

A Study of Thai Students' Selection of New Zealand as Study Destination

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Abstract

The number of international students who choose to study in New Zealand continues to rise from 2019 onwards. Each year, more Thai students are considering pursuing their studies in English-speaking countries, especially New Zealand. This study is a comprehensive summary of previous research on educational topics and aims to explore why Thai students choose New Zealand, to investigate the criteria of push and pull factors that students consider before making a final decision about the study destination, and to explore why New Zealand is an attractive study destination for Thai students. The study reveals multiple reasons why students study in New Zealand, including family preferences, personal goals and preferences, and benefits perceived from graduating overseas. The essential push factor for selecting New Zealand as a study destination is the disadvantages of studying in my home country. The main two pull factors are New Zealand's attractiveness, such as the green and clean environment, multi-culture, safe surroundings, and peaceful atmosphere. The New Zealand government's roles and support include convenient visa application, job opportunities, and stay in the country or immigration options after graduation. The main reasons why New Zealand is an attractive study destination for Thai students include university characteristics, the high quality of education, the public service such as accommodation, transportation, the low cost of living, and the easy-going style of New Zealand. The study results could benefit the government and private sectors regarding planning and marketing.

KEYWORDS: Thai students, study destination, push and pull factors, Thailand, New Zealand

1 INTRODUCTION

Thailand and New Zealand have long connected in education (Department of Trade Negotiations, 2009). More than 3,000 Thai students come to study in New Zealand each year (Migration Education International, 2019). New Zealand's government has developed strategies to recruit new students from overseas via various media channels. For example, a government-funded agency named "Study in New Zealand" or "THINKNEW" has run a series of marketing campaigns to draw attention and attract Thai students to choose New Zealand

as an overseas study destination (Post Up News, 2015). Recent data reveal that the number of international students continues to rise in 2019-2029 (Education New Zealand, 2018a, 2018c; The PIE News team, 2020). Previous data show that almost half of international students come from Asian countries (Zhong, 2014). The most important markets for international students studying in New Zealand are China, India, Japan, and South Korea (Education Counts, 2019).

International education is the fourth largest industry in New Zealand (Department for Trade, 2018). In 2018, it contributed 5.1 billion dollars to the country. Statistics reveal that 4.8 billion dollars come from international students visiting New Zealand, and 0.3 billion dollars originated from education and training goods and services delivered offshore (Education New Zealand, 2018b). The education industry creates more business opportunities for different people and increases the employment rate in New Zealand. Education income has risen in recent years for many reasons, including a successful education strategy. The statistics mentioned above show that New Zealand has received much revenue from taking international students into the country. The contribution of such value would help support New Zealand's economy, society, culture, environment, and development of public services and job creation. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the factors or characteristics of New Zealand as the county that contribute to the decision made by international students concerning why they come to study there. New Zealand has been regarded as one of the leading education destinations worldwide (Zhong, 2014). Students from around the world, such as North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. There are several reasons, in general, why international students choose New Zealand as their education destination. According to a recent New Zealand report, international students are expected to grow from about 5 million in 2015 to 7-8 million by 2025 (Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, 2018).

This study aims (1) to explore why Thai students choose New Zealand, (2) to investigate the criteria of push and pull factors that students consider before making a final decision about the study destination, and (3) to explore why New Zealand is an attractive study destination for Thai students. This study would also recommend a strategy for New Zealand to improve its educational products and services to receive more international students from Thailand and overseas. It also expects that the study results would benefit Thai and other international students from the better education opportunity provided by New Zealand.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 New Zealand as an education destination: Why New Zealand?

Reasons why students choose New Zealand as their education destination are the image and reputation of New Zealand (Universities New Zealand, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e; Zhong, 2014). New Zealand began its international education in the early 1950s via the Commonwealth's Colombo Plan (Universities New Zealand, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g; Zhong, 2014)). Since then, there has been a large number of international students coming to study in the country. Studying in New Zealand could provide an opportunity to pursue better opportunities and lifestyle changes (Universities New Zealand, 2020d, 2020e; Wang, 2014). New Zealand offers a world-class education, and all its eight universities are ranked within the top 3% of the world (Universities New Zealand, 2020e). New Zealand's natural

habitat also attracts visitors (Zhong, 2014). The impression that New Zealand is a green, clean, welcoming, honest and safe place to study (Universities New Zealand, 2020e; Zhong, 2014). It is also an essential factor that draws several students to the country each year. It provides an English-speaking environment as well as the experience of 'Western' culture (Zhong, 2014). Moreover, the students get good value for their money, and the country's entry requirements are lenient (Zhong, 2014). Previous research indicates that the low value of the New Zealand dollar (compared to Australia and the UK is appealing (Zhong, 2014). More importantly, New Zealand has provided the potential opportunity to stay and work in the country after graduating. The students graduating from New Zealand are more likely to get suitable employment (Universities New Zealand, 2020e).

New Zealand has been chosen to be a destination for the international study of students around the world. Its reputation concerning the country's image of green and clean, as well as the quality of academic services and programs provided by the education institution, made it one of the top 10 countries that international students want to pursue their study there.

Proposition 1: Top reasons for Thai students to choose New Zealand as their study destination.

2.2 International Thai students in New Zealand

Thailand and New Zealand have long connected in education (Department of Trade Negotiations, 2009). More than 3,000 Thai students come to study in New Zealand yearly (Migration Education International, 2019). New Zealand government has developed strategies to recruit new students from overseas via various media channels. For example, a government-funded agency named "Study in New Zealand" or "THINKNEW" has run a series of marketing campaigns to draw attention and attract Thai students to choose New Zealand as an overseas study destination (Post Up News, 2015).

The relationship between Thailand and New Zealand has been established for decades. The Thai government has engaged in globalization and encouraged Thai students to study English as a second language. English remains the most commonly taught foreign language in schools and universities. Thai students must learn as a requirement for degree completion (Baker and Jarunthawatchai, 2017). Therefore, Thai students seek to study English overseas. Thus, New Zealand is a destination for Thai students to come to learn as it is believed that New Zealand provides good academic quality and so on (Li, 2003). More details of the analysis on why Thai students choose New Zealand as their study destination, not other countries, are described in the push and pull factors below.

2.3 Understanding international students' decision-making criteria and processes

Globalization and internationalization are the trends that influence international students to study abroad. The factors influencing students' decision-making in selecting a study destination are summarized as shown in the picture below;

According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Mazzarol et al. (2003), the push-pull theory was used to understand the decision-making process to select a host country and institutions. The main idea of this model is that people from an unsatisfactory condition in the home country would move to other places or new countries that provide better opportunities or conditions (Alkarzon, 2015).

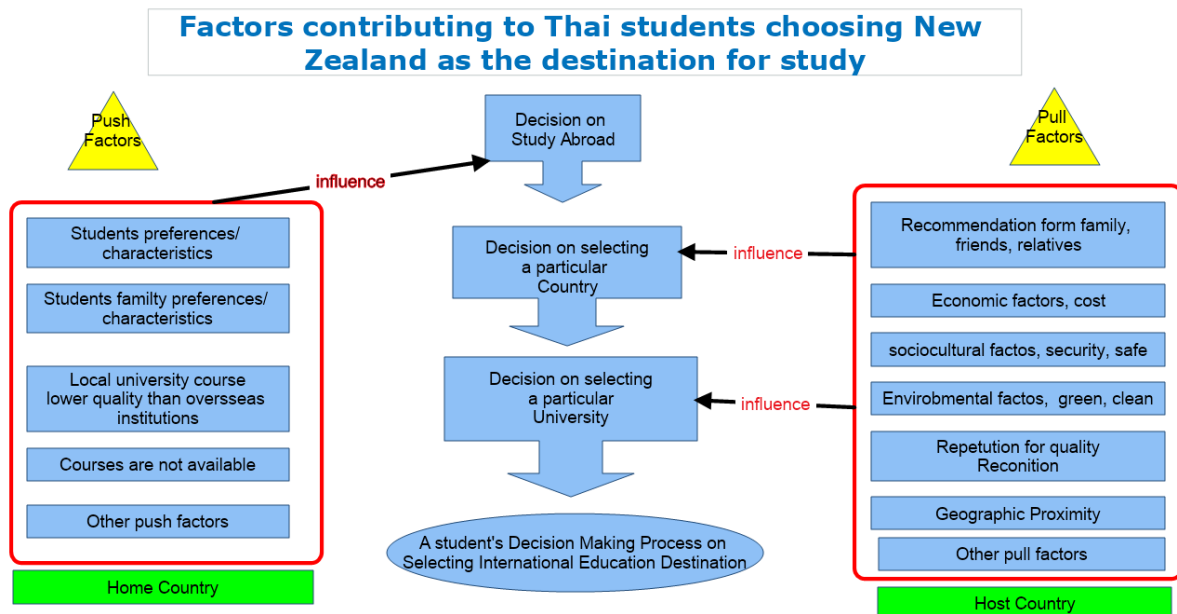


Figure 1: Push pull model and students decision-making on studying abroad (Alkarzon, 2015; Zhong, 2014)

As shown in Figure 1, the push-pull model comprises two main components; the push factors that drive students out of their home countries (such as Thailand) and the pull factors that attract students to host countries (such as New Zealand). Therefore, in more detail, the push and pull factors describe below;

2.3.1 Push factors

The push factors that drive Thai students to leave their home country and pursue their future overseas are as follows (Alkarzon, 2015; Zhong, 2014).

1. Students will study overseas to take advantage of their utility and reduce risks.
2. The institution's national with ranking and prestige.
3. Perceptions of a better quality of education overseas.
4. Availability of technology-based programs overseas.
5. Most information sources students use to make decisions are advice from family members, peers, and counsellors.
6. Students' family-related - personal characteristics also play a crucial role, i.e., parent's education level, nationality, and gender.
7. Personal desires include language capability and self-efficacy, the apparent benefit of studying overseas, having international friends and relatives, and having international experience.
8. Students desire to experience another culture.
9. Campus safety and education costs
10. The student's parents' influences.

To conclude, the student's decision-making to study overseas is influenced by numerous personal and situational factors (Phang, 2013).

2.3.2 Pull factors

The pull factors refer to the factors that attract students to study in the chosen destination or host countries (in this case, New Zealand). Pull factors include the followings (Zhong, 2014).

1. Students chose an institution where they felt safety was secured.
2. Students chose a school where they felt free from any form of discrimination.
3. Students consider cultural diversity, cultural environment, and racial security.
4. Students sought institutions that provided the opportunity to improve a second language especially English.
5. The consideration of the geographic location of the host country and the institution's academic reputation.
6. The range of available courses and the staff's qualifications and credentials. A large number of students chose a university because of its various courses provided. Moreover, students usually choose a study destination that recognizes their academic qualifications from their home country.
7. The status of the host nation in addition to the local environment surrounding the education institution.
8. The reputation of an educational institution, especially the quality of education delivered, the living condition of international students, the affordable cost of a stay, and the cost of living (for example, day-to-day expenses, accommodation, transport expenses, meals, low tuition fees, etc.).
9. The institution's qualifications are directly related to a student's future career.
10. The opportunities to develop students' careers by allowing them to work in the host country and the chance to immigrate.
11. The geographical proximity of the host country.
12. The knowledge and awareness of the study destination.
13. Institutions deliver other services to international students rather than its facilities and students for example, the attractiveness of the cultural activities in the area.
14. Recommendations from family members, friends, and society play a key role in students deciding on a study destination.
15. Suggestions or word-of-mouth recommended by former alumni of foreign institutions.
16. Students likely want to study with their friends; therefore, they are likely to choose institutions where they can join their friends.

In the review of the literature mentioned above, it is evident that many factors could be affected students' decisions to study overseas.

Proposition 2: The essential criteria of push and pull factors that students consider before making a final decision about the study destination.

2.4 The characteristics of New Zealand, its outstanding features, and the impact on international student's decision-making

New Zealand has an image and reputation for the high quality of education. It is one of the British Commonwealth comprising the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, South Africa,

and New Zealand. The Commonwealth uses the same politics, economy, and education (Jiang, 2005). As New Zealand began its international education in the early 1950s via Commonwealth's Colombo Plan (Zhong, 2014), it brought many international students to study in the country since. Apart from the high quality of the educational system, New Zealand's eight universities are among 3% of world-class ranked universities (Universities New Zealand, 2020c). This information guarantees that international students will study at a world-class rank university.

Furthermore, new Zealand provides an English-speaking environment and encourages the image of the experience of western culture. This image is another strong selling point. The impression of a 'green and clean' country is another factor that draws students worldwide into the country. Its natural habitat is one key point that attracts international students to visit and experience it. The perception of the students toward New Zealand that the government has low corruption and a high level of honesty and fairness also earned the trust of overseas students. In addition to the uniqueness, New Zealand education enables graduates to receive the opportunity to get suitable employment, stay in the country after graduation, and pursue a better lifestyle.

2.5 The student's decision-making process in the selection of an international destination

The table shows the benefits of international students to the host countries, including generating revenue, creating jobs; resolving workforce shortages; helping the tourism sector; providing the knowledge economy; enabling students to realize intercultural experiences, and supporting their host and home country. In addition, the findings from previous studies reveal that globalization and internationalization are the current trends that influence parents and students to decide to study abroad.

Proposition 3: The main reasons why Thai students choose New Zealand as an attractive study destination.

3 Discussion

As mentioned earlier, Thailand and New Zealand have had a long relationship regarding the education sector. About 3,000 to 4,000 students from Thailand come to study in New Zealand every year (Migration Education International, 2019; Singh, 2011). Thailand and New Zealand have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in education. Thailand hires New Zealand consultants and teacher-trainers in environmental science, innovation, and forensic aspects of criminology. The MOU provides for the forging of institutional linkages between schools and universities of the two countries. From the above, it is clear that the two countries have established a good relationship, and as a result, the students would have knowledge about New Zealand's education system. Therefore, it is not difficult for them to pursue further education in New Zealand. The findings from previous studies reveal that the New Zealand government has put considerable effort into attracting international students into the country via strategic planning development, marketing campaign, online activities, etc.

Table 1: The Benefits of International Students to the Host Country

Benefits	Details	Researchers
1. Benefits to national and regional economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As a significant source of income for the country ● Generated a large amount of revenue for the schools, community, and cities ● Helps speed up the development of the city infrastructure projects ● Source used to boost university revenues ● It helps the institutions remain competitive in the schooling market ● Allows the institution to benefit from cultural diversity in the student population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, 2018; Bang, 2013; Buddhichiwin, 2013; Kalafatellis et al. , 2018; Qin, 2003; and Zhong, 2014)
2. Benefit of tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● International students are keen to travel within the host country ● Students' families and friends visit students as tourists ● Graduates keep in contact with their friends, host families, or institutions ● After graduation, students are motivated to return for a visit ● Alumni influence in promoting two-way travel between international students' home country and host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, 2018)

Benefits	Details	Researchers
<p>3. Benefits to soft diplomacy and international trade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● International education helps the government promote cultural understanding ● Avoid relationship conflict ● Promote a significant and positive influence on bilateral trade flows between the host and home countries ● International education facilitates business ties, ● Students prefer to do business with the host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Ministry of Education, 2014; 2018).
<p>4. Benefits to business, innovation, and the workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● International students have made a significant contribution to the industry by the studying ● International students who graduated and migrated into the host country have shown to do better than domestic candidates ● Produce good health for the economy of the country ● International education provides employment ● Create a job in a learning institution and another related job in related industries such as accommodation, retail, transportation, and tourism ● Help reduce skill s hortage after finishing the study ● Students' language skills and cultural relationships help support tourists and related business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, 2018)

Benefits	Details	Researchers
5. Benefits of community-based, cultural, and educational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand students have learned and experienced international capabilities by learning alongside international students • It helps "broaden domestic students' perspectives and develop their language and intercultural skills." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, 2018)

4 Conclusion

This study is a comprehensive summary of previous research on educational topics and aims (1) to explore why Thai students choose New Zealand, (2) to investigate the criteria of push and pull factors that students consider before making a final decision about the study destination, and (3) to explore why New Zealand is an attractive study destination for Thai students. There are several reasons why Thai students choose New Zealand as their study destination. From the literature review, it can be concluded that The study reveals multiple reasons why students choose to study in New Zealand, including family preferences, personal goals and preferences, and benefits perceived from graduating overseas.

Several push and pull factors play critical roles in students' decision-making process of selecting a country, university, or city for their study. For Thai students, family expectations strongly influence, among other factors. The essential push factor for selecting New Zealand as a study destination is the disadvantages of studying in home country. The main two pull factors are New Zealand's attractiveness, such as the green and clean environment, multi-culture, safe surroundings, and peaceful atmosphere. In addition, the New Zealand government's roles and support include convenient visa application, job opportunities, and stay in the country or immigration options after graduation. The main reasons why New Zealand is an attractive study destination for Thai students include university characteristics, the high quality of education, the public service such as accommodation, transportation, the low cost of living, and the easy-going style of New Zealand. Students make the decision through three stages of selection processes, which are 1) students making a decision to study overseas, 2) students making the decision on the country they want to study in, and 3) students making decisions about the university they want to study.

The review of literature also suggests that the decision-making of the students is influenced by 'push' and 'pull' factors which are 1) the unavailability of courses/programs required by the student in the home country institutions; 2) the unique characteristics of the country (New Zealand), its reputation, the quality of education, and government support; 3) the factors concerning the university's characteristics such as the courses, the environment, facility, support, services and so on. According to Pimpa (2003; 2004), before making a final

decision on the choices of study destination, Thai students would pick the choice of country, university, city, and academic program. Overall, this study confirms the validation of the push and pull theoretical model and its critical contributory factors in the decision-making process of international students. It also suggests that all stakeholders, such as government, home, and host institutions, communities, related educational agents, and other services-related provided, should consider this model for further improvement of the education services and products in order to encourage more international students to come to study in the country.

It was found that the topic of research is fascinating in many aspects. The researchers suggest that future researchers conduct a quantitative study on this research topic. Further study should focus on the influence of 'push' and 'pull' factors in the area that this study lacks. Therefore, a longitudinal survey of international students' perceptions and experiences before and after arriving in New Zealand is suggested. Next, this study does not conduct the disadvantages of Thai students studying at English-speaking countries to homecountry, future researchers may conduct a study discussing about losing future skilled workers in Thailand. Other areas of study, such as pastoral care, or mental support from the institution, should also be focused. It may help identify the real problem and point to the new factors that students, universities, or government should pay attention.

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