



## **The Study Abroad Trends in the UK from Developing Countries: The comparison between Vietnamese students and others**

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### **Abstract**

*Many aspects impact the decision to select universities in a particular country. Based on the pull factors, Vietnamese students choose to join a given UK university because of political stability, lifestyle, the image of the institution, learning English, cost, quality of courses, the ability to succeed and job prospects. That is why Vietnamese students select highly marketable courses. Contrarily, the push factors for Vietnamese students to select UK universities include reference groups like family and friends, academicians, students, and alumni. The paper also compares these factors to other prospective students from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hungary, and other countries globally.*

**Key words:** Pull and push factors in marketing, marketing education, international higher education, destination attraction, British university.



## **INTRODUCTION**

Studying in an international country and experiencing life while learning is a rewarding experience for many students. Therefore, this accounts for the growing number of oversea students (Nghia, 2019). The UK holds an excellent reputation for education because of quality and excellence. The UK has more than 15 universities which rank among the best 100 learning institutions globally (HM Government, 2019). Vietnam has an emerging economy, and many students are seeking to study abroad (Huong and Cong, 2018). Over 100,000 Vietnamese students are studying overseas according to the current statistics (Huong and Cong, 2018). The UK is among a top preference for many Vietnamese students, which accounts for 13% of all the international students (Nghia, 2015). In 2018, 12,000 students from Vietnam enrolled in UK universities (Hoang et al., 2019). Comparably, China has 712,000 studies in universities abroad, which accounts for up to 5% of Chinese students in universities (Zhu, 2018). By 2014, the number of international students rose to 5 million globally, and this number continues to increase gradually (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017). Vietnam has experienced significant socio-economic growth in the past two decades (Hoang et al., 2019). The growth has increased the quality of education and the number of graduates with competence levels and adequate skills to meet the current demand in the market. The Vietnamese government also seeks to meet its socio-economic targets, which increases the demand for qualified professionals in different sectors (Nghia, 2015). However, Vietnam's universities still lag based on international rankings, which forces many students to seek opportunities abroad. An array factor attracts Vietnamese students to the UK education sector, as explored in this paper. gender-based.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Pull Factors**

#### **Country of Choice**

A majority of prospective students examine the reputation of the host nation before choosing it as the destination. Openness to local communication and security are fundamental aspects that many students consider. A stable political environment in the UK attracts many of these students (Universities UK, 2018). Previous studies contend that cultural and ethnic diversity, economic stability, low unemployment, and freedom of expression also makes it easy for Vietnamese students to adapt and coexist in the UK environment (Nghia, 2015). The host nation's cities also influence Vietnamese students into selecting their best destination. The UK has a range of reputable cities like London that intrigue many international students (Universities UK, 2018). Many students have a desire to study in large cities in the UK. According to recent trends, many students select their destination countries depending on their desire to reside in large cities (Hoang et al., 2019). As a result, these students focus on the transportation system, housing placement, and the size of the city (Nghia, 2015; Dao et al., 2015). Social life in the UK also attracts students to UK universities. Aspects like festivities and student association events create a favourable



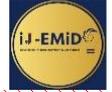
environment for many Vietnamese students. Previous research among international students also outlines similar trends. Many Asian and African students select their universities based on the city's image. Security, safety, cost of living, developmental level, international environment and weather are elements that aid in decision-making (Jiani, 2017). In the case of Vietnamese students, Tran (2019) suggests that students' immigration intentions depended on their personal attachment to the home country and (perceived) adaptability to the host country. Furthermore, time zones, culture, and languages in the destination country further influence decision-making among Chinese students (Liu et al., 2018).

### **Institutional Image**

The image of the institution and its reputation contribute is another aspect considered by prospective students (Dao et al., 2015). Recent research shows that reputation, accreditation, position, and status of the learning institution influences the choice of university for Vietnamese students (Jupiter et al., 2017). Besides, the rate of employment from a particular university further impacts the decision of Vietnamese students. A close connection exists between the image of the university and its international status. Besides, the areas of expertise are other factors that enhance the institution's image. The areas of expertise focus on creating career opportunities for students (Jupiter et al., 2017; Nghia, 2015). Significantly, the connection between the university and the professional industry also enhances the image of the university. The reason is that this enhances employability skills, thereby attracting Vietnamese students. Aspects like the capacity for universities to professionals or lecturers from the industry enhances job opening for many graduates. According to previous studies, many Vietnamese students consider job opportunities on graduation and reputation in selecting a specific course in UK universities (Hoang et al., 2019). Likewise, previous research points out that the university brand draws the attention of many prospective students. Malaysian students focus on the reputation of the university in producing successful professionals with high job prospects (Chelliah et al., 2019). Notably, university ranking on the global scale is another element that strengthens the brand image. Many international students seek affiliation with successful institutions (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017).

### **Language**

Universities in the UK teach courses in a range of languages apart from English (Ilieva and Peak, 2016). According to recent research, Vietnamese students choose their course based on teaching language and learning. Many Vietnamese students depict preference for institutions where English is the official teaching language. Nonetheless, Vietnamese students can learn the local language, depending on their desire and interest. Many universities in the UK promote diversity by fostering the learning of different languages, especially for international students (Atherton et al., 2018). Mastery of the local language is one of the factors that strengthen the confidence of Vietnamese students to select their learning institutions. Vietnamese students have a preference for strengthening their foreign language (Huong and Cong, 2018). Improvement in language skills influences decision-making among Vietnamese students because this widens their career prospects (Khai, 2017). Developing competency in English enhances the capacity of Vietnamese students to work in diverse settings, particularly in Western countries (Hoang et al., 2019). Previous research shows that many Chinese students select institutions, which teach in both English and Chinese.



Comparatively, Taiwanese students contend that language influences their capacity for suitable employment (Tsai and Kobori, 2017). Henceforth, English is integral in earning better income because it enhances their competency in international labour markets (Phang, 2013).

### **International Environment**

Prospective students consider a world-class learning setting before selecting their destination nation (Hoang et al., 2019). Many UK universities focus on creating the image of a world-class university to encourage and attract prospective students and other learners globally (Atherton et al., 2018; Ilieva and Peak, 2016). Many universities create a world-class environment through their websites for international students (Jupiter et al., 2017). Besides, these learning institutions also provide feedback to students seeking to enrol in different programs. In the UK, many universities focus on addressing the culture gap by creating a new culture that is favourable for international students (Hoang et al., 2019). Previous research shows that many Vietnamese students focus on the rich culture, local home-style cuisines in foreign countries, comfortable climate, and exciting places to live before deciding to select a particular university (Khai, 2015). Vietnamese students also select institutions that can support that offer a broad range of academic and non-academic services to enhance adaptability to the educational and social environment. Apart from studying, Vietnamese students seek to enjoy life, form social networks, and learn new skills with limited challenges in the learning environment (Nghiem-Phú and Nguyễn, 2020.). Nguyen (2017) report that Vietnamese students decide to study abroad to get a better education than the domestic one, improve job prospects as well as have a better understanding of western countries' culture. Similarly, previous studies also depict that the international environment, including culture and social life, influences the decisions of Chinese students (Haase et al., 2020). An understanding of the international environment enables Taiwanese students to understand the culture and lifestyle in the destination university (Lee, 2017).

### **Tuition Fees**

Many reputable universities have high tuition fees because of the quality and excellent education provided (Jupiter et al., 2017). Previous research shows that many Vietnamese students consider the cost of living and tuition fees to ensure that they select affordable universities (Tsai and Kobori, 2017; Tsai et al., 2017). Many Vietnamese students seeking to study in the UK are either sponsored or unsponsored (Huong and Cong, 2018). That is why a majority of these students without sponsorship select countries where the cost of living is low. The political sphere in the UK impacts inflation, which influences selection by Vietnamese students (Ilieva and Peak, 2016). Vietnamese students can work on a part-time basis while studying, and this is a significant attraction factor. Universities in the UK also financial assistance and scholarships to students with exceptional performance (Ilieva et al., 2017). Hence, this also pulls Vietnamese students into enrolling to these learning institutions. Previous research show that many Chinese students deliberate the overall cost of education, the availability of sponsorships, and the cost of living at the university before making a decision (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). Tuition fee is another aspect considered by prospective students. International students select universities where they are eligible for scholarships parents (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017).



## **Push Factors**

### **Courses and Programmes**

The quality of programmes offered by universities abroad is a significant determinant since this impacts the capacity to get employment on completion. Previous research on Vietnamese students reveals that they seek to study in institutions that guarantee comprehensive learning (Hoang et al., 2019). Besides, students also consider courses that fulfil their requirements and needs of the employment market. Vietnamese students select UK universities because they offer quality programs with qualifications that are recognised globally. Many Vietnamese students have a perception that learning in UK universities heightens their job prospects and the chances of better salaries on graduation (Khai, 2017; Dao et al., 2015). Moreover, Vietnamese further consider programmes that offer hands-on experience, industrial training, and attachment. A majority of the UK universities offer courses and programmes that fulfil student needs and enhance their experience, which attracts a majority of the Vietnamese students (Ilieva et al., 2017). Similarly, according to previous studies, international students believe that the courses offered in international universities are better than those in their countries. Economic, social, and political situations, lack of job opportunities, insufficient recognition of credentials, and limited subject options in Asian countries, including China, discourage prospective students from studying in domestic universities (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017). Many prospective students believe that they can have a range of courses in international universities. Besides, the quality of programmes in the UK, for instance, is marketable and reputable, which fosters the capacity to gain real-world experience (Jiani, 2017).

### **Family and Friends**

According to Jupiter et al. (2017), social relationships with friends, relatives, or family residing in the destination country affects the choice to study in the respective country among prospective students. Researchers have examined how family and friends attract international students to their study destination. Lee and Morrish (2012), in their research, denote that friends and family provide the necessary support and information, which builds trust and strongly influence the choice of destination among international students. Previous research on Vietnamese students indicates that discussions and feedback from friends and family in destination countries directly influence the students' perception of the universities in these countries (Huong and Cong, 2018). Significantly, the knowledge of students about the universities in these destinations acts as a pull factor. According to previous research among Vietnamese students, active social networks enhance their decision to study in the UK. Hoang et al. (2019) reveal that a majority of Vietnamese students consult friends and families residing in the destination country before making their choices. Vietnamese students trust information that comes from private sources like family and friends because it is unbiased (Rafi, 2018). Previous research points out that relatives and friends are primary information sources that international students rely upon to make decisions concerning their study destination (Wadhwa, 2016; Rafi, 2018). Comparable, research among Chinese students also highlights the significance of a social network in influencing decisions. Prospective



students in China depend on influencers or reference groups aid in making decisions concerning their destination countries. Examples of these groups include peers, spouses and parents (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017). Despite the impact of other factors, reference groups like Chinese parents have immense power over the educational choices made by their children (Fischer, 2015). Pressure for success in the Chinese economy is critical for Chinese parents and their children, contributing to the Chinese' parent's influence in the choice of the destination country (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017; Fischer, 2015; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). Research among Taiwanese students also illustrates that recommendations from friends and family help in making decisions about the destination country (Tsai and Kabori, 2017).

### **Academic Staff**

Apart from family and friends, lecturers and professionals can provide recommendations, which can help international students select their destination campuses abroad (Harder et al., 2015). Suggestions by academicians are highly valuable and enhance the confidence of students towards selecting a particular international institution. Academicians have reliable information and credibility because of their experience in teaching at the university (Jupiter et al., 2017). Academicians are part of the stakeholder groups in their respective institutions. In the UK, lecturers and professors' perspectives influence international students to join their universities of choice. The academic staff can share vital insights to international students, including foreign credentials and their probability of success (Harder et al., 2015; Lee, 2014). Vietnamese students consider the quality of the course, and the university is also considered when deciding to study in the UK (Nguyen, 2017). Comparably, research on Chinese students also indicates that recommendations from teachers in China and professors in the destination country make it easy for these students to decide on their destination campus. Considerably, recommendations from experts in a specific program, added to the teaching quality in the specific university enhances decision making for Chinese students (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017).

### **Student Testimonials**

Testimonials by alumni or current students enrolled in a program in the university can substantially impact decisions among prospective students. According to previous studies, Student testimonials provide insights and experience, which offers a clear picture of the environment, quality of education, and social networks in universities abroad (Jupiter et al., 2017). In most cases, student testimonials are valuable, especially when these students are from diverse backgrounds with a different culture from that of the host country. Past studies among Vietnamese students indicate that student opinions and online information attract students to different universities (Dao and Thorpe, 2015). Similarly, Vietnamese students tend to choose their destinations based on recommendations from alumni in UK universities (Hoang et al., 2019). Besides, student associations provide testimonials, which heighten the confidence of those seeking to study in these institutions. That is why many universities build a strong alumni network to provide support and enhance the confidence of these students seeking to learn abroad (Rafi, 2018). Past research among Hungarian students also illustrates that recommendations and social relations from students and



alumni convince students to join different institutions abroad (Fenyves et al., 2019). Cultural aspects are integral in influencing student decisions. Testimonials help Vietnamese students understand the culture in different institutions of interest. The UK institutions have an international education strategy that focuses on attracting students from all spheres (Ilieva et al., 2017; Ilieva and Peak, 2016). The strategy focuses on fostering the mobility of prospective students through testimonials. UK universities are diverse with students from various cultures around the world (Ilieva et al., 2017). Henceforth, testimonials inform of the underlying culture. Vietnamese students can understand education quality and the probability of success based on insights from alumni and students. Previous research shows that testimonials communicate the reputation of the institution. Vietnamese students can thereby select institutions that fit their career needs while supporting their social life (Khai, 2017). The experiences of students and alumni with the academic programs offered by a particular university determine their satisfaction with the institution (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Some of the areas where student testimonials are integral, including advising support, social environment, physical characteristics of the university, staff, and, and administrative services. Student testimonials help international students understand the quality of classroom instructions, library services, recreational and social activities, campus life, food and housing (Elsharnouby, 2016; Martirosyan et al., 2015). Housing is an independent factor that can impact the choice of a destination nation. Nonetheless, student perspectives can help understand the cost of housing and whether it is affordable for Vietnamese students (Hoang et al., 2019).

### **Communication Quality**

Constant communication between the university and international students before and after arrival influences the destination decision (Hoang et al., 2019). Quality communication attracts international students to a particular university in the host country. Communication can either be online or offline. In the current technological world, online communication is efficient in the application process (Marsden et al., 2019). Previous research among international students indicates that many of them utilise search engines to collect online information about a particular university. Google enables international students to find the university website, where they can access different aspects of the university (Jupiter, 2017). Many universities disseminate the necessary information through their websites to capture the attention of potential students. Existing studies also show that many universities utilise emails to communicate with prospective students (Tsai and Kobori, 2017). Email feedback provides an opening for prospective students to ask questions and raise concerns, which impacts their selection decision. Active communication between the administration and students increases their confidence regarding the credibility and commitment of the university. Past research on Vietnamese students indicates that electronic sources such as social networks, blogs, and forums help prospective students select their universities abroad. University websites provide the necessary information concerning programs, tuition, accommodation, and the culture of their institutions (Zhu, 2019; Marsden et al., 2019). The quality of communication enhances the familiarity of Vietnamese students with UK universities. Many Vietnamese students focus on learning about the programs offered by the universities and the quality of education (Cheung et al., 2011). Thus, online communication enhances access to this information among Vietnamese students. Offline communication is another aspect that can impact the decision of international students. In most cases, offline communication takes place



when international students arrive at the institution (Jupiter, 2017). Face to face interaction is a standard offline communication method that enables students and university staff to meet and deliberate on different issues that could impact performance. Studies among Asian students, mainly Chinese, indicates that they utilise the internet to attain the necessary university information (Fischer, 2015). Such students cannot visit these institutions for face-to-face interactions. Therefore, the quality of online communication attracts these students to a particular institution (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). Similar studies among Chinese students also illustrate that university reputation and academic program are critical influencers. Because of the geographical distance, students can learn about the reputation and programs offered by the university through online platforms. Access to quality information about respective universities promotes decision making (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017). Phang (2013) adds that knowledge and awareness of the university help prospective students understand the quality of life, facilities, and the university environment.

**Summary of the Factors**

<b>Pull Factors</b>	<b>Push Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Country of Choice</li> <li>▪ Institutional Image</li> <li>▪ International Environment</li> <li>▪ Tuition fee</li> <li>▪ Language</li> <li>▪ Communication quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Courses and programmes</li> <li>▪ Family and friends</li> <li>▪ Testimonials</li> <li>▪ Academicians</li> </ul>

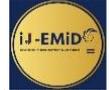
**METHODOLOGY METHODOLOGY**

*A Systematic Literature Review*

The researchers have used systemic literature review. The search involved using a range of key words and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The systematic literature review aims to establish to what extent existing research has progressed towards clarifying the trends of study abroad in the UK and identify relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature, and explore reasons for these (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Bem, 1995; Cooper, 2003). According to Sterberg (1991), systematic literature review also formulate general statements or an overarching conceptualization.

*Research instrument and data analysis*

Systematic reviews aim to address these problems by identifying, critically evaluating and integrating the findings of all relevant, high-quality individual studies addressing the study abroad trends in the UK from developing countries like Vietnam. Data analysis of this study include



comment on, evaluate, extend, or develop theories of study abroad trends in the UK. Besides, the authors aim to describe directions for future research and provide implications for practice and policy in the UK to attract more Vietnamese students.

## **DISCUSSION**

Different aspects come into play before Vietnamese students choose to join a given UK university. Examples of these factors include political stability and lifestyle in the destination country. The image of the institution also reflects its reputation and brand, thereby attracting prospective students. Furthermore, the quality of courses influences job prospects. That is why Vietnamese students select highly marketable courses. The findings of this paper are consistent with a study of Vietnamese student's choice of university (Dao and Thorpe, 2015). They showed the nine key factors influencing student decisions, in order of significance, as facilities and services, programme, price, offline information, opinions, online information, ways of communication, programme additions, and advertising. There are significant correlations in the Vietnamese context between the factors of price and facilities, and services and programme, and differences between genders and types of students in choosing a university. Meanwhile, language is another aspect that influences success in the job market. Hence, prospective students focus on learning English and other languages. The cost of education is another element that influences the affordability of different programs. Social factors also impact the decision for Vietnamese students to select UK universities. These include reference groups like family and friends, academicians, students, and alumni. Vietnamese students tend to select an institution based on references from trusted individuals or groups. Significantly, the quality of communication also strengthens the confidence of Vietnamese students in respective UK universities. Nguyen (2017) confirm that pull factor related to destination affecting Vietnamese students' motivations to study in the UK. Notably, this paper provides a comparison to other prospective students from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hungary, and other countries globally.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Government policymakers in the UK should improve the attractiveness of the UK as the top of mind country of choice for students from developing countries. Policymakers also should provide an international image and multi-cultural environment for international students. By doing so, international students will perceive the learning environment in the UK as friendly as their home countries. Government policymakers should consider loans for international students to help them to the tuition fee for the universities in the UK. For language and communication quality, policymakers should allow students with low English proficiency to have student-visa to learn English in the UK. International students can improve their English if they can practice English skills in daily life in the UK. For visa issues, international students face difficulties to prove their financial capacity to pass the requirements of the UK government. Hence, Government policymakers should consider the requirements to grant a visa for international students. Higher education policymakers in the UK should improve their institution images worldwide. Course and programmes should focus more on global issues to help international students apply their



knowledge and skills better as they graduate and come back home to work. Academic staff in higher education institutions in the UK must maintain world-class quality to attract international students. Besides, Testimonials of the alumni are significant to attract new students; especially from developing countries. Higher education institutions in the UK should reduce tuition fee for international students who have friends or family members as the referee in their institutions. Scholarship and fee support are significant factors to attract more international students to study abroad in the UK.

## **CONCLUSION**

Different aspects come into play before Vietnamese students choose to join a given UK university. Examples of these factors include political stability and lifestyle in the destination country. The image of the institution also reflects its reputation and brand, thereby attracting prospective students. Furthermore, the quality of courses in these universities influences job prospects. That is why Vietnamese students select highly marketable courses. The findings of this paper are consistent with a study of Vietnamese student's choice of university (Dao and Thorpe, 2015). They showed the nine key factors influencing student decisions, in order of significance, as facilities and services, programme, price, offline information, opinions, online information, ways of communication, programme additions, and advertising. There are significant correlations in the Vietnamese context between the factors of price and facilities, and services and programme, and differences between genders and types of students in choosing a university. Meanwhile, language is another aspect that influences success in the job market. Hence, prospective students focus on learning English and other languages. The cost of education is another element that influences the affordability of different programs. Social factors also impact the decision for Vietnamese students to select UK universities. These include reference groups like family and friends, academicians, students, and alumni. Vietnamese students tend to select an institution based on references from trusted individuals or groups. Significantly, the quality of communication also strengthens the confidence of Vietnamese students in respective UK universities. Nguyen (2017) confirm that pull factor related to destination affecting Vietnamese students' motivations to study in the UK. Notably, this paper provides a comparison to other prospective students from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hungary, and other countries globally.



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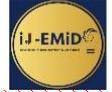
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