

Abstract

The ever growing demand for international education from Asian students has created intense competition among host countries and institutions, especially those in developed countries. The high fees that can be charged to international students make them a lucrative source of income, and they are particularly important when it comes to postgraduate study. Understanding student' decision making is a key for these institutions to differentiate among themselves and participate in the fiercely competitive environment. In the area of international education study, there are only a few frameworks which can explain students' decision-making process. The purpose of this study is to investigate the underlying factors for Thai students' destination choice as well to explain the relationship between the influencing factors and decision making process of Thai students. Push and pull factors were used to explain the motivation underpinning students' choice of study destination.

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodology. In-depth exploratory interviews were conducted with sixteen respondents who were prospective students, parents and agents. For the quantitative analysis, data was collected through questionnaire surveys. A total of 660 self-administered questionnaires were distributed using convenience sampling at OCSC International Education Expo 2013, organized by the Office of Civil Service Commission (OCSC), on 2 November 2013 from 1200 pm. to 6 pm. at the Royal Paragon Hall, Siam Paragon.

The hypotheses posed in this study were tested by Structural Equation Model (SEM) technique with 640 usable questionnaires. The results showed that both push and pull factors proposed in this study significantly influenced Thai students' destination choice. It was found that suitability of environment factor and recommendations of friends and family which are components of country characteristics (pull factor), have the greatest influence on Thai student's destination choice. Thai students' destination choice was also influenced by cost of education and Degree (content and structure), physical facilities and resources and value of education. On the other hand, personal factors and personal values are the push factors that can influence Thai students' destination choice. The limitations that should be taken to account in this study is that it only measures intention of students

who are planning to study abroad whereas the actual outcome may differ from the results of this study. Finally, this study concluded by offering implications for academicians and practitioners, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

