. HESA, 2016, *Student Introductions 2014/15*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/intros/stuintro1415> [Accessed 6 August 2016]

107. HESA, 2015, *HEUK Introduction 2013/14.* [online] Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/circulars/288-statistics/intros/3717-heukintro1314> [Accessed 16 December 2015].

108. HESA, 2014. *Income of UK HE Institutions*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/stats-finance> [Accessed 8 February 2014].

109. HESA, 2014, *Student Introduction 2012/13*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/intros/stuintro1213> [Accessed 6 August 2014].

110. HESA, 2013, *Student Introduction 2011/12*. [online] Available at: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2705&Itemid=239> [Accessed 18 February 2013].

111. Hesketh, A.J. and Knight, P.T., 1999. Postgraduates' Choice of Programme: Helping universities to market and postgraduates to choose. *Studies in Higher Education,* [e-journal] 24 (2), pp.151-163. Available through: Primo,.

112. Hesse-Biber, S., 2010. Qualitative Approaches to Mixed Methods Practice. *Qualitative Inquiry,* [e-journal] 16 (6), pp.455-468. Available through: Primo,.

113. HM Government, 2013, *International Education – Global Growth & Prosperity: An Accompanying Analytic Narrative*, July 2013, London: BIS.

114. Huang, I.Y., Raimo, V. and Humfrey, C., 2014. Power and control: managing agents for international student recruitment in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education,* [e-journal], pp.1-22. Available through: Primo,.

115. Hulme, M., Thomson, A., Hulme, R. and Doughty, G., 2013. Trading places: The role of agents in international student recruitment from Africa. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* [e-journal] 38 (5), pp.674-689. Available through: Primo,.

116. Humfrey, C.1., 1999. *Managing international students' recruitment to graduation.* [e-book] Penn: Philadelphia, Penn Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. Available through: Primo.

117. ICEF, 2013, *A Closer Look at African Student Mobility*. [online] Available at: <http://monitor.icef.com/2013/07/a-closer-look-at-african-student-mobility/> [Accessed 15 January 2015].

118. Inglis, S., 1992. Focus Groups as a Useful Qualitative Methodology in Sport Management. *Journal of Sport Management,* [e-journal] 6 (3), pp.173-179. Available through: Primo,.

119. Ivy, J., 2008. A new higher education marketing mix: The 7Ps for MBA marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 22 (4), pp.288-299. Available through: Primo,.

120. James, R., 1999, Non – traditional students and their university participation: An Australian perspective on persistent inequities and the new ideology of 'student choice', *Paper presented at 21st European Association of Institutional Research Conference*, Lund University, Sweden, 175 – 196.

121. Jankowicz, A.D., 2005. *Business research projects.* [e-book] 4th ed.. London: Thomson. Available through: Primo.

122. Jobber, D., 2010. *Principles and practice of marketing.* [e-book] 6th ed.. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill. Available through: Primo.

123. Johnson, R., Onwuegbuzie, A. and Turner, L., 2007. Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research,* [e-journal] 1 (2), pp.112-133. Available through: Primo,.

124. Johnson, R.B. and Onwuegbuzie, A.J., 2004. Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher,* [e-journal] 33 (7), pp.14-26. Available through: Primo,.

125. José María Cubillo, Joaquín Sánchez and Julio Cerviño, 2006. International students' decision- making process. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 20 (2), pp.101-115. Available through: Primo,.

126. Knight, J., 1994, *Internationalization: Elements and checkpoints* (Research Monograph, No. 7). Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Bureau for International Education.

127. Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Wong, V. & Saunders, J., 2008, *Principles of Marketing*, 5th European Edition, Harlow: Pearson Education. Available through: Primo.

128. Kotler, P. & Fox, K., 1995. *Strategic marketing for educational institutions.* [e-book] 2nd. ed. N.J: Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall. Available through: Primo.

129. Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Harris, L. & Piercy, N., 2013, *Principles of marketing.* [e-book] 6th European ed.. ed. Harlow, UK: Harlow, UK: Pearson. Available through: Primo.

130. Krampf, R. & Heinlein, A., 1981, Developing marketing strategies and tactics in higher education through target market research", *Decision Sciences,* Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 175-93.

131. Krasocki, J., 2002, Education UK Developing the UK's International Education Agent Network, *Education UK Campaigns & Strategic Initiatives: Agent Strategy*, The British Council.

132. Kumar, R., 2014. *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners.* [e-book] Fourth edition.. ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Available through: Primo.

133. Lancaster, G. & Reynolds, P., 2005. *Marketing.* [e-book] Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Available through: Primo.

134. Lawton, W., Ahmed, M., Angulo, T., Axel-Berg, A., Burrows, A. & Katsomitros, A., 2013, *Horizon Scanning: What Will Higher Education Look Like in 2020?*, Research Series/12, Surrey: Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.

135. Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry.* [e-book] Newbury Park, California: Newbury Park, California Sage. Available through: Primo.

136. Lovelock, C. & Wright, L., 2002. *Principles of service marketing and management.* [e-book]   Upper Saddle River, N.J: London: Prentice Hall; Prentice-Hall International. Available through: Primo.

137. Lunt, I., 2008. Beyond tuition fees? the legacy of Blair's government to higher education. *Oxford Review of Education,* [e-journal] 34 (6), pp.741-752. Available through: Primo,.

138. Lye, A., Shao, W., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Fausnaugh, C., 2005. Decision waves: consumer decisions in today's complex world. *European Journal Of Marketing,* [e-journal] 39 (1-2), pp.216-230. Available through: Primo,.

139. Manthorpe, J., Moriarty, J., Hussein, S., Stevens, M., Sharpe, E., Orme, J., Macintyre, G., Lister, P.G. and Crisp, B., 2010. Applications to Social Work Programmes in England: Students as Consumers? *Social Work Education,* [e-journal] 29 (6), pp.584-598. Available through: Primo,.

140. Maringe, F. & Gibbs, P., 2009. *Marketing higher education: theory and practice.* [e-book] Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press. Available through: Primo.

141. Maringe, F., 2006. University and course choice: Implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 20 (6), pp.466-479. Available through: Primo,.

142. Maringe, F. and Carter, S., 2007. International students' motivations for studying in UK HE; Insights into the choice and decision-making of African students. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 21 (6), pp.459-475. Available through: Primo,.

143. Mark, E., 2013, Student satisfaction and the customer focus in higher education, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 35(1), pp.2-10

144. Martens, D., 2005, *Research and Evaluation in education and psychology*, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

145. Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G., 2001. *The global market for higher education: sustainable competitive strategies for the new millennium.* [e-book] Cheltenham: Cheltenham Edward Elgar. Available through: Primo.

146. Mazzarol, T., 1998. Critical success factors for international education marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 12 (4), pp.163-175. Available through: Primo,.

147. Mazzarol, T. and Soutar, G.N., 2012. Revisiting the global market for higher education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics,* [e-journal] 24 (5), pp.717-737. Available through: Primo,.

148. Mazzarol, T. and Soutar, G.N., 2002. "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 16 (2), pp.82-90. Available through: Primo,.

149. Mazzarol, T., Soutar, G.N. and Seng, M.S.Y., 2003. The Third Wave: Future Trends in International Education. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 17, pp.90-3), p.90-99. Available through: Primo,.

150. McCaffery, P., 2010. *The higher education manager's handbook: effective leadership and management in universities and colleges.* [e-book] 2nd ed.. New York; London: Routledge. Available through: Primo.

151. McGhee, P., 2015, Let students be students – not customers, *The Guardian* [online] 31 March, Available at: < http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/31/students-not-customers > [Accessed 17 March 2016]

152. Mcgrath, J.E., 1982. Dilemmatics: The Study of Research Choices and Dilemmas. *American Behavioral Scientist,* [e-journal] 25 (2), pp.179-210. Available through: Primo,.

153. Mcnamara, D. & Harris, R., 1997. *Overseas students in higher education: issues in teaching and learning.* [e-book] London: London Routledge. Available through: Primo.

154. Mellors-Bourne, R., Humfrey, C., Kemp, N. & Woodfield, S., 2013, *The Wider Benefits of International Higher Education in the UK,* BIS Research Paper No. 128, September 2013, London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills.

155. Mohammadi, A.M. and Mohamed, B., 2011. Applying consumer behaviour theory and grand models to attendees behaviour in conference industry. *Encontros Científicos - Tourism & Management Studies,* [e-journal] (1), pp.151-159. Available through: Primo,.

156. Molina-Azorín, J.F., 2011. The use and added value of mixed methods in management research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research,* [e-journal] 5 (1), pp.7-24. Available through: Primo,.

157. Moogan, Y.J. and Baron, S., 2003. An analysis of student characteristics within the student decision-making process. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* [e-journal] 27 (3), pp.271-287. Available through: Primo,.

158. Moogan, Y.J., 2011. Can a higher education institution's marketing strategy improve the student- institution match? *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 25 (6), pp.570-589. Available through: Primo,.

159. Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. and Bainbridge, S., 2001. Timings and trade- offs in the marketing of higher education courses: a conjoint approach. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning,* [e-journal] 19 (3), pp.179-187. Available through: Primo,.

160. Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. and Harris, K., 1999. Decision- Making Behaviour of Potential Higher Education Students. *Higher Education Quarterly,* [e-journal] 53 (3), pp.211-228. Available through: Primo,.

161. Morgan, J., 2014, 'Overseas student total falls for first time as Indian numbers collapse', *Times Higher Education Online* [online] 16 January. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/overseas-student-total-falls-for-first-time-as-indian-numbers-collapse/2010576.article> [Accessed 17 March 2016]

162. Narver, J. and Slater, S., 1990. THE EFFECT OF A MARKET ORIENTATION ON BUSINESS PROFITABILITY. *Journal of Marketing; J.Mark.,* [e-journal] 54 (4), pp.20-35. Available through: Primo,.

163. Naudé, P. and Ivy, J., 1999. The marketing strategies of universities in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 13 (3), pp.126-134. Available through: Primo,.

164. Newman, S. and Jahdi, K., 2009. Marketisation of education: marketing, rhetoric and reality. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* [e-journal] 33 (1), pp.1-11. Available through: Primo,.

165. Nicholls, J., Harris, J., Morgan, E., Clarke, K. and Sims, D., 1995. Marketing higher education: the MBA experience. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 9 (2), pp.31-38. Available through: Primo,.

166. Niglas, K., 2004, *The combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods in educational research*, Tallinn, Estonia: Tallinn Pedagogical University Press

167. Östlund, U., Kidd, L., Wengström, Y. and Rowa-Dewar, N., 2011. Combining qualitative and quantitative research within mixed method research designs: A methodological review. *International journal of nursing studies,* [e-journal] 48 (3), pp.369-383. Available through: Primo,.

168. Oxford Economics, 2013, *The Economic Costs & Benefits of International Students*, Oxford Economics.

169. PA Consulting Group, 2011, *The Economic Impact of International Students to London's Economy: A Quantitative Perspective*, London: PA Consulting Group.

170. Pimpa, N., 2003. The influence of family on Thai students' choices of international education. *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 17 (5), pp.211-219. Available through: Primo,.

171. Price, I., Matzdorf, F., Smith, L. and Agahi, H., 2003. The impact of facilities on student choice of university. *Facilities,* [e-journal] 21 (10), pp.212-222. Available through: Primo,.

172. Price, L. & Feick, L., 1984. THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL SOURCES IN EXTERNAL SEARCH: AN INFORMATIONAL PERSPECTIVE. *Advances in Consumer Research,* [e-journal] 11 (1), pp.250-256. Available through: Primo,.

173. Punj, G.N., 1978. The Choice Process for Graduate Business Schools. *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR),* [e-journal] 15 (4), pp.588-599. Available through: Primo,.

174. Quinlan, C, 2011, *Business Research Methods*, Cengage Learning, Hampshire, UK

175. QS, 2014, *Trends in International Student Mobility: A comparative study of international student choices, motivations & expectations 2009 – 2013*, QS: London.

176. Raimo, V., Humfrey, C. & Huang, I., 2014, *Managing International Student Recruitment Agents: Approaches, Benefits & Challenges*. [online] Available at: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/managing_education_agents_report_for_bc_2.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2015].

177. Reynolds, P., 2012. *Marketing.* [e-book] Hoboken: Hoboken: Taylor & Francis. Available through: Primo.

178. Riggs, R., & Lewis, W,. 1980, Applicability of marketing research to student recruitment, *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 21(5), 467-468.

179. Robson, C, 2002, *Real World Research*, Second Edition, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford

180. Ross, M., Grace, D. and Shao, W., 2013. Come on higher ed... get with the programme! A study of market orientation in international student recruitment. *Educational Review,* [e-journal] 65 (2), pp.219-240. Available through: Primo,.

181. Rudd, B., Djafarova, E. and Waring, T., 2012. Chinese students' decision-making process: A case of a Business School in the UK. *International Journal of Management Education,* [e-journal] 10 (2), pp.129-138. Available through: Primo,.

182. Ryan, A., 2005. New Labour and higher education. *Oxford Review Of Education,* [e-journal] 31 (1), pp.87-100. Available through: Primo,.

183. Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., 2012. *Research methods for business students.* [e-book] 6th ed.. ed. Harlow: Harlow: Pearson. Available through: Primo.

184. Scandura, T. and Williams, E., 2000. Research methodology in management: Current practices, trends, and implications for future research. *Academy of Management Journal,* [e-journal] 43 (6), pp.1248-1264. Available through: Primo,.

185. Scott, J., 1990. *A Matter of record.* [e-book] Polity. Available through: Primo.

186. Simoes, C. and Soares, A.M., 2010. Applying to Higher Education: Information Sources and Choice Factors. *Studies in Higher Education,* [e-journal] (4), pp.371-389. Available through: Primo,.

187. Solomon, M., Barmossy, G. & Askegaard, S., 2002. *Consumer behaviour: a European perspective.* [e-book] 2nd ed. Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall,. Available through: Primo.

188. Solomon, M.R., 2013. *Consumer behavior: buying, having, and being.* [e-book] 10th ed., Global ed.. Boston, Mass. ; London: Pearson Education. Available through: Primo.

189. Stanfield, J., 2010. The broken university: What is seen and what is not seen in the uk higher education sector. *Economic Affairs,* [e-journal] 30 (3), pp.53-58. Available through: Primo,.

190. Stokes, D. and Bergin, R., 2006. Methodology or "methodolatry"? An evaluation of focus groups and depth interviews. *Qualitative Market Research,* [e-journal] 9 (1), pp.26-37. Available through: Primo,.

191. Sudman, S. and Lair, E.B., 1999. Sampling in the twenty-first century. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* [e-journal] 27 (2), pp.269-277. Available through: Primo,.

192. Tashakkori, A. and Creswell, J.W., 2007. Exploring the Nature of Research Questions in Mixed Methods Research. *Journal Of Mixed Methods Research,* [e-journal] 1 (3), pp.207-211. Available through: Primo,.

193. THES, 2014. *World University Rankings 2014 – 2015*. [online] Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2014-15/world-ranking> [Accessed 8 February 2014].

194. THES, 2013. *World University Rankings 2012 – 2013*. [online] Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking> [Accessed 18 February 2013].

195. Thietart, R., 2001. *Doing Management Research A Comprehensive Guide.* [e-book] London: London : SAGE Publications. Available through: Primo.

196. Thietart, R & Wauchope, 2001, *Doing Management Research*, Sage

197. Tight, M., 2011. How many universities are there in the United Kingdom? How many should there be? *Higher Education,* [e-journal] 62 (5), pp.649-663. Available through: Primo,.

198. Turner, J., 1998, *An investigation of business undergraduates' choice to study at Edith Cowan University*, unpublished research report, Perth: Edith Cowan University.

199. UKCISA (2016), *International Students Statistics: UK higher education.* [online] Available at: <http://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges--schools/Policy-research--statistics/Research--statistics/International-students-in-UK-HE/> [Accessed 6 August 2016]

200. UKCISA, 2015, *International Student Statistics: UK Higher Education.* [online] Available at: <http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges--schools/Policy-research--statistics/Research--statistics/International-students-in-UK-HE/> [Accessed 16 December 2015].

201. UKCISA, 2014, *International Student Statistics: UK Higher Education.* [online] Available at: <http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges--

schools/Policy-research--statistics/Research--statistics/International-students-in-UK-HE/#> [Accessed 25 May 2015].

202. UK HE International Unit, 2016, *International Higher Education in Facts & Figures*, June 2016, London: UK HE International Unit

203. UK HE International Unit, 2015, *International Undergraduate Students: The UK's Competitive Advantage,* December 2015, London: UK HE International Unit

204. UK HE International Unit, 2013, *International Higher Education in Facts & Figures Autumn 2013,* London: UK Higher Education International Unit.

205. UK HE International Unit, 2013, *International Higher Education in Facts & Figures Winter 2012-2013,* London: UK Higher Education International Unit.

206. UNESCO, 2014, Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students [online], Available at: <   http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx > [Accessed 17 March 2016].

207. Universities UK, 2016, *Higher Education in Numbers*. [online] Available at: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/Pages/higher-education-data.aspx> [Accessed 6 August 2016]

208. Universities UK, 2015, Higher education: A core strategic asset to the UK, *Higher Education in Facts & Figures*, London: Universities UK.

209. Universities UK, 2014, Higher education: A core strategic asset to the UK, *Higher Education in Facts & Figures*, London: Universities UK.

210. Universities UK, 2012, Higher Education: Analysing a decade of change, *Patterns & Trends in UK Higher Education*, December 2012, London: Universities UK.

211. Universities UK, 2012, Higher education: A core strategic asset to the UK, *Higher Education in Facts & Figures*, Summer 2012, London: Universities UK.

212. Universities UK, 2012, Higher Education: Meeting the challenges of the 21st century, *Futures for Higher Education: Analysing Trends*, London: Universities UK.

213. Universities UK, 2011, *Patterns & Trends in UK Higher Education 2011*, October 2011, London: Universities UK.

214. Veloutsou, C., Paton, R.A. and Lewis, J., 2005. Consultation and reliability of information sources pertaining to university selection; Some questions

answered? *International Journal of Educational Management,* [e-journal] 19 (4), pp.279-291. Available through: Primo,.

215. Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A. and Melanthiou, Y., 2007. Contemporary higher education student- choice model for developed countries. *Journal Of Business Research,* [e-journal] 60 (9), pp.979-989. Available through: Primo,.

216. Wasmer, D., Williams, J. & Stevenson, J., 1997, A Reconceptionaization of the Marketing Mix: using the 4 C's to Improve Marketing Planning in Higher Education, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education,* 8(2), pp. 29-35.

217. Whitehead, J.M., Raffan, J. and Deaney, R., 2006. University Choice: What Influences the Decisions of Academically Successful Post-16 Students? *Higher Education Quarterly,* [e-journal] 60 (1), pp.4-26. Available through: Primo,.

218. Wilkins, S., Balakrishnan, M.S. and Huisman, J., 2012. Student Choice in Higher Education: Motivations for Choosing to Study at an International Branch Campus. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* [e-journal] (5), pp.413-433. Available through: Primo,.

219. Willmott, H., 2003. Commercialising higher education in the UK: the state, industry and peer review. *Studies In Higher Education,* [e-journal] 28 (2), pp.129-141. Available through: Primo,.

220. Wood, K., 2015. *Student Data Breakdown.* [email] (Personal communication, 29 January 2015).

221. Yin, R.K., 2003. *Case study research: design and methods.* [e-book] 3rd ed.. ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage. Available through: Primo.

222. Zheng, P., 2014. Antecedents to international student inflows to UK higher education: A comparative analysis. *Journal Of Business Research,* [e-journal] 67 (2), pp.136-143. Available through: Primo,.

223. Zikmund, W.G., 2003. *Business research methods.* [e-book] 7th. ed. Mason, Ohio: Mason, Ohio South-Western. Available through: Primo.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

<u>Student Questionnaire</u>

Kindly take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire to provide us with some feedback on the effectiveness of promotional methods and information for a research study

Q1: Age group: 17 – 21 □   22 – 25 □   26 – 35 □   Over 36 □

Q2: Gender: Male □   Female □

Q3: Nationality ……………………………………

Q4: Course Level:

Foundation □   Bachelors □   Masters □   PhD □   Other ……………………..

Q5: Which information sources did you use in the process of finding a UK university? (Tick all that apply)

University prospectus / brochure□   University website□   UCAS handbook□

University fair / exhibition□   Internet search engine□   Career Tutor / Teacher□

University open day□   Parent / family members□   Friends□

University staff□   Agent / local representative□   Newspaper□

Universities League table□   Other (please state) ……………………….

Q6: How did you first find out about Anglia Ruskin University? (Tick only ONE)

University prospectus / brochure□   University website□   UCAS handbook□

University fair / exhibition□   Internet search engine□   Career Tutor / Teacher□

University open day□   Parent / family members□   Friends□

University staff□   Agent / local representative□   Newspaper□

Universities League table□   Other (please state) ……………………….

Q7: Please number each of the factors listed below in order of importance to you in your choice of a UK university. Number the most important as 1, the next as 2 and so on (if a factor was not important at all, please leave blank)

Location			Course of study	
Reputation			Course content	
Price / cost			Entry Requirement	
Facilities			University league table ranking	
Accommodation			Research Profile	
Links with employers			Other (please state) ………………………………………	

Q8: What was your main reason for choosing to study at Anglia Ruskin University? (Tick only ONE)

Location□   Reputation□   Course of study□   Price / Cost□

Course content□   Entry requirement□   Facilities□   Links with employers□

Other (please state) ………………………….

Q9: Kindly indicate how influential the following were in the process of deciding which UK university to choose (1= Not Influential, 5=Highly Influential)

	1	2	3	4	5
Friends					
Parents					
Other family members					
Career Tutor / Teacher					
Agent / local representative					
University staff					
Teachers / lecturers					
British Council staff					

Other ……………………………					
Other ……………………………					
Other ……………………………					

Q10: Which of the following interpersonal sources was most influential in your decision to study at Anglia Ruskin University? Tick only ONE

Career Tutor / Teacher□   Parents □   Other Family members□   Friends□

University staff□   Agent / local representative□   Teachers / Lecturers□

Other (please state) ……………………….

Q11: In what ways did the person / persons indicated in Q10 above influence your decision to choose Anglia Ruskin University?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Appendix 2

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Section A: The Research Project

1.   Title of project: Choosing a UK University: Interpersonal Influences for African Students

2.   Purpose and value of study: To explore the use of interpersonal sources at the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for prospective UK international higher education students.

3.   Invitation to participate: International students that joined the university in September 2014 & January 2014

4.   Who is organising the research: Richard R. Bakare (DBA Researcher)

5.   What will happen to the results of the study: The results will provide data for the researcher's DBA thesis and for research papers that will be submitted for publication.

6.   Source of funding for the research: N/A

7.   Contact for further information: richard.bakare@anglia.ac.uk

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1.   Why you have been invited to take part: As an international student that joined the university in Sept 2013 or Jan 2014, you are a member of the population for the research study

2.   Whether you can refuse to take part: Yes. Participation is entirely voluntary.

3.   Whether you can withdraw at any time, and how: Yes, you can withdraw by emailing the researcher at the email address provided.

4.   What will happen if you agree to take part (brief description of procedures/tests): You will be required to answer a few questions about the process that you went through in choosing a UK university.

5.   Whether there are any risks involved (e.g. side effects from taking part) and if so what will be done to ensure your wellbeing/safety: There are no risks involved.

6. Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong.

7. Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study: No special precautions required.

8. What will happen to any information/data/samples that are collected from you: The information provided will be collated, analysed and summarised for the thesis and research papers. All interview transcripts and audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.

9. Whether there are any benefits from taking part: You will be making a significant contribution by helping practitioners to understand the decision-making process for international students in order to ensure that marketing activities are designed to meet their needs effectively.

10. How your participation in the project will be kept confidential: The interviews do not require any personal information from which individual respondents can be identified. All interview transcripts and audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,

TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix 3

Questions for In–depth Interviews

1. Tell me about the process that you went through in choosing a UK university at which to study

2. Which information sources did you use during the process? At what stage did you use each source?

3. What type of information did you obtain from the different sources?

4. What factors did you consider in the process of choosing a UK university? Which one was most important & Why?

5. How many universities did you consider during the process and which factors did you use to assess them?

6. Which other people were involved in the decision-making? What was the nature of their involvement?

7. How influential were they during the process of choosing amongst the different universities? (Rank in % of influence)

8. At what stage of the process did they influence your choice of university?

9. Who was most influential in your decision to join Anglia Ruskin University?

10. In what ways did they influence your decision to choose Anglia Ruskin University?

11. What type of information / evidence did they provide that strongly influenced your decision?

12. Why did you trust in their advice / opinion on choice of UK University?

13. Is there any other information that you would like to add about your decision to study at Anglia Ruskin?

Appendix 4

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: Choosing a UK University: Interpersonal Influences for African Students

Main investigator and contact details: Richard R. Bakare (richard.bakare@anglia.ac.uk or 07585 888 527)

1.   I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2.   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

3.   I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

4.   I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

5.   I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University[1] processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print)…………………………Signed…………………..….Date………………

Name of witness (print)……………………………..Signed……………….…….Date………………

<div align="center">YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP</div>

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project:
I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____   Date: _____

---

[1] "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

Appendix 5

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
New age group V3 * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	73	91.3%	7	8.8%	80	100.0%

New age group V3 * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New Crosstabulation

			Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New			
			Family / Friends	Agent / University Staff	Tutor / Others	Total
New age group V3	17 - 25	Count	18	11	5	34
		% within New age group V3	52.9%	32.4%	14.7%	100%
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	54.5%	45.8%	31.3%	46.6%
		% of Total	24.7%	15.1%	6.8%	46.6%
	26 and over	Count	15	13	11	39
		% within New age group V3	38.5%	33.3%	28.2%	100%
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	45.5%	54.2%	68.8%	53.4%
		% of Total	20.5%	17.8%	15.1%	53.4%
Total		Count	33	24	16	73
		% within New age group V3	45.2%	32.9%	21.9%	100%
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%
		% of Total	45.2%	32.9%	21.9%	100%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.358[a]	2	.308
Likelihood Ratio	2.403	2	.301
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.273	1	.132
N of Valid Cases	73		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.45.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.180	.308
	Cramer's V	.180	.308
N of Valid Cases		73	

Appendix 6

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
New course levels * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	76	95.0%	4	5.0%	80	100.0%

New course levels * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New Crosstabulation

			Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New			
			Family / Friends	Agent / University Staff	Tutor / Others	Total
New course levels	Postgraduate	Count	15	15	10	40
		Expected Count	17.4	14.2	8.4	40.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	45.5%	55.6%	62.5%	52.6%
	Undergraduate	Count	18	12	6	36
		Expected Count	15.6	12.8	7.6	36.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	54.5%	44.4%	37.5%	47.4%
Total		Count	33	27	16	76
		Expected Count	33.0	27.0	16.0	76.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.399[a]	2	.497
Likelihood Ratio	1.407	2	.495
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.365	1	.243
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.58.

Appendix 7

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	76	95.0%	4	5.0%	80	100.0%

Gender * Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New Crosstabulation

			Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New			
			Family / Friends	Agent / University Staff	Tutor / Others	Total
Gender	Male	Count	13	11	10	34
		Expected Count	14.8	12.1	7.2	34.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	39.4%	40.7%	62.5%	44.7%
	Female	Count	20	16	6	42
		Expected Count	18.2	14.9	8.8	42.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	60.6%	59.3%	37.5%	55.3%
Total		Count	33	27	16	76
		Expected Count	33.0	27.0	16.0	76.0
		% within Most Influential Interpersonal Source - New	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.597[a]	2	.273
Likelihood Ratio	2.595	2	.273
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.873	1	.171
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.16.