

Chapter 1

To Study Abroad: A Complex Matrix of Influences

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ABSTRACT

Universities globally are increasingly seeking to improve the international mobility of their students. There are several latent benefits that accrue to a university whose faculty and/or students actively participate in international exchange programs. Essentially, this can lead to an increase in the capacity to develop international relationships, greater diversity in the student population with all the benefits that stem from diversity, opportunities for benchmarking against best practices, and the university's international reputation spreading on a global scale. Drawing on extant literature, this descriptive chapter reviews many and varied scholarly works to elicit a comprehensive range of 'Push-Pull' factors or 'a complex matrix of influences' that play a role in tertiary-level students' decision-making in relation to study abroad.

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INTRODUCTION

Study abroad offers an invaluable chance to discover a diverse culture through a personal, professional, and educationally enriching experience. School choice, however, is not susceptible to ‘one’ definitive analysis. Different kinds of analysis bring out and highlight different aspects of and patterns of educational choice. The decision to facilitate (*faculty*) and/or undertake (*student*) a study abroad experience is not always a simple or straightforward one. Principally, there needs to be an ‘educative’ connection between the ‘home’ and ‘host’ destination/organization for advancing HE teaching and learning opportunities (Velliaris, 2018). Undoubtedly, the more relevant the international experience is to the overall educational objectives of the program/course, the more participants will benefit. Though there may be a plethora of recurring themes and patterns, attempts to reduce choice-making to one simple formula or metaphor will lead to dangerous over-simplification and misrepresentation.

BACKGROUND

The Push-Pull Model of International Student Choice

The ‘Push-Pull’ model was originally developed to explain the factors influencing the movement of people for migration (E. S. Lee, 1966), but it has since become the most common tool used by educational researchers to aid the examination and explanation of international student motivations and decisions. The model has been used to understand international student flows, the decision or motivation to study abroad, and international students’ choice of country and higher education institution (HEI). Although the basic ‘Push-Pull’ model of international student choice is valuable as an explanatory mechanism, it does have limitations (Li & Bray, 2007).

Both ‘Push-Pull’ factors are forces that impact on students’ behaviors and choices, but the individual preferences and personal characteristics of students are largely unaccounted for. Individual students may react to different ‘Push-Pull’ factors in different ways. Various researchers have built upon this model to develop other sophisticated conceptual models of international student choice (see Velliaris & Coleman-George, 2016). Relatedly, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) recognized that the decision process through which an international/foreign student moves when selecting a final study destination, appears to involve at least *three* distinct stages (pp. 85-86):

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