

# STUDENT MOTIVATIONS TO STUDY ABROAD – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN UK

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(Received: October 02, 2017; Revised: November 27, 2017; Accepted: November 29, 2017)

## ABSTRACT

This study adapts Push and Pull Theory in educational tourism to explore and measure factors that make students studying abroad in addition to considering travel behaviours of them while being in UK. By using the survey data from 125 Vietnamese students currently studying in United Kingdom. Vietnamese students decide to study abroad to get a better education than domestic one, improve job prospects as well as have a better understanding of western countries' culture. Quality of the course and university is also considered when making decision. Besides, pull factor related to destination is the last factor affect students' motivations. When Vietnamese students study at the host country, they seem to travel frequently and stay longer per trip. Vietnamese students also prefer hotel/motel than youth hostel in terms of accommodation.

**Keywords:** International student; Motivations to study abroad; Push and pull theory; Travel behaviours.

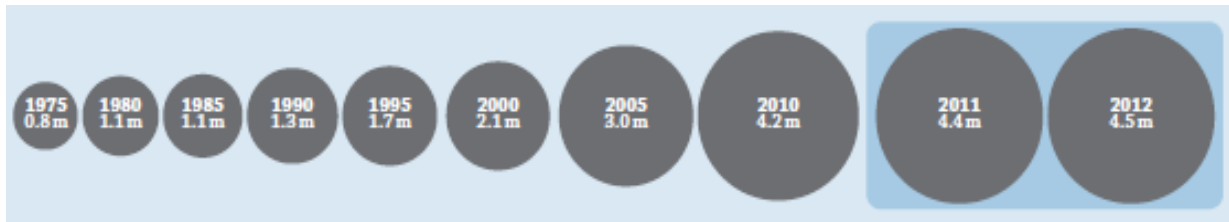
## 1. Introduction

Studying abroad is not a new phenomenon, especially in higher education level. In fact, Altbach and Teichler (2001) argued that the 21st century might be called the century of education. In the world of economic globalisation, the need for human resources which can work effectively in international environment becomes more essential (Vaicekauskas et al., 2013). Organisations hunt for employees who have linguistics capability (Tremblay 2005) as well as intercultural skills, international experience (Daly and Barker, 2005). Studying abroad is one of the most effective methods for graduates to equip themselves those skills and become more employable.

There is no surprise that the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their countries of origin has witnessed the sustainable growth since 1975. Over 37 years, the increase was more than 560%, reached 4.5 million of foreign students in 2012 (Figure 1). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are considered as top destinations which have

75% of all foreign students study in (OECD 2014). In addition, EU countries hold the largest proportion with 48% of foreign students, followed by North America with 21% and Asia with 18% (ibid). More specially, US, UK and Germany are top three countries of destination respectively and the top six countries which include top three and France, Australia, Canada occupy more than 50% of the market (OECD, 2014).

On the demand side, with the young population, fast economic growth and the value of education in societies, Asia is the region which has the highest number of international students studying abroad with 53% of total (OECD 2014). In some particular host countries, the proportion of Asian students among international students is extraordinarily high such as 94% (Japan), 93% (Korea), 82% (Australia), 73% (US), and 70% (New Zealand) (ibid). In country level, China is leading country of origin of students studying abroad with 22% of the market. Table 1 shows the top ten sending countries of international students enrolled tertiary education outside their home nation.



**Figure 1.** Long-term growth in the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their home countries

*Source: OECD (2014, p. 344)*

There are five objectives discussed in this study:

- To explore contributing factors students base on to choose a destination to study.
- To identify the relationship between contributing factors and the satisfaction of students while studying in UK.
- To investigate the future intention of student after experiencing UK education.
- To explain descriptively the travel behaviours of Vietnamese students.
- To discover the differences and similarities in travel behaviours in terms of different characteristics such as gender, marital status.

## 2. Literature review

### *Push and Pull concept*

“Push and pull” concept has become the most common tool for educational researchers to explain the international student choice of country and institution (Wilkins et al., 2012). Students tend to study abroad because of the lack of capacity and opportunities in their home countries (Altbach, 2004), relatively lower educational quality, the unavailability of some particular subjects (Safahieh and Singh, 2006) as well as social and political issues (Maringe and Carter, 2007). Bourke (2000) in his research found that the most crucial reason that make student wish to study abroad is enhanced career prospects. The second significant factor is the chance to meet new friends and explore new culture. Chen (2007) supported that idea by suggesting one of the motivations is that the foreign degree could improve the job prospect and the chance to have better salary and promotions.

On the other hand, some of the “pull” factors discussed frequently in many researches is likely related to academic and institutional aspects. For example, among all of push – pull factors in Chen’s study (2007), the academic factor which includes criteria such as the reputation of university/programme, the quality of university/programme and the ranking of university/programme received relatively high scores. The finding was confirmed again by Abubakar and his colleagues (2010). However, with the aim of exploring travel behaviours, this research is going to focus on those factors students choose university that associated with destination. In general, the impact of country image on purchasing decision of any products or services has been investigated in various studies (Javalgi et al., 2001). In addition, Cubillo et al. (2006) argued that the city image plays a role as important as country does in international students’ decision. In their suggested model, a destination factor could comprise weather, cost of living, international environment, development level, safety and security. Moreover, there are few more factors mentioned in other studies that are quite important, such as opportunity to live in a diverse culture (Mavondo et al., 2004), host country experience (Maringe and Carter, 2007) or travel opportunities (Porumbu and Necsoi, 2013)

### *Educational tourism – A lucrative tourism sector*

This market is estimated as a multi-billion dollar business by professionals and

academics (Chadee and Cutler, 1996). According to StudentMarketing (2014), the youth, student and educational travel market occupy more than 20% of all international arrivals and create US\$ 194 billion in 2012. School breaks and holidays always offer university students the time to travel (Mattila et al., 2001). In detail, with around 20 weeks of free time for holidays each year and low rate of full-time employment (Davies and Lea, 1995), university students have few commitments and high propensity for travel. There is a common bias that students or youth travellers have small budget and do not spend a lot during their trip but actually from the observation of the industry, they tend to stay longer, spend more and travel more frequently than average international tourist (StudentMarketing, 2014). Additionally, the market is estimated to reach 300 million arrivals by 2020 and value US\$ 320 billion.

***VFR visits to international students – a significant source should not be neglected***

With the nature of international student staying away from home for long time, their participation rate in VFR (visiting friends and relatives) tourism as a host or traveller is relatively higher among university students than general population (Chadee and Cutler, 1996, Michael et al., 2004). Michael et al. (2004) in their study also suggested considering the lifetime value of tourists since there is a significant positive relationship between VFR travel and repeat visitation. Furthermore, VFR travellers seem to take their visits in the off-season and lengthening the period of time at the destination (Noordewier, 2002; Hu and Morrison, 2002).

**3. Methodology**

***3.1. Questionnaire Design and Data Collection***

To test the proposed model and the given hypotheses, quantitative approach was mainly applied and a questionnaire survey was used to collect data. All items in the questionnaire were set with the Likert Scale's statement, basing on the five-point ranging from scale 1 to scale 5, equivalent to "strongly disagree" to

"strongly agree". The target population is all Vietnamese students who are pursuing higher education degree in UK. According to HM Government (2013), UK welcomed 47,200 international students to study higher education level from Vietnam, ranked 6th in top sending countries.

This study applied convenient sampling technique. The data were collected by two ways: (1) questionnaires were delivered directly to the target respondents and (2) the link of online questionnaire was sent to respondents through emails. After completing data collection, there were 125 valid respondents in total.

***3.2. Data Analysis***

Firstly, to explore the correlations of independent and dependent variables and to examine the reliability and validity of them, the study conducted Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Reliability Test. Secondly, Multiple Regression were applied to find out the causal relationships between independent variables and dependent variable. Finally, descriptive analysis would be conducted to have an brief look at the travel behaviour of Vietnamese students when they are in UK.

**4. Research findings**

***4.1. Profile of the Sample***

In total of 125 collected questionnaires, there are 44 male students (taking possession of 35.2%) compared to 81 females (taking possession of 64.8%). More than 60% of the respondents are participating in graduate programs (Master or Doctor degree) and around 40% is studying bachelor level or lower. When being asked whether students are having part-time job while studying, 49 respondents said yes which means the majority (60%) completely focus on studying. This confirms previous researches about the potential of the international student market in tourism. With low rate of employment, especially full-time employment, international students have few commitments and high propensity for travel.

In addition, respondents come from various universities throughout the UK. In detailed, there are opinions from 29 different universities from North to South of the country.

#### 4.2. Factor Analysis and Reliability

The factor analyses (EFA) were conducted with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test of sphericity and Varimax Rotation of 24 items of independent variables. The research collected the results of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy for independent variables (KMO=.914). It was higher than the minimum value for a good factor analysis .60. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (Sig.=.000),

demonstrating the sufficient correlation between the variables.

From the result shown in table 1, all independent variables were divided into 5 different components, including Social Adaption, Destination Pull Factor, Course Quality, Push Factor, Study Support. Factor loadings of remained items were from .433 to .848, all of which were acceptable because of being higher than the level of minimum requirement at .40 (Hair et al., 2006). In addition, Cronbach's coefficient alpha value above .60 was proved to be acceptable by Pallant (2007), as a result, Cronbach's coefficient alpha values of all factors in the research were accepted.

**Table 1**

Factor Analysis and Reliability test

Factors/variables	Factor loadings				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Factor 1: Social adaptation</b>					
The diversity of the city where my university is located	.738				
Range of student clubs and societies	.718				
Part-time employment while studying	.656				
Intention to migrate	.604				
Chance to travel	.572				
Make new international friends	.527				
The international student support service is helpful	.499				
There is no discrimination against me at this university	.465				
<b>Factor 2: Destination pull factor</b>					
Comfortable climate		.832			
Quiet- studious environment		.788			
Lifestyle of the country/ city		.633			
Exciting place to live		.522			
Relatively lower cost to pursue the degree		.433			
<b>Factor 3: Course quality</b>					
The quality of the program			.848		
The quality of the university			.837		
Qualifications recognised worldwide			.536		

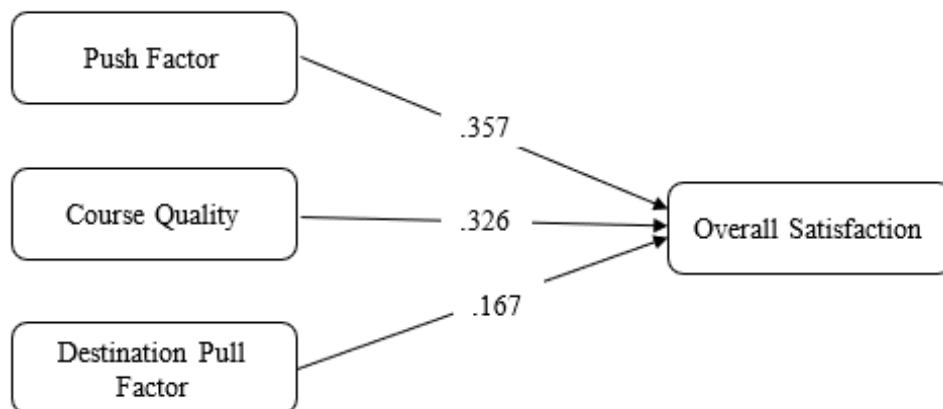
Factors/variables	Factor loadings				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Factor 4: Push Factor</b>					
Overseas course is better than local				.811	
Improves job prospects/ chance of receiving a good salary and promotions				.656	
Chance to get better understanding of Western countries				.597	
Improve language skills				.568	
<b>Factor 5: Study support</b>					
My profession requires an advanced degree					.639
Safe (low crime) environment					.592
General facilities at school - buildings and equipment					.570
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	.842	.811	.835	.809	.641
<b>Eigenvalues</b>	4.06	3.11	2.80	2.61	2.13
<b>Explained Variance (%)</b>	17.65	13.51	12.17	11.37	9.26
<b>Cumulative (%)</b>	17.65	31.17	43.33	54.70	63.96

**4.3. Factors affecting Dependent variable**

Pearson's Correlation Analysis and Linear Regression Analysis were conducted three times to explore the relationships between independent and dependent variables, independent and mediating variables, mediating and dependent variables.

Basing on the data's result, it showed that

three out of five independent variables are correlated with the dependent variable – Overall Satisfaction. The Push Factor seems to have most impact to the overall satisfaction with  $r=.357$ ;  $p<.001$ , followed by Course Quality  $r=.326$ ;  $p<.001$ ), and Destination Pull Factor  $r=.167$ ;  $p<.001$ .



**Figure 2.** Causal relationship result

**4.4. Student travel behaviours**

*Past travel experience*

When be asked for the number of holidays in UK in the last 12 months, only six

students (less than 5%) reported they have not travelled yet. On the other hand, 30% of the sample said that they travelled more than 6 times. It means that roughly they have at least

one trip in every two months.

*Type of accommodation*

Regarding to which kind of accommodation that students usually use when travelling, 74 respondents indicated that they stayed in hotel or motel, 53 respondents would stay in Friend/ Relatives' houses, the same amount of respondents also stayed in Backpacker, Youth hostel, and only five respondents would stay in Camp site. The result may contradict with the common sense that students generally seek to cheap accommodation (WYSE 2010). However, it is similar to what Huang and Tian (2013) found when they studied about Chinese students in UK. There are several possible reasons for why Hotel/ motel is the most popular choice although Field (1999) indicated that students are more likely to stay at friends and relatives' houses. Firstly, Vietnam is very far away from UK and there are few students have relatives and friends in Britain. Secondly, B&B accommodation and camp site are types of accommodation which are not popular in Vietnam.

*Mode of transportation*

When being asked about mode of transportation students often use, Bus/coach (88 respondents) and train (79 respondents) are chosen the most and just only few students used to use rental car, motorcycle or taxi as

their main mode of transportation when travelling. It is understandable while the public transportation in UK is well-developed and it is also convenient and relatively cheaper to travel across cities with this means of transportation. The rental car and motorcycle are not popular might due to the different side when driving between UK and Vietnam and there are not many Vietnamese young people who can drive car.

*Size of travel group*

The result when asking how many people respondent usually go with reveals that students seem do not want to travel alone. However, the big group is also not a preferred choice when only 4 respondents reported to go with a group larger than 6 people. 79 respondents indicated to go with 1-3 other people and 38 of them would go with 4-6 people. One possible factor might account for such finding is that it is fairly difficult to find accommodation to big group when travelling. Since majority prefer hotel-type accommodation, a room for a group of 2-4 traveller is easy to seek.

*Eating preference*

84% of respondent reported that they chose local home-style cuisine to try when travelling. 48% of them indicated fast-food restaurant as one of the options, followed by deli (24.8%), self-prepared meal (24%) and prestigious restaurant (16%).

**Table 2**

Travel behaviours

Categories	Frequency	Categories	Frequency
<u>Past travel experience</u>		<u>Transportation</u>	
Not yet	6	Rental car	16
1-2 times	31	Bus/ Coach	88
3-4 times	31	Train	79
5-6 times	19	Aeroplane	53
>6 times	38	Motorcycle	9
		Taxi	13

Categories	Frequency	Categories	Frequency
<u>Length of trip</u>		<u>Size of travel group</u>	
One-day trip	18	Alone	4
1-2 nights	37	1-3 people	79
3-4 nights	49	4-6 people	38
5-6 nights	12	>6 people	4
>6 nights	9		
<u>Accommodation</u>		<u>Eating preference</u>	
Hotel/Motel	74	Fast-food restaurant	60
Backpacker, Youth Hostel	53	Home-style restaurant	105
B&B Accommodation	27	Prestigious restaurant	20
Friends/ Relatives' houses	53	Self-prepared meal	30
Camp site	5	Deli	31

### 5. Conclusions and limitations

With the large amount of Vietnamese international students currently studying in the UK (HM Government 2013), this study critically explores the motivation factors of Vietnamese students in deciding the university to study abroad and investigate their travel behaviours during the time being in UK.

Firstly, there are three factors, destination pull factor (5 items), course quality (3 items) and push factor (4 items) were confirmed significantly have a positive relationship with the overall satisfaction (3 items). The social adaptation (8 items) and study support (3 items) were rejected to affect the outcome. Many students would like to recommend their friends and relatives to study in the country/university (68% of respondents) or even travel to the city/country that they are living (73.6%) of the respondents. In addition, 55.2% of the sample reported that they would like to come back to UK in the future after graduation. This could be a hint to the increasing of Vietnamese tourists in UK; therefore, any businesses in tourism and hospitality industry should prepare strategy to attract potential customers from this nation. On the other side, 57.6% of students indicated that they made the decision of selecting

university to study abroad by themselves. University manager could base on this finding to reshape their marketing plan to approach the student better.

Moreover, in the last two decades, thanks to the increasing of internationalisation of education, both tourism and education industries are getting closer and witness the great growth rate (Lam et al., 2011). This research not only contributes to the academic literature but also provides crucial findings for both educational institution manager and organisations in tourism and hospitality industry. The understanding of motivations to study abroad and who influence the decision would help university to attract more students in the lucrative market. On the other hand, knowledge about travel behaviours would support tour operators or hospitality organisations to serve their potential customers better.

When considering the place to study abroad, Vietnamese students choose universities in UK mostly because the quality of the program as well as the university. Students believes that with a qualification that recognised worldwide, they can improve job prospects/ chance of receiving better salary and promotions. Besides, Vietnamese students in the sample have a willingness to gain

understanding of Western countries and like other Asian students, they believe overseas course is better than domestic one. Improving language skill is also one of the reasons that push students to study abroad. Moreover, factors related to destination such as climate, environment, lifestyle and living cost are considered when making decision. Therefore, envisioning a bright future after graduation by introducing successful alumni stories or their reviews about the course could attract more prospective students. In addition, an introduction of the destination which is both rich cultures, exciting to live and suitable to study with cost advantage would gain impression from future students. The public educational fair or workshops in high school and university in Vietnam that targets directly to students could be a suitable approach since students reported they made the studying abroad decisions by themselves.

Tour operators should pay more attention to this lucrative market since most of respondents (95.2%) have travelled last year; even 30% of them had more than 6 holidays per year. In addition, the fact that majority would come back to the country after

graduation turns this market more beneficial not only at the moment but also in the future. Therefore, the attractive promotions exclusively for students and strategy to maintain relationship with those who used to travel are some of the must-have tactics of any tourism organisations. In addition, the eating preferences of Vietnamese students imply that local home-style restaurants have competitive advantage against chain fast-food restaurant. The business owners of that kind of restaurant should have more promotions to appeal students.

Due to the difficulties in approaching target population which is Vietnamese students living in UK, the sample size of the study is quite small. Therefore, it will be difficult to generalize to the whole population. There is a recommendation that future research can use result from the study and conduct in the larger scale to ensure a representative distribution of the population. Besides, the objective of this study is to collect opinions of students from all level of higher education included doctorate degree. However, it was challenging to find many PhD students to diversify the answers ■

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