

Enhancing Awareness of Higher Education Opportunities in Malaysia Among Kerala High School Leavers Through EMGS Educational Promotion Campaigns

Meningkatkan Kesedaran tentang Peluang Pendidikan Tinggi di Malaysia dalam Kalangan Lulusan Sekolah Menengah Kerala Melalui Kempen Promosi Pendidikan EMGS

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ABSTRACT

International student mobility is highly competitive, with countries actively seeking to attract students to their higher education institutions. This study appraises the effectiveness of Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) marketing campaigns in promoting Malaysia as a higher education destination for high school graduates in Kerala, India. A mixed-method approach was adopted to capture a comprehensive dataset of questionnaire surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews with the students' representatives. To gain primary research data, these two combinations of questionnaires and interviews with prospective students are supported by secondary data from academic journals, literature reviews, business reports and policy documents especially from the ministry of higher education. The research focused on students' perceptions and key decision-making factors. Results show that while Malaysia offers benefits such as affordable education, a multicultural environment, and English-medium programs, its marketing efforts may not fully match Kerala students' expectations. Furthermore, at the end of this research, it is revealed that social media content engagement, word-of-mouth peer recommendations, employability prospects after completing the studies and international recognition to the higher education institution strongly influence students' choices. As a result, this study recommends

that EMGS strengthen targeted, localized marketing strategies to effectively improve the visibility, rate of engagement, and reputation status among Kerala students. Developing digital content which is culturally relevant especially to Kerala high school leavers and managing concerns about career opportunities and global recognition will further support Malaysia's position as a preferred higher education destination.

Keywords: Higher Education; EMGS; Malaysia; Kerala; Student Awareness.

ABSTRAK

Pergerakan pelajar antarabangsa sangat kompetitif dengan negara-negara secara aktif berusaha menarik pelajar ke institusi pendidikan tinggi mereka. Kajian ini menilai keberkesanan kempen pemasaran Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) dalam mempromosikan Malaysia sebagai destinasi pendidikan tinggi bagi lepasan sekolah menengah di Kerala, India. Pendekatan kaedah campuran telah diguna pakai untuk mengumpulkan set data komprehensif melalui tinjauan soal selidik dan temu bual mendalam kualitatif bersama wakil pelajar. Untuk memperoleh data penyelidikan primer, gabungan soal selidik dan temu bual bersama bakal pelajar ini disokong oleh data sekunder daripada jurnal akademik, ulasan literatur, laporan perniagaan dan dokumen dasar terutamanya daripada kementerian pendidikan tinggi. Penyelidikan ini memfokuskan kepada persepsi pelajar dan faktor utama dalam membuat keputusan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa walaupun Malaysia menawarkan faedah seperti pendidikan mampu milik, persekitaran pelbagai budaya dan program pengantar bahasa Inggeris, usaha pemasarannya mungkin tidak menepati jangkaan pelajar Kerala sepenuhnya. Di akhir penyelidikan ini, didapati penglibatan kandungan media sosial, cadangan rakan sebaya dari mulut ke mulut, prospek kebolehpasaran selepas tamat pengajian dan pengiktirafan antarabangsa terhadap institusi pendidikan tinggi sangat mempengaruhi pilihan pelajar. Hasilnya, kajian ini mencadangkan agar EMGS memperkukuh strategi pemasaran yang disasarkan dan ditempatkan untuk meningkatkan keterlihatan, kadar penglibatan dan status reputasi dalam kalangan pelajar Kerala dengan berkesan. Membangunkan kandungan digital yang relevan dengan budaya terutamanya bagi lepasan sekolah menengah Kerala, serta mengurus kebimbangan mengenai peluang kerjaya dan pengiktirafan global akan terus menyokong kedudukan Malaysia sebagai destinasi pendidikan tinggi pilihan.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Tinggi; EMGS; Malaysia; Kerala; Kesedaran Pelajar.

INTRODUCTION

International student mobility is a key part of the international higher education sector, and there is a growing competition for higher education students from other countries through the strategic marketing, quality education and supportive immigration policies of different countries (UNESCO, 2026; OECD, 2025). Malaysia has become a contender for students from developing countries to choose as a destination for higher education, in recent years, due to its low cost of tuition, multicultural environment, English-medium programmes and internationally recognised universities (Koh, 2025; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

Malaysia has been actively promoting itself as a centre for international education with the creation and operation of the Malaysian government's Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) to coordinate and provide services for international student recruitment and visa applications (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2024). EMGS has a strong position in marketing Malaysia higher education in the international arena by organising digital marketing campaigns, engaging education agents, exhibitions and student engagement activities.

Kerala is emerging as a major source of overseas students in Malaysia with India being one of the major providers of such students after secondary school (Bonard, 2025; ICEF Monitor, 2026). However, competition from other study destinations is intense despite the advantages Malaysia offers. Awareness

about Malaysian higher education opportunities among Kerala high school leavers may also be limited. Hence, it is crucial to assess and improve the marketing efforts of EMGS to ensure that Malaysia is a more attractive choice of higher education destination among this group. The objectives of this research are to understand the effectiveness of the marketing efforts by EMGS and to find out strategies that can help make it more attractive to the high school leavers from Kerala.

Case Company Background

In 2012, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE) established Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLBG) that handles and streamlines the services of International Students who plan to study in Malaysia. EMGS serves as a one-stop centre that handles and coordinates the services of international students such as processing student visa, handling applications, coordinating medical screening and conducting promotional activities on higher education institutions in Malaysia.

EMGS also contributes to the Malaysian government's goal of bringing more international students to Malaysia by enhancing experiences of the students studying in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and promoting Malaysia's HEIs abroad. EMGS implements several marketing campaigns to reach international students, such as digital marketing campaigns, social media marketing, education fairs, webinars, cooperating with foreign recruitment agents and content marketing.

India is one of the major markets for EMGS to recruit as a country has a large population of students and an increasing interest in studying abroad. Kerala in India is a good market due to its high literacy rate, strong educational culture, growing interest in pursuing international education pathways, and large population of high school leavers. But with the student's preference changing and intense competition from other nations, EMGS must constantly work on improving its marketing strategies to stay competitive and relevant.

Research Questions

- i. How effective are EMGS marketing initiatives in promoting Malaysia as a higher education destination among Kerala high school leavers?
- ii. What are the perceptions of Kerala high school leavers toward Malaysia as a study destination?
- iii. What strategies can EMGS implement to enhance its marketing effectiveness among Kerala high school leavers?

Research Objectives

- i. To evaluate the effectiveness of EMGS marketing initiatives in promoting Malaysia as a higher education destination among Kerala high school leavers.
- ii. To examine the perceptions of Kerala high school leavers toward Malaysia as a study destination.
- iii. To identify strategies that can enhance EMGS marketing effectiveness among Kerala high school leavers.

Researcher Role

The researchers are independent investigators who are tasked to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the marketing campaigns of Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) in promoting Malaysia as a higher education destination to Kerala high school leavers. The researchers will develop research instruments like questionnaires and interview questions to obtain information from the selected respondents namely prospective students in conducting this study.

In addition, the researchers had the task of ensuring that the research process is carried out systematically, objectively and professionally. Finally, the researchers aim to present practical suggestions that can help the EMGS to improve its marketing efforts and make Malaysia the top choice for higher education among the youths of Kerala.

Researcher Ethics

Research ethics are crucial to conducting the study in a responsible, honest, and professional manner. The participation in this study will be voluntary. The purpose of the study and consent of the respondents will be obtained prior to collecting any information. Participants will also be able to opt out of the study at any time without any repercussions.

Secondly, the anonymity and privacy of the participants will be ensured. The information that would be gathered during the research would not be given to other people without permission and the collected information would be used only for academic purposes. The names of respondents will be anonymous in the final research report.

Thirdly, the researcher will be honest and responsible in collecting, processing and reporting of data. The results of the study will be presented in a clear, accurate way without data fabrication, manipulation or misrepresentation. All references and sources used in the research will be properly cited to avoid plagiarism.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this research was felt by the following stakeholders: Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), the higher education institutions in Malaysia, the policy makers and future researchers. The study will give EMGS insightful information on the effectiveness of their existing marketing efforts aimed at students from Kerala high schools. Based on the result EMGS can find the weaknesses of the promotional program and can make more effective marketing strategies to boost the student enrolment from Kerala.

This study can help Malaysian higher education institutions gain insight into the factors that affect international students' decisions on studying in Malaysia. The results can be used in the future by universities and colleges to fine-tune their branding, communication and engagement strategies in the Indian market.

The study would also help the Malaysian higher education sector and policy makers in achieving the Malaysian aspiration of becoming an international education hub (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2024; Bernama, 2025). This can be used as a reference for other researchers in the field of international student recruitment, higher education branding, and marketing in emerging education destinations in the future.

Definition of Terms

i. Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS)

Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) refers to an organisation under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia to manage the visa processing of international students and the promotion of Malaysia as an international higher education destination.

ii. Marketing Initiatives

Marketing initiatives refer to promotional activities and strategies implemented by an organisation to create awareness, attract target audiences, and influence consumer decisions. In this study, it refers to the promotional efforts conducted by EMGS to attract international students to Malaysia.

iii. Higher Education Destination

"Higher education destination" refers to a country chosen by students to pursue tertiary education such as diploma, undergraduate, or postgraduate studies.

iv. Kerala High School Leavers

Kerala high school leavers refer to students in the state of Kerala, India, who have completed their secondary or pre-university education and are considering further studies locally or abroad.

v. Student Perception

Student perception refers to the opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and understanding that students have regarding Malaysia as a study destination and the effectiveness of EMGS marketing efforts.

vi. International Student Recruitment

International student recruitment refers to the process of attracting and enrolling students from foreign countries into educational institutions through various marketing and promotional strategies.

Organization of the Research

This research was organized into six chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the study, case company background, research questions, research objectives, researcher role, researcher ethics, significance of the research, definition of terms, and organization of the research.

Chapter 2: Problem Statement

This chapter outlines the main challenges Malaysia faces as a higher education destination, particularly the intense competition from established global education hubs. It highlights the specific issues regarding the lack of awareness among Kerala high school leavers, the limitations of current EMGS marketing approaches, and the existing research gap in evaluating the effectiveness of these promotional activities.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to international student recruitment, higher education marketing, consumer decision-making behaviour, study destination selection factors, digital marketing strategies, and previous studies related to Malaysia as an education hub.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter explains the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, target respondents, research instruments, and data analysis methods used in the study. Ethical considerations and limitations of the methodology will also be discussed.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the data collection process. The collected data will be analysed and interpreted to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the overall findings of the research, discusses the implications of the study, and provides recommendations for EMGS and relevant stakeholders. Suggestions for future research will also be included.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite being recognized as one of the preferred higher education destinations, Malaysia still has several obstacles to overcome to become a leading competitor like the Big 4; Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States (Nicholls, 2018; Jupiter et al., 2017). Even today many students and parents in Kerala think that these countries provide a better education system, better employment opportunities and gain more recognition internationally.

A major challenge for EMGS is the lack of awareness and visibility of Malaysia as a preferred choice of higher education destination for Kerala high school leavers. Moreover, the content and marketing approaches used in digital marketing might not be fully localised or of the Kerala students and their parents' taste and decision-making process.

A second difficulty is that social media, recommendations of peers and online reviews are becoming increasing factors in students' decisions regarding where to study (Mihart, 2012). When marketing communication with EMGS is not engaging, relevant or believable, prospective students may opt for other destinations. Besides, other issues concerning the employability, international recognition of the Malaysian qualifications, cultural adaptation and post-study opportunities may also influence students' attitudes towards Malaysia.

Overall, there is a lack of specific research that explores the effectiveness of these activities on the young people that are leaving high school in Kerala. Hence, an investigation on the effectiveness of the marketing strategies being used by EMGS and the possible improvement to boost the positioning of Malaysia in the market segment is required.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to international student recruitment, higher education marketing, and factors influencing students in selecting overseas study destinations. The chapter also covers underpinning theories and models of marketing communication and consumer decision-making. Furthermore, the gaps identified in previous studies conducted on international education marketing and students' perceptions of study abroad destinations were reviewed to guide the planning of proposed interventions.

Underpinning Theory and Models

This study was supported by several theories and models related to marketing, consumer behaviour, and study destination decision-making.

Push-Pull Theory

Push-Pull Theory has been widely used in the area of international student mobility research to justify students' motivation to study abroad. For this study, the pull factors for students from Kerala who are interested in studying in Malaysia include affordability, multiculturalism, education in English, and strategic location. Meanwhile, emanating from the Indian context, higher education is becoming more competitive, which can act as a push factor for Indian students thinking about studying abroad.

Consumer Decision-Making Theory

As consumers, students make comparisons when choosing study destinations for their higher education, which are related to cost, reputation, employability, social influence, and safety (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The decision-making process typically involves the following steps of problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The information that high school students from Kerala get from social media, education fairs, websites, peer recommendations, and education agents can significantly impact their perception towards studying in Malaysia.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Model

The ways in which Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) implements IMC strategies include education fairs, digital marketing campaigns, webinars, education institution partnerships, and social media engagement. How effective this communication channels are could affect the awareness and perceptions of the students in Kerala on Malaysian higher education.

Perceived Risk Theory

For students considering their higher education choices, there are risks of quality education, career prospects, safety, visa procedures, economic considerations, and cultural adjustment. While Malaysia's education system is affordable and the universities are well-recognised, parents and students from Kerala may believe that the long-term prospects in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom or the United States appears more promising. Thus, marketing communication is significant in minimizing uncertainties and increasing confidence for Malaysia as a study destination.

Past and Contemporary Studies

In previous studies, international student recruitment has been proven to be very competitive as a result of a globalized world and the development of cross-border education (UNESCO, 2026; Gutema et al., 2023). The academic research related to international education marketing indicates that digital marketing and social media are increasing in significance when it comes to influencing the choice of prospective students. Research on Malaysia as an education destination highlights that the nation is becoming known for its low tuition fees, cost of living, cultural diversity, and English language programme (Koh, 2025).

There are several recent studies that focused on the prominence of online reviews, social media bloggers, social media influencers, webinars, and student reviews in the consideration of study destinations. Students have a greater trust in authentic experiences from peers and alumni than in traditional marketing. While digital marketing has become a vital tool in international student recruitment, there were limited studies that specifically focused on the effectiveness of the marketing efforts of the Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) among the students from the high schools in Kerala. Hence, this research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the enhancement of EMGS marketing strategies to increase the attractiveness of Malaysia in this particular target group.

Proposed Interventions

The proposed intervention emphasises improving the effectiveness of EMGS marketing initiatives and strategies through enhanced engagement, awareness-building, and personalized communication strategies targeted at Kerala high school leavers.

The intervention emphasises: Stronger digital marketing engagement, improved student interaction during education fairs, better follow-up communication, increased use of student testimonials and alumni success stories, enhanced collaboration with schools and education agents and localized marketing content tailored to Kerala students and parents.

Cycle One Intervention (Input)

The intervention includes the promotion of Malaysia's higher education learning pathway through the Educafe Education Fair in Kerala by Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) with several Malaysian universities. Over 7,500 students, parents, school counsellors, and education stakeholders attended the event, which included high school leavers across three main cities: Calicut, Mallapuram, and Cochin. The education fair gave students insights on Malaysia's higher education landscape, the universities, types of academic programmes available, scholarships, visa procedures, and life as a student in Malaysia.

Cycle One Intervention (Transformation)

During the transformation stage, the researchers analysed the effect of the education fair and marketing activities in raising awareness, perceptions, and interest of the students towards studying in Malaysia. Several enhancement strategies are proposed during this stage, including Enhancing personalized engagement with students and parents, using digital follow-up post-event, utilizing social media

platforms for engagement, providing localized and culturally relevant promotional content, incorporating alumni success stories and student experiences and conducting webinars and virtual counselling sessions after the fair.

Cycle One Intervention (Output)

The expected outputs of the intervention include: Increased awareness of Malaysia as a higher education destination among Kerala students, improved perceptions towards Malaysian universities and their education quality, higher student engagement through digital platforms and follow-up activities, greater interest among students to consider studying in Malaysia, stronger visibility and brand positioning of Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) in Kerala and increased inquiries and potential student applications to Malaysian institutions.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter was on international student recruitment, study destination decision-making factors, and higher education marketing. To support the study, several theories and models were discussed, such as the Push-Pull Theory, Consumer Decision-Making Theory, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Model, and Perceived Risk Theory.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates the methodological framework of mixed methods approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the EMGS educational promotion campaign among high school leavers in Kerala, India.

Research Philosophy

This research has adopted a pragmatic research paradigm where it leverages quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews concurrently to deliver a complete evaluation of the intervention.

Research Design

As the objective of this study is to understand the effectiveness of EMGS educational promotional activities after high school, action research design is the most suitable one. By using this approach, EMGS ran a local educational awareness campaign in Kerala from 17 April to 26 April 2026 as an intervention approach. The campaign aimed to inform students about higher education options in Malaysia and encourage them to consider studying in Malaysia. To provide a thorough evaluation, this study used a mixed-method study design within the action research framework by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The quantitative part included a large survey to measure changes in knowledge and intentions while the qualitative part involved semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect detailed views from the high school leavers.

Research Instrument and Measures (Questionnaire Design)

In this study, a structured online questionnaire adopted based on the EDUCATOOL Framework by Matolić et al. (2023) is being used as the main quantitative tool. This questionnaire was also being used by Martinino et al. (2026) showing its reliability. To suit this study topic, the questionnaire was adjusted to align with the EMGS campaign's marketing goals while retaining its validated structure. This questionnaire is able to measure 4 levels of the campaign's effectiveness using the Kirkpatrick Model including the reaction, learning, behaviour or behaviour intent and expected outcomes and results.

Items C1 until C3 (Level 1) in this questionnaire are able to look at reaction on how respondents felt after the campaign which covers their satisfaction, how useful they found the information, and their engagement during presentations. While Items C4-C5 (Level 2) check on the learning of the participants, Items C6 – C10 (Level 3) check on the behaviour and behaviour intent. It also looks at changes in behaviour, like searching Malaysian university websites or using the EMGS visa application system.

Last but not least in this question on Level 4, it will assess the expected outcomes and result (Items C11-C12). This section will measure how much the campaign affected the participants' confidence in choosing Malaysia's higher institution, and how effective the campaign in shifting the final results.

In terms of the questionnaire body, it has two main sections to understand the participants' demographic details such as gender and age and also the 5-point Likert Scale from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") for the changes in experiences. For questions about learning and skill development, respondents give two ratings: one for before the campaign and one for after to help improving data quality by reducing inattentiveness and cognitive drift, as shown in earlier studies (Hwalek et al., 2024; Hwalek et al., 2022). The knowledge self-assessment items (B1 and B2) used a 0-10 numeric rating scale to capture finer-grained changes in self-reported knowledge before and after the campaign, whereas the evaluation items (C1 to C12) used the 5-point Likert scale. As for the questions about program evaluation and emotional reactions, only one after event question was given since the focus is on participants' experiences.

Research Instrument and Measures (Interview Protocol Design)

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to complement the quantitative data using open-ended questions to gather detailed understanding from the student representatives or student focus group. Using the primary data source of the interview session, the study can understand how well things worked and the structural challenges that arose during the EMGS campaign on April 17 to April 26, 2026. The interview framework focuses on three main themes which are how marketing messages connect with Kerala's social and cultural context, explores practical barriers students face such as administrative steps and visa transparency, and last but not least to examine how institutions close the initial interest into confirmed applications.

Validity and Reliability

For the quantitative part, EDUCATOOL Framework was used to confirm content and construct validity, as it has shown strong factorial validity, convergent validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability (Matolić et al., 2023). The questionnaire was improved by pre-testing it and running a pilot study with a small group of high school graduates in Kerala. The internal consistency for each multi-item construct using Cronbach's alpha (α), setting a minimum threshold of 0.60 to confirm reliability, was also checked before using the questionnaire widely.

To improve credibility, certain parameters like investigator and methodological triangulation, comparing what students said in interviews with the results from the quantitative surveys (Enworo, 2023). The dependability and confirmability were maintained by keeping a detailed audit trail for every step of the qualitative analysis including transcribing interviews word for word, open coding, axial coding, and bringing themes together to ensure the interpretations stayed true to what participants actually said (Kakar et al., 2023). By allowing key interviewees to review and confirm their interview transcripts and summaries also improved the accuracy of the interpretations, reduced researcher bias, and made the results more trustworthy (Lim, 2025).

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data collection procedure was conducted according to a structured timeline in this case 30 days following the EMGS educational campaign. The target population comprised 417 497 high school leavers in Kerala reported by Bernama (2025). Based on the sample size calculator, at least 273 surveys are needed with the selection of 90% confidence level. This 90% confidence interval was selected due to the specific target of high school leavers in Kerala, time constraints for the survey collection timing and also proximity challenges to remind or reach the populations. This study still uses a normal 5% margin of error and 50% population proportion to ensure the result reliability. Quantitative data were obtained through google form distributed via email lists from the EMGS campaign' attendees employing non-probability convenience sampling to maximize participation. For the qualitative participants, purposive sampling was identified to ensure direct involvement in the campaign or influence over

student

decision-making.

A single-point Retrospective Pretest-Posttest (RPT) was implemented in this study as a key methodological design approach rather than the traditional three-stage longitudinal model described by Martinino et al. (2026). By adapting this approach, participants completed both “before” and “after” evaluations concurrently 30 days following the campaign due to its practicality and cost-effectiveness with limited time and resources in this study (Hill, 2020). The advantage of using this design is it enables the participants to more accurately assess their knowledge and abilities through simultaneous reflection on both states, before and after at the same times (Little et al., 2020). Collecting the survey 30 days after the program also allows sufficient time for the students to translate the information or new knowledge into actions, consistent with EDUCATOOL Framework recommendations (Matolić et al., 2023).

Quantitative Procedure

Descriptive analysis from the quantitative data collection is exported and analysed using statistical software, IBM SPSS. Results such as percentages, mean scores and standard deviations are used to analyse and characteristic of Kerala high school leavers and to summarize the findings. Inferential statistical analysis is conducted to compare participants’ retrospective before and after the Campaign on the effectiveness of the EMGS educational promotion campaign. A paired-samples t-test is used to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in self-reported knowledge and skill levels ($p < 0.05$). This approach is consistent with previous retrospective assessment studies (Crapo et al., 2025). Data normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test prior to hypothesis testing. As the ordinal rating scales (the 5-point Likert items and the 0-10 knowledge items) did not meet normality assumptions, the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed to evaluate the significance of behavioural and cognitive changes.

Qualitative Procedure

To analyse the qualitative data from semi-structured students’ interview, this study uses systematic thematic analysis and inductive coding. The interviews recording was reviewed multiple times to ensure the familiarity with the content and to ensure the interviews were transcribed verbatim using three primary coding stages such as open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The transcriptions were segmented into smaller conceptual units in open coding; related codes were compared and organized into broader sub-themes for axial coding and last but not least is the final stage where sub-themes were integrated into main themes in the selective coding. These main themes and coding analysis will support and contextualize the quantitative result, providing deeper insight on the quantitative results of the EMGS campaign.

Summary

In summary, pragmatist philosophy employed in this action research study with a clear and systematic approach of quantitative adaptation from EDUCATOOL Framework and qualitative methods tailored to high school graduates in Kerala, India through the use of a Retrospective Pretest-Posttest design.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data from 381 high school leavers in Kerala, India was collected after a promotional campaign held for Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) on 17 to 26 April 2026. Findings are organized by the four levels of the Kirkpatrick Model of Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results; and evaluated using a retrospective pretest-posttest design.

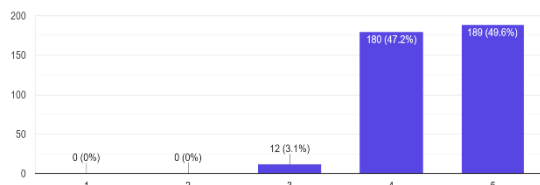
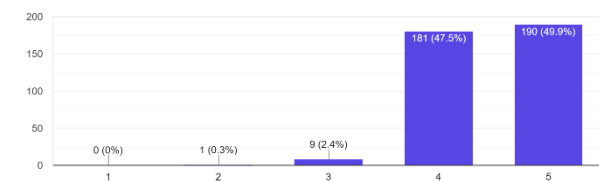
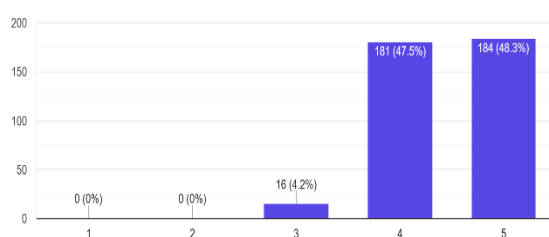
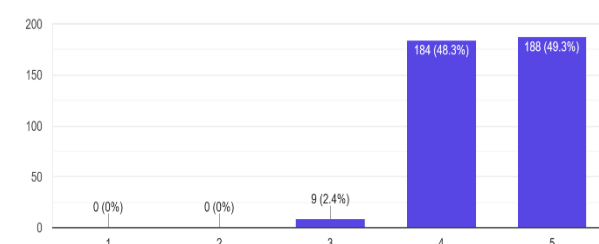
Table 1: Retrospective Pretest-Posttest Outcomes by Kirkpatrick Level**Kirkpatrick Model — Campaign Evaluation Summary**

Colour coding: Green = Level 1 Reaction · Blue = Level 2 Learning · Amber = Level 3 Behavior · Purple = Level 4 Results

Kirkpatrick Level	Key Indicators	Pretest Findings	Posttest Findings	Retention / Application	Interpretation
Level 1: Reaction (Satisfaction & Engagement)	C1–C3 (Satisfaction, Usefulness, Engagement)	Majority neutral (3.1–4.2%); very few dissatisfied	96.8% satisfied (47.2% rated 4, 49.6% rated 5); 95.8% found info useful; 95.8% fully engaged	Sustained high satisfaction and engagement	Campaign achieved exceptionally high satisfaction and credibility
Level 2: Learning (Knowledge Acquisition)	B1–B2 (Knowledge ratings), C4–C5 (Knowledge gain & retention)	Mode = 4/10 (34.1%); very few rated 8–10	Mode shifted to 8/10 (35.4%); 28.1% rated 10/10	97.6% acquired new knowledge; 96.3% retained after 30 days	Substantial knowledge gain and strong retention
Level 3: Behavior (Skill Application)	C6–C10 (Research & application skills)	Low awareness of EMGS website/exhibitions	EMGS official channels became primary methods	97.4% developed skills; 96.6% retained; 96.1% applied to universities/visa	Strong skill acquisition and real-world application
Level 4: Results (Confidence & Interest)	C8, C11 (Confidence & interest in Malaysia)	Malaysia mainly perceived as "affordable"	97.4% increased interest; 96.9% greater confidence; Malaysia recognised for academic quality	Sustained confidence and interest in Malaysia	Campaign successfully repositioned Malaysia as a quality higher education destination

Field Work and Level 1 for Respondent Reaction

The local awareness campaign preceded the data collection during the fieldwork operation. Surveys were carried out after 30 days of the campaign to study behaviour (Level 3). The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of respondents were high school leavers, with 83.2% being between 18 and 20 years old. Respondents reported high satisfaction and engagement. Overall, 96.8% were satisfied with the campaign (C1: 47.2% rated 4, 49.6% rated 5), and 95.8% found the information useful (C2: 47.5% rated 4, 49.9% rated 5). Engagement was also strong with 95.8% fully engaged (C3: 47.5% rated 4, 48.3% rated 5). Just 3.1% to 4.2% of respondents gave neutral feedback, and almost none expressed dissatisfaction.

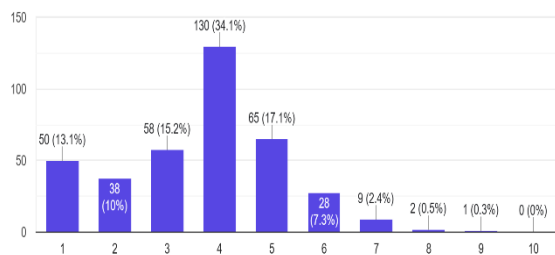
C1: Overall I am satisfied with the EMGS promotional campaign.
381 responsesC2: The information provided about Malaysia has been useful to me.
381 responsesC3: I was fully engaged during the campaign sessions/presentations.
381 responsesC4: I acquired new knowledge about higher education in Malaysia.
381 responses**Figure 1: Level 1 of Respondent Reaction (Satisfaction and Engagement)**

Level 2 for Learning (Knowledge Acquisition)

Before the campaign, the most frequent knowledge rating was 4 out of 10 (B1: 34.1% of respondents), with only 2, 2, 1 and 0 respondents choosing 8, 9 and 10, respectively. After the campaign, the mode rose to 8 out of 10 (B2: 35.4%), and 28.1% gave their knowledge a maximum score of 10. Additionally, 97.6% reported gaining new knowledge (C4: 48.3% rated 4, 49.3% rated 5), and 96.3% indicated they retained this knowledge 30 days later (C5: 45.4% rated 4, 50.9% rated 5).

B1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your knowledge of higher education opportunities in Malaysia BEFORE the EMGS campaign?

381 responses



B2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your knowledge of higher education opportunities in Malaysia AFTER the EMGS campaign?

381 responses

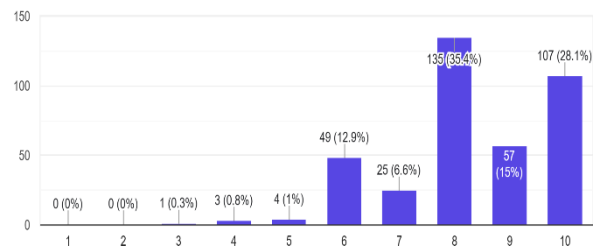


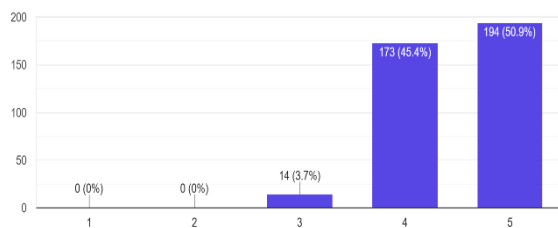
Figure 2: Level 2 of Knowledge of Higher Education Opportunities in Malaysia Before and After the Campaign

Level 3 for Behaviour (Skill Application)

Before the campaign, very few participants knew how to use the official EMGS website or attend EMGS exhibitions. After the campaign, these were the main sources of information, along with guidance from official sources and ongoing contact with EMGS representatives. 97.4% of respondents reported that the campaign helped them develop skills to research international study options (C6: 45.4% rated 4, 52.0% rated 5), and 96.6% reported they still have these skills (C7: 45.4% rated 4, 51.2% rated 5). Notably, 96.1% have already used these skills to research Malaysian universities (C9: 44.9% rated 4, 51.2% rated 5) or to explore the EMGS visa application process (C10: 44.4% rated 4, 51.4% rated 5).

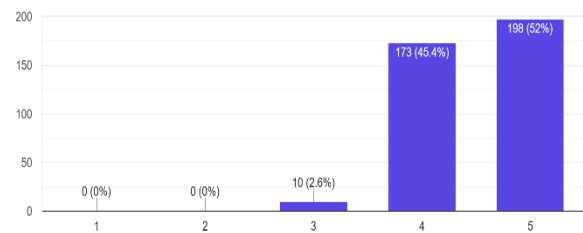
C5: I still possess the knowledge I acquired during the campaign.

381 responses



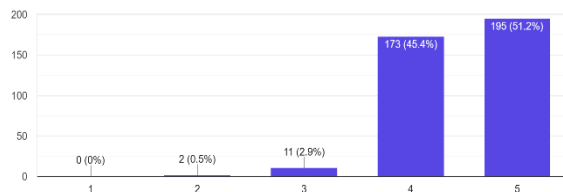
C6: The campaign helped me develop skills to research international study options.

381 responses



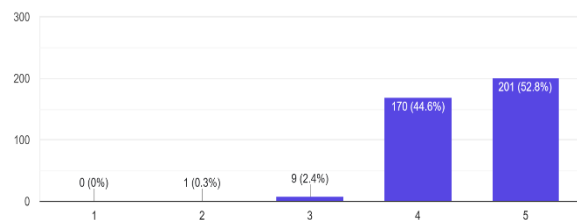
C7: I still possess the skills developed during the campaign.

381 responses

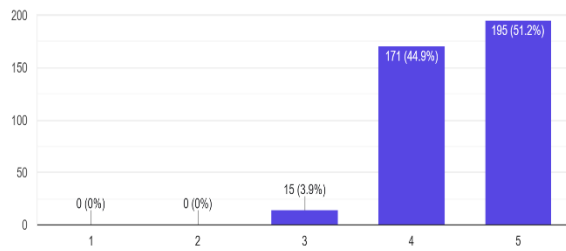


C8: Participating in this campaign increased my interest in studying in Malaysia.

381 responses



C9: I have used the knowledge acquired to research specific Malaysian universities.
381 responses



C10: I have used the skills developed to explore the EMGS/visa application process.
381 responses

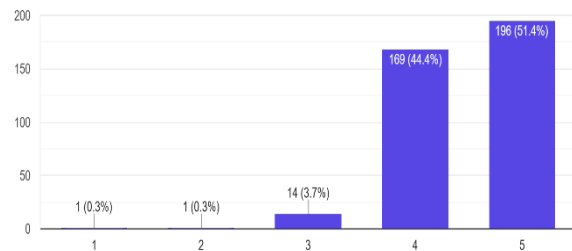


Figure 3: Level 3 of Behaviour (Skill Application)

Level 4 for Results (Confidence and Interest)

The ultimate goal of increasing recruitment potential was strongly supported by the data. A total of 97.4% of respondents reported an increased interest in studying in Malaysia (C8: 44.6% rated 4, 52.8% rated 5), and 96.9% felt more confident in choosing a study destination (C11: 42.8% rated 4, 54.1% rated 5). Notably, perceptions of Malaysia shifted from being primarily considered affordable before the campaign to being recognised for the high quality of academic programmes following the intervention.

C11: Participation in this campaign has improved my confidence in choosing a study destination.
381 responses

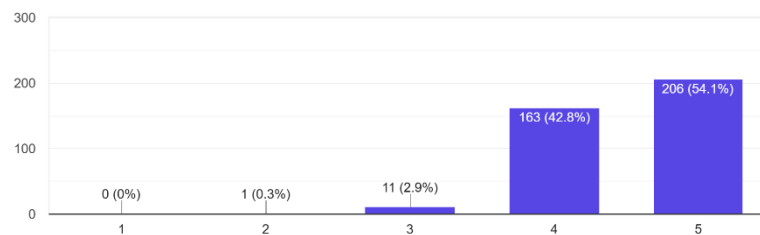


Figure 4: Level 4 of Confidence in Choosing Malaysia as a Study Destination

The effectiveness of all four levels was consistently very high. Mean scores are in the range of 4.44 to 4.51 with a small spread ($SD \approx 0.55-0.58$). This suggests clear agreement among the respondents and confirms that the campaign was successful in achieving both learning and behavioural outcomes, as well as with a strategic impact.

In general, all constructs showed very high mean scores, ranging from 4.44 to 4.51, signifying strong positive assessments of satisfaction, learning, behavioural application, and outcomes. Standard deviations (0.55-0.58) indicate low variability; respondents' opinions are generally positive and consistent.

Posttest Survey Results — Likert Scale Summary

Colour coding by Kirkpatrick Level: Green = Level 1 Reaction (C1–C3) · Blue = Level 2 Learning (C4–C5) · Amber = Level 3 Behavior (C6–C10) · Purple = Level 4 Results (C11)

Item	Strongly Disagree–Disagree (1–2) %	Neutral (3) %	Agree (4) %	Strongly Agree (5) %	Mean	SD
C1 (Satisfaction)	0.0	3.2	47.2	49.6	4.46	0.56
C2 (Usefulness of information)	0.0	2.6	47.5	49.9	4.47	0.55
C3 (Engagement level)	0.0	4.2	47.5	48.3	4.44	0.58
C4 (New knowledge acquired)	0.0	2.4	48.3	49.3	4.47	0.55
C5 (Knowledge retention – 30 days)	0.0	3.7	45.4	50.9	4.47	0.57
C6 (Skill development)	0.0	2.6	45.4	52.0	4.49	0.55
C7 (Skill retention)	0.0	3.4	45.4	51.2	4.48	0.57
C8 (Interest in Malaysia)	0.0	2.6	44.6	52.8	4.50	0.55
C9 (Research universities)	0.0	3.9	44.9	51.2	4.47	0.57
C10 (EMGS visa exploration)	0.0	4.2	44.4	51.4	4.47	0.58
C11 (Confidence in decision-making)	0.0	3.1	42.8	54.1	4.51	0.56

Figure 5: Summary of Evaluation Result (Likert Distribution, Mean and Standard Deviation)

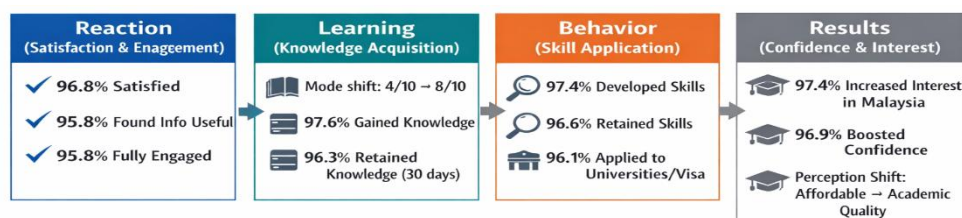


Figure 6: Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model - EMGS Campaign Outcomes

Discussion

The data show that the EMGS program was successful in increasing the level of interest of Kerala high school leavers for higher education in Malaysia. The initiative helped to promote the positive image of Malaysian universities by highlighting Malaysia's academic quality, affordability, cultural diversity and student support services. This aligns with the Push-Pull Theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and is consistent with Aziz et al. (2025) that these are key factors in the choice of destination of international students.

The results also show the significance of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach. Through education fairs, presentations and one-to-one conversations with future students, EMGS was able to provide clear and consistent messages, and increase engagement and confidence. This was also noted by Chan et al. (2025) and Gordon-Isasi and Ronda (2024) who emphasized the need for coordinated student-centred communication in the marketing of higher education.

Level 1 for Reaction (Satisfaction and Engagement)

The level of satisfaction and engagement was high, suggesting relevance and usefulness of the information. This aligns with Sharma and Singh (2024), who reported that interactive and participant-centred programs are more likely to elicit higher levels of engagement and positive reactions. The positive feedback suggests that EMGS is making a good impression in the Malaysian higher education sector.

Level 2 for Learning (Knowledge Acquisition)

The participants learned more about higher education in Malaysia, such as courses, entry requirements, and visa requirements. The results align with the studies by Martinino et al. (2026) and Matolić et al. (2023), which showed that structured educational interventions enhance knowledge retention and knowledgeable decision-making.

Level 3 for Behaviour (Skill Application)

The initiative promoted among students the study opportunities in Malaysia. A lot of the respondents said that they did research on their own about the universities, academic programmes and the visa requirements after the event. This is consistent with Paul & Roy (2024) who observed that information that is practical and relevant to the topic is more likely to result in behavioural change and action.

Level 4: Results (Confidence and Interest)

The respondents also demonstrated their confidence and interest in education in Malaysia after the intervention. There was a generally more positive attitude towards Malaysian universities as a result of greater awareness of possible study pathways and education opportunities. Likewise, Aziz et al. (2025) discovered that students are more willing to consider Malaysia with a greater understanding of the learning programs and learning environment. The face-to-face connection, with supplemental promotional materials, seems to have raised the level of trust and interest among prospective students. The EMGS education promotion campaign had positive results on all four levels of the Kirkpatrick Model. Targeted, culturally relevant, and student-centred promotional strategies can have a major impact on increasing Malaysia's attractiveness as an international higher education destination, as evidenced by the findings.

B6. How does EMGS attract and engage prospective Indian students?

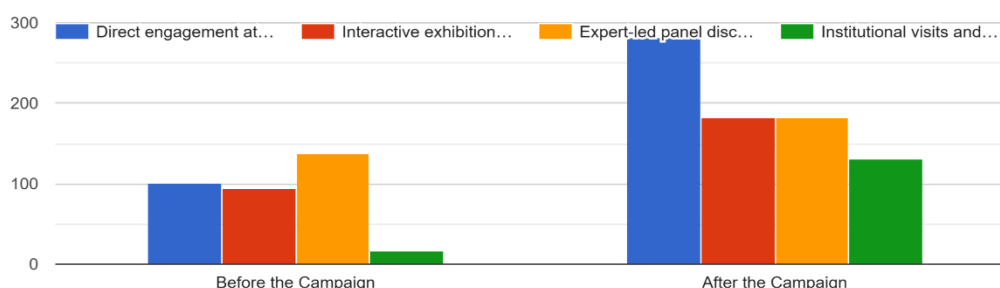


Figure 7: EMGS Student Engagement Strategies

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the interviews with the students was carried out in three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding generated key concepts from the transcripts. Respondents frequently described the EMGS educational campaign as “informative”, “clear” and “easy to understand”. This suggests that the educational campaign was effective in creating awareness of Malaysian higher education opportunities. Codes such as Affordable Education, Quality Universities, Visa Guidance,

Student Support Services, Halal Food Accessibility, and Safe Environment indicated the attractiveness of Malaysia as a study hub. Participants also raised issues about financial management, accommodation information, scholarship opportunities and living away from family.

During axial coding, concepts were grouped into sub-themes that clarified how campaign exposure influenced participants' educational intentions. The Advanced Educational Awareness sub-theme included greater knowledge of universities, academic programs, and admission opportunities in Malaysia. Participants' understanding of EMGS services and visa procedures showed their appreciation for clear guidance on visa applications, medical screening, documentation, and admissions. Positive perceptions of Malaysia as a study destination reflected views on educational quality, affordability, safety, cultural diversity, and a student-friendly environment. The study found that the campaign increased confidence, intention to apply, and interest in Malaysian universities, showing its positive effect on future learning goals. The Remaining Concerns and Information Needs sub-theme captured requests for more information on scholarships, accommodation, internships, career opportunities, and financial planning.

Table 2: Coding Framework for Qualitative Analysis of EMGS Educational Promotion Campaign

Open Codes	Axial Coding (Sub-Themes)	Selective Coding (Major Themes)
Informative Content, Practical Clarity, Knowledge of Universities, Academic Programme Awareness	Enhanced Educational Awareness	Enhancing Awareness and Reducing Information Gaps
Affordable Education, Internationally Recognised Qualifications	Positive Perceptions of Malaysia as a Study Destination	Malaysia as an Attractive and Accessible Study Destination
Visa Guidance, Documentation Support, Medical Screening Information, Student Support Services	Understanding of EMGS Services and Visa Procedures	Enhancing Awareness and Reducing Information Gaps
Safe Environment, Cultural Diversity, Student-Friendly Environment, Halal Food Accessibility, Religious Facilities	Positive Perceptions of Malaysia as a Study Destination	Malaysia as an Attractive and Accessible Study Destination
Increased Confidence, Intention to Apply, Interest in Malaysian Universities	Influence on Study Intentions	Enhancing Awareness and Reducing Information Gaps
Financial Management Concerns, Scholarship Information Needs, Accommodation Information Needs, Internship Opportunities, Career Opportunities, Living Away from Family	Remaining Concerns and Information Needs	Malaysia as an Attractive and Accessible Study Destination

The final themes, sub-themes and participant perspectives can be identified as below:

Table 3: Summary of Emergent Themes, Supporting Sub-Themes, and Participant Perspectives

Major Theme	Supporting Sub-Themes	Representative Evidence from Participants
Enhancing Awareness and Reducing Information Gaps	Enhanced Educational Awareness; Understanding of EMGS Services and Visa Procedures; Influence on Study Intentions	Participants gained a better understanding of Malaysian universities, study options, visa procedures, and EMGS support services. This led to greater confidence and a stronger intention to study in Malaysia.
Malaysia as an Attractive and Accessible Study Destination	Positive Perceptions of Malaysia as a Study Destination; Remaining Concerns and Information Needs	Participants viewed Malaysia positively, citing affordable education, quality universities, cultural diversity, safety, and supportive environments. However, they indicated a need for more information on scholarships, accommodation, and career opportunities.

Reflections

The retrospective design was able to document the Level 3 behavioural outcomes that a traditional pre and post-test design would not have been able to capture. The high scores of C9 (researching universities) and C10 (exploring visa processes) justify the data collection window of 30 days. The success of the direct engagement model demonstrates that Kerala students are more likely to be reached through personal verification as opposed to online outreach, which should guide Cycle Two planning.

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines the practical consequences of the EMGS marketing campaign in Kerala, the caveats of the campaign, and recommendations for future campaigns.

Research Impact to Practice

The study demonstrates that interventions with high engagement can help Malaysia close the visibility gap in the Indian market. Academic quality and visa transparency are the most impactful factors influencing Kerala students to convert interest to intent for EMGS. The study also offers a methodological model (EDUCATOOL adapted to the Kirkpatrick Model) that has been validated to be used in future campaigns in other source markets.

Research Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Although this approach helps reduce response shift bias, it may still result in inaccuracies in respondents' recall of their prior state. Second, the geographical coverage of the study was restricted to Kerala, a place with high literacy rate and a culture of studying abroad. Consequently, the conclusions might not be broadly applicable to the broader Indian student body or to other international markets under varying socioeconomic and educational conditions. Third, there may have been a sampling bias in the use of non-probability (convenience) sampling at the Educafe Fair, as those attending the event

are likely to be more interested in overseas education than general high school leavers. Lastly, the study is restricted to a one cycle action research design and only includes Cycle One. The results indicate positive shifts in awareness and behavioural intent, but no conversion to applications or enrolments has been measured yet, so the effects are not yet known.

Research Future Recommendations

The second cycle should be dedicated to changing EMGS' focus from general awareness building to a conversion-driven marketing approach. Highlighting tangible outcomes such as alumni success stories, student employability and career pathways after graduation will show clear value and inspire students to move from interest to intent to apply.

Digital integration will be given more weight in the engagement strategy. Face-to-face communications generate an initial trust, but follow-up should be structured to sustain behavioural intent. One-on-one email campaigns, interactive webinars and direct communication on WhatsApp will assist in keeping them interested and guiding them on the way to decision making.

In future campaigns, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on parental involvement as parents play a significant role in higher education choices. Openness in the type of information given regarding the quality and safety of education, tuition and employment opportunities can help instil confidence in Malaysia as a preferred study destination (Aziz et al., 2025).

Future research and evaluation of the campaign should incorporate more performance measures. Conversion measures that EMGS should monitor are applications submitted and final enrolment rates in addition to awareness and behavioural intention.

The EMGS educational promotion campaign achieved its main objectives. It assisted Malaysia in transitioning to a good destination rather than a low-cost, and students could independently cope with applications. Hence, Malaysia is now a prime destination for Kerala's high school graduates.

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