Factors Influencing International Students in Selection of Country for Higher Education: A Case Study of Thailand

Sanaullah Baloch[*]
Sanober Salman Shaikh[†]
Shakeela Shah[‡]

Abstract

The paper aims to examine the factors, which influence the decision of international students regarding the selection of a host country for higher education. Push-pull model has been used to examine the relationship between country-based pull factors and students' decision to study abroad. Additionally, this study also investigates the influence of push-pull factors on students' satisfaction over the decision of foreign study. Research participants were international students from five universities in Thailand. Using the quantitative research method, online questionnaires were distributed through email and social media and personal visits were also made by authors. The findings suggest that country-based three pull factors (awareness of host country, cost issue, and environment of host country) showed a significant relationship with students' decision-making to study abroad. Conversely, results also show that pull factors influence students' satisfaction over the decision to study abroad.

Keywords: *Higher education, international students, push-pull factors, Management*

Introduction

The substantial literature is available on factors influencing international students' decision-making about abroad study in context of developed nations. On the other hand, less attention has

[*]Sukkur IBA University. Email: sanaullah.shar@iba-suk.edu.pk
[†]Assistant Professor, IBA, University of Sindh, Email: sanobershaikh25@yahooh.com (Corresponding Author)
[‡]Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Sindh.
Email: shakeela.seyed@gmail.com

been paid to the research in the domain in the context of developing countries (Shah, Sid, Nair & Bennett, 2013: Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Thailand was hosting about 20,000 students from 20 nations studying undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate programmes (OHEC, 2016). In its 6th education development plan in 2001, Government of Thailand made an over ambitious plan to attract at least 100,000 international students by 2016, as a result many Thai Universities started to offer international programmers with English as a medium of instructions (Rhein, 2016; Lavankura, 2013; Daquila & Huang, 2013). By the end of 2016, they were able to attract approximately 20000 students in 769 programmes with business administration and international business among the largest attracting programmes (OHEC, 2016). Despite increasing importance of international students, little or no research has been conducted in context of Thailand. Therefore, this study fills this lacuna with aim to investigate 'pull factors' that influence international students in selecting Thailand as Higher Education destination (Korbchai, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Most of research work on factors influencing students to study abroad is based on universities in UK, USA and Australia. To date research has been focused on developed countries only and has been based on publicly funded community colleges in the UK and the USA using quantitative method (Shah, Sid, Nair, & Bennett, 2013). Whereas, this study seeks to answer the important research questions: Which pull factors affect most of international students' decision to study abroad (Thailand) for higher education? Which pull factors affect most of students' satisfaction over the decision of higher education in abroad (Thailand)? Therefore, this study aims to investigate the 'pull factors' that influence international students in selecting Thailand as destination of their higher education. Hence, this study fills the research gap and provides an insight into the factors that may affect the decision-making process of international student selecting Thailand for higher education. Thus, the study is

based on previous research and test models, which integrate the influencing factors on international students' decision-making in selecting Thailand as advanced study destination. In addition, this study also explains the interconnection between factors influencing decision-making.

Literature Review

Push and Pull Factors

Originating from tourism research, the sign-gestalt paradigm, commonly recognized as push-pull factors (Tolman, 1959; Dann, 1977) is highly recognized theory in understanding consumer-travelling motivation. Researchers have extended the theory toward education tourism to understand underlying motivation of international students for study abroad. To study abroad is a complex decision and involves a risk having high personal relevance and must consider the wide range of choices (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010). Mazzrol and Soutar (2002) suggested that two essential factors in decision making to study abroad are 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Push factors operate in the home country of students and create base for the overseas study decision; whereas, pull factors operates in the host country and influence students to select host country as an academic destination for higher education (Mazzrol & Soutar, 2002). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argued that study abroad is influenced by both factors, push and pull. Push factors influence students within its home country for opting to go abroad (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010). Study by Mazzrol, Kemp and Savery identified six pull factors influencing international students in making a country of choice for higher education. Lack of access to institutions at home county among Asian and African country students have been considered a key reason for students flow to the developed countries (Mazzrol & Soutar, 2002).

According to study by Agarwal and Winkler (1985) found in United States the four key factors influencing international students: Per capita income of home country, cost of education, education opportunities in home country and expected benefit of studying abroad. Another study carried out by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) by collecting data from Indian, Chinese, Taiwanese and Indonesian students intended to study abroad. They identified five push factors operating in the home country and six pull factors of selecting host country and host institution. The push factors operating in the home country of student were: perception that abroad education (qualification) is better than local; difficulty in getting entry into the local institution; unavailability of desired programme in home country; desire to gain better understanding of west; and intention to migrate from/ settle in the host country. They also found pull factors that operating in the host country include knowledge and awareness of host country, personal recommendation, cost issues, environment, geographic proximity and social links. Pull factors that influence students in selecting host institution include: institute reputation for quality, alliances with other institutions, reputation of having quality teaching staff, strong alumni base, number of students enrolled in institution and institution recognition of qualification of host students. Main reference groups that also influence students are: parents, relatives already lived in host country or abroad and alumni members.

Eder, Smith and Pitts (2010) examined push, pull and structural factors. It suggests that push factors that influence students are: personal growth, improving language skills and future career. Personal growth factors included knowing American culture and being independent in foreign country are crucial to personal growth. In future career factors. The study further suggested three pull factors including college issue, physical geography and USA culture. College issues means variety of courses offered, high quality education and friendly atmosphere and friendly behaviour of

college faculty. This study further suggested two structural factors can be constraints in study abroad decision which are visa issue to enter in USA and study cost issue, which is very high in context of the USA.

The lack of access to quality higher education in many Asian and African countries have been the key driver for students' flow to the developed countries like the UK, USA, Australia, and Canada. Overall image of host country, commonality of language and social acceptance to avoid racial discrimination are also important factors that influence international students' decision to select particular country (Mazzrol & Soutar, 2002).

Although both factors play important role in influencing students and shaping their study abroad decision but pull factors in particular are considered to be significantly powerful factors (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002). In fact, most of the push-pull factors studies originated from under developing countries (Maringle & Carter, 2007; Korbchai, 2014). Moreover, author also observed that little has been explored in the context of developing country. Resultantly, studying pull factors make significant case for academic contribution. Pull factors exert greater influence on students purchase intention and is a determinant of quality perception (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). It is because the image of a particular country is the first element of information evaluation and influencing most (Peng, Lawley, & Perry, 2000). Study by Maria Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino, 2006) assumed a theoretical model with greater weight to pull factors operating in the host country like image of a country, city and institutions.

Study by the McMahon (1992) found a positive correlation of pull factors like host country size in comparison to domestic country size. Pull factors collectively make an imperative model that explains students' motivation toward selecting a particular host country over others (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This study further

suggests that lack of access to quality education at home in developing countries makes most of push factors common across the board so it become important to evaluate what pull factors pertaining to particular country influence most students' decision to study abroad.

Students' Decision to Study Abroad

This decision is a difficult and involves many factors deciding to study abroad, selecting from range of host countries based on country knowledge and selecting host institution (Eder et al., 2010). The selection of host country is most important part of the decision to study abroad and pull factors play a vital role in helping students to prioritize a host country. Understanding of the students' decision-making process is an important element before we analyse the factors affecting this decision.

International students' study decision is almost similar to the other decisions about purchasing commercial products. It is important to understand the nature of product, here education is not a product it is a service. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of services (Maria Cubillo, Sanche & Cervino, 2006). According to Gronroos (1997), it is impossible to determine when the execution of service begins in general, but in case of higher education, service most probably begins when a student contacts to the host institutions by email or phone requesting for particular information about programmes. According to model suggested by Maria Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino (2006), consider 'purchase intention' as dependent variable, student's study abroad decision depends upon five factors: personal reasons, the effect of country image, influence by city image, institution image, and the evaluation of the program of study.

Pull Factors and Study Abroad Decision

Study by Eder, Smith and Pitt (2010) revealed a positive relationship between three pull factors (host institution location, host country geography and host country culture) and student motivation to study abroad. Korbchai (2014) disclosed a strong connection between pull factors and study abroad decision, these pull factors includes recommendations from family and friends and overall cost of study in host country. Family recommendation and their influence was strong predictor of decision to study abroad. In the study of Taiwanese students intending to study Australia and the USA (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). This study adapted six pull factors identified by the Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery (1997) that influence international students in selecting a host country. First factor is 'knowledge and awareness' of host country in the students' home country is an important motivator of selecting a particular host country. This factor is based on fact that how easily host country information is available in student home country, what is country image in terms of education quality and is host country qualification recognized in home country. Second factor is 'recommendation from family and friend' that acts as referral and a powerful motivator since study abroad decision is complex and expensive.

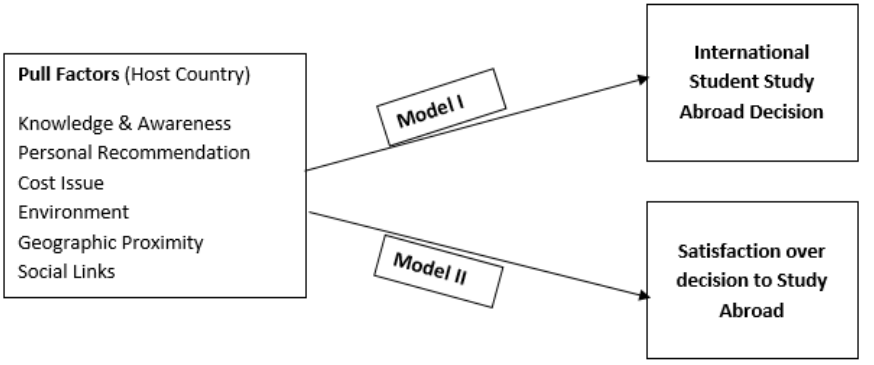
Friends, relatives and parents are crucial in refereeing student and assisting his final decision. Cost is the third most comprehensively influencing factor as it determines financial viability of host country. Cost issue covers living, tuition, travelling as well as social cost (like safety, crime and racial issues). Moreover, job prospects or part time work and going far away from home (social cost) are also integral part of this factor. Fourth factor is 'host country environment', which includes climate of host country, perception about study environment in it and level of excitement attached to it. Fifth and sixth factors are 'geographic proximity and social links'. Geographic proximity of host country that describes the time and geographic similarity exists between student's home and host country. Social

links determine if family or friend of student have already lived or studied in the host country.

Theoretical Framework

The adapted model suggests a positive relationship is expected in pull factors and students' decision to study abroad (Lavankura, 2013). It includes six key factors including the importance of country awareness, importance of personal recommendation by family and friends, importance of cost related to international education, the importance of environment of host country and importance of geographic proximity of host country. When students perceive them all positively then they intend to decide and select education destination in the abroad, thus, the general hypothesis is shown in Figure 1 while specific hypotheses of each model (figure 1) are presented separately.

Figure1. Theoretical Framework



Model I: Following are the hypothesis for Model I.

H1: There is significant positive relationship between knowledge and awareness of the host country and students' destination choice for Thailand

H2: There is significant positive relationship between recommendations from friends and relatives and students'

destination choice of Thailand.

H3: There is a positive relationship between cost and students' destination choice of Thailand.

H4: There is a positive relationship between environment and students' destination choice of Thailand.

H5: There is positive relationship between geographical proximity and students' destination choice of Thailand.

H6: There is significant relationship between social links and students' destination choice of Thailand.

Model II: following are the hypothesis for the model II.

H1: Knowledge and awareness of the host country is positively related with satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand

H2: There is positive relationship between recommendation from friends and relatives and satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand.

H3: There is positive relationship between cost and satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between environment and satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand.

H5: There is positive relationship between geographical proximity and satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand.

H6: There is significant relationship between social links and satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand.

Research Method

Sample and Procedure

This research study employs the quantitative research method. An online survey questionnaire was used to gather the responses on

pull factors. The target respondents were international students studying in various institutions of Thailand in different programmes such Bachelor, Masters or Ph.D. on both scholarships and self-finance. The sample has been drawn from top five international Higher Education Institutions of Thailand. The simple random sampling technique was used and online survey was disseminated through email and by sending online Google form through social media, circulating email to the students through university administration and by personally visiting some places. Total 251 respondents filled the survey questionnaire. As a result, only 245 questionnaires were used for analysis of this study. This study used the statistical packing for social sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data.

Questionnaire and Measurement

We adapted questionnaire and scale developed by various researchers for measuring pull factors. Survey was developed by the Mazzarol, Savery and Kemp (1996), items were further tested by the Korbchai (2014) for Thai student motivation to study Australia, the UK and USA. This contains 24 items having Likert scale measuring six variables. The students' overall satisfaction with these universities was measured through two items adapted from the study of Gruber, et al. (2010) after pilot study. The two items of overall satisfaction were measured with Likert and dichotomous scales respectively.

Data Analysis & Results

Descriptive Analysis of the Results

To assess the difference and weight of each pull component on student's decision making, simple descriptive analysis based on mean and standard deviation has been calculated.

As per collected data the 64.9% of the respondents were males and 35.1% of the respondents who filled the survey tool were females. Interesting fact about the respondent is their country of origin or

nationality which is 11 1 Majority of the respondents were South Asian and East Asian countries including Pakistan (22.9%), Myanmar (15.5%), Vietnam (15.1%), Bangladesh (8.6%), Nepal (6.9%) and Sri Lank (6.1%). However, other nationalities also include India, China, Indonesia, US, Germany, Laos etc. Majority of the respondents belong to Masters/Graduate programmes consist 63.7% of total sample size. Second category is Doctoral level students that are 28.2% and undergraduate students with 8.2% contribution.

Discussing about the field of study of international students enrolled in the targeted five universities also reveal some interesting results. Majority of the respondent who filled the survey questionnaire belong to Engineering (51.8%), Business (23.7%) and Health Sciences (15.5%). The remaining student belong to other field of studies including social sciences, natural sciences, computer and information technology (IT). The other important dimension of demographic information is the financial support to the international students. Interestingly, majority of the surveyed students (58.4%) have some sort of external financial support to pursue their studies in Thailand. Total students' percentage supported by their families to pursue higher education in Thailand is 41.6%. This shows that majority of the international students pursuing their degree programmes in Thailand are seeking some type of financial support.

Tale 1. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.448[b]	.200	.073	.47263
2	.681[a]	.464	.379	.57309

The summary table of regression (see Table 1) Model-I shows that independent variables (IV) explain 7.3% (with adjusted R square

value of 0.073) change or variation of dependent variable. It means that 7.3% of total change in intention to study Thailand (DV1) is depicted by five independents. The summary table of regression model also shows that independent variables explain 37.9% (with adjusted R square value of 0.379) change or variation of dependent variable. It means that 37.9% of total change in satisfaction over decision to study at Thailand for higher education (DV2) is depicted by five independent variables. Independent variables i.e. Knowledge and Awareness; Recommendation from Friends and Relatives; Cost Issue; Environment and Social Links; and Geographic Proximity and demographic variables.

Table 2. ANOVA

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.581	30	.353	1.579	.036
2	Regression	53.722	30	1.791	5.452	.000[b]

Table 2 depicting the ANOVA results for both models helps to explain whether model is fit or not. Keeping in view the value of F with 10% level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected for Model-I as F value is significant (Sig F = 036). This further explains that regression model applied in this study is fit for analysis and has some explanatory power. It is case with Model-II, with 10% level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected as F value is significant (Sig F = 000). This further explains that regression model applied in this study is fit for analysis and has good explanatory power.

Regression Analysis of Model 1: Destination Choice versus Pull Factors

The table 3 presents the results through coefficients output for regression equation of the data. The H1: aim to investigate the relationship between knowledge and awareness of the host country

and student's destination choice of Thailand. The result suggest that we partially accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) because only one item showed a positive significant relationship with dependent variable (β=0.170, p=0.049 at p<0.1 with 90% CL). The H2: propose the relationship between recommendations from friends and relatives and students' destination choice of Thailand. The result of this study did not show any significant relationship, as a result, we fail to reject null hypothesis for this variable. H3: the relationship between cost issue and student destination choice. Only two items showed positive relationship with significant values (β=0.185, p=0.039 & β=0.192, p=0.037 respectively at p<0.1 with 90% CL) which are; lower fees and lower travelling cost. We partially accept the alternative hypothesis H3. The H4: environment in host country is also partially accepted due to the fact that only one item out of three showed positive significant relationship (β=0.152, p=0.059 at p<0.1 with 90% CL) with student destination choice of Thailand. The H5 and H6 social links and geographic proximity of host country also rejected.

Table 3. Coefficients of Model-I

	Model	Model I Sig.	Model II Sig.
1	(Constant)	.784	.346
	Easy to Find Programs Info	.313	.190
	Country Knowledge	.618	**.009****
	Quality of Thai Education	.049**	.925
	Thai Qualification recognized	.189	**.008****
	Recom: from Parents/Family	.258	.601
	Reputation of institutions	.432	.668
	Recom: from Agent	.879	.273
	Recom: from Friends	.748	.140
	Lower Fees	.039**	.103

Lower Travel Cost	.037**	**.000****
Lower living Cost	.832	.134
Work/Job Opportunities	.929	.138
Safe Environment (Low Crime)	.311	.525
Racial Discrimination	.821	.631
Entry Qualification Accepted	.228	.220
Many Govt Institutions	.997	**.012****
Easy Getting Entry Visa	.404	**.005****
Scholarship/Financial Aid available	.227	.145
Comfortable Climate	.221	.708
Exciting Place to Live	.059**	.575
Quite-Studious place to study	.615	.431
Friends/Relatives Already Studied here	.310	.007**
Friends/Relatives Living/Lived here	.139	.181
Thailand nearby to Home Country	.113	.796
Gender	.056**	.221
Age of Respondents	.291	**.014****
Education Program Enrolled	.828	.124
Field of Study	.094**	.145
Nationality	.471	**.008****
Financial Support Provided	.665	.693

Regression Analysis of Model II: Satisfaction over Study Abroad Decision versus Pull Factors

The summary table of regression model shows that independent variables explain 37.9% (with adjusted R square value of 0.379) change or variation of dependent variable (see table 4). It means that 37.9% of total change in satisfaction over decision to study at Thailand for higher education (DV2) is depicted by five independent variables i.e. Knowledge and Awareness, Recommendation from Friends and Relatives, Cost Issue, Environment and Social Links and Geographic Proximity and demographic variables.

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	.681[a]	.464	.379	.57309

b. Predictors: (Constant), K&A, Recommendations, CI, Environment, Social Link & Geographic Proximity

Table 5 demonstrating the ANOVA results explains whether model is fit or not. Keeping in view the value of F with 10% level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected as F value is significant (Sig F = 000). This further explains that regression model applied in this study is fit for analysis and has good explanatory power.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	53.722	30	1.791	5.452	.000[b]
	Residual	62.074	189	.328		
	Total	115.795	219			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. K&A, Recommendations, CI, Environment, Social Link & Geographic Proximity

Another five hypotheses have been developed to answer this research question of Model-II. The H1: relationship between knowledge and awareness of host country and their relationship with student satisfaction over decision to study abroad Thailand for higher education. Two items out of four showed positive significant relationship with dependent variables (β=0.169, p=0.009 and β0.19, p=0.008 respectively with p<0.1 at 90% CL). We partially accept the alternative H1. H2: investigates the association between recommendations from friends and relatives. It did not show any

positive significant relationship with dependent variable. H3: investigates the relationship between cost issues and student satisfaction over decision to study in Thailand. Three out of ten items showed positive significant relationship (β=0.275, p=0.000 & β=0.176, p=0.012 & β=0.179, p=0.005 respectively at p<0.1 with 90% CL). As a result, we partially reject the null hypothesis H3. The H4 is proposing the relationship between pull factor of environment and student satisfaction over study in Thailand decision. The result did not show any positive significant relationship so we reject alternative hypothesis (H4). The H5 and H6 are about the relationship between social link and geographic proximity of the host country in which one item out of three showed a positive significant relationship (β=0.169, p=0.007 at p<0,1 with 90% CL) with dependent variable. So, we partially reject null hypothesis (H5). See Table 6.

Table 6. Coefficients of Model II

Model		Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
2	(Constant)		-.945	.346
	Easy to Find Programs Info	.085	1.316	.190
	Country Knowledge	.169	2.622	**.009****
	Quality of Thai Education	-.007	-.094	.925
	Thai Qualification recognized	.190	2.702	**.008****
	Recom: from Parents/Family	-.037	-.524	.601
	Reputation of institutions	.031	.430	.668
	Recom: from Agent	.068	1.100	.273
	Recom: from Friends	.091	1.481	.140
	Lower Fees	.119	1.639	.103
	Lower Travel Cost	.275	3.864	**.000****
	Lower living Cost	.117	1.504	.134
	Work/Job Opportunities	.100	1.488	.138
	Safe Environment (Low	.045	.637	.525

Racial Discrimination	-.031	-.481	.631
Entry Qualification Accepted	.082	1.229	.220
Many Govt. Institutions	.176	2.536	**.012****
Easy Getting Entry Visa	.179	2.867	**.005****
Scholarship/Financial Aid	.098	1.464	.145
Comfortable Climate	.024	.375	.708
Exciting Place to Live	.038	.562	.575
Quite-Studious place to study	-.061	-.790	.431
Friends/Relatives Already	.169	2.718	.007**
Friends/Relatives	.099	1.343	.181
Thailand nearby to Home	.019	.258	.796
Gender	.073	1.228	.221
Age of Respondents	.155	2.485	**.014****
Education Program Enrolled	-.096	-1.545	.124
Degree Program Enrolled	-.093	-1.463	.145
Nationality	.167	2.677	**.008****
Financial Support Provided	.027	.396	.693
Overall Satisfaction	.168	2.43	.008**
Recommending to Others	.171	.201	.007**

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Discussion

Model I Discussion

This study results shows that knowledge and awareness have partially positive relationship with student destination choice of Thailand for higher education. According to previous studies, especially by Cubillo Sanchez, and Cervino (2006) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); greater the knowledge and awareness of a particular host country, better the perception about education quality in that particular country and higher the intention of international students to select that country for higher education. Another important factor measuring relationship is recommendations from friends and relatives & social links. Previous

studies suggest that friends and family has been very influencing factors through recommendations to students in selecting host country (Duan, 1997; Zimitat & Chen, 2006; Lawley, 1998). However, the result of this study is different from most of previous studies but in line with the study of Korbchai (2014) which suggest that recommendations from friends and relatives do not have significant relationship with students' destination choice. The third pull factor that influenced international student is Cost Issue. Earlier studies consider cost issue as notorious with inconsistent results. It has been investigated as an essential for western students, but the findings by Lawley (1998) revealed that cost was not much important issue for those students supported by families. This study found cost issue as partially significant influencing factor in international student decision choice. These findings are partially consistent with studies carried out by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002).The fifth pull factor investigated is environment of the host country. Previous studies suggest that environment factor has also been inconsistent throughout many studies conducted in Asia. Korbchai (2014) argue that the reason can be environment construct itself. Mixed elements within this construct are identified to differ throughout the studies carried out in the area of international education. Other researchers believe that country image may also influence student perception and attitude toward a particular country environment (Palacio et al., 2002). The result of this study is in line with previous research work suggesting environment with partially significant.

Model II Discussion

In second model, the first pull factor is Knowledge and Awareness of host country. The results of this study show that knowledge and awareness have positive relationship with students' satisfaction over decision to study abroad in Thailand. The second pull factor is recommendations from friends and relatives. Results of this study suggest that recommendations from friends and relatives do not have significant relationship with students' satisfaction over the

decision to study abroad (Thailand). The third pull factor that influenced international students' satisfaction is issue of cost (Financial & Social) associated with study abroad. This study found cost issue as partially influencing factor in international students' satisfaction over the decision to study abroad (Thailand). The fourth pull factor investigated is environment of host country. The result of this study suggested that environment did not show significant relationship with students' satisfaction. The fifth pull factor is social links & geographic proximity of host country which measures the influence of friends and relatives. Earlier literature suggests that this factor influence strongly on student decision when alumni of particular school or institution suggest and influence on student decision. However, we do not have any evidence that suggest the influence of this factor on students' satisfaction over study abroad decision. The results of this study suggest that this pull factor influence partially on students' level of satisfaction over the decision to study abroad

During this study, researchers faced few limitations. Firstly, using only country-based pull factors to investigate students' decision to study abroad in Thailand for higher education. Other study may be carried out in Thai context using whole push-pull model, which can give more holistic results in terms of push factors, pull factors and personal factors affecting international students in selecting Thailand as higher education destination.

The second limitation of this study is smaller sample size. This study collected data from 245 respondents, however; international students' population is more than 20 thousand. Another study can be carried out by collecting data from a large number of international students studying in universities in the country. It will give more comprehensive results and more robust findings, which can be generalized in the context of international students in Thailand. Last, this study is focused only on quantitative research method. However, another study can be carried out using

quantitative and qualitative (Mix-method) approaches, which may collect perception and experiences of international students.

Conclusion

knowledge & awareness (KA) of host country, cost issue (CI) and environment (Env) of the host country are three pull factors that positively affect the international student decision to study abroad Thailand for higher education. Knowledge & awareness of host country, cost issue and social links & geographic proximity (SG) of host country are positively related to international students' satisfaction over the decision to study abroad. This study is important from academic and managerial perspective. May be little literature is available on this topic. This study fills the gap and provides an empirical evidence to the academicians about the pull factors that may influence on the international student study abroad decision making. Additionally, this study also explores a new area by investigating pull factors that affecting student satisfaction over decision to study abroad (Thailand) for higher education destination. The findings of this study can also help the management of Higher Education Institutions to get insight into the issue pertaining to student decision making and what possible factors influence their decision. As a result, the insight will help them to formulate marketing strategies effectively to attract international students.

References

Agarwal, V.B. & Winkler, D.R. (1985). Foreign demand for United States higher education: A study of developing countries in the eastern hemisphere. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 33*(3), 623-644.

Binsardi, A. & Ekwulugo, F. (2003). International marketing of British education: research on the students' perception and the UK market penetration, *Marketing Intelligence &*

Planning, *21*(5). 318-327.

Brown, R. & Carasso, H. (2013). *Everything for sale? The marketization of UK higher education.* Routledge.

Chapleo, C. & O'Sullivan, H. (2017). Contemporary thought in higher education marketing, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 2* (2), 159-161.

Chen, C. & Zimitat, C. (2006). Understanding Taiwanese students' decision-making factors regarding Australian international higher education, *International Journal of Education Management*, *20*(2), 91-100.

Dann, G. M. S. (1977). Anomie, ego-enhancement and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 4*(4), 184–194.

Daquila, T. C. & Huang, S. (2013). Introductory editorial for a special theme of the journal of studies in international education: internationalizing higher education in Southeast Asia—government and institutional responses, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *17*(5), 624-628.

Duan, J.P. (1997). The influence of various factors on international students in selecting universities: a South Australia study of Chinese students from Hong Kong and Malaysia, (PhD Thesis). University of South Australia.

Eder, J., Smith, W.W. & Pitts, R.E. (2010). Exploring factors influencing student study abroad destination choice, *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, *10*(3), 232-250.

Gibbs, P. & Knapp, M. (2012). Marketing higher and further education: An educator's guide to promoting courses, departments and institutions. New York: Routledge.

Gronroos, C. (1997). Value drive relational marketing: from product to resources and competencies, *Journal of Marketing*

Management, *13*(5), 407-419.

Gruber, T., Fuß, S., Voss, R. & Gläser-Zikuda, M. (2010). Examining student satisfaction with higher education services: Using a new measurement tool, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *23*(2), 105-123.

Hayes, T. (2007). Delphi study of the future of marketing of higher education, *Journal of Business Research*, *60*(9), 927-931.

Hemsley-Brown, J. (2012). The best education in the world: Reality, repetition or cliché? International students' reasons for choosing an English university, *Studies in Higher Education*, *37*(8), 1005-1022.

Hemsley-Brown, J. & Oplatka, I. (2006). Universities in a competitive global marketplace: A systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *19*(4), 316-338.

Higher Education & Research Act (2017). Implementation of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Retrieved from: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/briefing-higher-education-research-act-implementation.pdf. (accessed 15 January 2017)

Ho, R. (2006). *Handbook of univariate and multivariate data analysis and interpretation with SPSS.* New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Ivy, J. (2001). Higher education institution image: a correspondence analysis approach, *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(6/7), 276 -282.

Kirp, D.L. (2009). *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the bottom line: The marketing of higher education*. Harvard University Press.

Lavankura, P. (2013). Internationalizing higher education in

Thailand Government and university responses, *Journal of studies in international education*, *17*(5), 663-676.

María Cubillo, J., Sánchez, J. & Cerviño, J. (2006). International students' decision-making process, *International Journal of Educational Management*, *20*(2), 101-115.

Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G.N. (2002). Push-pull factors influencing international student destination choice, *International Journal of Educational Management, 16*(2), 82-90.

Mazzarol, T., Kemp, S. & Savery, L. (1997). *International students who choose not to study in Australia: An examination of Taiwan and Indonesia.* Canberra: Australian International Education Foundation.

McMahon, M.E. (1992). Higher education in a world market. *Higher Education*, *24*(4), 465-482.

Niphan, P.N. (2005). *Internationalizing Thai Higher Education: Examining Policy Implementation.* (PhD Thesis), University of Leeds.

Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) 2016. Ministry of Education Thailand. Retrieved from http://www.mua.go.th /home.html. Accessed on 23 January 2017.

Palacio, A.B., Meneses, D.G. & Perez Perez, J.P. (2002). The Configuration of university image and its relationship with satisfaction of students, *Journal of Education Administration*, *40*(5), 486-504

Peng, Z., Lawley, M. & Perry, C. (2000). Modelling and testing effects of country, corporate and brand images on consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention. *In Proceedings of ANZMAC 2000 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference*. Held on November 28-

December 1st, 2000. School of Marketing and Management, Griffith University.

Peterson, R.A. & Jolibert, A. J. (1995). A meta-analysis of country-of-origin effects. *Journal of International business studies*, *26*(4), 883-900.

Rhein, D. (2016). Westernisation and the Thai higher education system: past and present, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *48*(3), 261-274.

Shah, M., Sid, N. C. & Bennett, L. (2013). Factors influencing student choice to study at private higher education institutions, *Quality Assurance in Education*, *21*(4), 402-416.

Srikatanyoo, N., & Gnoth, J. (2002). Country image and international tertiary education, *Journal of Brand Management*, *10*(2), 139-146.

The Nation (2009). High hopes to be Asia's international education hub. Retrieved from: http:// www.nationmultimedia.com/ 2009/10/11/national/national_30114200.php.

The Telegraph. (2017). Why the higher education bill is bad news for students? Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk /education/2017/01/06/higher-education-bill-bad-news-students/ (accessed 10 January 2017.)

Tolman, E.C. (1959). Principles of purposive behaviour. In S. Koch (Ed.) *Psychology: A Study of a Science* (pp. 92–157). New York: McGraw-Hill.