Sci. Educ. Innov. Context Mod. Probl. P-ISSN: 2790-0169 E-ISSN: 2790-0177
Issue 3, Vol. 8, 2025, IMCRA

# The Influence of Management Commitment on Export Performance in Higher Education Service: Mediating Role of People Marketing Mix Adaptation

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Received date: 22.01.2025; Accepted date: 08.04.2025;
Publication date: 07.05.2025, doi: 10.56334/sei/8.3.67

Abstract

Export marketing mix enables an organization to fulfill its goals in target markets and respond to market forces. In successful marketing services, adaptations/standardization strategies in different cultures should be demonstrated. However, the adaptation of marketing mix strategy in the service industry has been the subject of limited study. This paper aims to examine how the management commitment and people adaptation marketing mix can influence export performance in the context of higher education. Questionnaires were collected from 140 Malaysian higher education institutions. Partial least square–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was utilised to investigate relationship of constructs. The main results indicated that the people adaptation marketing mix is mediating the association between management commitment and higher education export performance. This study addresses the gap related to the understanding of export performance and export marketing in the service industry and higher education internationalisation. Future studies need to improve the theoretical model by testing other elements in the export marketing mix in the higher education industry.


**Citation** Panteha Kh., Zukarnain Z., Rossilah b. J. (2025). The Influence of Management Commitment on Export Performance in Higher Education Service: Mediating Role of People Marketing Mix Adaptation *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(3), 1106-1126. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.3.67. https://imcra-az.org/archive/358-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-3-volviii-2025.html

Keywords: Export performance, inward export performance, export marketing, marketing mix, marketing mix strategy adaptation, management commitment, higher education

## 1. Introduction

The service sector has been recognized as a crucial growth driver in many countries worldwide. The education sector is one of the most important service sectors that supports the competitiveness of the country's economy (Al-Hemyari & Al-Sarmi, 2017; NDUM & UDOYE, 2020). Despite the ongoing globalisation of higher education, scarce research has assessed international students' experiences in non-Western higher education institutions (HEIs) (Ahrari et al., 2019). Inward export includes moving international consumers (i.e. students) to the local market where the services are provided. Services dealing with education normally required foreign students to go to the local marketplace (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2008; Bianchi & Drennan, 2012). Therefore, the export marketing of such kinds of services may be similar or different from other types of export services.

The features of the service business differ from the manufacturing business. Therefore, the marketing approach must also be accordingly altered. With regard to this, Ivy (2008) has created a coherent marketing mix for the higher education industry. In his model, the people factor was added to the service marketing mix together with physical facilities and processes. His framework introduced new 7Ps in the marketing mix. The 'people' element of the marketing mix includes all interactions that occur between higher education staff (academic, administrative, and support employees) with students.

Communication, negotiation, and cultural adaptation/standardization tactics are among the key elements for successful marketing services (Hyder & Fregidou-Malama, 2009). As a result, more research on export marketing mix standardisation/adaptation in service businesses is required (Akgün, Keskin, & Ayar, 2014), especially in the case of higher education services. Furthermore, there is only a few literature in international marketing strategy adaptation/standardization that focuses on exporting enterprises from developing markets (İpek, 2020). Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature by studying this issue in the context of developing or emerging economies.

In addition, in every company's export department, the impact of commitment on financial growth cannot be overlooked. El Makrini and Chaibi (2014), and Bloemer, Pluymaekers, and Odekerken (2013) claimed that there is a significant relationship between management commitment (MC) and export performance. Sraha et al. (2020) highlighted that decision makers' commitment facilitates internationalisation activities by allocating resources and building capabilities. Therefore, MC is an inimitable element that develops export performance (El Makrini & Chaibi, 2015). Moreover, a stronger export commitment can adapt distribution strategy to suit with the several export markets (Sraha et al., 2020). In other words, MC can affect export performance through marketing mix adaptation strategy.

Based on the above discussion, this paper intends to determine factors that influence inward export performance (IEP) in the higher education service industry. In addition, this paper aims to examine the mediating effect of the people marketing mix adaptation (PP) on the relationship between MC and inward export performance of higher education services in Malaysia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Export Performance

The conceptual definition of export performance is context-dependent and multidimensional without having exclusive appropriate criteria. The study of export performance is still under-developed, hence there is some discordance (Tan & Sousa, 2011; Dahooie et al., 2020). Certain researchers classified the factors of export performance into three different groups such as internal elements, external elements, and marketing strategy (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Filipe Lages & Montgomery, 2004; Safari & Saleh, 2020). The role of management attitudes in the performance of service exports has been investigated (La et al., 2005; Cort, Griffith, & Steven White, 2007; Sichtmann & von Selasinsky, 2010; Sichtmann et al., 2011). Sichtmann & von Selasinsky (2010) found a positive impact of export commitment or MC on export performance. Though, they reported a weak relationship between MC and export performance.

Akgün et al. (2014) noted the lack of export marketing mix strategy in many studies in the service industry. In the service export research, for instance, reviews showed that most research focused on the direct effect of export performance factors (Chen et al., 2016). Since export market strategy operates as a crucial intermediation variable that influences the export performance, the export marketing strategy must be considered as a mediator in the service industry.

Patterson and Cicic (1995) have established a categorization for internationally traded services. They highlighted that characteristic of services determines the level of tangibility and personal interaction in service delivery. Higher education services can be included in the category of services that need a high level of contact between the service provider (e.g. university) and the client (e.g. student). Open days, information evenings, and personal communications with graduates are examples of important contacts between staff and students. People who are in contact with international students, to a great extent, can affect university inward export performance. Therefore, the people factor is one of the important elements of the 7Ps export marketing in service industry such as higher education (Ivy, 2008). The current study aimed to examine the people marketing mix adaptation strategy with export performance in higher education.

### 2.2 MC and Export performance

MC is a crucial variable in raising the success rate of export performance in overseas markets (Munawar et al., 2019; Haddoud et al., 2019). Lu et al. (2012) stated that efficient management plays a critical role in the success of internationally competitive industries. Furthermore,

researchers have confirmed the importance of MC to export marketing performance (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Lu & Julian, 2007).

The role of MC is based on the fact that managers who are enthusiastic towards successful exports will be most likely to allocate the necessary budget and resources to achieve this goal (Sousa, Martínez-López, & Coelho, 2008; Latan et al., 2018). In contrast to other studies that found a positive relationship between manager commitment and export performance, Zarin Negar and Vazife Dost (2009) discovered that staff commitment and export performance are not significantly related. Besides, Saharum, Songip, and Baroto (2016) clarified that MC does not produce positive outcomes in the service industry unless it is linked to the quality of customer services.

In summary, the commitment to export markets relies on decision makers' knowledge about the threats and opportunities in the international market (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Sraha et al., 2020). Top MC can help in ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to improve the quality of educational institutions (Sakthivel, 2007). Likewise, the resource-based view (RBV) demonstrates that managers can facilitate the process of export activities by accessing and controlling intangible factors such as capabilities and managerial attributes (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen Jr, 2001).

### 2.3 Marketing Mix Adaptation and Export performance

The export market strategy serves as an important mediator, linking the relationships between export performance, external and internal factors (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; C. Lee & Griffith, 2004; Chen et al., 2016; Safari & Saleh, 2020). The original 4Ps marketing mix (Product or Service, Price, Place, and Promotion) does not include services due to its nature; intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity, and inseparability (Shostack, 1977). In the tourism industry, Labanauskaitė, Fiore and Stašys (2020) highlighted that the 8P marketing mix aids implementation of communication strategy, target users, and the use of offers. Even though the marketing mix elements can positively influence performance, there is a dearth of research on the impact of 7Ps export marketing adaptation and standardisation on export performance (Chen et al., 2016; Tibaingana, 2019).

All international educational institutions are attempting to strengthen their marketing mix instruments in order to gain a competitive advantage in the education market (Brkanlić et al., 2020). Due to the simultaneity of production and consumption in services, particularly in "high contact" services such as education, personnel play a critical role in affecting customers' quality perceptions. Edvardsson, Holmlund, and Strandvik (2008) claimed that clients judge the contents and service delivery based on their experience in interacting with one or a few people who represent the service. However, in the case whereby the service provider and the customers do not share a common cultural background, it may be difficult to demonstrate the quality of the service (Sichtmann et al., 2011). Therefore, the people strategy is important to services marketing. Consequently, administrative and teaching staffs are critical in attracting students, and universities

can create a strong marketing mix strategy by assessing the right personnel for market opportunities (Enache, 2011).

International students experience difficulties when pursuing higher education outside of their home countries. Students encounter challenges such as unfamiliar food, unfamiliar living conditions, financial issues, study schedules, learning styles, language and cultural adjustment. Universities can support and must be prepared to meet students' academic, social, and cultural needs. Hence, the degree of adaptation and standardization in communication is vital in higher education institutions. Standardization or adaptation in marketing is one of the important factors in export strategy (Navarro-Garcia, 2016). The degree of adaptation and standardization depends on the product/service, market, environment, and business (Ozsomer & Cavusgil, 1991; Zou & Stan, 1998).

Studies report a positive relationship (Navarro et al., 2010; Calantone, 2006; Ruzo et al., 2011; Magnusson et al., 2013) and a negative relationship (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Lages, Jap, & Griffith, 2008) between export marketing mix adaptation and export performance. Meanwhile, Hultman, Robson, and Katsikeas (2009) revealed that product adaptation had no direct effect on export performance. However, they showed that the performance-enhancing effect of product adaptation can happen if it "fit(s) to relevant macro-, micro-, and internal environment circumstances." In summary, researchers demonstrated different results in testing adaptation/ standardization elements of marketing mix strategy.

2.4 Mediating effect of Export Marketing Adaptation

MC may not have a direct impact on internationalisation, but it can influence it indirectly through intermediaries, such as focusing on providing the most potential outside market (Bell et al., 2003). MC through export marketing, on the other hand, can improve higher education export performance. Anikin (2020) argued that management in the education industry not only enhances an educational institution's marketing recognition but also helps with the need for adaptation to external conditions. Higher education institutions' adaptability is important. According to Sporn (1999), Taylor, de Lourdes Machado, and Peterson (2008), committed management enhances the adaptability of the HEIs which can raise the export of higher education institution.

In summary, Ivy (2008) in his study included the "people" element (academic staff) in the higher education marketing mix strategy. He found that getting advice from experts and alumni aided in students' decision-making process. The findings from Besides, Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), and Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cerviño (2006) also supported this. Thus, the current study focuses on MC to international strategy on the marketing mix elements, adaptation, or standardization. In other words, this study examines the influence of 'people' adaptation that is one component of the 7Ps service marketing in higher education for inward export performance.

3. Theoretical Framework

A conceptual model for the study was developed based on the Resource-Based View (RBV) that regards a firm as a parcel of valuable tangible and intangible resources. Thus, the competitive advantage and company performance in the export market are determined by its resources and capabilities (Katsikeas, Leonidou, & Morgan, 2000). A firm's unique and inimitable factors can result in a firm's advantage and determine its export performance in the export service sector (Barney, 1991).

Given the intangible nature of many service industries, most customers are unable to assess the service quality of their purchases. Instead, they assess their satisfaction and quality based on tangible cues such as brand reputation, country of origin, word of mouth, and relationship skills when service delivery occurs (Patterson & Cicic, 1995). Therefore, uncertainty before making a purchase leads to a higher perceived risk, especially when it comes to cultural borders (Patterson, 2004). In this situation, excellent communication and marketing functions can be beneficial (Sichtmann et al., 2011).

According to Oflac, Dobrucalı, Yavas, and Escobar (2015), marketing mix efforts are critical for positioning. In particular, the intangibility of education creates difficulties for international education marketers in communicating their educational services to potential consumers (Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007). Besides, variations in culture, economy, and regulations may necessitate an adapted marketing strategy (Westjohn & Magnusson, 2017). Three hypotheses were developed in order to meet the research objective. The framework of this paper is described in Figure 1:

$H_1$. There is a significant association between MC and inward export performance in the higher education service industry.

$H_2$. There is a significant association between people marketing mix adaptation and inward export performance in the higher education service industry.

$H_3$. There is a significant relationship between MC and inward export performance by mediating the people 7Ps export marketing adaptation strategy in the higher education service industry.

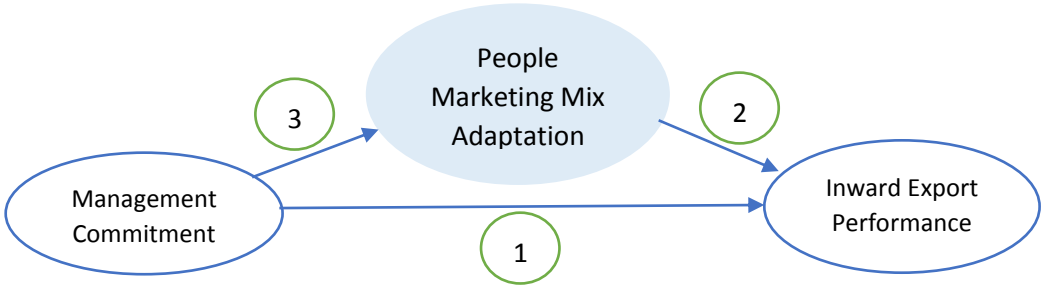


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Data and Characteristics of the Respondents.

The quantitative approach was used in this study. Some researchers prefer subjective measures based on respondents' self-evaluation and perception (G Azar & Ciabuschi, 2017). Others prefer to use objective measurements based on financial records to assess firms' sales, growth, and profitability (Katsikeas, Leonidou, & Morgan, 2000; Love, Roper, & Zhou, 2016). The present study evaluates export performance subjectively. The sampling units were the associate directors in charge of international student's departments at higher education institutions. The non-probability, judgment sampling was used in the sampling section in which the respondents must have an experience in the recruitment of international students. Data were collected from all types of HEIs in Malaysia. There are 20 public universities, 40 private universities, 25 private university colleges, 8 foreign branch campuses, and 421 private colleges in Malaysia (Ideris, 2014).

The study questionnaire was designed to be completed by the associate director from each institution. A total of 149 questionnaires were returned. Questionnaires with more than 15% missing values were rejected. Hence, due to large amounts of missing data, 9 questionnaires were deemed unusable. As a result, there were 140 usable questionnaires in total which represented 87% of response rate.

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the respondents and their institutions. Statistics indicate that most of the respondents are male (n = 108), which is about 71.1% of the total respondents, while 22.9% (n=32) are female. The majority of the institutions (n=92, 65.7%) have less than 400 staffs, and 19 institutions have more than 1600 (6.4%) staffs. The statistics show that most of the higher education institutions (n=56, 40%) have 6 to 10 years of internationalization experience, whereas 9 institutions have more than 20 years of internationalisation experience.

The outcomes of the Table 1 also revealed that most of the institutions have 100 to 500 international students. The largest number of international students is more than 2000 which represented in 12.9% (n=18) of the institutions. Table 1 shows that international students from more than 20 countries, make up about 40.7% of all students at these institutions. In other words, the findings suggest that Malaysian universities attract a large number of international students from various countries.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender of the respondent | Female | 32 | 22.9 |
| | Male | 108 | 77.1 |
| Total staff | Less than 400 | 92 | 65.7 |
| | 401-800 | 9 | 6.4 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 801-1200 | 7 | 5.0 |
| | 1201-1600 | 13 | 9.3 |
| | More than1600 | 19 | 13.6 |
| | | | |
| Length of internationalization | 1-5 | 44 | 31.4 |
| | 6-10 | 56 | 40.0 |
| | 11-15 | 25 | 17.9 |
| | 16-20 | 6 | 4.3 |
| | More than 20 | 9 | 6.4 |
| | | | |
| Number of international Student | 100-500 | 97 | 69.3 |
| | 501-1000 | 19 | 13.6 |
| | 1501-2000 | 6 | 4.3 |
| | More than 2000 | 18 | 12.9 |
| | | | |
| Number of countries | 6-10 | 34 | 24.3 |
| | 11-15 | 32 | 22.9 |
| | 16-20 | 17 | 12.1 |
| | More than 20 | 57 | 40.7 |

The cross-tabulation between the length of internationalisation and the number of international students is presented in Table 2. Table 2 shows that institutions that have been involved in internationalisation for a longer time (more than 20 years) have a higher number of international students. The youngest institutions with 1 to 5 years' activity have between 100 to 500 international students. This finding indicates that as institutions get older, their ability to attract international students improves as well.

Table 2. Length of Internationalisation, Number of International Students Cross tabulation

| Length of internationalisation | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of International students | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | More than 20 Years | Total |
| 100-500 | 42(30%) | 44(31.42%) | 6(4.28%) | 5(3.57%) | 0(0.00%) | 97(69.28%) |
| 501- 1000 | 2(1.42%) | 8(5.71%) | 9(6.42%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 19(13.57%) |
| 1501-2000 | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 6(4.28%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 6(4.28%) |
| More than | 0(0.00%) | 4(2.85%) | 4(2.85%) | 1(0.71%) | 9(6.42%) | 18(12.85%) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 | | | | | | |
| Total | 44(31.42%) | 56(40%) | 25(17.85%) | 6(4.28%) | 9(6.42%) | 140(100.00%) |

4.2 Measurements

Scales used in the existing study were established based on a minor adaptation to suit the higher education industry. Specifically, institutions' inward export performance was measured based on subjective judgement of the associate directors of the international student departments. In this study, the export performance was operationalized using items suggested by Cadogan et al. (2005). Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards statements on inward export performance (IEP) using a five-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 is 'very unsatisfied', and 5 is 'very satisfied').

The MC construct was measured through 3 items based on Cadogan et al.' s (2005) with a five-point Likert scale, where 1 for strongly disagreed and 5 represents strongly agreed. Meanwhile, the people export marketing mix strategy (PP) construct was measured by 3 items based on (Ivy, 2008). People element was numbered by the degree of fully standardized, majority standardized / minority adapted, 50% standardized / 50% adapted, majority adapted / minority standardized, and fully adapted. All items were also measured by the same five-point Likert scale.

5. Analysis and results

5.1 Non-response Bias

The presence of non-response bias was investigated by examining differences between early and late respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). The first 65 responses found in this study can be considered as early responses, while late responses were assigned to 75 responses. Using an independent t-test, the mean score of all variables was compared between early and late respondents to see if there are any substantial differences. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, it is assumed that there is no significant difference (Skarmeas, Katsikeas, & Schlegelmilch, 2002). The test result found no significant differences between the groups of respondents, hence there is no late-response bias in this study.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

SPSS 24 was used to calculate the means, standard deviation (SD), and the correlation matrix. The results in Table 3 show there are positive correlations between MC, PP, and IEP. MC that measured using three items has a mean value of 3.55, and standard deviation of 0.67. Likewise, people marketing mix adaptation mean score is 3.17, and standard deviation 0.79. Meanwhile, IEP that was assessed using five items has the mean score 3.55 and standard deviation 0.48. Descriptive statistics shows that the overall mean for IEP is above moderate. Pearson correlation results show that MC and IEP are positive and statistically significant ($r = .40^{**}$, $P<.000$). The result of Table 3 indicates that MC is positively correlated with PP ($r = 0.27^{**}$, $P<.001$). The results also reveal that

there is a significant positive relationship between PP and IEP (r = 0.51**, P<.000). Those results highlight that an increase in PP would lead to higher IEP in higher education service.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

| Constructs | Mean | SD | MC | PP | IEP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MC | 3.55 | 0.67 | 1 | | |
| PP | 3.17 | 0.79 | 0.27** | 1 | |
| IEP | 3.55 | 0.48 | 0.40** | 0.51** | 1 |

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

5.3 Evaluating Common Method Variance

Common method variance (CMV) problem could happen due to several reasons such as lengthy scale, lack of respondent's experience, forced participation, respondent's low self-efficacy to provide a correct answer, item ambiguity, double-barrelled items, and respondent's low cognition (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). To detect the existence of this problem, this study used Harman one-factor test to determine the presence of a common method bias. If a single factor explains more than 50% of the variance, the data has CMV (Harman, 1976). Harman's test showed that a single factor only explained about 26.255% of the variance in this research.

5.4 Assessment of Measurement Model

Structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was chosen to analyse the measurement and structural model of the study. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to examine the relationship between constructs and their items. An item is reliable if the values of the factor loadings are greater than 0.60 (Joe F. Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Figure 2 clarifies that all items are higher than 0.60 thresholds.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2019). Hair et al. (2019) recommended that an indicator is reliable if the value of factor loading is above 0.70. The results of the current study indicate that the items and latent constructs are reliable, greater than the minimum threshold (Table 4). The next stage to measure internal consistency reliability is using composite reliability (CR). Reliability values between 0.70 and 0.90 range from "satisfactory to good" (Diamantopoulos, 2012). Therefore, the latent variables and items are reliable.

The convergence validity of the structures was evaluated with an extracted average variance (AVE). An AVE value of <0.50 implies a sufficient degree of convergent (Joe F. Hair et al., 2011). Table 4 displayed the proven AVE results. The AVE values for all variables are larger than 0.50, which means that all variables are convergently valid.

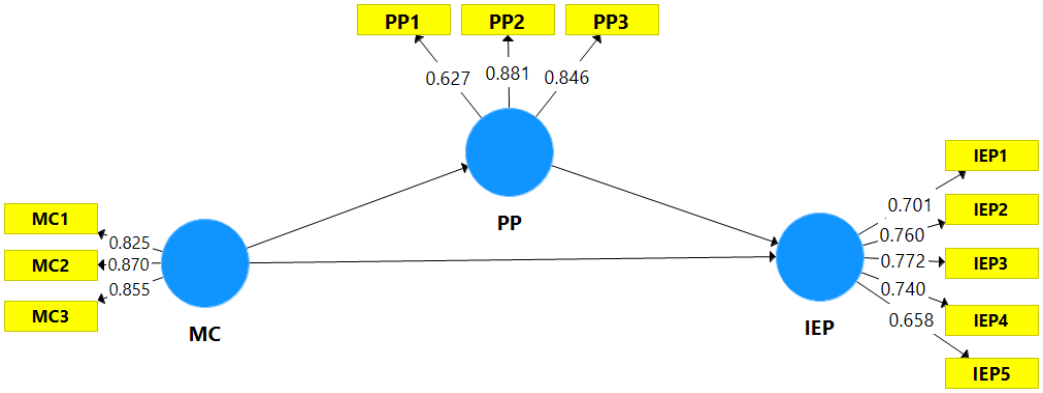


Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

| | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| IEP | 0.779 | 0.849 | 0.529 |
| MC | 0.809 | 0.887 | 0.723 |
| PP | 0.707 | 0.832 | 0.628 |

It is essential to evaluate the discriminate validity when analysing relations of reflective construct in PLS-SEM. Researchers examined the discriminate validity of the constructs by using two methods: Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016). The AVE of each latent variable should exceed the highest squared correlation of the variable to any other latent variable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 reported that the AVE for each variable is more than the squared correlation between variables.

Discriminate validity is ascertained by testing the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations. Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations explained that all values of HTMT were less than the recommended level of 0.90, hence indicating acceptable discriminant validity for all constructs (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Table 5 presents the results of the discriminate validity of the constructs.

Table 5. Discriminate Validity

| Construct | IEP | MC | PP |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fornell&Larcker | | | |
| IEP | 0.727 | | |
| MC | 0.409 | 0.850 | |
| PP | 0.550 | 0.267 | 0.793 |
| HTMT | | | |
| IEP | | | |
| MC | 0.506 | | |
| PP | 0.680 | 0.356 | |

5.5 Assessment of Structural Model

The internal model or structural model shows the relationship among a number of variables of the study (Henseler et al., 2016). Bootstrapping was run with 5000 subsamples (Figure 3). According to Hair et al. (2019), the following steps are used to measure the PLS-SEM. Path coefficient (β), coefficient of determination ($R^2$), and effect size ($f^2$) should be reported.

Firstly, the study found that the path coefficient of the impact of MC on IEP was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 3.995$, $p < 0.000$); hence, H1 is supported. The results showed the path-coefficient between people marketing mix adaptation and inward export performance was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.475$, $t = 8.289$, $p < 0.000$); thus, H2 is supported. The findings displayed that MC had an indirect effect on IEP through PP ($\beta = 0.127$, $t = 3.116$, $p < 0.001$), thus H3 is supported.

Secondly, the R-squared values measured the variance described in the endogenous construct. The results show that the model explained 37.6% variance in the IEP ($R^2 = 0.376$). Besides, IEP was explained by 72% of 7Ps mix adaptation ($R^2 = 0.720$) thus showing a greater exploratory power.

Thirdly, the effect size ($f^2$) value of variables was evaluated. The result showed that MC has a medium impact on IEP (0.119). Meanwhile, The effect size value demonstrates that MC has a small effect on people marketing mix adaptation (0.077). In contrast, people marketing mix adaptation has a large effect on IEP (0.335).

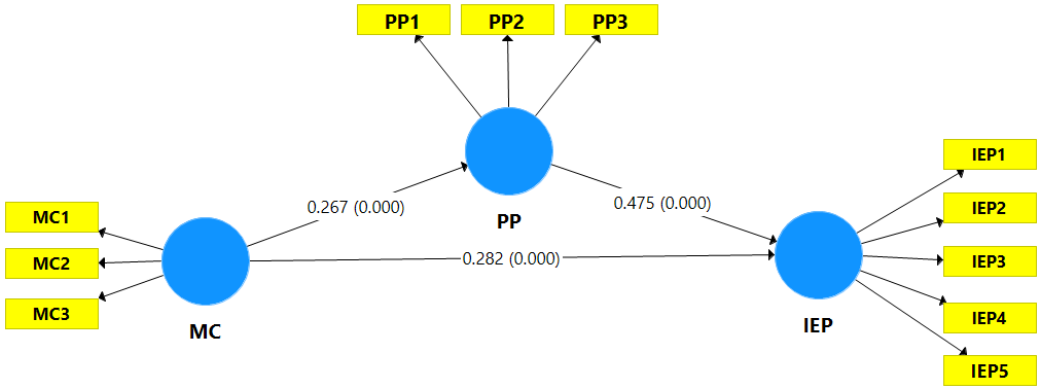


Figure 3. Structural Model Based on Bootstrapping

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

| Path Model | β | SE | T-Value | P-Values | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MC -> IEP | 0.282 | 0.071 | 3.995 | 0.000 | Supported |
| MC -> PP | 0.267 | 0.081 | 3.294 | 0.000 | Supported |
| PP -> IEP | 0.475 | 0.057 | 8.289 | 0.000 | Supported |
| MC -> PP -> IEP | 0.127 | 0.041 | 3.116 | 0.001 | Supported |

6. Discussion

In contrast to the majority of the literature in EP that concentrated on the manufacturing industry, this paper is focusing on the service industry. The outcomes of this paper confirm that MC has an impact on Malaysian higher education EP. The finding is consistent with Bloemer et al. (2013), which stating that MC acts as an energy force for the development of competencies that impact export performance. According to Navarro et al. (2010) managers with a strong commitment will look for opportunities in foreign markets, particularly in countries with cultures that differ from their own. Managers must prioritise obtaining relevant market information and improving the speed they respond to the changes in the environment. The result of this study is in line with Sakthivel's (2007) study, which found that MC can help in allocating resources to increase the quality of the services in education institutions. Recent research by Sraha et al. (2020) has also confirmed the current results and the influence of MC on exporting.

Meanwhile, marketing strategy can implement adaptation or standardization to its marketing mix (Lee & Griffith, 2019). The results are in line with Westjohn and Magnusson (2017) who argued that the greater the adaptation, the more value can be delivered to clients around the world, thus increases EP. In this paper, the relationship between people marketing mix adaptation and IEP is proven. The path coefficient supported earlier research that found a link between 7Ps export marketing and IEP (Cubillo et al., 2006). This is due to the fact that how people interact with customers can sometimes reflect how satisfied they are with the service they receive (Tibaingana, 2019). The findings regarding the adaptation of the marketing mix strategy are also consistent with

prior research findings (Shoham, 1999; O'Cass & Julian, 2003; Calantone et al., 2006). Firms can satisfy customer requirements in export markets by adapting marketing strategies to the needs of foreign markets (Goudarz Azar & Drogendijk, 2014; Haddoud et al., 2019). Ngo-Thi-Ngoc and Nguyen-Viet (2021) mentioned that adapting people is positively associated with performance in international markets.

The third hypothesis of the study approved the significance of the mediating effect of PP on the relationship between MC and IEP. As stated by Anikin (2020), not only that management helps in increasing the marketing recognition of an educational institution in the industry, but it can also assist adaptation in the external environment. According to Fuchs and Köstner (2016), commitment applies a positive influence on the adaptation of marketing strategies. Hence the results are in line with the previous studies. The findings suggest that the presence of good MC in the higher education institutions can help employees to adapt the marketing mix strategy, which finally enhances the EP.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Research

The internationalisation of the service industry has shifted the world's perspective on the sector's development in recent years (Eckardt & Skaggs, 2018). Accordingly, the higher education industry has become a vital service sector. Previous literature, however, mostly concentrated on the determinants of EP and the adaptation/standardization of export marketing in the manufacturing industry, which left a gap in the literature. Therefore, this paper seeks to increase the understanding of IEP in the service industry. The paper tested and confirmed the positive relationship between MC and IEP of education services. The relationship between people marketing mix adaptation and IEP was also found positive, while mediating effect of the people marketing mix adaptation on the relationship between MC and EIP is significant.

This research investigated people marketing mix adaptation on IEP of the Malaysian higher education institutions. Hence, future studies can be conducted in other developed or developing countries with different educational characteristics to increase the generalisability of the outcomes. Moreover, future studies can test 7Ps export marketing in other inward industries such as healthcare, tourism, entertainment. Lastly, future research can include an external factor to the framework such as domestic country characteristics factors that important in inward exports. According to Malik and Kotabe (2009), and Safari and Saleh (2020), governments' supports often play a role in the field of export marketing and promotion. Thus, future studies can also test the influence of government supports on IEP.

The results of this paper contribute to the EP literature in many ways. First, this is one of the very few research that has been done in inward export to differentiate export of services. Second, the study adds to IEP in the context of higher education. In terms of tuition fees and living expenses, inward exports such as education services help to expand the economy of the host country

(Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016) and generate opportunities to industry sectors, including property, tourism, and retail sectors, through the spillover effects (Zheng, 2014). Third, the study investigates EP in a developing country. It has been mentioned that recent studies on EP research in developing countries are limited (Krammer, Strange, & Lashitew, 2018). Forth, higher education institutions need to know that a low level of MC in international student's section can have a negative effect on the performance. Moreover, people 7Ps marketing mix adaptation can increase the EP. Therefore, people in higher education services need to improve their skills to adapt themselves to international students.

Acknowledgment: The authors would like to express their gratitude to Malaysian higher education institutions for their assistance with data collection.

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