

'Push-Pull' Factors Influencing International Student Destination Choice

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During the 1980s, Tim worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and served as Second Secretary in the Australian Embassy Bangkok. He is experienced in cross-cultural negotiation, particularly within Asia. Tim was an Assistant Agency Manager for National Mutual and has experience in the practical aspects of marketing and team management. Tim's major research interests include international education, small business development, entrepreneurship, international management and sustainable competitive advantage for exporters. He holds an MBA with Distinction and a PhD in management. He has published numerous articles on international education management and marketing.

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Professor Geoffrey Soutar was educated at the University of Western Australia where he received a first class honours degree in economics. He then studied at Cornell University, receiving an MA and Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Business and Public Administration before returning to the University of Western Australia where he was a lecturer and senior lecturer in the Department of Management from 1973 to 1986. He was appointed as the Foundation Professor of Management in the School of Management at Curtin University of Technology in February 1986. He was Executive Dean of the Faculty of Business and Public Management at Edith Cowan University from 1994 until 1999. He took a position as Professor of Management at the Graduate School of Management at the University of Western Australia at the end of 1999 and was appointed as Director of that School in the early part of 2000.

While at Curtin University he was Head of the School of Management and Marketing from 1986 until his departure in 1994. He was responsible for much of the School's offshore development that saw the School's offshore students increase from 50 in 1986 to over 500 in 1994. He was active in the development of the Institute for Research into International Competitiveness and the creation of a strong research program within the Curtin Business School. He was made a Fellow of the Australian Marketing Institute in 1985, an honorary member of the Market Research Society in 1989, a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management in 1994, a Fellow of the Marketing Institute of Singapore in 1996, an honorary Fellow of the Professional Sales and Marketing Institute in 1995 and a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management in 1998 for his contributions to management, marketing, marketing research and education in Australia and the region. He is a member of the executive of the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management and Marketing Academy and was a member of a Federal Government committee that investigated the status of management and marketing research in Australia.

'Push-Pull' Factors Influencing International Student Destination Choice

Abstract

This paper examines the factors motivating international student choice of host country. It describes a 'push-pull' model motivating the student's desire to seek overseas education and influencing the decision process in selection of a final study destination. Drawing on the findings from research studies undertaken in Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India, the paper examines the factors influencing host country selection and additional research that examines the factors influencing choice of final host institution. Based on these findings the paper argues that economic and social forces within the home country serve to 'push' students abroad. However, the decision as to which host country they will select is dependent on a variety of 'pull' factors. The paper highlights the importance of student's prior knowledge and awareness of a host country or institution, as well as recommendations made by the student's family and friends during the purchase decision. It also appears that international students tend to select a country first and then an institution within that country. Drawing together these findings the paper examines the implications for governments and education institutions seeking to recruit international students.

Key words: international students, study destination choice, international education marketing.

Introduction

Why do students choose to study overseas? Demand for education, particularly higher education, has traditionally been driven by expectations of its ability to raise the economic and social status of the graduate. For people in less developed countries, limited access to education in their own countries led to a significant rise in the number of international students studying overseas. Between 1960 and 1970, the average growth in international student flows was around 9 per cent, and continued at about 6 per cent from 1970 to 1980 (Hughes 1988). While there is some evidence of a slowing in the overall flow of international students during the 1980s and 1990s (Kemp 1995), a global industry has been created.

The global pattern of international student flows may be explained by a combination of 'push and pull' factors that encourage students to study overseas. 'Push' factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. 'Pull' factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students. Some of these factors are inherent in the source country, some in the host country and others in the students themselves.

A 'Push-Pull' Model of International Education Flows

Many factors influence the demand for international education. A lack of access to higher education among many countries in Asia and Africa has been a key driver for much of the student flow that has taken place over the second half of the twentieth century. Historical or colonial links between host and home countries have played an important role in determining the direction of much of the international student flow. Other factors influencing the selection

of a country study destination have been a commonality of language, the availability of science or technology-based programs and the geographic proximity of the home and host countries. In addition, perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system available in the home country; the relative wealth of the home country population and the GNP growth rate in the home country all have an impact (Lee and Tan 1984).

Agarwal and Winkler (1985) studied the demand for an international education in the United States among students from fifteen developing countries throughout the post-war era. They found the proportion of international students seeking to undertake higher education in America had declined for most countries in later years. While noting that international student flows had risen strongly since the 1950s, the later slow down was linked to the rising cost of a United States university education and improvements in higher education opportunities in source countries. Their study suggested the principal flow drivers were per capita income in the home country, the price or cost of education, the education opportunities available in the home country and the expected benefits of studying abroad.

McMahon (1992) examined the flow of international students from eighteen developing countries to developed countries during the 1960s and 1970s, testing an outbound or 'push' model and an inbound or 'pull' model. The push model suggested the student flow was dependent on the level of economic wealth, the degree of involvement of the developing country in the world economy, the priority placed on education by the government of the developing country and the availability of educational opportunities in the home country. His pull model suggested student attraction to a host country was influenced by the relative sizes of the student's home country economy compared to the host country, economic links between the home and host country, host nation political interests in the home country through foreign assistance or cultural links and host nation support of international students via scholarships or other assistance.

McMahon (1992) found a negative correlation between economic prosperity in sending countries and the volume of international student flows, perhaps because greater educational opportunity counteracts the effect of improved GDP per capita. Involvement by the developing country in the international economy was a significant factor, as was the home government's emphasis on education. A positive correlation was found between the size of the host nation and the sending nation's economies. The other explanatory factors within the 'pull' model varied from country to country.

The decision process through which the international student moves when selecting a final study destination appears to involve at least three distinct stages. In stage one, the student must decide to study internationally, rather than locally. As noted, this can be influenced by a series of 'push' factors within the home country. Once the decision to study abroad has been made the next decision is the selection of a host country. In this second stage, 'pull' factors become important, making one host country relatively more attractive than another. In stage three, the student selects an institution. A variety of additional 'pull' factors make a particular institution more attractive than its competitors. Such factors include an institution's reputation for quality, market profile, range of courses, alliances or coalitions, offshore teaching programs, staff expertise, degree of innovation, use of information technology, resources, size of the alumni base and promotion and marketing efforts (e.g. the use of agents and advertising) (Mazzarol 1998).

Six factors have been found to influence student selection of a host country (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery 1997). The first was the overall level of **knowledge and awareness** of the host country in the students' home country, which was influenced by the overall availability of information about the potential destination country and the ease with which students could

obtain the information. The destination's reputation for quality and the recognition of its qualifications in the student's home country also formed a part of this factor. A second factor was the level of referrals or **personal recommendations** that the study destination receives from parents, relatives, friends and other 'gatekeepers' prior to making the final decision.

The third factor related to **cost issues**, including the cost of fees, living expenses, travel costs and social costs, such as crime, safety, and racial discrimination. The presence of students from the student's country (social cost) and the availability of part time work (financial costs) also formed part of this factor. A fourth factor was the **environment**, which related to perceptions about the study "climate" in the destination country, as well as its physical climate and lifestyle. The fifth factor was **geographic proximity**, which related to the geographic (and time) proximity of the potential destination country to the student's country. The final factor was **social links**, which related to whether a student has family or friends living in the destination country and whether family and friends have studied there previously.

These six 'pull' factors are an important framework for understanding the influences that motivate a student's selection of a host country. They work in conjunction with the 'push' factors mentioned earlier to create the demand for international education.

The Present Study

Four country studies enabled an investigation of the factors likely to influence international student choice of study destinations. Conducted from 1996 to 2000, these studies were undertaken on behalf of the Australian Education International (AEI), of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

The first of these studies surveyed students from Indonesia and Taiwan (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery 1997). Undertaken in 1996, the study surveyed 780 prospective international students, 53 percent (n = 404) from Indonesia and 47 percent (n = 361) from Taiwan. The second study was undertaken in India in 1999, using a sample of 152 prospective postgraduate students (Mazzarol, Choo and Nair 2001). A third study was undertaken in China using a sample of 689 prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students (Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart and Choo 2001). In all, a total of 2,485 students were surveyed, including those bound for secondary school, vocational education and training (VET) programs, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), as well as undergraduate and post-graduate studies.

Data were gathered using a questionnaire translated into the student's native language (e.g. Bahasa in Indonesia and Mandarin in China and Taiwan). All questionnaires were back translated prior to distribution in the field. A common set of items was used in all surveys enabling comparisons across the four countries. Prior to undertaking the surveys, focus group discussions were undertaken with students at different levels (e.g. school, VET college, ELICOS and university). The focus groups discussed the nature of student decision-making in greater depth. In many cases – particularly Indonesia, Taiwan and China – these discussions were undertaken via use of an interpreter.

The purpose of the studies was to identify reasons why students selected a particular study destination. Sampling procedure was undertaken on a convenience basis, usually through assistance from local schools, colleges and recruitment agencies. Students who completed the questionnaire had made a firm commitment to study abroad and had usually demonstrated their desire to do so by enrolling in a pre-departure program (e.g. language training course such as TOFEL or a program such as the GMAT).

From the previous discussion it can be seen that a student seeking an international education will first make the decision to go abroad, then select a host country based on a variety of ‘push-pull’ factors. Once the decision as to host country has been made, the decision as to a particular institution will be made. Students’ selection of particular institutions is based on a variety of complex issues. The variety of institutions from which a prospective student can make a choice is so large that the decision to attend a particular institution is a trade-off and is likely to be influenced by opinions from family, friends and education agents or counsellors. Few previous studies have fully examined this issue. In order to investigate this matter, a further survey of 879 students studying at a dozen colleges and universities throughout Australia was undertaken (Mazzarol, Soutar and Thein 2000)

Just over half of this sample (53%) was international students, of whom 69 per cent were studying in Australia for the first time. Fifty-five per cent of the sample was female and the average age of the students was 24 years. Ages ranged from 16 years to 64 years. The majority of the students (88%) were enrolled within their institutions on a full-time basis. Eighty-one per cent of the students were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 15 per cent in post-graduate programs and the remainder in ELICOS, post-secondary diploma courses or other programs. The students were representative of the population of students – international and domestic – enrolled in higher education institutions within Australia during the 1990s. Eighty-four per cent of the students were enrolled in business, administration or economics programs. While this may appear to be a bias towards this field of study, in 1995, just over 71 per cent of international students enrolled in Australian institutions were studying business, administration or economics programs (DEETYA 1997).

“Push-Pull” Factors influencing the decision to study overseas

Table 1 shows the results of four surveys undertaken in Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia. The majority of students saw that an overseas course was better than a local one and this was an important factor motivating their decision to study overseas. The next most important influence was the idea that they could gain a better understanding of ‘western culture’ through an international education. The relatively low rating among Indian students was due to this sample being postgraduate students. As such, respondents were older and more experienced than were their counterparts from the other three countries.

Table 1 Factors Influencing Student Decision to Study Overseas

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important:</i>				
Overseas course better than local	92%	93%	62%	92%
Difficult to gain entry at home	59%	47%	39%	49%
Course not available at home	51%	47%	33%	51%
Better understanding of West	91%	47%	91%	80%
Intention to migrate	43%	59%	38%	40%

Notes:

The India samples were postgraduate students in the fields of science and technology. All other samples included students from higher education, vocational education and school education segments.

Mazzarol, T., and Soutar, G.N. (2001) “Push-Pull Factors Influencing International Student Destination Choice”, Globalization & Tertiary Education: Impacts, Responses & Implications for the 21st Century, Australasian Association for Institutional Research Inc. 12th Annual International Conference, 3-5 September, Rockhampton, Qld.

The Importance of Knowledge and Awareness of the Host

As shown in Table 2, 'knowledge and awareness' of a host country was measured through four items. The first of these was the ease with which students are able to find or access information on the host country as a study destination. It can be seen that this was an important influencing variable in the selection of a host country. The second item was the level of knowledge a student has of the host country. This was considered important by a high proportion of students in all four countries.

Table.2 Importance of Knowledge & Awareness of the Host Country as an Influencing Factor Motivating Student Destination Choice.

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important to their decision to select a particular host country:</i>				
Easy to obtain information on host	88%	89%	87%	95%
Knowledge of host country	89%	82%	79%	94%
Quality of education in host	87%	96%	87%	99%
Host qualifications recognised	88%	90%	88%	98%

Notes

Samples were drawn from four separate countries using identical questions.

The high importance placed on the final two items was not surprising, as few students would seek to study in a host country where education standards were low or from which qualifications were not recognised at home. However, what needs to be understood is that they are not, by themselves, sufficient to ensure the selection of a host country. The *four* variables must work together to provide the necessary influence. In other words, the host country must have a reputation for quality education services, its qualifications must be recognised by the source countries and the host country must have a high international profile and make it easy for students to find out about its education services.

The Importance of Recommendations from Friends and Relatives

Table 3 shows the importance of the items associated with personal recommendations or referrals from friends and relatives. The most important for all four countries was the 'reputation of the institution' where the student was to study. This is not surprising by itself but, as with the previous 'knowledge and awareness' dimension, the reputation the institution enjoys is greatly affected by the number of people who are willing to refer others to it. Word of mouth referral is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use. Parents and relatives who have graduated from a particular institution and enjoyed the experience are likely to recommend it to their children, other family members or friends. Private recruitment agents who have graduated from a particular institution also make good advocates for that institution. This factor is likely to become more important the more students study in a host country, or have family who visit that country for other reasons.

Table 3. Importance of Recommendations from Friends and Relatives as an Influencing Factor Motivating Student Destination Choice.

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important to their decision to select a particular host country:</i>				
Parents/relatives recommended	67%	60%	52%	80%
Agents recommendation	47%	30%	35%	62%
Reputation of institution	83%	94%	77%	93%

Notes

Samples were drawn from four separate countries using identical questions.

As shown in Table 3, parents and relatives had more influence than did agents. This was less true in Indonesia, which reflects the lower level of market sophistication in that country than in the other three. In comparison with their counterparts in Taiwan, India and China, families in Indonesia have had less experience in selecting an overseas study destination. What these findings highlight is the importance of Alumni networks as a means of promoting international education. Strong international Alumni are a valuable source of word-of-mouth referral for education institutions and one that competitors will have difficulty emulating quickly.

The Importance of Cost Issues

Table 4 shows the importance of these various cost issues in influencing the decision of an overseas student in selecting a particular host country. It can be seen that the importance of part time work was substantially greater than the cost of fees, travel costs or living expenses. This was particularly true for students from India, China and Indonesia, reflecting the relative affluence of students. Many Taiwanese students do not need part time work to support them and, in the focus groups, some felt part-time work would be a detriment to their studies. By contrast, postgraduate students from India viewed part-time work as an essential part of their study program. Many seek an opportunity to work in a research laboratory during their studies to gain experience in their chosen fields.

Table 4. Importance of Cost Issues as an Influencing Factor Motivating Student Destination Choice.

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important to their decision to select a particular host country:</i>				
Lower fees	49%	35%	65%	60%
Lower travel costs	48%	32%	63%	62%
Lower Cost of living	59%	37%	66%	63%
Job Opportunities	58%	91%	85%	82%
Safe (low crime) environment	81%	46%	65%	85%
Low racial discrimination	66%	55%	75%	79%
Est. pop of overseas students	78%	78%	85%	79%
Entry qualifications accepted	57%	81%	57%	79%
Institutions Government run	67%	62%	65%	87%

Notes

Samples were drawn from four separate countries using identical questions.

The importance of ‘social cost’ issues, such as crime and safety or racial discrimination, was also high, with most students indicating these factors were important to their host country selection decision. It can be seen that the Indian students considered these ‘social cost’ issues as less important. This may be because the Indian samples contained postgraduate students, who were generally older and more comfortable with travelling and living abroad.

The presence of an established population of international students in the selected host country was also important. This suggests that, once a host country has succeeded in attracting relatively large numbers of students from a particular source country, their presence will serve as an additional ‘pull’ factor. This pattern was especially strong among Indonesian students considering Australia or Indian, Taiwanese and Korean students considering the United States.

The Importance of Environment

Table 5 shows the importance of environmental issues to student study destination choice. It can be seen that these factors were of importance to students from the four source countries. While the relative importance of the environmental issues was low compared to the other influencing factors, it is a matter that needs to be considered by host nations and their

institutions when seeking to develop marketing strategies. Students from many source countries find the physical and learning environment of western campuses attractive.

Table 5. Importance of Environment as an Influencing Factor Motivating Student Destination Choice.

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important to their decision to select a particular host country:</i>				
Comfortable climate	82%	70%	87%	89%
Exciting place to live	82%	83%	63%	93%
Quiet-studious environment	86%	74%	86%	95%

Notes

Samples were drawn from four separate countries using identical questions.

The Importance of Social Links and Geographic Proximity

Table 6 shows the relative importance of social links and geographic proximity to students' study destination choice. It can be seen that, for most students, the presence of family or friends studying in a particular host country was important. China's lower percentage may be explained by the one child policy, which has reduced the number of siblings Chinese students can follow overseas, plus the lack of opportunity for parents to study abroad prior to the 1990s. Geographic proximity was less important to most students. The Indonesia students were the exception, as many selected Australia during the 1990s due to its close proximity.

Table 6. Factors Motivating Student Destination Choice, Importance of Social Links and Geographic Proximity.

Source country	Taiwan	India	China	Indonesia
Sample size:	(n=361)	(n=152)	(n=689)	(n=404)
<i>Proportion who indicated influencing factor was important to their decision to select a particular host country:</i>				
Friends/relatives study there	66%	75%	47%	79%
Friends/relatives live there	58%	62%	41%	61%
Geographic proximity	39%	28%	36%	62%

Notes

Samples were drawn from four separate countries using identical questions.

Factors Influencing Host Institution Selection

In the survey of 879 students studying at Australian colleges and universities, respondents were asked to rate the importance of the seventeen factors shown in Table 7 to their decision to select a particular institution. A seven-point rating scale, ranging from of little or no importance (1) of extreme importance (7) to the decision, was used. Differences between the international and Australian domestic students were examined using discriminant analysis. This statistical technique is used when the dependent variable is categorical and the independent variables are metrically scaled. The results obtained are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Factors Influencing Choice of an Institution- Australian Sample

Factors influencing choice in selection of institution	Mean	Discriminant Rating function
The institution...		
has a reputation for quality	5.66	positive
was willing to recognise my previous qualifications	5.65	positive
has a reputation for quality and expertise of its staff	5.48	positive
has links to other institutions known to me	4.42	positive
has a large number of international students enrolled	4.45	positive
has a strong Alumni through which I learnt about it	4.03	positive
offers qualifications that will be recognised by employers significant		6.10 not
offers a broad range of courses and programs	5.45	not significant
makes use of the latest information technology	5.40	not significant
has a reputation for being responsive to student needs	5.33	not significant
is well known for innovation in research and teaching	5.19	not significant
has a large campus and excellent facilities	5.10	not significant
is financially stable	4.96	not significant
offers flexible entry throughout the year	4.94	not significant
is noted for its superior use of technology	5.10	negative
was well known to me	4.96	negative
advertises and promotes itself strongly	4.68	negative

Notes

Sample of 879 students included 466 international (FFPOS) and 413 locals.

Discriminant function indicates whether the variable serves to classify FFPOS from local students. FFPOS = Full Fee Paying Overseas Students. Positive indicates that the variable was found significantly positive for FFPOS. Negative indicates that the variable was found significantly negative for FFPOS. Not significant indicates no difference between FFPOS and local students.

The mean scores for the international student sample (FFPOS) for each of the seventeen variables are shown in Table 7. Also shown is a ‘discriminant function’ score, which indicates whether the variable was positive or negative in differentiating international from local students. A “positive” score implies that variable was significantly more important to international students, while a “negative” score implies it was significantly less important. Variables that were positive and had high mean scores can be considered particularly important in influencing international students to select a host institution. A high mean score,

even if not significant, is important, indicating that the variable is an important influencing variable for local and international students.

It can be seen from Table 7 that the most important issue for international students was whether their qualifications would be recognised. This was also important to the local students. A further examination of Table 7 suggests that international and local students considered most of the factors to be important. However, the variable that were more important to international students were the quality and reputation of the institution, the recognition of the institution's qualifications in their own country, the international strategic alliances the institutions had, the quality of the institution's staff, its alumni base and its existing international student population.

A Discussion of the Findings

The students from the four countries identified at least eight factors that motivate a student to study abroad, and these factors appear to be important, regardless of the source country involved. Investigations of the 'push' factors that motivate the decision to study overseas highlighted four influences. The first was a perception that an overseas course of study is better than a local one. This factor was identified during a series of focus group discussions undertaken as part of an Australian Government study with international students from Taiwan and Indonesia and supported by subsequent discussions with students from India and China, also undertaken for the Australian Government. The next two factors were related to a student's ability to gain entry to local programs. If it were difficult for them to gain entry to particular study programs within their own country or the program they wished to enter was unavailable in their own country, then they would choose to study internationally. Two other factors that were found to influence a student's decision to study overseas was a desire to gain a better understanding of the 'West' and an intention to migrate after graduation. These are important issues for educational institutions to consider when developing an international marketing strategy. These findings are also consistent with the findings of other research into the factors influencing the competitive advantage of 315 education institutions in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Britain (Mazzarol 1998).

Compared with the factors influencing the decision to study overseas, students' choice of a particular host country as a study destination appears to be influenced by the reputation or profile of the country in which the student is seeking to study (Kinnell 1989). The better knowledge or awareness a student has of a particular host country, the more likely they will select it as a study destination. This is not surprising and may explain why so many students from particular source countries choose to study where they do. A major factor in explaining the popularity of the United States as a host country for many of the world's international students is the general knowledge people throughout the world have of America. American domination of the world's media and news services in the second half of the Twentieth Century has assisted in this process, as has film and television.

The decision to study abroad is frequently a family decision that involves several decision-makers. Parental influence is particularly strong among undergraduate students when they are choosing a destination country. In a series of focus group sessions with students from Indonesia and Taiwan, the importance of parental involvement in the decision-making was highlighted. Young female students from Indonesia indicated that they had been sent to Australia by their parents, even though they would have preferred to go to the United States. They explained that their parents thought Australia was 'safe' and less likely to offer the girls 'undesirable influences' that might be found in California. Most hoped to go to the United States as postgraduates. Among the students from Taiwan, the role of parents and family as

influencing forces was also highlighted. Because many parents or relatives in Taiwan had studied in the United States or had a closer affinity with that country, they were more likely to influence students towards the United States than to other potential host countries.

In considering the importance of family or friends recommendations to international student study destination choice it should be noted that strong Alumni can be a valuable source of referral for education institutions. The 'social links' that emerge when a student has family or friends who have studied or are studying in a host country is another important influence on destination choice. Geographic proximity from the source to the host country may also be an important influence. While less important than most of the factors, it helps to explain the strong flows of Canadian students to the United States, Korean students to Japan and Indonesian students to Australia.

The cost of an international education must be measured through the direct cost of fees, the cost of living and other indirect factors, such as the opportunity cost of studying at home or not studying at all. In addition to the direct cost of fees and living expenses, students need to consider whether they can work part time during their period overseas. Many host countries offer students the right to undertake a certain amount of part time work under their visas. For many students this is a means to make the cost of obtaining an international education possible. During the late 1980s, the rapid growth in enrolments of Chinese students into Australian English language colleges was attributed largely to Australia's student work provisions (Simington 1989).

This present research suggested that cost is evaluated on such issues, as well as additional factors, such as the cost of air travel to the host country, the level of crime, the presence of racial discrimination and whether the host institution accepts existing qualifications for entry into study programs. The existence of an established population of international students within a host country is also part of this "cost" assessment. This appears to be due to a perception that such a population will make it easier for the student to become accepted. All these variables can be combined into a dimension that measures students' assessment of the overall 'cost' of one host country compared to another.

The "local environment" also influences the attractiveness of a host country. The climate, the lifestyle and whether the country is viewed as being quiet or 'studious' were seen as aspects of this 'environment.' Focus group discussions with students suggested that this environment could be a significant influence. Many students from South East Asia viewed Australia as a preferred destination to the United Kingdom, New Zealand or Canada because the weather was warmer. By contrast, discussions with students from Japan and the United States, undertaken by AGB in the 1990s, found Australia was viewed as a place of 'beaches and fun' but not somewhere to undertake 'serious' education (AGB 1992).

In relation to the factors influencing the attractiveness of a particular host institution, the findings also suggest that while both international and Australian students feel that having their qualifications recognised by future employers after graduation is very important, international students were more influenced by:

1. An institution's reputation for quality
2. An institution's links or alliances with other institutions familiar to the student
3. An institution's reputation for having high quality staff
4. An institution's alumni base and word of mouth referral process

5. The number of students enrolled at the institution
6. Whether an institution is willing to recognize students' qualifications.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from these multi-country studies suggest host governments and their education institutions need to consider the importance of the 'push-pull' factors that influence students' study destination choice. A recent trend in government policy among Asian countries (e.g. China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand) has seen a significant upgrading of the local supply-side of education at all levels. This trend is likely to continue and includes participation by host country institutions that are developing branch campuses in these source countries (World Bank 1992). Over time, this trend is likely to reduce the impact of traditional 'push' factors.

Under these conditions, the ability of a host country and its institutions to continue to attract substantial numbers of foreign students will increasingly depend on the 'pull' factors mentioned in this study. Of these, the awareness and reputation of the host country and its institutions are likely to be critical. Key influences are also likely to be the personal recommendations or word of mouth referrals of former alumni. Quality of reputation is likely to remain the most important factor influencing study destination choice. This is unsurprising, but highlights the need for host country governments to invest in education to ensure quality is maintained. Institutions need to ensure their marketing and promotion is undertaken in a sophisticated manner and that quality claims can be substantiated.

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