

2017

## International postgraduate students and their reasons for choosing to study at public universities in Perth, Western Australia

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**International Postgraduate Students and Their Reasons  
for Choosing to Study at Public Universities  
in Perth, Western Australia**

This thesis is presented for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Steven Cohen**

Edith Cowan University

School of Education

2017



### **Abstract**

The global higher education sector has become increasingly competitive. A large segment of that market now consists of attracting international students. Understanding why these students are motivated to study overseas is crucial for universities seeking to attract the transnational students as well as for the host country. Trading education is now Australia's third largest export. As the international market for students becomes more crowded, it is imperative that thorough and concise research occurs to assist local universities within Australia to maintain their competitive advantage.

Perth, Western Australia (WA) comprises a small segment of the international Australian tertiary education market. An insufficient evidence base exists to aid local universities with strategic planning to maintain their competitive advantage in attracting international students. The current literature is sparse in analysing Australian state based international student decision-making. Most research focuses upon a generalised understanding of international student motivations concentrating on specific motivational factors.

To enrich and contribute to the current research literature, a comprehensive qualitative study was undertaken to explore the decision-making processes of postgraduate international students who chose to study in Perth. The research explored how and why these students chose Perth as their study destination. The study employed a variety of decision-making theories, most importantly the Push-Pull Theory of international student decision-making to test the applicability of a generalised model of international student flows on the local market.

Data sources included international postgraduate students who are currently or have completed their studies at a public university in Perth. Data were collected using a variety of qualitative instruments including semi structured open-ended interviews and a focus group.

The findings suggested that postgraduate students in Perth are sensitive to course price, with those on scholarships submitting such an undertaking would otherwise be impossible. Students, particularly from countries suffering economic or political disruptions considered international study as a pathway to immigration. These participants viewed Australia as a stable and prosperous nation, which offered them a 'good life' without the problems of their home countries.

Most participants also considered WA as a culturally pluralistic destination, with a relaxed and outdoor lifestyle, without the pressures and costs of larger Australian cities like Sydney and Melbourne. Participants also sought to choose their preferred university on the recommendation of family or friends.

The study has implications for how Australian universities market their courses to international students. The study contributes to the growing literature on international student decision-making. This knowledge is critical to both recruitment strategies and government policies to continue to attract international students.

**Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) Incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) Contain any material previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- (iii) Contain any defamatory material.

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Steven Cohen

15 September 2017

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To my fellow PhD students who shared my journey from the beginning to the end, I will forever be thankful for your encouragement, your celebration of milestones, your voices and laughter, usually at odd things and at odd times.

To all the participants who took part in this study, thank you for giving up your time to help me undertake this research. Your positive feedback and constructive criticism helped me in learning the nuances involved in successful interviewing. I hope that the findings of this study will one day help your colleagues or your friends or even your students in making a more informed decision when choosing an overseas study destination.

To my parents, thank you for your unconditional support. I am so grateful you encouraged me to pursue my dreams. To just keep going and follow that which makes me alive. A lesson I hope to one day pass on to my son.



And finally, to my wife Rachel. You are the most important person in my world.

You are my favourite person. I dedicate this thesis to you.

# INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENT DECISION-MAKING

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International Postgraduate Students and Their Reasons for Choosing to Study at  
Public Universities in Perth, Western Australia.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background**

As students hunger for degrees, universities adapt to meet the growing demand, creating a burgeoning global marketplace for higher education. This is certainly the case in Australia where over the last four decades, universities transitioned from insular and self-contained institutions to globally competitive organizations of higher learning and research.

According to The Economist (2014), during the 1990s, universities instigated a shift from elite to mass education with almost half of all young people enrolling in a higher education course, together with a growing number of international students. Cheung, Yuen, Yuen, and Cheng (2016) suggest that this trend has important ramifications for Australia, given that in 2016 higher education exports contributed almost \$20 billion to the national economy, making it the largest service export, while providing a significant contribution to the nation's financial system at a time when traditional resource exports were flagging.

The effects of these changes in the 1990s caused structural fractures within the university system: for example, universities relished the improved enrolments and flourishing relationships with industry, but were less enamoured with government funding levels that failed to match the increase in participation rates (Croucher, 2017). New sources of private equity were required, with one solution being to open tertiary courses to full fee paying international students, an unexploited and viable revenue

stream. Universities would be paid tuition fees directly from students, with limited government interference and narrow spending constraints.

The opening of the higher education sector to international students resulted from global macro-economic and political changes (Cheung et al., 2016). The advent of globalisation influenced developing countries to 'skill up' or face continued stagnation and uncompetitive practices. The governments of developing countries recognised that a highly educated population could help improve their country's economy by using their skills gained overseas to help improve international competitiveness and decrease internal inefficiencies.

Governments perceived education as an investment for the future that could hedge both the individual and the country from poverty and unemployment. In the medium to long term, the living standards of the population will increase and, ergo, the country would encounter economic growth as well as social and political stability. Economists and politicians viewed educating the populace as a win for both the individual and the country: for example, refer to Schofer and Meyer, (2005); as well as Goldberg and Pavcnik, (2007).

Various developed countries such as the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, who were structurally positioned to accept large numbers of international students, were keen to maximize the opportunities of servicing the growing international student market (Mazzarol, Soutar, & Thien, 2000). Those countries' governments and related administrative bodies responsible for higher education policies recognised the unique international circumstances that globalisation afforded them, including the potential to capture a share of the developing international student market. This was made possible by liberalizing the tertiary industry,

deregulating the higher education market, reducing red tape within the academic bureaucracies, as well as constructing legislative frameworks to induce overseas students to purchase higher education services. By the early 1990s Australia was fast becoming a major competitor in selling higher education (UNESCO, 2014).

This shift to increase supply and make tertiary studies in Australia more attractive resulted in a growth in the number of overseas students studying in Australia (Cheung et al., 2016). Such early success propelled the federal government and the university sector to continue allocating resources to develop the rapidly burgeoning trade in international students: for example, see Mundava and Gray (2008), and Hyde (2012).

With early success in attracting foreign students, higher education institutions within Australia, as well as state and federal governments, continued to develop and enact strategies to attract new foreign students. Universities around the world recognised that by understanding international student motivations, they could maximise overseas student numbers. These factors helped drive increases in overseas students, such that between 1975 and 2014, the number of international students studying outside their home country grew over 500% from 800,000 to over 4.5 million students, with most these students choosing to study in an Organisation for Economic Corporation Development (OECD) country (OECD, 2014).

The internationalisation of higher education began to materialize into one of the world's most important service industries of the new millennium (Mazzarol, 1998). In these formative years, research conducted by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that English speaking countries such as the USA, UK, Canada and Australia dominated the non-French speaking market (UNESCO, 2012), while native French speakers, particularly those from the Levant and

old French colonies, naturally chose France as their study destination. These nations sought to position themselves to capitalize on the potential growth with substantial success (Bodycott, 2009).

The benefit to participating countries including Australia was significant. Table 1.1 provides a 2014-15 snapshot of the direct economic contributions (in million dollar terms) of international students in Australia. The flow on consequences create substantial economic and social benefits for academic institutions, the host country and the general population through such measures as job creation, economic growth, the introduction of new goods and services as well as cultural diversity.

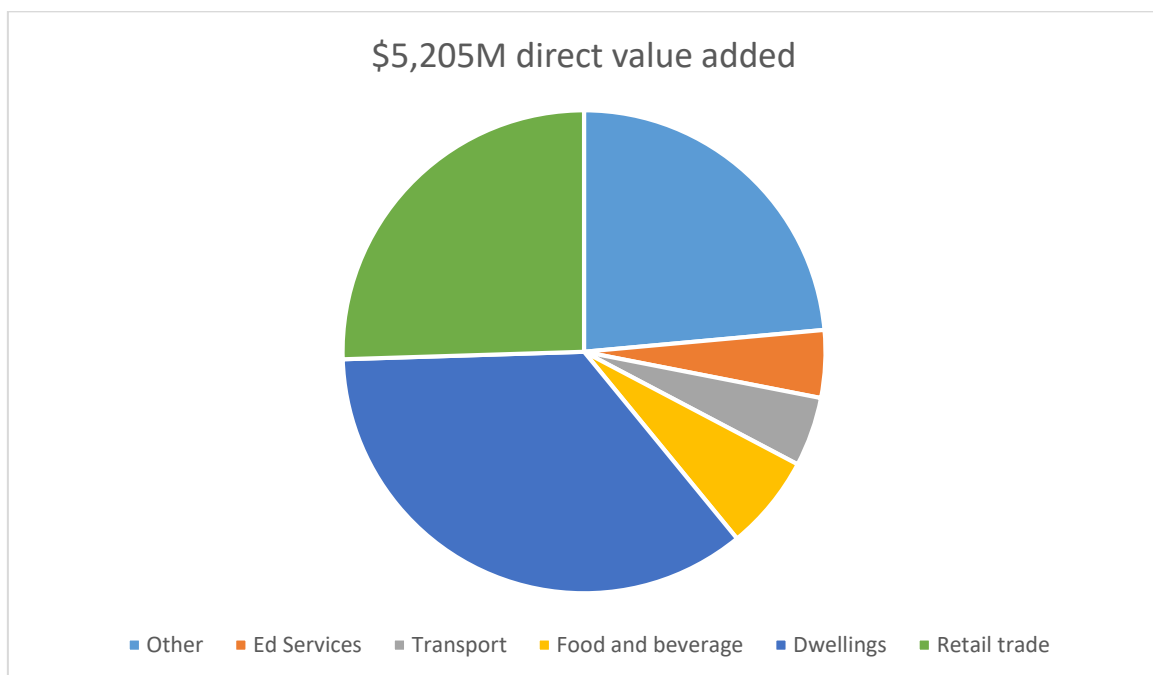


Figure 1.1. *Direct value added to GDP by international students for years 2014-15*  
(Deloitte Access Economics, 2015)

As the above figure indicates, international students provide enormous contributions to the local financial systems, helping to drive the Australian economy. By 2015, international education services injected almost 50% more income into the Australian economy than international travel tourism (Norton & Catitaki, 2016). Further, international students helped support 76,700 full time jobs, providing significant value added benefits to the Australian economy (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015; Productivity Commission, 2015).

The burgeoning service industry grew into Australia's third largest export, behind traditional minerals of ore and coal, despite suffering a slight decline in 2013-14. Table 1.1 below compares the value of the top five exports in A\$ million for the period 2011 to 2014. By 2013-14, international students contributed a net benefit of nearly \$14.5 billion to the Australian economy.

Table 1.1

*Australia's top five exports, goods and services (A\$ million)*

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>% Growth 2013-2014</b>
Iron Ore	57,075	74,671	30.8
Coal	38,640	39,960	3.4
Natural Gas	14,271	14,553	2.0
Education related travel services	14,790	14,553	-1.6
Personal travel	11,820	12,551	6.2

*Source: (DFAT, 2014)*

Data from UNESCO confirms the vast growth in transnational education: for example, from 2000 to 2010, the demand for overseas university places increased by 99% to 4.1 million students. This represents a growth rate of 7.1% annually (KPMG, 2013). Forecasts for global student mobility indicate that by 2020 demand will increase to approximately 5.8 million students (ICEF Monitor, 2015).

By 2015, five countries hosted almost half of all international students: USA, UK, Australia, France and Germany. For more than 20 years, these countries have dominated the industry, maintaining a competitive advantage over other contending nations. Table 1.2 illustrates the top ten countries hosting international students in 2017.

Table 1.2

*Countries hosting the most foreign students in 2017 (%)*

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of Total International Students</b>
United States	19
United Kingdom	10
France	6
Australia	6
Germany	5
Russian Federation	3
Japan	3
Canada	3
China	2
Italy	2

*Source: (UNESCO, 2017)*

The data suggest the ‘top five’ destinations remain competitively placed. By 2015, the USA continued its dominance as the largest provider of international services hosting 18% of all students, with Australia remaining stable at 7%. However, newly emerging markets such as the Russian Federation, China and Japan are challenging for a portion of the lucrative trade.

Gradually with the spread of neo-liberal and capitalist ideas together with the marketisation of university education, the international student industry began to

become more competitive. Improved efficiencies and the potential for large revenue receipts from international students resulted in higher education moving towards becoming an internationally traded and profitable commodity.

These emerging host nations and their respective universities recognised the enormous potential of investing in the overseas education sector. In particular, non-English speaking countries launched education hubs in planned cities such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi to compete with the traditional markets (Chadee & Naidoo, 2009). These hubs encouraged highly skilled educators, students, institutions, and industries to relocate and engage in education, training and the provision of knowledge centres through collaboration and innovation networks. The objective was to market the education hub as a centre for educational excellence, research and expertise (Knight, 2011).

Countries like China, Singapore, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates persuaded internationally renowned universities to set up regional education centres with great success: for example, The Education Act (1998) passed by the Malaysian Government opened the way to permit the establishment of foreign university campuses in the country (Mazzarol, Soutar, & Sim Yaw Seng, 2003).

These countries presupposed that students were more inclined to attend a university of good repute than a local institution, unknown outside of its own borders. The policy worked, curbing the dominance of the traditional international host markets like the UK, USA and Australia and forcing policy makers in these countries to think more critically about their marketing policies.



### The Current Australian Position

By 2016, Australia maintained its position as a ‘top five’ provider of international higher education services. Overseas students made up approximately 18% of Australia’s higher education student population (International Education Advisory Council (IEAC), 2015). Figure 1.2 below describes the historical and future trends of international students in Australia as a proportion of domestic students from 2001 to 2020.

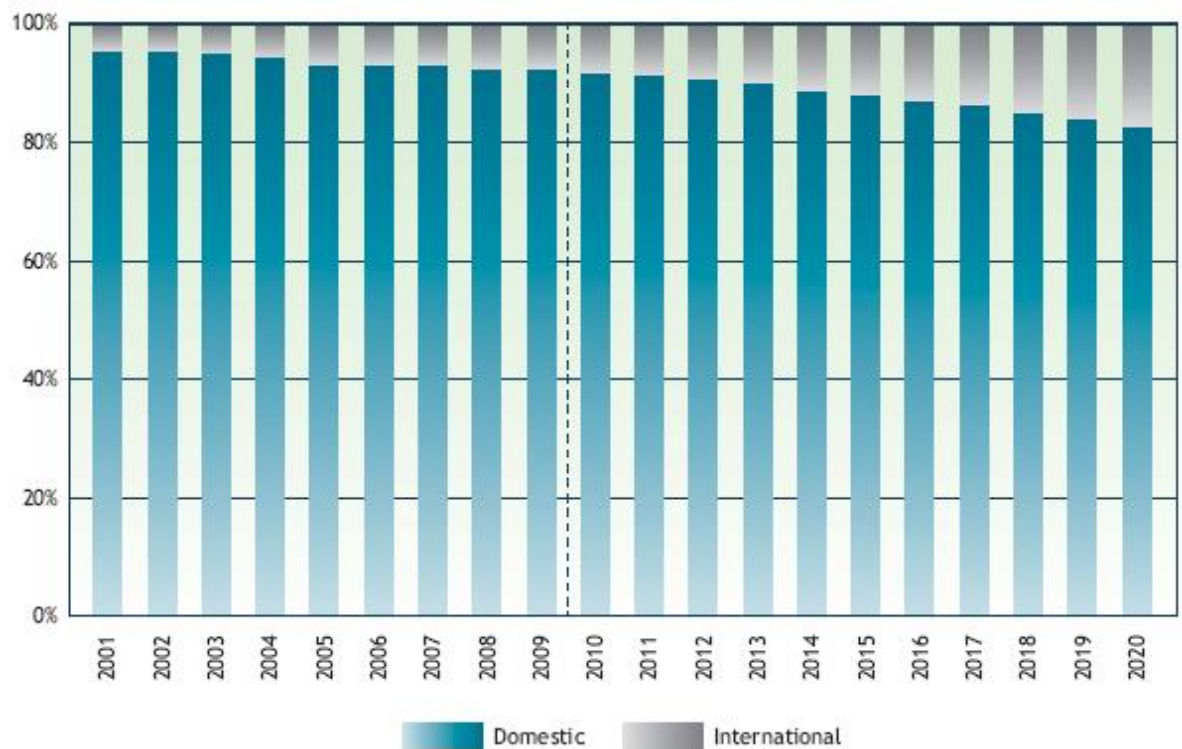


Figure 1.2. *Historical and future trends of international students as a proportion of domestic students from 2001 to 2020 in Australia (IEAC, 2015)*

The consistent growth in the reputation of Australia as a host country reflects the proportional increases in international student enrolment together with the projected growth in future international student enrolment in Australia. From 2002 to 2014, the

number of international students studying in Australia increased ten-fold (IEAC, 2015). In 2014, an estimated 266,233 international students from 180 countries studied in an approved Australian higher education institution. By 2020, forecasts suggest that 330,000 students will be studying in Australia (IEAC, 2015). This will require Australian universities to provide an additional 80,000 places to accommodate the increase in demand.

**Indirect benefits.** International student mobility also benefits Australia through broad international engagement. Students interact with individuals from different cultures, exposing themselves to different ways of life, foods, religion and other cultural imperatives. Conversely, overseas students become ambassadors for their host country (Neri & Ville, 2008) reflecting their experiences upon return to their home country. In addition, these students gain lasting connections with their host country (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003) providing valuable cross-promotion, connection building and cultural interchange, which is indispensable for fashioning a more diverse, inclusive and highly industrialised nation (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999).

International students also provide benefits to local industries through flow-on multiplier effects (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Overseas students often obtain employment, internships and skilled opportunities to contribute to the local economy (See Table 1.1) (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015). These newly skilled and well-educated international employees bring fresh ideas and different perspectives to their workplace, assisting in the development of professional connections, helping with language and ethnic barriers while promoting cultural differences between Australia and the rest of the world.

The international education industry further enhances Australia's global reputation. Local universities and governments are committed to providing the highest quality services and experiences for overseas students (Buddhichiwin, 2003). This drives goodwill and the development of strong multi-lateral relationships. Foreign nationals and overseas industries are more inclined to engage with Australia providing they perceive the country as an open, stable yet flexible place to undertake business and travel.

**History of international students in Australia.** Australia's international higher education systems have matured remarkably since the inception of the aid driven Colombo Plan (Harman, 2004). In 1951, the Australian government entered into a number of bi-lateral arrangements with postcolonial Asia to assist in their economic and social development, whereupon eight Australian universities offered scholarships to Asian students (Harman, 2004).

Malaysian and Indonesian students dominated the program, contributing approximately 570 international students (Alexander, 2001). Although numerically small, the impact of these students within their home countries was exceptional, by providing much needed expertise in developing economic fundamentals and setting micro-economic policies to move these developing countries from quasi-feudal based societies to more modern states (Alexander, 2001).

By the 1980s, other relevant arrangements supplanted the program whereby from 1985, the Australian international education industry underwent an exponential transformation, which involved recruiting international students from a diverse array of countries to attend local universities. The various phases of Australia's shift to educating international students may be summarised in Figure 1.3 below.

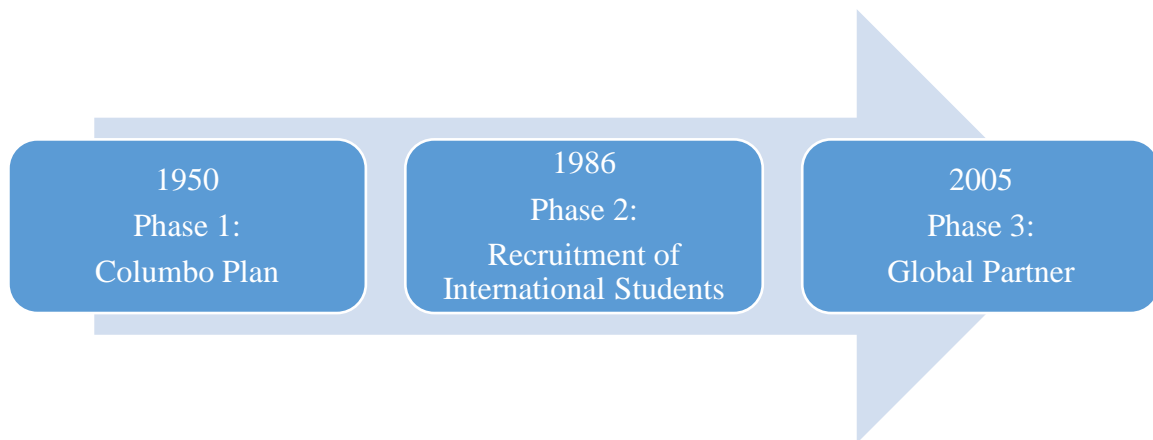


Figure 1.3. *Phases of Internationalisation*

After the demise of the Colombo Plan in 1985, almost 50% of all education tourists entering Australia were Asian, with the majority from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan (Harman, 2004). From those sources, Malaysia and Indonesia continue to provide Australia with substantial student numbers (Tan & Hugo, 2016).

Implementation of policies and settings saw a remarkable shift in international student numbers in Australia. By 2005, the Australian higher education industry pivoted North, recognizing the potential of those Chinese students seeking an international university education. Almost 60% of all Asian education tourism entering Australia were Chinese (Department of Treasury, 2007), while one-fifth of all Chinese tourists were centred in education. Compared to the period immediately after the Colombo Plan, this expansion represented a 1600% increase (Department of Treasury, 2007).

Table 1.3 below provides a snapshot of the two distinct periods demonstrating the change in the demographics as well as the overall numbers of international students entering Australia. It is interesting that other major country arrivals include those from the USA and Japan, countries with stable political structures and highly regarded tertiary education systems.

Table 1.3.

*Overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes, major countries of residence and proportion female*

Selected countries of residence	1985(a)		2005(a)	
	Arrivals '000	Proportion female %	Arrivals '000	Proportion female %
China (excludes SAR)	0.4	24.9	63.6	52.9
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	1.5	41.7	22.5	49.8
India	0.3	13.7	16.7	20.3
Indonesia	1.7	36.4	18.6	48.7
Japan	1.0	64.5	25.6	65.6
Korea (Republic of South)	0.2	26.5	29.9	52.2
Malaysia	7.7	45.5	24.2	52.1
New Zealand	2.2	47.5	11.3	46.4
Singapore	1.3	42.3	20.0	52.9
Thailand	0.7	41.8	15.5	55.4
United States of America	2.2	58.5	29.1	60.2
<b>Total (b)</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>374.6</b>	<b>50.9</b>

(a) Annual data (i.e. total number of arrivals in the year).

(b) Includes other countries not listed and therefore components do not add to total.

Source: ABS (2005) Overseas Arrivals and Departures Collections.

The changing political and social landscapes accounted for China's growing representation amongst Australia's international student community. Economic deregulation and a relaxing of some aspects of their social systems created new middle classes who were ardent about investing in their children's education (Li & Bray, 2007).

While China constituted a large segment of students, other Asian countries began to send their offspring overseas (Bodycott, 2009). Families throughout the developing world regard an international education as an investment in their children's future (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). A growing number of factors motivated the decision to obtain an overseas education (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These included a perception of a superior Western education (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Mpinganjira, 2009), opportunities to emigrate to the host country (Bodycott, 2009; Labi, 2012), obtaining English language skills (Choi, Nieminen, & Townson, 2012; Chen, 2008; Counsell, 2011) and prospects to engage with Western culture and values (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). All these factors served to place upward pressure on Australia's economic indicators (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Until 2011, Australia experienced tremendous growth in the international education sector. However, from 2011, for the first time, Australia underwent a decline in the provision of international education services, despite the sector contributing \$16.3 billion to the economy (AEI, 2012). Notwithstanding this positive contribution to the national accounts, this was a 12% decline in total international education service receipts compared to the \$18.6 billion recorded in the 2009-10 financial year (Australian Education International, 2012), a record year.

The reduction in student numbers caused a reverse multiplier effect and a shrinking of the sector, causing a reduction in the income derived from international

education services (Australian Education International, 2012). The drop was due to several domestic political factors and international competitive practices that Australian universities were slow in adjusting.

In retrospect, Australia's increasingly conservative migration policy specifically targeting international students appeared to be one of three main drivers contributing to the decline in international student numbers (Tan & Hugo, 2016). The amended regulations meant a stricter, narrower setting, detrimental to many international students who sought an Australian education as a pathway to migration (Tan & Hugo, 2016).

Secondly, during the period 2006 to 2012, Australia experienced a significant mining boom with demand for its resources at unprecedented levels, specifically from the newly industrialised China (Garnaut, 2012). This growth in an unrelated export industry unfortunately negatively interfered with education tourism. The sale of Australia's minerals increased the value of the Australian dollar against other currencies including that of its main education competitors, including the USA, UK and Canada causing an upward spike in the cost of studying in Australia (Phillimore & Leong, 2016).

Thirdly, other international education markets matured, competing effectively against Australia. This included both universities with traditional university sectors, educational hubs as well as non-English speaking countries, which adapted to the international market to attract foreign students (Norton & Catitaki, 2016).

Despite these challenges, by 2014, Australia's position recovered slightly: for example, the domestic currency fell, visa grants increased, and changes in marketing policies began to show signs of effectiveness (Garnaut, 2012). Australian tertiary and policy makers acknowledged that the volatility in the industry, as well as the

requirement to interpret a host of factors, contributed to the movement of international students (AEI, 2012).

These characteristics, including cost pressures, increased international competitiveness and migration policy, are fundamental to understanding the Australian international student market. As this thesis discusses, such issues are crucial in considering how overseas students choose a study destination in a progressively competitive environment where student choices are numerous and expectations rising (KPMG, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Combined, these factors meant that Australia's position as a choice destination remains under pressure (KPMG, 2013; Tan & Hugo, 2016). It is imperative that for Australia to maintain its market share, it recognises the issues facing international students. Australia's host universities must revise marketing strategies and governments at all levels need to arrange policies which best attracts students. To understand Australia's position as a host for international students, policy makers must recognise the competitive challenges ahead and face them directly.

### **Relevance of the Study**

The significance of this thesis is to understand the motivations behind international postgraduate students studying in Western Australia (WA). As a corollary, the research also aims to examine the importance of attracting international students to WA and meeting their needs. If Australia's most isolated state is to compete both internationally and domestically for high calibre postgraduate students, it must continue to develop and adapt to changing world conditions.

Postgraduate international students bring tremendous benefits to the host economy both in terms of engaging in innovative economic activity and community action



(Stuen, Mobarak, & Maskus, 2012). Policy levers must be set that both attract and support this growing cohort. Efficient planning requires a profound appreciation of international postgraduate students currently studying and who have studied in WA. Institutions are likely to be more competitive if they understand past and existing students' reasons for studying in WA. This study aims to provide useful and beneficial research that may be used by both government and the higher education sector in assisting them to deliver consistent and efficient growth in the international university sector within WA.

**Motivations and Contribution.** In determining this study's relevance, the researcher was motivated by several reasons:

***Reason 1: Generalised literature.*** Existing publications, while comprehensive and beneficial in developing context are, however, generalised, indiscriminate and non-localized: (for example, see Peterson, 2003; Pimpa, 2002; and Phang, 2013). These studies do not provide specific understanding between the intersectionality of postgraduate international students and push-pull theory. In addition, the prevailing literature does not, in the main, distinguish postgraduate students from the general undergraduate population. The studies are ambiguous in both examining and determining postgraduate enrolment patterns within WA: (for example, see Mazzarol, Choo, & Nair, 2001; and AIEF, 1998).

***Reason 2: Understanding the cohort.*** A second motivation for this analysis is to appreciate the reasons why postgraduate students choose WA as their study destination. The research intends to provide clarity and nuance into the decision-making processes amongst postgraduate international students by focusing and investigating this specific group.

Few publications test the motivations of postgraduate students within Australia. No studies have solely and definitively inspected this group within WA. By obtaining a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the decision-making processes amongst postgraduate students within WA, both universities and political strategists can develop policies and approaches to assist the flow of students to local institutions.

A key driver of this research is to provide recommendations to increase enrolments and revenue receipts while reducing expenditure. This is achieved by firstly developing an understanding of the local international postgraduate student population, and then creating policies to facilitate the process. This research recommends specific policies and strategies to assist in the development and improvement of the industry as it relates to the study's participants.

The international postgraduate cohort is a growing, significant and lucrative market for universities, albeit under-examined and not clearly understood. By undertaking the research, it will lead to a more succinct appreciation of postgraduate international student decision-making.

***Reason 3: Qualitative research.*** A third motivating factor of this study is to investigate the specific specialist group of international students using a purely qualitative methodology. Chapter Four (Methodology) describes and explains the methodology chosen.

Existing studies on international tertiary students have principally used quantitative methods as the foundation for their analysis: (for example, see Bodycott, 2009; McMahon, 1992; Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002). Some papers integrate a mixed methods approach, while few publications undertake investigations using only a qualitative method. In analysing the literature, there were no

publications that used solely a qualitative methodology to investigate international postgraduate student's motivation either in Australia or within WA.

A detailed justification and explanation for using this approach is explained in Chapter Four (Methodology). The aim in using a qualitative approach was to use participants' narratives to investigate and identify any patterns and relationships that exist amongst international postgraduate students when choosing Perth as an international study destination.

***Reason 4: Marketisation and policy setting:*** The study also contributes to the knowledge of higher education and government policies including marketisation and strategic frameworks. The thesis intends to understand why postgraduate international students choose WA as a destination to complete their higher degrees. It is likely that institutions and key players in international education do not consider these factors as comprehensively as they might and as a result under estimate both the importance and relevance of the issues affecting local international students. Consequently, WA may not be fulfilling its potential in attracting proportionate numbers of postgraduate international students as it does with the foreign undergraduate cohort (Mazzarol et al., 2000). This study could be of use in addressing policy implementation.

Both Naidoo and Woo (2011), as well as Chimhanzi (2004), suggested that research on marketing higher education services to international students focused primarily on formulation of policy rather than implementation. This research examines existing implementation policies and recommends additional strategies for future growth.

***Reason 5: Marketing higher education.*** The study also contributes to a relatively new and growing body of knowledge on marketing higher education. Universities

increasingly rely on international students for a substantial source of revenue. This requires them to develop marketing strategies. As the strategic process is multi-faceted and highly complex, the empirical evidence suggests the efficacy of each strategy is only in its infancy.

This thesis incorporates an investigation of higher education marketing policies, specifically those strategies used to attract postgraduate students to WA. By exploring this field, the study adds to the developing body of literature related to this subject matter. This includes contributing to the marketisation and strategic formulations of higher education and government policies.

Understanding international student decision-making is a relatively new and growing body of knowledge, even within a country such as Australia, which has for twenty years remained a top five destination for international students (Altbach & Reisberg, 2015). Universities increasingly rely on international students for a substantial source of revenue and to achieve this, they must enact internationally competitive practices and develop highly geared marketing strategies. There is little empirical evidence to suggest the efficacy of each strategy. Notwithstanding, the strategic process is multi-faceted, layered in secrecy and highly complex (Cheung et al., 2016).

Marketing higher education is crucial for both the host city and their universities to appreciate the extensive benefits offered: for example, in economic terms, full fee-paying students provide much needed revenue to their chosen university and through a multiplier effect enhance the domestic economy by their consumer spending.

In summary, enticing foreign postgraduate students, especially those who provide expertise to developing modern economies and are highly contributing individuals is becoming a fundamental concern for policy makers and strategists.

***Reason 6: Testing of existing model.*** The final contribution of this research is that it analyses and tests an existing push-pull paradigm of international student movements. This hypothetical model is the starting point to examine student flows. The model developed by Cubillo et al. (2006), which is both illustrated and examined in Chapter Three (Frameworks) attempts to explain international student purchase intention. It is a predictor of why and where a student chooses to study overseas. It defines the student as a consumer of education and the host country as the provider of the education service.

There are no known publications that scrutinize the Cubillo et al. (2006) model in the context of postgraduate student flows within WA. This thesis seeks to evaluate the veracity of the model in a very narrow, but extremely important cohort of international students and then draw upon the findings to develop a new model specific to postgraduate student decision-making in WA.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to analyse and discuss the pertinent variables that guide postgraduate student flows into WA. The research problem formulated for this thesis is as follows:

Various factors motivate international students to study overseas. There is little unanimity as to which of these factors influence postgraduate students in WA. How do these factors influence those students?

Three research questions follow:

1. How do international postgraduate students describe and explain why they selected WA as their host destination?
2. What factors does a qualitative interview identify as pertinent to international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA?
3. What are the relationships between the factors that influence international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA?

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis comprises seven chapters, with Chapter One or the Introductory Chapter outlining the background to the research, the relevance of the study, research questions and the thesis' structure.

Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature, which begins by providing a historical foundation of individual decision-making and the relevant theories, focusing upon push-pull modelling, which is the theoretical framework that supports the research. The review then uses this framework to analyse the individual factors that motivate students to study overseas.

Chapter Three depicts the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the thesis. The chapter discusses the rationale for choosing the structures that support this research and explains how they underpin the study.

Chapter Four reviews the research methodology implemented in the research study. The section reflects upon the historical and contextual basis for using qualitative research methods, provides a justification for the approach and depicts the methods used to tackle the research problems.

Chapter Five presents the research results. The section begins with a description of personal and demographic data and continues with a thematic evaluation of the data.

In Chapter Six, the results from the qualitative research are discussed in reference to the prior literature. The section scrutinizes the motivations of the participants with reference to the prescribed conceptual framework. The inquiry identifies the differences between a generalised model of international student decision-making and a paradigm for those students studying a postgraduate degree only.

The final chapter summarises the main findings and recommends policies to ensure the sector remains competitive into the future. This part also discusses the implications of the thesis together with the limitation of scope.

### **Summary**

Chapter One summarises the study by introducing the research problem and its significance within the field of higher education policy. The growing importance of international students to the sector, from both a domestic and macro-policy setting underpin the significance of international student decision-making and the responses from universities and governments.

The chapter considered the broader rationale of the project, firstly setting the scene with a historical analysis of globalisation and the effects on international higher education policy. A focus on the Australian position provided a lens to consider responses of international student decision-making. This section offered a context to examine the growth in transnational students seeking higher education both internationally and particularly in Australia. Appropriate strategies are crucial if governments and universities are to maintain education services as a fundamental part

of Australia's balance of trade in the future. This is a primary justification for undertaking a rigorous examination of the thesis topic.

The introduction narrowed its focus with specific analysis of international postgraduate students. This enabled the research to contextualise the motivations for the study, that is, by explaining the importance of this group to the higher education sector.

The chapter then examined, from a student centred approach, the relevance of this research. By examining the dynamics behind the decision-making process, the research can determine the factors influencing students' decision-making processes.

These objectives and motivations then served to inform the specific research questions. This involved the construction of three substantial tests: firstly, a descriptive analysis of students' decision-making processes, followed by an examination of the motivational factors involved in postgraduate student decision-making in WA and finally a critical study of the inter-relationships between the various factors. The problems are analysed using a qualitative methodology approach, which seek to respond to the questions posed. Finally, a brief section introduced the configuration of the thesis as a compendium to exploring the research, its results and the ensuing discussion.

Chapter Two begins with a review of the literature associated with decision-making theories, then focuses upon the push-pull theory of international student decision-making, and examines the literature related to the relevant factors associated with the push-pull theory.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Chapter One introduced the foundation for this research, discussed the significance and context of the study, including an understanding of globalisation and its relationship to higher education and more particularly to postgraduate higher education. Within that setting, the introductory chapter also examined the international higher education market and the relevance of Australia as a major exporter of these services.

This chapter analyses the prevailing literature that informs this thesis in order to develop a context to understand the research questions. It achieves this by an examination of the various issues that influence international students' purchase intentions. These include:

1. Decision-making theories;
2. Consumer decision-making theories in higher education;
3. Push-pull theory of international students; and
4. Motivational factors affecting international university choice;

By considering these matters within the theoretical framework, international student university choice is more clearly understood. The literature review uses an economic lens to accomplish this by applying two assumptions:

- a. Students are consumers; and
- b. Education is a service product or commodity.

### **Decision-Making Theories**

There are innumerable methods to discern the way consumers make choices. One of these macro-approaches is through selection modelling called 'choice decision-

making theory'. This model posits that an individual must select one alternative and reject the remainder. In this research, an international student deciding to study overseas must choose a suitable destination and university, while ruling out unsuitable alternatives based on variables such as cost, distance or reputation.

**Normative and descriptive models.** Various hypotheses exist to explain an individual's decision-making behaviour within the confines of choice theory, classified either as normative or descriptive. Normative theory suggests that a person's decision-making will be rational (Keren, 1996), whereas descriptive modelling provides insight into *how* the decision maker arrived at their choice (Carroll & Johnson, 1990). In practice, both these approaches are interrelated and used in conjunction when applied to a choice task (Coombs, Dawes, & Tversky, 1970). These models of characterising an individual's choice provide a framework to understand a person's response within complex economic and social environments.

**Compensatory and non-compensatory models.** Another way to classify individual decision-making is by using a compensatory structure. These models "employ a linear organising principle ... combining cue information to form prediction" (Cooksey, 1996, p. 368). In these approaches, a decision maker will attribute a higher value for one trait and a lower value for another trait: for example, a student considering overseas study may attribute a high value for university reputation, which compensates for a small isolated city.

There are two types of compensatory strategies (Ford, Schmitt, Schechtman, Hults, & Doherty, 1989). The 'lineal additive strategy' applies when a consumer adds up all the trait values to obtain the total worth of the choice. The highest value selection is then chosen (Payne, 1976). The 'additive difference strategy' applies when a

consumer calculates the differences between choices on each trait. The total value determines the trait chosen (Westenberg & Koele, 1994).

Non-compensatory modelling uses a non-linear structure, whereby each attribute is independent from another (Yoon & Hwang, 1995). This means it is not possible to offset an advantage in one attribute with a disadvantage in another. Using the example of the overseas student, if that individual's requirements include both a top 100 university and provision of a scholarship, but the student is unsuccessful in attaining a bursary, then you must exclude that particular university.

### **Decision-Making Behaviour**

There are various approaches to examine individuals' decision-making behaviours framed within compensatory and non-compensatory modelling. Theories underpinned by neuro-biological principles and cognitive behavioural modelling are generally used to examine psychological ideas whereas consumer intentions may be discerned by applying economic models of consumer behaviour (Abelson & Levi, 1985).

Regardless of the theoretical approach, as individuals make choices they engage in varying forms of decision-making behaviour. The more complex the decision, the more time and effort persons will consider and analyse their choices before arriving at a decision. When the decision involves a large portion of income or comprises substantial amounts of time, the individual's decision-making is generally more considered and thoughtful (Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999). Often individuals will seek counsel, obtain various opinions or engage with those who have experienced similar choices. This is particularly the case when important purchasing decisions are required.

**Consumer decision-making.** Choosing a university is a type of consumer choice behaviour. In a general sense, consumer decision-making involves a decision to purchase either a consumption good, an investment good, or a mixture of both (Howard & Sheth, 1969). A consumption good is a good that depletes relatively quickly, such as a bottle of soft drink. An investment good is a good that an individual may derive some utility from, such as the purchase of a computer. In other words, the good has a useful life expectancy.

Determining how a consumer purchases these goods has been a mainstay of economic theorists over the last hundred years. Consumer behaviour theory invokes three major decision-making models that assist to explain how international students purchase higher education services overseas: Utility Theory, Satisficing and Prospect Theory.

**Utility theory.** Early economic researchers such as John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern examined how consumers make choices, focusing on acquisition (Richarme, 2005). Their hypothesis suggested that consumers carefully consider all data to arrive at a coherent and rational outcome (Chisnall, 1997). Consumers make their decision based on the expected outcome that incorporates absolute self-interest within the confines of economic rationality (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

The problem with this approach to decision-making is that it is inherently discriminatory. The utility model only considers few alternatives and assumes the individual is economically rational and self-interested (Savage, 1954). Not surprisingly, the model fails to account for the myriad of irrational ways in which individuals behave.

Such criticism is evident within the literature. Shackle (1972) reasoned that rational decision-making theory is not in fact rational or cogent, nor does it encompass a

heuristic, investigative or knowledge based premise. Rather, it is merely a deductive process which Foley (1987) termed 'instrumentally rational' (as opposed to epistemic rationality) (p. 68). It follows that utility theory is regarded more as a primitive starting point than as a model to understand complex consumer behaviour. As a result, further modelling built upon this theory to develop a greater understanding of consumer behaviour.

*Satisficing.* Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon (1976) suggested that a consumer will purchase a product or service after exhausting all available and known alternatives. It is never a perfect choice. Simon suggested that in making a decision, a consumer must "...always select that alternative, among those available, which will lead to the most complete achievement of [their] goals" (p. xxviii).

The theory remains rational, suggesting that consumers select from available alternatives, achieve an outcome and then cease the decision-making process: for example, satisficing occurs when a prospective university student (the consumer) seeks to enrol in a tertiary institution, but does not want to leave their home city. Accordingly, the student chooses only from those institutions that are within their hometown. In contrast, applying utility theory, the university student cannot limit their choice based on location. The choice must be determined using the highest utility, regardless of its locality.

Critics of satisficing argue that it does not incorporate the element of prediction, limiting its ability to forecast consumer purchasing behaviour (Richarme, 2005). Detractors advocate that this rational choice theory fails to consider epistemic problems of constructing models that properly and effectively evaluate purposeful information, particularly risk data (Shackle, 1972). Prospect theory resolved this problem.

**Prospect theory.** Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman suggested that individuals decide on an outcome by calculating risk, particularly when the outcomes are known (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The descriptive model suggests that individuals evaluate possibility, thereby gauging their likely loss or gain, as opposed to the outcome which they undervalue. People use heuristics or rules generally derived from rational thought or probability to make decisions based on risk assessments.

**Kotler's comprehensive model of consumer decision-making.** Leading consumer behaviourist Philip Kotler (1997) considered the strengths and weaknesses of the three theories described above, and adapted them into a comprehensive economic model that seeks to clarify how consumers make decisions. Kotler suggested that consumers begin the process of purchasing a product when they identify the requirement for a product that satisfies their needs. Consumers then evaluate the alternatives, while at the same time appraising the risk. The process concludes after purchase, when the consumer evaluates the product's utility or whether the product meets their requirements. By progressive amalgamation of these consumer theories, student university choice may be understood. The Kotler model is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

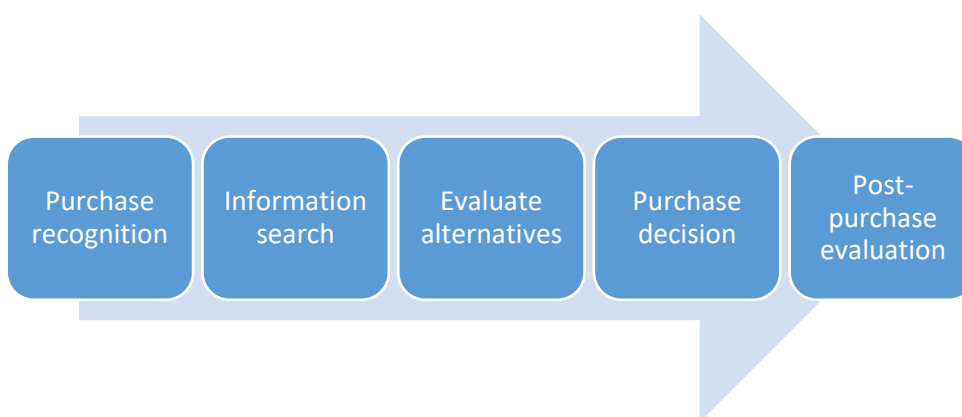


Figure 2.1. *Kotler's purchase decision model (Kotler, 1997)*

### Higher Education Student Decision-Making

Chapman (1986) and later Moogan et al. (1999) both posited that students purchase higher education in similar ways to how consumers purchase any other good or service. The purchase of higher education includes elements of both consumption and investment goods. By applying Kotler's (1997) consumer behaviour model set out in Figure 2.1 above, a student will choose their university in the manner illustrated in Figure 2.2 below:

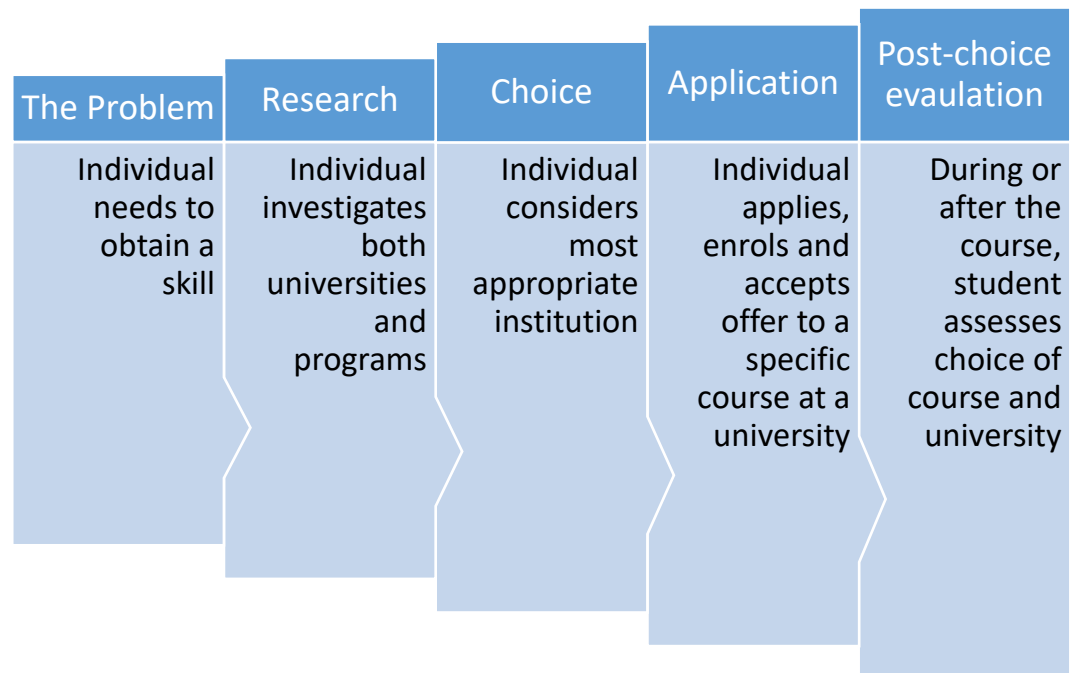


Figure 2.2. *Chapman's university student purchase model (Chapman, 1986)*

Step one necessitates the recognition of a problem, resolved by obtaining or purchasing higher education to develop a skill. To remedy this problem, the individual

must complete a university course, which increases the chances of gainful employment, job satisfaction and reasonable earnings.

Steps two and three involve investigating which tertiary institution best suits the individual. Often potential students will have no direct experience of purchasing higher education, unless they are enrolling in a subsequent degree. Pre-enrolled students will usually solicit the advice of ex-students, agents or counsellors to assist them to understand the student experience (Mortimer, 1997). This strategy assists in alleviating risk (Friedman & Smith, 1993).

Individuals must also consider the financial implications against the utility of obtaining a higher education. As previously stated, tertiary education is both an investment and a consumption good: the student must calculate the opportunity cost of attending university which includes possible income advantages, job satisfaction and better social traction.

In addition, a student must also consider the present utility of attending university. These benefits involve experiencing university life, which includes learning new ideas, making new friends, engaging in sport and other activities as well as possibly meeting lifetime partners.

Step four is an administrative process, where the student may require pre-requisites to entry such as appropriate school grades or experience commensurate with education levels.

Step five involves appraising the choice of university either during enrolment or after completion. There is substantial literature on this theme of student university experience: for a snapshot on the engagement of international students in Australia, see



Eckersley (2016). This research does not seek to examine student experience other than within the framework of understanding student purchase intention.

### **Historical Analysis of Institutional Purchasing Behaviour**

By the early 1960s researchers were beginning to examine the factors involved in choosing a university. These studies focused primarily on domestic purchases. An early example of scholarship was that of Pace and McPhee (1960) who compiled a list of reasons why meritorious undergraduate students chose a particular university within the USA based on a review of 65 different research publications conducted between 1955 to 1960 in relation to USA universities. They found, in order of importance, that exceptional students considered the following factors: the faculty standard, quality of education, curriculum, university reputation, availability of scholarships and facilities. It is noteworthy that some forty to fifty years later, international students consider similar factors when choosing a university (Lee, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

A few years later, Nicholls (1964) conducted a quantitative study of those students attending USA ivy league universities and found that university choice requires the individual to make a difficult decision involving a complex set of factors. The author found, much the same as the study published by Pace and McPhee (1960), that students consider the supply or pull side of the purchase, but also alluded to additional variables including perceived ability, personality type, vocational goals and family background.

Three important papers followed: Astin (1965) and the Carnegie Corporation (1965) both proposed that university reputation was paramount, while Beach (1965) submitted that cost and availability of scholarships were the overriding factors important to students.

The next few decades witnessed variations on this early research, although the published findings were generally similar. Gorman (1976), as well as Wright and Kriewal (1980), hypothesised that location was the dominant factor for domestic students. Anderson (1976) confirmed the earlier findings of Beach (1965), but added that tuition and associated costs were not as important as location.

Chapman (1981) found that both external and internal choices motivated students in choosing a university. External factors refer to matters such as university reputation, cost and advice, while internal factors imply issues such as future aspirations, job prospects and aptitude for a particular course. These features remain relevant in international student decision-making, although were later categorised as push-pull factors (Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996).

The last two decades of the twentieth century elicited further, but similar investigations. Of note were publications by Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989), as well as Kallio (1995), who all argued that parents and friends guide students in deciding on university destination. A few years later, Foskett and Hesketh's (1997) study confirmed this view, postulating that advice from family members is the dominant factor in a student's decision-making.

The final decade of the twentieth century bore witness to the beginnings of globalisation and its associated neo-liberal economic reforms which engulfed the higher education sector. Globalisation concerns the internationalisation of people, goods, and services flowing freely across borders (Appadurai, cited in Starks & Nicholas, 2017). As Starks and Nicholas (2017) suggest, "As a concept, globalisation is a general process that is, in some sense, placeless" (p. 3). In relation to international students, they are involved in this process through, amongst other things, international trade, currency

dealings, cultural exchange and skill transfer. They are markers for a truly internationalised world.

Research analysing the impact of globalisation on universities quickly found its way into academic journals, including examinations on the confluence of globalisation and student motivation for university preference.

In an Australian study, James, Baldwin, and McInnis (1999) found no discernible differences to the earlier studies referred above. The authors proposed, in order of preference, that students were motivated to choose a study destination based on university image, entry requirements, closeness to home and the characteristics of the universities. A few years later in an English study Price, Matzdorf, and Agahi (2003), confirmed the earlier findings of James et al. (1999), but identified an additional element of teaching reputation.

Both these studies regarded program cost as a minor concern to applicants. There are a few possible reasons for this discrepancy. Firstly, the regulation of domestic university pricing in the United Kingdom and the system of deferred fees (HECS) in Australia served to counteract the unaffordability of higher education. Further, prior to the deregulation of the tertiary industry, universities were principally the domain of students from a middle to high socioeconomic status, relegating the issue of cost to the periphery. As a result, participant samples obtained for research prior to the impact of the neo-liberal reforms most likely included students from middle-class to wealthier backgrounds who disregarded cost as a determinant in their decision-making. However, for international students, cost remains an important determinant in student decision-making (Abbot & Ali, 2009).

With the establishment of more flexible higher education fee systems in Great Britain, applicants seemed to consider overall study costs more carefully. A British study by Foskett, Maringe, and Roberts (2006) found that students regarded living costs, job opportunities and proximity to home as more pertinent to their choice of university compared to previous research. In fact, these factors were of little consequence prior to the recent university reforms resulting from globalisation. In contrast to the earlier British based papers by James et al. (1999) and Price et al. (2003), the Foskett led study incorporated a wider sample selection from diverse socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic background, perhaps accounting for the variation in factors including the predominance of cost pressures. These variations in decision-making attributes are crucial in understanding the changing policies behind domestic higher education student populations that by the early 2000s began to be more inclusive and less reliant upon specific classes of students.

Prior to research conducted by Menon (2004), much of the available literature consisted of listing definitive factors that rationalise why students choose a particular university. Menon challenged this presumption by proposing that university choice is not simply a rational process where a pre-university student must apply specific and cogent processes. In the last ten years, this idea has found favour, with several authors exploring the confluence of influences upon student motivations. These studies are analysed below.

In a two part study, Imenda and Kongolo (2002) sought to understand post-apartheid enrolment patterns in South Africa. The authors firstly examined undergraduate enrolments in one post-apartheid South African university (Rhodes) by surveying 104 currently enrolled students. The authors found a plethora of

considerations that influenced these students to study including cost, financial assistance, job prospects and future outcomes. Most importantly, the authors stated that it was the students themselves who reached the decision to undertake tertiary education.

In the follow up research, Imenda, Kongolo, and Grewal (2004) also sought to observe the reason for enrolment trends in traditionally white only universities, but expanded the study to four institutions by sampling 362 students using the same qualitative techniques as per the first study. The findings from this study sought to verify the outcomes of the original paper. In that regard, this latter study's findings suggested that students continued to make their own decisions concerning attending university and were also motivated by career objectives and cost. However, the students sampled in the second study were also influenced by additional variables such as institutional image, university quality and English language skills.

Perhaps the greater sample size spread over four different universities and, therefore, four different geographical and political areas, coupled with the limited time difference in data collection were responsible for the addition of the added variables. Notwithstanding, the latter study does provide evidence that South African students were influenced by a myriad of factors, while seeking to make their own decision, in a similar manner to other tertiary students regardless of location.

Researchers were becoming increasingly aware that student university choice involved the weighing of several different variables. In a local WA study, Soutar and Turner (2002) confirmed this view by suggesting that no single factor determined WA university preference, rather course, reputation, job prospects and teaching quality were equally as important. Compared to the Scottish study by Briggs (2006), the researchers in that instance located ten characteristics that influenced student choice, with the top

five being university reputation, proximity to home, own perception, career prospects and social life.

While both investigations accept the progressively prevailing view that multiple factors influence student decision-making, the studies are differentiated by dissimilar factors, perhaps resulting from the nuanced cultural imperatives, environmental and geographical locations of Scotland and WA. Therefore, while continent, culture and ethnicity may influence the type of factors involved in choosing a university, students, regardless of their source country, will weigh up several inter-related factors to determine if and where they should enrol. Indeed, this remains consistent even for international students, who perform the same calculation as local students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Recent de-centralisation of universities has seen upward cost pressures on students. Callendar and Jackson (2008) considered this issue in a comprehensive survey of 1,954 prospective university students in the USA. The authors regarded cost and more particularly the fear of debt as a paramount consideration, mainly affecting lower-socio economic students, echoing the findings of predominantly poorer black South African students in the study by Imenda et al. (2004). This remained the case in a UK specific study by Brown (2011), where the author hypothesised that the singularly most important feature amongst students when choosing a university is cost. Indeed, this proposition is considered by a number of authors who have investigated the relationship between cost and international student decision-making with several studies suggesting that cost is a paramount consideration (Peterson, 2003; Rousanville, 2011).

In summary, domestic student decision-making incorporates a multifactorial analysis, not unlike international students. Local university students undergo complex

decision-making processes, evaluating risk and applying personal biases when choosing a university. The following section further narrows the literature review to analysing postgraduate student decision-making behaviour.

### **Factors Influencing Postgraduate Student Buyer Behaviour**

Postgraduate education has developed into a core aspect of university business. Changes in government policies, tighter job markets and the liberalisation of the tertiary education industry have resulted in higher learning institutions accommodating the demand for postgraduate courses.

The term 'postgraduate' applies predominantly to students who have completed an undergraduate Bachelors degree. Either these students seek further qualifications in the form of specialist research degrees such as a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) or practical profession based training such as a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Publications concerning postgraduate student intentions, particularly in the last fifteen years, focus predominantly on professional degrees. However, this was not always the case. In an early paper by Rudd (1975), the author, in considering the purchase intention of postgraduate research students in Great Britain found that these students considered the standing of their institution as paramount. Where relevant, these students sought to transfer to institutions that are more reputable.

This finding does not echo the later suggestions by Brown (2011), as well as Callendar and Jackson (2008) who proposed that cost is a major factor for students when considering tertiary education. It is more than likely that this was because participants in the Rudd study originated from middle to high class families who could afford enrolment fees (Boliver, 2011).

With the onset of globalisation in the early 1990s, universities sought to enrol more students, resulting in authors seeking to investigate the processes involved. Chapman (1993) analysed postgraduate students' gauges of quality when choosing a university, finding that this cohort favoured practical training, work placements and the desire to obtain course satisfaction. In comparison, Hesketh and Knight (1999) confirmed these factors to be important, but added reputation, course cost, location and course content as determinants of student choice.

In an empirical study on customer information, Schoenfeld and Bruce (2005) considered the issue from a university marketing perspective. These authors' argued that postgraduate students primarily seek advice in choosing their university from a variety of sources including the university itself, friends, family and from the media. This authors' decision to understand student intention from a marketing perspective rather than simply mapping postgraduate student intention, may account for the differences in the results. The specific focus on advice is a crucial consideration for university marketing executives, principally in understanding how advice from friends, family and colleagues can translate into enrolments.

In a survey study on American MBA students, Carrel and Schoenbachler (2001) measured the "decision considerations" (p. 23) used by students when choosing a program. The authors suggested that students seek to develop and hone various personal attributes including cultivating their specific skill set, while ensuring they have flexible study arrangements and a convenient university location. Despite this study being limited to MBA students, there is no discernible difference in the variety of decision-making factors when compared to other similar USA based studies. Indeed, there



appears to be both a measured similarity in the types of factors present amongst students with a gradual increase in the issues motivating students.

For example, a decade later, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) undertook a similar investigation to the Carrel and Schoenbachler (2001) study surveying 61 Canadian students who were in the active phase of choosing an MBA program. They posited that these MBA students considered a number of key factors in their decision-making including financial and time impacts, career prospects, learning satisfaction, reputation as well as program quality.

This study may be contrasted to the study by Subramaniam, Yusoff, and Othman (2014), who sought to investigate one Malaysian university and its respective MBA program as a marker of postgraduate students' decision-making. The study examined 41 currently enrolled students in their first semester, finding that students were motivated by similar factors as found in the Heslop and Nadeau (2010) study, but were also drawn to the university's website as a means of reach and influence upon the students. This finding is perhaps a result of the increasing prevalence of Internet marketing and the new ways universities market their programs to potential students.

The above consideration of the factors influencing domestic postgraduate student decision-making constitutes a critical representation of the available research. It is by no means comprehensive, but rather serves to provide useful guidance in interpreting postgraduate student motivations as well as providing a contextual outline for the foundations of this research.

The following section analyses the literature relevant to international student decision-making. This review considers the literature in light of the utility of the push-pull model in construing students' incentives to study overseas.

### **Approaches to the Study of International Student Decision-Making**

Examination of the literature suggests there are currently limited structures upon which to frame international student decision-making. Two alternative paradigms dominate the research: sociological and consumer purchasing theories.

**Sociological model.** The sociological model is not based upon consumer theory, but rather incorporates aspects of family influence, personal motivations and the individual's own ability when deciding to study overseas (Chapman, 1981; Walsh & Cullinan, 2017). A student's university choice can be understood by converging these factors: for example, variables that comprise a student's personality together with a modicum of external influences, such as family and friends will together create a general expectation of university. While at the same time costs and university marketing will separately impact upon the student's decision-making processes. The model below illustrates the sociological approach to student decision-making.

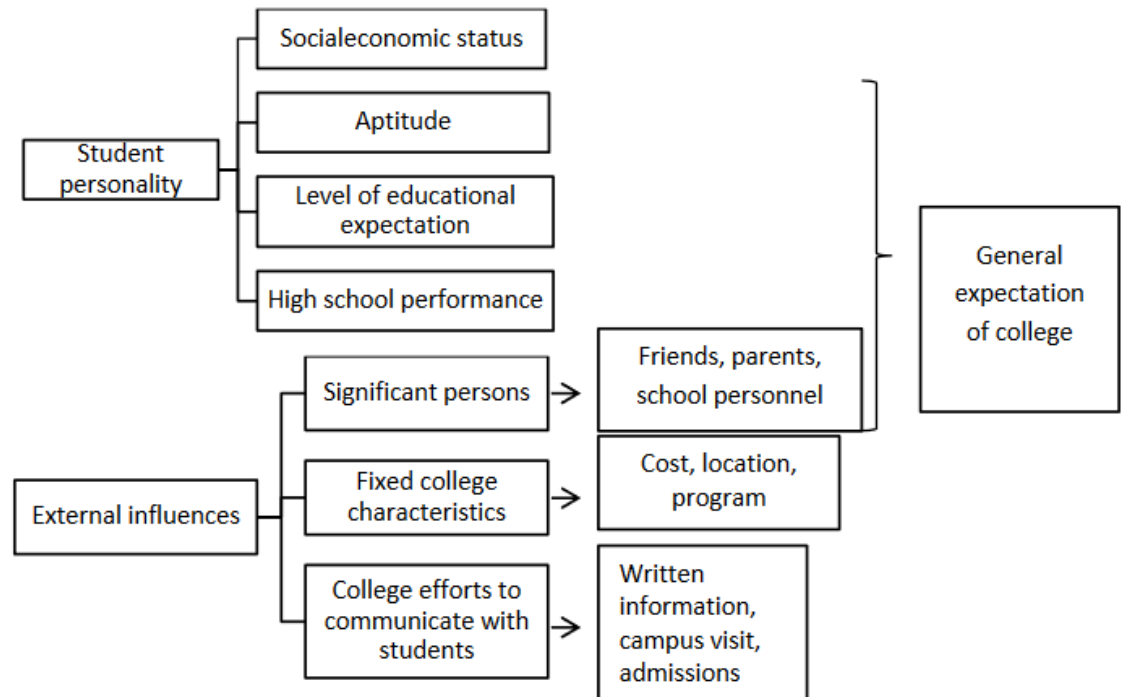


Figure 2.3. Sociological model of student college choice (Chapman, 1981)

Despite the sociological model's attempt to understand student behaviour in choosing a university, it appears limited in its application to international student decision-making (Chapman, 1981). Firstly, this is due to the model's focus on domestic university choice. As a result, the model is unable to explain the steps international students take in deciding to study overseas. Secondly, the model is too wide in its application (Chapman, 1981). That is, it cannot specifically account for a particular group of students, such as postgraduate students choosing to study in WA. Consequently, there is no mechanism to answer this study's research questions accurately.

To ameliorate this shortcoming, the alternative approach, and the design chosen for this study is to frame student decision-making within a consumer paradigm. As previously suggested, this involves considering the decision to purchase overseas

education as an inherent economic problem whereby the student (consumer) recognises a need (lack of education) that requires mollifying. The following section considers two such consumer based theories in which to examine international student decision-making

**Human capital theory.** Earlier discussion in this chapter considered generalised decision-making theories. Those theories underpin the various frameworks that may be used to evaluate international student decision-making. The first of these specific theories, published by Becker (1975) who rooted his ideas within the Kotler (1997) paradigm, while framing the principal notion in labour systems. He hypothesised students firstly identify the need to obtain a skill and after searching and evaluating alternatives they proceed to purchase a specific education that will garner them the required expertise. In that way, the proficiencies obtained by students can then be applied in the form of human capital that will potentially be invested in the production of goods or services (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004). In other words, the student's investment in their tertiary education applies those skills that they previously invested: for example, those with university level education are usually more proficient in adapting to technological changes in the workplace. Applying the theory of human capital, through their education, graduates achieve comparative advantages in both the job market and the workplace.

Human capital theory incorporates three facets: ability, knowledge and skills. As Becker (1975) and later Blundell, Dearden, Meghir, and Sianesi (1999) hypothesised, people invest in human capital to obtain a future benefit. In education terms, students obtain a degree to optimise their chances of a prosperous future. This process involves

a measure of risk and a significant opportunity cost. Students relinquish an immediate income to study in order to gain a future financial benefit.

In addition, the investment in education may also generate non-pecuniary benefits (Kenkel, 1990). Education often results in upward social mobility, better health and more diverse and interesting experiences. The theory posits that students invest in their futures. By studying, students become more adept at managing their lives, increase their productivity in the workplace and live better quality lives. Subsequently, the potential for a more fulfilling life helps motivate students to invest in their education.

Conceptually, the theory helps to explain why international students choose to study overseas. It offers a framework to analyse the motivational factors involved in their decision-making processes. The theory does not generally account for the illogical and 'human element', that is, the irrational reasons why students choose to study overseas (Hemsley-Brown, 1999).

While it is appealing to incorporate these sociological, psychological and economic aspects of decision-making, empirical evidence suggests that complex rational thinking dominates the individual's decision to study overseas (Bredo, Forersom, & Laursen, 1993). That is, students are motivated by a variety of push-pull factors, much the same as immigrants are motivated to leave their home country for a better life.

**Push-pull theory.** In the same way that Kotler (1997) influenced the creation of human capital theory, the generalised decision-making paradigm also assists in appreciating the principles of push-pull theory as it applies to international student decision-making.

The concept has its origins in migratory analysis wherein the nineteenth century, Ernst Ravenstein published the Laws of Migration that were framed using a push-pull theory of migration (Dorigo & Tobler, 1983). Ravenstein suggested that migrants choose a destination to live based upon a series of push-pull factors (Faist, 2012). Push factors connect to the conditions of the source country that caused the person to move. These factors may include political turmoil, economic recession or even war. Pull factors are the positive attributes of the destination country pulling the individual towards relocation (Chen, 2017). Examples of pull factors include economic stability and political freedoms (Yaukey, 1985).

In other words, individuals are motivated to change their circumstances due to an event or a perception of a situation. This triggers the person to consider their options and eventually inspires a change in their consumer behaviour (Lee, O'Leary, Lee, & Morrison, 2002). This motivational model underpins the push-pull theory and is shown in Figure 2.4 below.

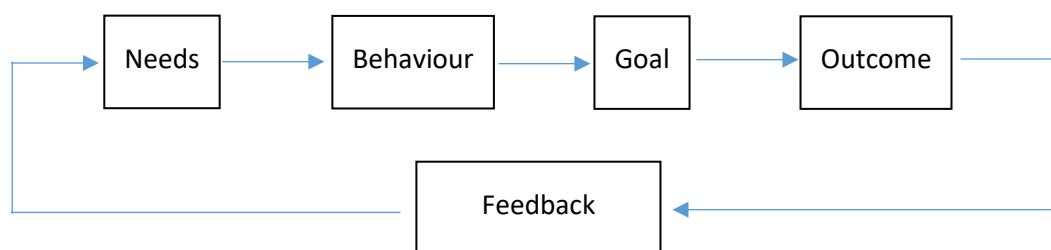


Figure 2.4. Motivational Model (Lee, O'Leary, Lee, & Morrison, 2002).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) applied the push-pull model to international education. They suggested, conforming to Kotler's (1997) theory, that students, particularly from developing countries, often find their domestic circumstances prevent

them from securing a desirable university education (purchase recognition). Some students may be pulled to a foreign destination because of their inability to secure a university place domestically or because their hometown college does not offer a particular course. International students may also be pulled towards a specific country because of its developed economy, job opportunities and liberal social policies. These students find the pull of countries like Australia, England and the USA enticing with many students not returning to their home country.

At postgraduate level, many tertiary institutions in developing countries do not have the available resources to properly supervise students at Doctoral level or appropriate standards for professional Masters Courses. For students seeking these qualifications, sometimes the only available option is to study overseas.

Students may also be pushed out of their home countries by political or social factors. Some countries may give preference to distinct student groups: for example, in Malaysia, it is common for indigenous Malays to receive preferential treatment over ethnic Chinese students (Arshad & Nahar, 2016; Selvaratnam, 1988).

Students might also seek overseas study opportunities because of political repression or war. Since the 1950s, many developing nations experienced domestic political problems. The effect of this strife often paralyzes higher education institutions, resulting in inadequate and unresponsive universities (Chen, 2008). In these instances, students seeking postgraduate education have limited option but to pursue overseas education (Mazarrol & Soutar, 2002; Rounsaville, 2011).

The above factors provide the underlying elements to develop a comprehensive push-pull framework for understanding international students' decision-making. The pull features offer a destination, which meets the individual's needs. The push factors

cannot meet the students' needs by themselves. It follows that the push factors motivate the student to change their consumer behaviour. As a result, the pull features then ensue. Consequently, while each factor may relate to a specific stage in the calculation, the factors do inter-relate and are dependent upon each other (information search and evaluation of alternatives).

In economic terms, students (consumers) seek other markets overseas. This is usually because of a number of factors such as the home state struggling to maintain political and economic cohesiveness, consistent world class education institutions, and employment opportunities. Subsequently, as competition for global education increases, governments continue to deregulate education systems and international tuition fees become less expensive.

The next section discusses the literature that applies the push-pull theory to international student flows with an emphasis on the early research in the area and how those studies culminated in a generalised model of overseas student decision-making.

***Historical modelling.*** Maringe and Carter (2007) suggested that pull-push analysis is the appropriate mechanism to understand international student decision-making. Early studies adapted the model as an instrument to analyse the international student cohort. Research by Rao (1979), Lee and Tan (1984), as well as Agarwal and Winkler (1985) were the first authors to recognise pull factors amongst international students. The latter study is the most comprehensive of the early publications, incorporating a longitudinal economic analysis of the changes in international student motivations from 15 unindustrialised countries studying in the USA between the periods 1954 to 1973. The data were obtained from the Institute of Higher Education and



accounted for between 25,000 to 75,000 foreign students studying in the USA, in any given year.

Agarwal and Winkler (1985) found that a variety of push-pull factors influence students' decisions to study in the USA including the source country's economic situation, the variability in cost and the future benefit for undertaking an international degree. In comparison, the preceding two studies also found a variety of influences which closely matched the factors in the larger study including the host country's public infrastructure, the relationship of their home country with the host, program cost and career advancement.

Rao (1979), as well as Lee and Tan (1984), used different measurements to determine student motivations compared to Agarwal and Winkler. It is useful to consider these different methodologies to permit a more informed comparison: for example, Rao measured undifferentiated foreign students studying in Australia between the years 1973 to 1975 using macro data obtained from publicly available sources in Australia, while Lee and Tan used a similar economic equation to that of Agarwal and Winkler to measure over 130,000 students from 103 less developed countries pursuing a tertiary education in the USA, UK and France in 1979. Despite the differences in source and host countries, the age of the studies and the method of determining students' motivations to study overseas, all three authors recognised a consistent set of decision-making factors that influenced students to seek an international education, which remain relevant today. These include the two key attributes of cost and employability.

The growth of a comprehensive push-pull model of international student flows had its genesis in a study by McMahon (1992) and later by Altbach (1998). McMahon

examined international student flows by undertaking a longitudinal survey of students from 18 developing nations in the 1960s and 1970s. The author sourced national aggregated data inputted into a similar economic equation used by Agarwal and Winkler (1985). In doing so, McMahon was able to investigate the global variables that both pushed and pulled students to a destination. The author hypothesized that tangible events within the international systems affected students' decisions to study overseas. In other words, by analyzing the relationship between the causal variables, which affected students' decisions to study overseas, the direction and size of international student flows, researchers could better understand the phenomena.

The results suggested that a variety of push factors motivated students to study overseas including the importance of education to their country, their home country's wealth and availability of higher education at home. Equally, the push factors suggested that students chose a destination due to the host country's relative international status, economic prowess, bilateral relationship with their home country (such as foreign aid) and financial support. The McMahon (1992) study was important for both its size and its ability to make generalizations about international student movements. The paper remains, twenty five years later, one of the most comprehensive analyses of international student flows.

Altbach (1998) built upon the work of McMahon (1992) undertaking a comprehensive literature review of the various factors that were considered to influence students to study overseas. His approach was much broader, incorporating a greater number of factors than McMahon. Altbach's premise was that external and uncontrollable factors influence foreign students, including political and social dynamics such as domestic political instability and economic volatility. Students were

drawn to a host country based on intangible, yet promising futures including improved living standards and career opportunities.

While the model was slowly developing into a comprehensive push-pull paradigm that sought to understand international student flows, critics averred that Altbach (1998) focused too broadly on external forces, ignoring the student's personal behaviour and choices (Davis, 1995; Li & Bray, 2007). Despite these criticisms and the formation of sociological modelling as an alternative, the advent of the push-pull model was a watershed in investigating international student movements. This was because the development of the model provided a consumer or student-centric based framework capturing the essence of international students' motivations that could then be used by policy makers to improve experience and increase enrolment. Researchers readily understood this breakthrough and steadily developed a list of factors to explain overseas study intentions.

Mazzarol and Hosie (1996) built on this theory, intent on developing a wide ranging model. The authors surveyed the marketing and international officers of 315 Australian and international higher education institutions to ascertain their expert opinions as to international student motivations. The authors suggested that international students studying in Australia rely primarily on friends for advice when choosing both a destination and a foreign university, as well as the distance of the destination country to their home, the climate and educational opportunities as primary determinants of choice. The authors further argued that a greater number of students from Asia regarded proximity to home as a key motivator.

The research by Mazzarol and Hosie (1996) began to recognise the maturing international market, providing a case for Australia to differentiate itself from other

destinations because of its reputation, as well as political and economic stability. In addition, unlike prior research on international student decision-making, the Mazzarol and Hosie study considered the views of an experienced professional group, rather than the students themselves. The findings from this research suggests that universities and students both recognise similar factors that influence students to seek an overseas education.

A year later, Lin (1997) conducted research on international students studying in the Netherlands using the push-pull framework. Questionnaires were randomly provided to international students studying at seven Dutch universities. Both descriptive and factor analysis was used to determine the students' reasons for studying in Holland.

The results from the Lin (1997) study highlighted the inter-relationship between the push-pull factors, proposing that students valued the Netherlands university system over their own (reputation) as well as the career opportunities derived from an overseas education compared to those job prospects within their home country. The difference in the factors suggested by Lin compared to Mazzarol and Hosie (1996), are perhaps due to the geographic specificity of both countries, whereby Australian based students appeared to value that country's warmer climate together with attaining English fluency over a European language.

While both papers show differences in sample attributes and country specific preferred factors, they provide a proficient demonstration of the multi-faceted nature and inter-dependent factors that influence international student decision-making, implying that these relationships are at the heart of push-pull theory.

Building upon the notion that student movements are multi-dimensional, Mazarrol and Soutar (2001) provided the breakthrough research that contextualized the existing

paradigms developed by the early theorists to develop a defining and comprehensive study of international student flows.

The significant and wide-ranging survey by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) explored international student flows within the push-pull framework through its factor analysis of 2,485 both undergraduate and postgraduate international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India who were enrolled in an Australian university in the 1990s. In comparison to previous analyses, the authors tested a diverse array of push-pull factors. They firstly assessed the push factors as a partial determinant of a student's decision-making and then hypothesised that two arrangements of pull factors influenced students – those relating to the host country and university choice. The authors listed six factors:

1. Obtaining an understanding of the potential host country;
2. Recommendations obtained through advice;
3. Cost pressures;
4. Environment;
5. Geographic proximity to the source country; and
6. Social networks within the host country.

In addition, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) complemented the understanding of international student flows by firstly theorizing that student purchase intention comprises three distinct stages. Firstly, the student will decide to pursue a degree, then the student will decide to study overseas and finally the student will choose a university to enrol, which built upon the early domestic university modelling by Chapman (1986).

For the student, the purchase of overseas education is a rare event and involves complicated cognitive decision-making. Such a decision requires substantial consideration to risk and to future outcomes: for example, students must consider

factors including price, country, program, attitudes about the proposed destination and other people's opinions.

The research was not without criticism. Pimpa (2002) contended that the investigation was too elongated and discrete in its measurements the authors only considered a small segment of the relationship between family members and student motivations. He argued that the benefit of push-pull modelling is to identify international students' motivations for studying abroad. In his view, the Mazarrol and Soutar (2002) research failed to paint a complete portrait of international student decision-making and accordingly, additional research should be advanced to examine students' decision-making as it related to familial influence.

The push-pull model of international student decision-making was now developing into a comprehensive archetype to understand student flows. Chen and Zimitat (2006) focused upon the belief structures of Taiwanese students in Australia, hypothesizing that attitudes and beliefs guided students' decision-making, rather than any evidence based outcomes. They conducted a qualitative research by firstly ascertaining the variables affecting international students from the existing literature and then identifying the key variables affecting Taiwanese students through interviews (n=12). They triangulated these data by interviewing seven expert researchers.

Chen and Zimitat (2006) found that university alumni were influential upon a pre-student's decision-making as was the perceived economic benefit of obtaining a transnational university education. The authors also proposed that students believed that cost acted as a negative factor, inhibiting the decision to study overseas.

While Chen and Zimitat (2006) focused solely on one source country, it was becoming clear that researchers like those cited above considered the modelling

suggested by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) to be more functional than the early macro-economic methodologies used by McMahon (1992), as well as Agarwal and Winkler (1985). This research on inter-related push-pull modelling soon resulted in a comprehensive framework to discern an international student's motivation to study abroad.

Cubillo et al. (2006) sought to integrate all relevant and pertinent factors associated with international student decision-making into a single model to explain the decision-making processes of students studying abroad. While a detailed analysis of the model can be found in Chapter Three of this thesis, where it is used as the conceptual framework for this study, it is pertinent to briefly describe how Cubillo et al. constructed their theoretical choice model.

Cubillo et al. (2006) considered the variables suggested by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) that motivated international students to study overseas together with other pertinent motivating factors, as illustrated in the extant literature. By modelling these multi-factorial and inter-related themes, the authors proposed to explain international student purchase intention. The authors suggested that modelling the choice factors could offer a mechanism to predict why and where a student chooses to study overseas.

Further studies incorporated the Cubillo et al. (2006) paradigm into their research, illustrating the veracity of the push-pull model. However, subsequent authors sought to augment the Cubillo et al. model by researching and ascertaining the relevance of other variables not considered by Cubillo et al., including migration, scholarship and specificity of advice depending on source and host country.

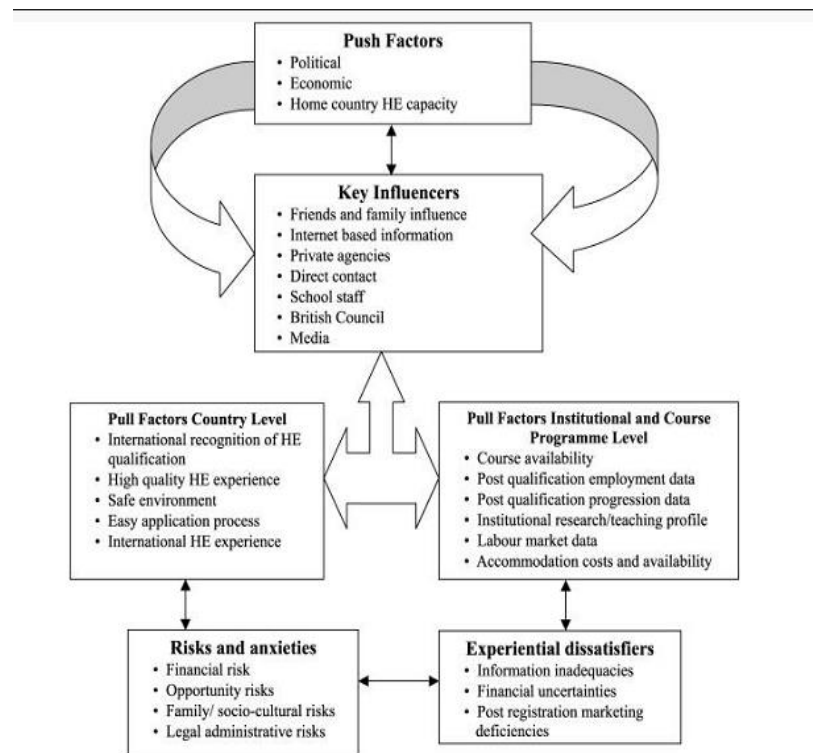
Szelenyi (2006) conducted one such study, suggesting that postgraduate international students chose to enrol in USA universities as it gave them a greater

chance to migrate from their home country. The author interviewed 26 international postgraduate students enrolled in an array of PhD programs at a large public research university on the west coast of the USA. Szelenyi postulated that the less developed a country, the greater the push for the elite or wealthy to study in the USA. While Szelenyi's study only considered enrolled PhD students in one corner of the USA, thereby limiting the ability to generalise the results to all international students, it does suggest the growing importance of the relationship between migration, country image and postgraduate students within the context of the push-pull model, an issue that this thesis considers.

A year after the publication of the Cubillo et al. (2006) study, Maringe and Carter (2007) conducted an exploratory qualitative project to investigate African students' decisions to study in the UK. The authors invited 28 participants from Africa divided into four focus groups from two south England universities to ascertain their reasons for studying in England.

Framing their findings using the push-pull model, Maringe and Carter (2007) found that African students chose the UK due to a range of factors that were not markedly different to the themes raised by Cubillo et al. (2006) including the influence of friends and family, cost as well as political and economic imperatives. These findings are illustrated at Figure 2.5 below. In addition, the authors hypothesised that African students also undergo a process of decision-making that is similar to the Chapman (1986) model illustrated at Figure 2.2 herein.





*Figure 2.5.* A push-pull model describing African students' overseas study decision-making. (Maringe & Carter, 2007)

Bohman (2009) also employed qualitative techniques in his research, engaging 13 international students studying in rural Illinois, USA. The study found that advice from friends and educational agents are pivotal to a student's decision-making. In addition, the outcomes further confirmed the benefit of using qualitative methodology within a push-pull framework by accurately depicting the connections between the various factors coded. Further, the author applied a conditional matrix to identify where the codes fit within the chronology of student decision-making, a measure that previous quantitative studies had not achieved.

In contrast to Bohman's (2009) qualitative study, Mpinganjira (2009) employed a mixed methods approach to investigate students' decisions to study in South Africa using the push-pull framework. In so doing, the author firstly interviewed eight international students enrolled at the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg to ascertain decision-making factors and then tested those factors against a further 188 international students also enrolled at the same university. While this exploratory sequential design is relatively understated within the literature, the findings are consistent with other research in that there is nothing different. However, when considering the context of postgraduate student decision-making in WA and more specifically this study, the ability to generalise these results are limited because of the explicit focus on only one university in Johannesburg, and the non-differentiation of data between undergraduate and postgraduate students given that each cohort presents with distinct decision-making factors.

In a Malaysian study, Padlee, Kamaruddin, and Baharun (2010) surveyed 656 foreign students enrolled at public Malaysian universities using factor analysis, to determine their motivations for choosing that country. The results echoed the findings of existing literature, suggestive of a commonality amongst the variables, such as cost, quality of teaching, English language and country effect despite the variations in methodology. Noticeably these themes echo the variables suggested by Cubillo et al. (2006).

With respect to both the Bohman (2009) and Padlee et al. (2010) studies, there are two issues that should be addressed. Firstly, both studies used factor analysis as the technique to determine students' choice variables. While the design offers a comprehensive method to test decision-making traits, it may be limited in determining

where the factor falls within the decision-making process of the student. In addition, the decision by Padlee et al. to only draw data from undergraduate participants enrolled at private Malaysian universities does not necessarily represent a complete cohort of those individuals seeking to study abroad and, therefore, might not be a true representation of the factors involved in decision-making. Nevertheless, both the Bohman and Padlee et al. studies do help to inform us of the likely variables that influence international students when they are deciding to study overseas.

Building upon the growth of studies centred on single host countries, Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2012) adapted the push-pull framework to investigate the growing demand for off-shore enrolments or transnational higher education (TNHE). The authors surveyed 320 undergraduate and postgraduate international students studying in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They found that students enrolled in non-traditional host countries like the UAE, were driven by the same push factors as those international students seeking a traditional host, such as Australia. This includes the under-supply of quality higher education services in their home country. The important difference between these two study destinations is that students who chose to study in the UAE, generally do not seek migration, whilst those students who selected Australia, commonly sought permanent residency.

This issue of international student migration was further considered by Rosenzweig, Irwin, and Williamson (2006) as well as Beine, Noël, and Ragot (2014). Rosenzweig et al. (2006) utilised publicly available data to conduct an empirical study about international student flows, while Beine et al. (2014) investigated international student migratory intentions from 13 OECD countries by obtaining the data directly from the OECD.

In both cases, Rosenzweig et al. (2006) and Beine et al. (2014) proposed that the push-pull model can be used to predict a student's strategy to migrate to a typically Western, democratic overseas country to escape the negative push effects of their home country. Despite the studies being published eight years apart, both consider migration as a primary consideration for students when choosing to study overseas within the context of push-pull theory.

The above chronological literature review is not exhaustive, but rather provides examples of host countries studied and factors considered within the push-pull lens. A complex pattern of interacting variables emerges, suggesting the potential of the push-pull framework and the importance of the research in understanding international students' motivations to study overseas.

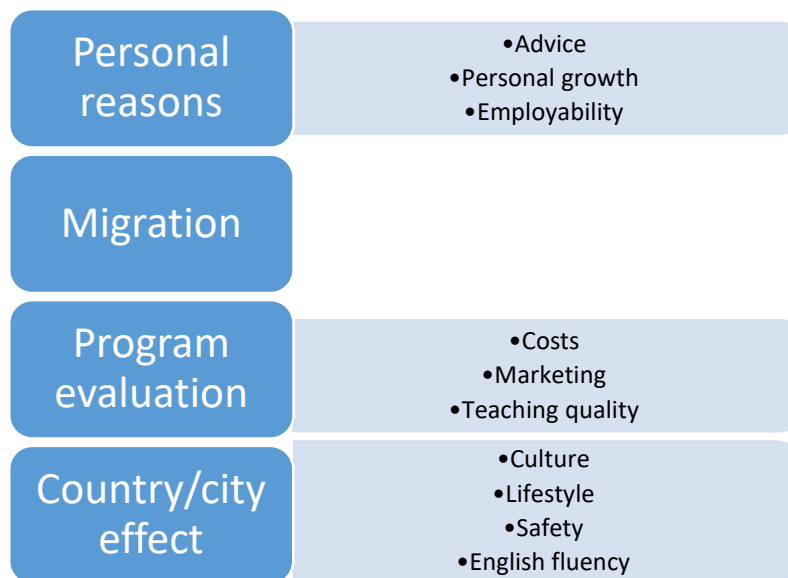
The next section examines the effect of discrete variables on international student decision-making in order to develop a more concise depiction of why international students choose to study overseas.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The literature analysis undertaken below is thematic. The reason for this is because of the way thematic analysis identifies patterns of significance across a dataset to assist in answering research questions (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). It allows for pin-pointing not only specific themes, but relationships amongst the variables. This permits the researcher to accurately describe country specific factors and discern the strength of each theme within different contexts (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012).

In addition, most of the investigations below are multi-attribute studies, which identify the prevalence and importance of specific themes. In effect, the nature of the decision-making research lends itself to thematic analysis. As a result, the literature

review attempts to explicate all the available motivators of international students, differentiating between the available research, methodologies used and factors garnered. Each section is illustrated using a table that summarizes the characteristics of the research including the authors, year of publication, research design and the applicable push or pull factor specific to the study. The table excludes those peripheral references that do not specifically consider the relevant factor as motivating international students to study overseas. To retain consistency, the factors and variables reviewed are indexed in the manner referred in Chapter Six (Discussion). Figure 2.6 below illustrates the contents of this part of the literature review:



*Figure 2.6.* Main factors and variables reviewed from the literature.

### Personal Reasons

The literature considers three matters that are related to benefitting an individual's core beliefs and character. These range from considering the opinion of others when deciding to study overseas, to seeking maturity and finally to obtaining employment. Each of these variables are discussed below.

**Advice.** Decision-making is an iterative concept (Foskett, 1999) that involves a continuous calibration of complex factors to derive a satisfactory outcome. Individuals in all aspects of life consider the advice of others to help them reach a decision. They will integrate and weigh these opinions in reaching a satisfactory conclusion. Obtaining counsel is good life practice, thereby improving judgment accuracy in decision-making (Yaniv, 2004). As a result, students considering international education will more often than not seek the opinion of others in helping them reach a decision.

This discrete section is divided into two segments: studies focused on students from developing countries and those studies centered on Western students. Table 2.1 below illustrates the substantive literature that considers advice as an important feature of decision-making amongst international students.

Table 2.1

*Literature depicting advice as a factor of international student decision-making*

Reference	Target Students	Research Design	Other Factors
Hembroff and Rusz (1993)	Minority American students considering study abroad programs	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic imperatives</li> <li>• Fear of discrimination</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language difficulties</li> </ul>
Mazarrol and Hosie (1996)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Marketing</li> </ul>
Ivy (2002)	MBA students in South Africa	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University image</li> </ul>
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	International students from China, India, Indonesia and Taiwan	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Course range</li> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>
Pimpa (2002)	Thai students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Self improvement</li> </ul>
Jackson (2005)	Minority undergraduate students studying abroad	Literature analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical exclusion</li> <li>• Media bias</li> </ul>
Chen and Zimitat (2006)	Taiwanese students in Australia	Qualitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of Western countries</li> </ul>
Maringe and Carter (2007)	African students in the UK	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six factor push pull model based on three stages of decision-making</li> </ul>
Bohman (2009)	International students studying in Illinois, USA.	Qualitative study	

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Kasravi (2009)	Minority American students considering study abroad programs	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic imperatives</li> <li>• Fear of discrimination</li> <li>• Gender</li> </ul>
Lu, Mavondo, and Qiu (2009)	Chinese high school and undergraduate students considering studying overseas	Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Marketing</li> </ul>
Nyaupane, Paris, and Teye (2011)	Post choice American undergraduate students studying abroad	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>
Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013)	USA undergraduate students on studying abroad programs	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographics</li> </ul>
Beech (2015)	International students in the UK	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>

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*Students from developing nations.* Early research conducted by Mazzarol and Hosie (1996) suggested that “friends and education agents were the most commonly cited source of student information about institutions in Western Australia” (p. 37). Several years later, the seminal investigation by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) provided evidence for this argument, proposing that parents of undergraduate students from Asia



have robust relationships with their children, whose advice is crucial in the decision to choose Australia as a host destination.

The Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) paper contrasts with the exploratory investigation by Maringe and Carter (2007) who submitted African students seek out and value the advice of their teachers more than their parents and friends. These different findings may be as a result of cultural nuances amongst African students who value teacher input above all other advice compared to the study by Mazzarol and Soutar.

The bulk of the literature on advice follows these early examples and increasingly builds upon the findings, suggesting that family and friends are crucial in the decision-making process. A notable and previously considered paper in the lexicon belongs to Chen and Zimitat (2006) who suggested that Taiwanese international students were heavily influenced by family and friends when choosing Australia as a destination. The authors noted that as participants' data were captured in Taiwan through school leavers, there was no way to indicate whether the students did in fact proceed to studying overseas.

In another Chinese based survey study, Lu, Mavondo, and Qiu (2009) administered a self completing questionnaire to 480 high school and undergraduate students in mainland China who were considering studying overseas. The authors found that familial influence is an important factor for high school students, but not for postgraduate students who appeared more independent in reaching their own decision about their higher education, a critical aspect that was found in this study. The authors noted the inter-relationship between employability, career advancement and the high

cost in tuition fees as relevant considerations when families offered their advice, suggesting that it is difficult to regard any one variable as a sole motivating factor.

Pimpa's (2002) study rectified the Chen and Zimitat (2006) limitation by including data on both contemplation and decision phases with respect to the importance of familial advice to Thai students studying in Australia. Pimpa employed a mixed methodology, by firstly convening four focus groups of nine students each and then combining the findings with a survey of 803 undergraduate and postgraduate Thai students studying in Australia.

The author found that advice vis-a-vis family influence is broad, incorporating four phases in the decision-making process. These sequential phases are as follows: the decision to study abroad, the choice of country, academic course and finally the institution. Any one of these decisions are influenced by various factors including finance, personal experience as an overseas student, expectation and persuasion. Such a finding harks back to Bohman (2009) who suggested that it is important to discern where the factor falls within the decision-making process to more accurately apply the results to policy.

An evaluation of the subsequent literature confirms that obtaining advice is indeed a diverse and complex process. Using aggregated higher education data and employing a correspondence analysis of the information, Ivy (2002) suggested that along with the iterative processes involved in obtaining advice and making a decision, international students studying in the UK and South Africa must also navigate the confluence of 'cultural influence' and their country of origin. He advocated that African and Pakistani students are more influenced by their family in selecting a destination abroad than

Indian and Caribbean students, perhaps due to these students' traditionally strong familial networks.

In a recent qualitative study by Beech (2015), the author interviewed 38 international students enrolled at three universities in the UK. Beech confirmed previous findings that students from developing nations do not operate within a vacuum, engaging in complex decision-making with friends, family and international student alumni when deciding on both course and host city/country.

The Beech (2015) study was part of a wider project identifying the factors relevant to a student's decision to study overseas. It does not distinguish between student cohort nor subject major, but rather focuses on the social and economic dimensions of decision-making, consistent with push-pull theory: for example, the study found that advice is dependent upon the impact of students' relationships, which in turn may be influenced by financial imperatives such as the host city's costs of living. As such, the decision to study overseas should not be obfuscated by reference to one particular factor, instead each factor is merely one part of the whole.

*Students from Western nations.* In a paper by Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013), the authors surveyed 3584 first year North American (excluding Canada) students who were considering study abroad programs rather than international degrees. The distinction is important as much of the literature on international student decision-making disregards students from Western countries. Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with the literature, suggesting that even Western students who do not intend to undertake their entire degree overseas consider advice to be of importance. These students obtained advice using familial and friendship networks, accepting guidance in

respect of a diverse array of issues including cultural differences, ethnicity, university life, cost and course major.

Two issues are raised in this study: firstly, the study considers study abroad programs, which are inherently different to degree programs and, therefore, may encapsulate a unique set of reasons for enrolling in these programs. Following on from this issue, the Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) study does not permit the use of the push-pull framework when considering relatively affluent students studying at a private university in the USA. These North American study abroad participants are not pushed to study overseas due to factors such as political and economic instabilities. They are often well-resourced and highly motivated individuals who are offered opportunities to broaden their experiences without any existential threats.

Economic and social imperatives cause some students to remain at home. Three papers that considered minority USA students studying abroad are those by Hembroff and Rusz (1993), and later Kasravi (2009). Hembroff surveyed 1139 undergraduates from Michigan State University, while Kasravi employed a mixed methodology by interviewing four focus groups of three to six participants each and surveying 30 students also attending one North American university. Both authors found that black students participated less in study abroad experiences than white students due to economic considerations, fear of travel, media bias and discrimination (historical exclusion). Many of these fears were attributed to the advice obtained from their family and friends, suggesting that advice can be both a positive or a negative influence upon students' decision-making. Kasravi (2009) suggested that these minority students overcame such barriers by communicating with friends and alumni, objectively considering the information obtained and proceeding with caution.

While these papers provide an insight into Western students' decision-making, they are limited in their generality given the focus on black American students seeking to undertake a semester abroad. In addition, the early date of the Hembroff and Rusz (1993) publication may also be an impediment to generality because of the marked changes in international social conditions and micro-economic reforms that subjected the higher education industry to much change over the last twenty five years.

In comparison, another North American study by Nyaupane, Paris, and Teye (2011) considered the results from a survey of 136 Western students enrolled at one university in the USA and who intended to study abroad, either in Western Europe or the South Pacific. The authors found that these students valued the advice received from their friends, regardless of whether the information received was a positive or negative indicator of the friend's experience. Like the Hembroff and Rusz (1993), as well as Kasravi (2009) studies, the Nyaupane et al. (2011) publication provides not only an indication as to the factors that motivate Western students to study overseas, but recognises the importance of friends' advice to potential undergraduate students seeking to study abroad.

In summary, the provision of advice emerges as an important factor in assisting international students regardless of their source country. The literature suggests that conditional upon cultural nuances, closeness of family, traditional familial networks and veneration for friends and colleagues' opinions, students seeking to study abroad generally valued the information obtained from third parties when trying to reach a sound decision, regardless of whether that advice was positive or negative.

**Employability.** The ensuing section considers the importance of employability or career advancement as a key indicator of international student decision-making. Table

2.2 below illustrates the literature that substantiates employability as a central tenet for international students' decisions to study overseas. The term relates to a student's ability to obtain not only adequate and satisfactory employment, but the potential to gain career advancement and opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Table 2.2

*Literature depicting employability as a factor of international student decision-making*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Mazzarol, Soutar, and Tien (1996)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Local credits towards qualification</li> <li>• Teaching quality and expertise.</li> </ul>
Lin (1997)	International students in Holland	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
Ashley and Jiang (2000)	Chinese locals who had studied overseas	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience</li> </ul>
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	International students from China, India, Indonesia and	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Course range</li> <li>• Cost</li> </ul>

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	Taiwan in Australia		
Gareth (2005)	International Chinese students and their parents	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration</li> </ul>
Chen and Zimitat (2006)	Taiwanese students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of Western countries</li> <li>• Immigration</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• Self improvement</li> </ul>
Baruch, Budhwar, and Khatri (2007)	International graduate business students studying in UK and USA	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration</li> </ul>
Dustman and Weiss (2007)	Returning international students to UK	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration</li> </ul>
Lee (2008)	International students in the USA	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Advice</li> <li>• Reputation</li> <li>• Ranking</li> </ul>
Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2009)	International students returning home	Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>
Labi (2010)	International students	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Reputation</li> <li>• City effect</li> <li>• Cost</li> </ul>

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Findlay et al. (2011)	UK students studying in six countries	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social mobility</li> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>
Roberts (2012)	International graduate students in the USA	Macro-statistical analysis and literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social mobility</li> <li>• University quality</li> </ul>
Tharenou (2015)	Chinese international graduate (coursework) students	Conceptual analysis with development of integrated model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>

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In a quantitative survey on international student decision-making that utilised an early rendition of the push-pull framework, Mazzarol, Soutar, and Tien (1996) submitted that international students chose to study in Australia primarily to obtain an overseas qualification based on the perception that foreign degrees were more highly regarded than those obtained from a local university. In the later analysis, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), built upon this foundation, positing that overseas qualifications remained a key indicator of students' decision-making, suggesting concerns around employability and job security.

The hypothesis presented by Mazzarol et al. (1996) was tested soon after in a localized Dutch survey study by Lin (1997) who, using the push-pull construct, confirmed the earlier findings, proposing that international students valued the Netherlands Higher Education system over their own, having regard to career



opportunities. The results compared well with both Mazzarol led studies referred to in the preceding paragraphs, despite the small international student market in Holland.

Building on the push-pull theory of international student decision-making, two Chinese based studies published five years apart and carried out by Ashley and Jiang (2000) as well as Gareth (2005) both recognised the value of an international tertiary education in obtaining satisfactory employment in the source country. Ashley and Jiang interviewed 33 Chinese based students who had studied overseas, while Gareth conducted a survey of an unspecified number of Chinese students studying overseas. Both authors argued that international students perceived their education gave them higher remuneration and job satisfaction (in China) compared to domestic students. Gareth also considered the link between employability and migration, stating that students who immigrated to their host country felt they had a brighter future with better job prospects than if they remained within their source country.

Tharenou (2015) reiterated this hypothesis in his examination of Chinese students' motivations for studying in Australia by developing a model of Chinese international university graduands mobility paths based on the existing literature. Tharenou's findings showed that while the push-pull theory is a reliable mechanism to understand international student movements, international Chinese graduate students regard career prospects above all other factors. In other words, the comparative advantage a student obtains from an international university improves the student's international employability and by consequence their social mobility and migratory ambitions. The study posits that student decision-making is a confluence of evaluations, resolutions and inter-related assessments resulting in long term consequences and life changing outcomes.

Chen and Zimitat (2006), in their country specific survey of Taiwanese students studying in Australia, also considered the association between employability and migration. The authors indicated that a transnational university education is both an economic benefit and a tangible trade-off. In the short term, students pay high fees to study overseas, while waiving their immediate income earning capacity for potentially enhanced job prospects either within or outside of the source country.

The inter-relationship between push-pull factors was further described by Labi (2010) in an opinion piece on international student decision-making. The author proposed that an overseas education is merely one indicator of a student's intention to gain a comparative advantage in the international job market. While the article by Labi is not quantifiable, her views do compare favourably with the assessment by Lee (2008), who employed a mixed methodology to consider the hypothesis that employability and career prospects are crucial elements of the push-pull model. The author surveyed 501 foreign students and then interviewed a further 24 international students enrolled at one large public North American institution, finding a myriad of factors influenced study participants including marketing material, advice from family and friends and reputation. Career prospects were the main driver for choosing a North American university of high repute.

Despite Lee (2008) suggesting that the "findings here are not intended to be generalizable to international students across or outside the United States" (p. 317), a broader reading of the literature suggests that there is a consistency in research outcomes, namely the prospects of gainful employment and career improvement. As suggested in this literature review, these related factors occur amongst many of the

singular host country studies, including smaller analyses whose samples are taken from only one or two universities.

The importance of career prospects is also seen in literature related to graduate students. Research conducted by Baruch, Budhwar, and Khatri (2007) examined the relationship between career, experience and the postgraduate international student through a survey of international postgraduate management students (N=949) who were studying in the UK and the USA. The results indicated that participants linked education with investment in one's future. The authors suggested that this may be due to the study participants linking an international education with an opportunity to gain experience, which employers regard highly. There is no differentiation between students from developing versus industrialised countries.

Contrasted with the Chinese-centric research by Tharenou (2015), the findings from this study indicate that there is a strong correlation between international postgraduate students, immigration and the lack of job prospects at home, suggesting that migration is an important co-determinant for Chinese nationals who undertake postgraduate studies overseas.

Dustmann and Weiss (2007) confirmed the view expounded by Baruch et al. (2007) in a statistical analysis of returning residents to the UK by evaluating census data (N=10,939). The authors found that job seekers exploit their international experience when returning home, regardless of where they originated from. While the study was framed using a push-pull model, its premise was primarily to investigate returning migrants to the UK and not international students specifically. Nevertheless, the findings are important when considering the net effects of a foreign education despite the different sample population.

This idea of improved employability upon returning home from an overseas education was investigated in a French publication by Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2009). The authors theorised that by examining the published literature on expatriation, they could determine that combining overseas education with international work experience is advantageous to a student when searching for work in their source country. While the paper refrains from integrating individual, environmental and organisational variables within the theoretical framework, it does substantiate the role of career orientation as a dominant push-pull factor, particularly when an individual considers returning home.

Two further examples of research examining international employment mobility were conducted by Findlay et al. (2011) and Roberts (2012) who examined the same construct, but targeted different participants. The Findlay et al. study employed a mixed method approach by way of survey (n=560) and interviews (n=80), targeting UK students who were considering or had already enrolled in overseas institutions. In contrast to students from developing countries, Findlay et al. found that international students emanating from Western countries were more socially and culturally mobile than those students arriving from developing countries, which combined with their overseas education, resulted in additional job seeking competitiveness.

In the analysis by Roberts (2012), the author examined macro-data (obtained from the Council of Graduate Schools), pertaining to international graduate students enrolled in the USA from 2010 to 2011. Roberts advocated a variation on the push-pull framework, hypothesising that graduate students are pushed from their home countries due to inadequate specialised graduate programs and pulled to universities in the USA to obtain an education that will provide them with greater professional and social mobility. By studying overseas, these students also obtained a comparative advantage

when searching for employment. Indeed, enhanced employability was the fundamental driver for seeking an overseas education in the first place regardless of whether they originated from a developing or developed country. These students perceived that a postgraduate education provided them with both social and economic mobility that would otherwise be limited, but for the education.

While the literature reviewed so far offers reasons for international student decision-making, it does not consider the high levels of underemployment amongst international students. Sanyal (1987), in an examination of census data relating to the tertiary sectors of 21 developed and developing countries, provided a stark warning that over-supply would lead to international underemployment for many students. While this examination acknowledged early on the potential importance of transnational mobility (see Baas, 2016), it also suggested that international student numbers in Australia will fluctuate depending upon the international demand for different occupations (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2007).

In summary, the review of the literature suggests international students invest substantial resources to obtain a comparative advantage regardless of their source country, and which skills they identify to be highly sought after. Students further perceive that a postgraduate education will provide them with a semblance of both economic and social mobility otherwise unattainable with a local education only. The literature proposes that international students who then capitalize on their international education, regardless of from where they originate, compete far more effectively in the global market, compared to their local counterparts able to obtain financial and social success either in their home country or in another region. These labour and social imperatives are at the forefront of most of the research reviewed.

The next section considers students' desires for personal growth through the experience of international education.

**Personal growth.** General research on university student identity by Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that students undergo seven stages of development while in college. These phases affect the individual's emotional, social, intellectual and physical growth, which combine to form a true identity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Subsequent to this theory, Cubillo et al. (2006) proposed that international students choose to study overseas based on five interdependent variables including the potential in obtaining personal growth or the development of character. This latter variable is the central focus of this section. Table 2.3 summarises the characteristics of the literature as it pertains to personal growth and overseas student decision-making.

Table 2.3

*Literature depicting personal growth as a factor of international student decision-making*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Mazarrol and Soutar (2002)	International students from China, India, Indonesia and Taiwan in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Personal improvement</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Course range</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> </ul>

Pimpa (2002)	Thai students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Self improvement</li> </ul>
Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	International students in the UK	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Product</li> <li>• Place</li> <li>• Promotion</li> </ul>
Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cervino (2006)	International students	Theoretical model based on literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal reasons</li> <li>• The effect of country image, influenced by city image</li> <li>• Institution image</li> <li>• Evaluation of the programme of study</li> </ul>
Chen and Zimitat (2007)	Taiwanese students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of Western countries</li> <li>• Immigration</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• Self improvement</li> </ul>
Maringe and Carter (2007)	African students in the UK	Explorative focus group qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six factor push pull model</li> </ul>
Brown (2009)	International postgraduate students at a single	Ethnographic study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences</li> </ul>

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	university in the UK		
Mpinganjira (2009)	International students in South Africa	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International qualifications</li> <li>• Personal experiences</li> <li>• Cultural mobility</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> </ul>
Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2012)	International students studying at western universities in UAE	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal improvement of no influence</li> </ul>
Singh, Schapper, and Jack (2014)	International students in Malaysia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal improvement of no influence</li> </ul>
Fonseca, Pereira, and Iorio (2016)	Brazilian students in Portugal	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>

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In developing their theoretical model, Cubillo et al. (2006) cited an earlier paper by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), who suggested that one of the interdependent variables motivating international students is the potential to mature by engaging in cultural immersion. Despite that study ranking personal improvement fourth amongst other variables, Cubillo et al. considered the characteristic important enough to warrant inclusion in their model.



The high regard for personal growth is consistent with Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) proposition that international students seek new experiences and by extension personal growth. In particular, students from non-Western backgrounds pursue an understanding of Western culture through engaging in unfamiliar environments. In doing so, the authors suggest that an international education provides multi-dimensional advantages to the individual by improving their ability to communicate and engage in different community settings, thereby opening up employment opportunities and enhancing social mobility.

There is a modicum of literature that considers personal growth as a motivating factor amongst international students including the ethnographic study by Brown (2009), who analysed the interviews of 13 international postgraduate students from 13 different countries who were all enrolled at a single university in the UK. Brown found that these students considered their study experience as potentially character transforming. There was no correlation between the development experienced by the student and their country of origin, culture or affluence, suggesting that personal growth may be a universal element of all individuals who experience exposures to other cultures in an educational setting.

Foregoing familial and cultural environments for other pastures provides individuals with opportunities in self-discovery. Brown (2009) further observed that his study participants were motivated to study in the UK predominantly as a cross cultural experience, to gain a better understanding of the world around them through improved communication skills and cultural awareness. This benefits students by making them more worldly and opening up employment and social opportunities that would otherwise be closed.

While the Brown (2009) study involved students from both developing and industrialised countries studying at one specific university, which *prima facie* may limit the findings generality, the ethnographic framework does lend itself to generalisations as comparable settings are likely to produce similar data, a principle useful in this research.

The survey undertaken by Mpinganjira (2009) on international students in South Africa, also suggests that cultural mobility, personal experience and new experiences are significant factors for students. While the findings focus upon students at South Africa's premier higher education institution (Witwatersrand) and, therefore, on those scholars who could theoretically access most local and international institutions on entrance results alone, this consideration does not seem to contradict the substantive literature on other single country studies, which affirms that personal growth remains an important consideration: for example see other single country studies by Pimpa (2002), Chen and Zimitat (2007), Maringe and Carter (2007), as well as the single university study by Brown (2009).

While most research endorses the view that personal improvement is an important reason to study overseas amongst international students, two recent papers that focused on non-traditional destinations by Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2012), and Singh, Schapper, and Jack (2014) found there is no significant correlation between a student's personal growth and their decision to study either in the UAE nor Malaysia respectively. The Wilkins et al. (2012) survey of undergraduate and postgraduate students (N=320) studying on satellite Western university campuses in UAE, framed their study using the push-pull paradigm, found no discernible data to suggest that

students choose UAE for reasons other than convenience, cost, familiarity and reputation.

Similarly, the research by Singh et al. (2014), who interviewed 33 international students studying in Malaysia also found that these students chose Malaysia as host country because of the low fees, religious and cultural familiarity, convenience and safety.

These two research papers by Wilkins et al. (2012) and Singh et al. (2014) may indicate a difference in pull characteristics amongst participants who are predominantly Muslim compared to those students studying in Western countries, particularly having regard to students' desire for familiarity and sameness. The nature of Islamic culture seems to necessitate a tendency amongst Muslim students to collectivistic relationships perhaps diminishing these students' motivation to choose a study destination based on personal growth. As such, and in light of these two publications, there appears to be a possibility that students from culturally similar countries as their proposed destination do not consider personal growth as an influential factor in their decision-making.

However, that theory may also have some limitations as evidenced in a recent examination of Brazilian students studying in Portugal by Fonseca, Pereira, and Iorio (2016), who through an analysis of Portuguese tertiary institutional frameworks found that while culture and language influenced students' decisions, there were "... other factors, such as personal and cultural development, things that don't show up in your CV" (p. 281).

While students generally move to independence as a consequence of maturing into adults, the opportunity to study overseas provides unique experiences to develop both character and personality in a culturally nuanced and vibrant setting. Brazilian

students who study in Portugal are already adept at the local language, providing them with the ability to communicate proficiently and participate within the local communities. This advantage allows them to experience the host country's customs, ethnography and national ethos with ease, offering the chance to develop emotionally without recourse to basic linguistic understandings.

For those students who choose a country where they are not proficient in the local language, they may find difficulty in accessing the local society, requiring them to engage firstly with language and only then with the society at large. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that this student will undergo a process of maturation, perhaps even greater than those who speak the host country's language because of the added exposure of unfamiliarity. These particulars may provide both incentive and cause for students to study overseas.

### **Migration**

With the growth in the international higher education sector, students began to contemplate migration as a key prerogative for studying overseas. The literature describes students as being pushed from their economically harsh and politically stagnant communities to countries that exude stability and growth. The following section analyses the available literature that considers migration as a motivating factor amongst international students. Table 2.4 illustrates the relevant context of those papers.

Table 2.4

*Literature depicting migration as a factor of international student decision-making*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Students</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Lawley (1993)	Hong Kong students in Australia	Quantitative Survey	• Cost
Lee and Lam (1993)	Hong Kong undergraduate students	Literature analysis	• Government policy
Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke, and Fraser (1994)	International students in Australia	Quantitative Survey	• Nil
Harvey and Nesdale (1995)	International students in Australia	Quantitative Survey	• Nil
Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000)	Secondary Chinese mainland students	Quantitative Survey	• Government policy
Mazarrol and Soutar (2002)	International students from China, India, Indonesia and Taiwan	Quantitative Survey Development of model	• University reputation • Marketing • Course range
Industry Canada (2002)	International students in Canada	Policy analysis	• Nil
Alberts and Hazen (2005)	International students in USA	Qualitative study	• Nil
Rosenzweig, Irwin and Williamson (2006)	International students generally	Quantitative survey	• Nil

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Alberts (2007)	International students in USA	Qualitative study	• Nil
Australian Education Network (2007)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Martin (2007)	International students in Canada	Empirical analysis	• Nil
Tillbrook (2007)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Gribble (2008)	International students in Australia	Policy review	• Nil
Banks and Olsen (2009)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Birrell and Perry (2009)	International students in Australia	Longitudinal Policy analysis	• Nil
Bodycott (2009)	Chinese students and their parents	Quantitative survey	• Family influence
Arthur and Flynn (2011)	International undergraduate and postgraduate students in Canada	Qualitative study incorporating Semi-structured interviews	• Nil
Labi (2012)	International students in Australia	Qualitative study incorporating contextual analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National and institutional reputation</li> <li>• Choice of city</li> <li>• Specific program</li> </ul>

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Eskela (2013)	International students in Finland	Qualitative	• Transnational mobility
Beine, Noël, & Ragot (2014)	International students who migrated	Qualitative study	• Nil
Baas (2016)	Indian students in Australia	Longitudinal qualitative study	• Transnational mobility
Clark and Skuterud (2016)	Immigrants to Australia, USA and Canada	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Tan and Hugo (2016)	Indian and Chinese students in Australia	Mixed methodology	• Immigration policy
Gomes (2017)	Asian international students studying in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Sancho (2017)	Indian students seeking to study in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil
Wu and Wilkes (2017)	International students generally	Quantitative survey	• Transnational mobility

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Early analysis suggested that university deregulation in countries such as the USA, UK, Canada and Australia resulted in a corresponding increase in demand by international students wanting to migrate to their host countries (Harvey & Nesdale, 1995; Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke, & Fraser, 1994; Lawley, 1993; Lee & Lam, 1993).

However, these studies were limited by the infancy of the immigrant student cohort and government policies that disregarded this group.

An examination of the research by Lawley (1993), as well as Lee and Lam (1993), detail the context of Hong Kong's transition from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China, where anxiety of the future caused an increase in Hong Kong students to consider migration prior to Chinese handover. Lawley surveyed pre-enrolled university students (N=354) emanating from Hong Kong who were intending to study overseas. The author posited that it was the students' families who primarily advised their children to immigrate to their host country.

Using macro-economic data obtained from the Hong Kong government, Lee and Lam (1993) confirmed the views of Lawley (1993), adding that because of the increased student emigration from Hong Kong, the government shifted their higher education policy to retain students to reduce emigration. In both cases, political instability was the driver behind student motivation.

These Hong Kong studies by Lawley (1993) and Lee and Lam (1993) parallel the findings by both Nesdale et al. (1994), and Harvey and Nesdale (1995), who suggested that in the last fifty years, overseas students have sought to migrate to Australia because of its advantageous economic, political and social conditions. Such a finding provides an example of the inter-relationship between the push and pull factors, whereby students seek stable and consistent national frameworks when choosing a country, while an unstable source country invariably pushes the student to seek an overseas study destination.

The literature post-1995 began to develop a more comprehensive understanding of international students' intentions and migration. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)



considered permanent relocation as an aspirational feature of student decision-making because of the source country's woes. The study posited that these students were mobile, well educated and optimistic about their futures.

A later study by Birrell and Perry (2009) focused on the changing dimensions of immigration policy for international students. These authors undertook a historical review of Australian migration policy and proposed that deviations in Australian migration strategy in the 1980s resulted in an increased focus on vocational training rather than university graduates, causing a gradual decline in international student migration from the early 1990s to 2000s. The study did not examine international students within any particular framework, noticeably avoiding any reference to push-pull mechanisms.

Towards the end of the twenty first century's opening decade, three Australian based studies, published within three years of each other, empirically tested international student migration, although not within the push-pull framework. The Tillbrook (2007) study surveyed over 4,000 undergraduate and postgraduate international students studying in Australia, concluding that 65 per cent intended to remain in Australia, while seven percent had already obtained permanent residency status.

This contrasts to the research by the Australian Education Network (2007), who used Australian census data to find that 36 percent of students with non-specified nationalities had already applied for, and a further 36 percent intended to apply for permanent residence. These statistics are inconsistent with the study by Banks and Olsen (2009) who concluded that only 38 percent of students surveyed intended to apply for permanent residence.

The differences in the data findings may be due to the participation sample in the Banks and Olsen (2009) study compared to the Tillbrook (2007) and Australian Education Network (2007) papers. All three papers used a quantitative measure to discern their findings, although Banks and Olsen (2009) restricted their investigation to those students who were contemplating migration as opposed to the other studies that consolidated data from students who had already obtained permanent residency.

In comparison, Tan and Hugo (2016) surveyed 455 Chinese and Indian students studying in Adelaide, finding that 72 percent of these students hoped to stay in Australia long term with at least 16 percent pursuing permanent residency. This finding is consistent with Tillbrook (2007), Australian Education Network (2007) as well as Banks and Olsen (2009).

In defining their study, Tan and Hugo (2016) raised the importance of the heterogeneity amongst international students. They acknowledged their research is limited by application to only two source countries, which may not be illustrative of migratory patterns amongst all international students. Rather, they suggested that the findings provided data to discuss the interplay between immigration policy and international student movements. Given this reasoning, the Banks and Olsen (2009) paper should not be discounted, but considered within its own parameters, namely a quantitative study to determine the relationship between international students and migratory intention.

Unlike the aforementioned literature, which by-and-large consists of research that tests choice variables upon host countries, Gribble (2008) elected to investigate the impact of student migratory patterns upon source countries by analysing OECD data and government policies. The author suggested that students seek to migrate

predominantly due to the host country's higher standard of living, better employment prospects and research opportunities. The advantage migration provides to the student's source country is primarily through remittance payments, technology transfer, entrepreneurial partnering and the development of international networks. The author states that, in part, these attributes are key in recognizing students' familial pressures to migrate, given the financial benefits (remittance payments) that family members derive from a child studying overseas.

Gribble's (2008) publication is important considering the recent analysis by Baas (2016), who suggested that international students migrate to obtain transnational mobility. Baas focused upon Indian student migrants in Australia, offering three vignettes as snapshots for much larger case studies. The author hypothesised that participants were pulled to Australia by classical push-pull variables including improved salaries and the ultimate prize of permanent residency. Baas proposed that these Indian student migrants seek the advantages of migration, allowing them to becoming flexible in their movements, while retaining a close relationship to their home country through business and personal connections that are intrinsically geared to benefit their source country.

Similarly, Wu and Wilkes (2017), in a large study on migratory intention amongst international students studying at a Canadian public university within the period 2006-2013, analysed data from 232 participants from more than 50 countries. They found that participants who did not view migration as a binary option, but instead have a "cosmopolitan and nebulous conception of home" are more likely to migrate (p. 123).

In comparison, Bodycott (2009) focused on host country participants, by surveying Chinese mainland undergraduate and postgraduate students (n=251) and their

parents (n=100), to discern student motivations to study abroad. Student participants considered migration as an aspirational consideration consequent upon a successful period overseas. The students' parents agreed, satisfied that an overseas qualification would assist them in leading a productive life as immigrants.

The Bodycott (2009) study confirmed the views of an earlier publication by Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000) who, by surveying 1513 senior secondary Chinese students, observed that these students considered migration as a paramount consideration when deciding to study overseas. While the Hung et al. (2000) study only considered Chinese school students, the findings are consistent with other international research on international Chinese student decision-making, suggesting an important relationship between migration intention and Chinese student decision-making.

Despite the importance of migration as a motivating factor amongst international students, Cubillo et al. (2006) decided not to include migration as a construct of international student decision-making without providing reason. The evidence continued to contradict the the Cubillo et al. assumption that migration is not a key motivator amongst international students as shown in the qualitative Canadian study by Arthur and Flynn (2011). These authors used semi structured interviews (N=19), to ascertain that undergraduate and postgraduate foreign students from an array of developing countries, including a majority from Asia and the Middle-East, seek migration to Canada due to two specific pull factors: superior job prospects and better life opportunities. Within that model, Arthur and Flynn raised three immigration barriers including employment anxiety, difficulty acculturating and fears of returning home. These variables may be considered as both sub-sets of the push-pull factors, as well as emotional responses to immigration.

These migration rejoinders are reminiscent of the findings by Alberts and Hazen (2005), who conducted focus groups with 31 participants enrolled at the University of Minnesota in USA. The participants were chosen from six different countries, on the assumption that these subpopulations would provide different motivations for studying overseas. The authors found that their study participants sought to migrate to the USA after graduation, but did not at the time of interview feel a sense of cultural integration and belonging. Rather, these students chose to immigrate because they considered the advantages (or pull factors) of remaining in the host country outweighed any social and economic benefits of returning home (push factors).

A point to note is that the Arthur and Flynn (2011), as well as the Alberts and Hazen (2005) study data sets do not discriminate between undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts. Further, the Arthur and Flynn research participants were all under the age of 40, suggesting an age specific set of migratory motivations that are consistent with younger migrants. These individuals are likely to be more productive and optimistic about their future than older persons, including professional aspirations, accessing reduced migratory regulations and personal growth.

Recent Australian research undertaken by Gomes (2017) is consistent with the findings by Baas (2016) and Wu and Wilkes (2017). Gomes interviewed 106 international students from Asia, finding that these students sought transnational and cosmopolitan mobility, which could more easily be attained by becoming Australian citizens. Like much of the literature discussed herein on migration and student intention, the results indicated a relationship between student migratory intention and the push-pull framework, arguing that migration is inextricably linked with cultural mobility and career prospects.

Sancho (2017) investigated the link between cultural mobility and migration amongst Indian students studying in Australia through findings obtained from interviews (N=25) with pre-enrolled Indian students who had yet to travel to Australia. The author found that cultural aspirations amongst these students push them to study overseas and migrate. Indeed, these students regarded migratory aspirations as providing them with cultural capital necessary to fulfill their familial aspirations at home.

It is important to note the suggestion made by Labi (2012) that Australia's volatile visa system continues to cause consternation amongst students, particularly those from China whose numbers have steadily declined. Many of these students seek to migrate, but are hampered by restrictive visa conditions. This is consistent with the Canadian experience, where Martin (2007), in a review of migration literature, argued that stringent immigration procedures benefit high quality graduates, increasing their propensity to migrate over poorer skilled students.

These propositions by both Labi (2012) and Martin (2007) are consistent with a government policy position paper published by Industry Canada (2002), which considered international students as a priority within its migration policy. The authors illustrated how Canada attracts high quality international students. Policies included giving foreign students access to local labour markets post study, the extension of post-graduation visa programs to three years and the creation of a new visa class. These advantageous conditions invariably pull students to consider Canada as a study destination and then as a migratory destination. Those students who are able to take advantage of these incentives may use them as an intervening step for permanent residency.

The success of the Canadian model in attracting both international students and highly skilled young migrants, resulted in Australia implementing a similar system. Aydemir (2014) described the mirrored policy including the activation of a migrant points system and the opening of skill channels in a cross-comparative analysis of USA, Canada and Australia's migratory regulations. Clarke and Skuterud (2016), using OECD data to analyse Australian, Canadian and USA immigrant's skill usage, further argued the benefits the migratory points system accrues to postgraduate international students through their local activities such as study, skill set and employment, which induces many graduated students to remain in Australia.

Subsequently, Birrel and Healy (2016) in their analysis of Australian immigration policies from the 1970s argued that such strategies, like those suggested by Aydemir (2014), have resulted in international students making up a large proportion of the total Australian migrant intake. Birrel and Healy also proposed that Australian cities are a net beneficiary of globalism, attracting and retaining high quality international students who choose to reside in the main urban centres because of lifestyle and employment reasons. This is partly consistent with a migration study by Stimson and Minnery (1998) who analysed migrants living on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia and who also found that migrants chose the Sunshine coast because of lifestyle factors.

Due to the growing relevance of globalisation, Beine, Noël, and Ragot (2014) undertook a wide ranging study on international students and migration by considering public data from UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat. They hypothesized that international students migrate based on an array of positive and negative factors consistent with the push-pull model. Positive influences include career prospects, language and network while negative factors include distance from source country and living costs. While the

paper does not discriminate between student cohort, it does provide a reasonably current picture of migratory intention amongst international students within the Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) framework.

In a single country study, Alberts (2007) used data from the Institute of Higher Education for the period 1995 to 2005 to investigate international student migration to the USA, post 9/11; a period of international upheaval. The author discussed the migratory dynamics amongst students seeking to remain in the USA and argued that international students will compare the micro-economic fundamentals of their home to the host country, including a broad analysis of employment opportunities, career growth, migratory regulations and political stability when considering to stay or return home. Alberts observed that if the fundamentals at home are on par or appear more certain than those in the host country, students are more likely to return home after completion of their degrees.

In the final study to be discussed in this section, Eskela (2013) interviewed 25 foreign students from both Europe and Asia studying at two public universities in Finland. The author suggested that international migration is a modern day, normal activity for middle class people. As international transport becomes more affordable and communication channels allow a wider array of employment opportunities, transnational migration is fast becoming more common amongst international students than ever before. This study aligns with that of Baas (2016), suggesting that transnational mobility is as important as obtaining permanent residency.

In summary, the literature on international students and migration is a diverse array of papers drawing on the relevance of migration to both host and source country and the reasons why students consider to leave their home. The studies examined

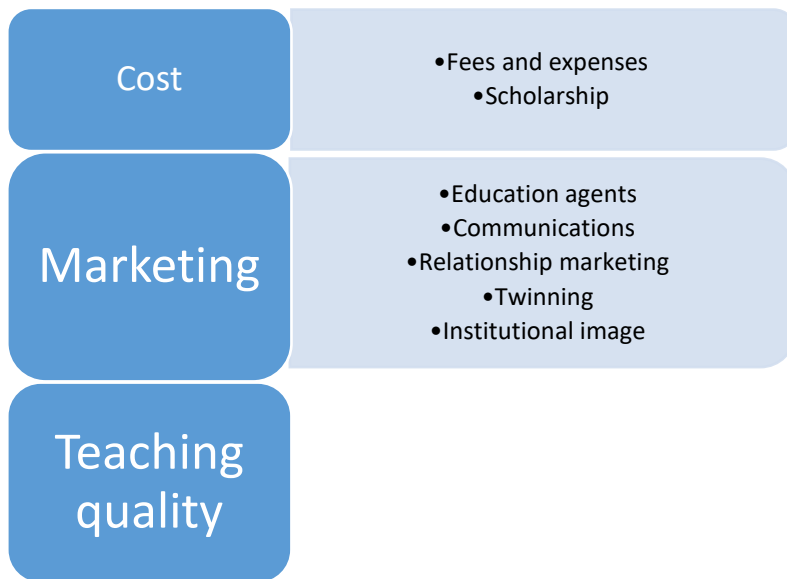


suggest a symbiotic relationship between student, university and host country, all of whom have particular aims in within the relationship. For the student, this involves deciding on an institution and country based on a variety of push-pull factors, such as the potential for a superior education and as a result enhanced employability and increased living standards. Many students, particularly those from developing nations consider their host country as offering them superior opportunities compared to prospects back home. This results in many students considering migration as a consequence of obtaining a local education.

Despite the reluctance of authors such as Cubillo et al. (2006) to include migration as part of their model of international student decision-making, it is apparent that permanent relocation is an essential aspect of international student decision-making.

### **Program Evaluation**

Students identified and evaluated a number of program related items to determine whether a tertiary level program is suitable to their needs. The literature refers to three dominant themes and their associated variables as illustrated in Figure 2.7 below. Each of these issues are discussed as components of the push-pull model of international student decision-making.



*Figure 2.7.* Factors considered as illustrative of Program Evaluation as a theme of international student decision-making

**Cost.** Studying involves an opportunity cost. When an individual chooses to enrol in higher education, they forego an immediate income through employment. Studying overseas also disadvantages the individual in the short term, given the expense of studying at a student's home town is usually significantly lower than if an individual chooses to study abroad. By studying in their home country, students may receive state subsidies or low interest government loans. The student may also have the option of living in the family home, have access to support networks, a part-time job or health care.

While these individuals have upward cost pressures on a restricted income, such stresses are magnified when students choose to study overseas. In that regard, international students pay expensive tuition fees, visa and accommodation costs, and

living expenses including health insurance while subject to exchange rate fluctuations.

The following review of the literature provides a comprehensive analysis of the considerations involved in cost factors. Table 2.5 below illustrates the substantial literature that considers cost as a motivating factor amongst international students. That literature is also discussed below.

Table 2.5

*Literature depicting cost as a factor of international student decision-making*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Back, Olsen, and Davis (1997)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Variety of push-pull factors
Lawley (1993)	Hong Kong students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Family advice
Lawley (1998)	International students in Queensland, Australia	Quantitative survey	• Various push-pull factors
Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000)	Chinese secondary students from special economic zone (SEZ)	Quantitative survey	• Nil

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Mazzarol, Choo, and Nair (2001)	Indian postgraduate students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Mazarrol and Soutar (2002)	International students from China, India, Indonesia and Taiwan in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University reputation</li> <li>• Personal improvement</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Course range</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> </ul>
Peterson (2003)	American students studying abroad	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice</li> </ul>
Zheng (2003)	Chinese students studying in China and overseas	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Chen and Zimitat (2006)	Taiwanese students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of Western countries</li> <li>• Immigration</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• Self-improvement</li> </ul>
Maringe (2006)	African students in the UK	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various push-pull factors</li> </ul>

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Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	International students in the UK	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product</li> <li>• Place</li> <li>• Promotion</li> </ul>
Abbot and Ali (2009)	International students in New Zealand and Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing</li> </ul>
Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010)	International students in Italy	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student values</li> </ul>
Chow (2011)	International students in the USA	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of push-pull and 'anti-pull' factors</li> </ul>
Rousanville (2011)	International postgraduate students from 5 developing countries in the UK, Ireland and USA	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Waters & Brooks (2011)	UK students studying abroad	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiential factors</li> </ul>

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Early research on the globalisation of higher education recognised cost as a crucial variable in students' decision-making. An Australian study that did not discriminate between undergraduate and postgraduate students, undertaken by Back, Olsen, and Davis (1997), as well as a localized source-country specific study authored

by Mazzarol et al. (2001) on Indian postgraduate students in Australia (which used part of the data set obtained by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), both suggested that cost pressures influence students when choosing an overseas education destination. The diversity of these two early studies indicate that regardless of the degree type or country of origin, students appear to be extremely sensitive to cost pressures when making their study decision.

Given the importance of price sensitivity as a construct of overseas education, there are numerous studies that discuss the matter both as single country studies and within the push-pull framework: for example, Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000) found that, amongst other things, those students who wished to pursue an overseas education were most concerned about the high tuition fees and cost of living. The study does not state how many of these students proceeded to enrol in an overseas education, rather focused upon cost as an elastic factor for a substantial number of undergraduate students when considering studying overseas. This finding reflects the views of Chow (2011) who obtained international student data from the Institute of Higher Education. In that study, Chow suggested that for many of these students, the cost of international education is a substantial roadblock for many would-be students, while others may seek out cheaper destinations.

Like Chow (2011), Chen and Zimitat (2006) framed cost as a competitive, price sensitive influence within the push-pull model: if the price of the program is uncompetitive, a student will look elsewhere. Both survey studies regarded cost as an 'anti-pull' factor suggesting that cost factors cause the most consternation amongst students when choosing to study in Australia and the USA respectively.

Quantitative analytical research conducted by Zheng (2003) on pre-enrolled international Chinese students, further added claim to the proposition that cost is a pre-eminent consideration of international Chinese students when choosing a destination. The author noticeably criticises the push-pull model for neglecting the impact of individual student features as well as insights on students' decision-making behaviour. To rectify that concern, the writer added a third measure to the model, namely student characteristics. Nonetheless, the outcomes confirmed the relevance of the normative push-pull framework developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) with no additional elements added to the model.

Rousanville (2011), in her PhD thesis, surveyed 74 postgraduate students studying in the UK and interviewed 23 of those students initially surveyed. The author confirmed the important role that cost plays in determining a student's decision to study overseas by illustrating the concern pre-enrolled students showed with respect to the various costs associated with studying overseas. This finding is unique given the use of a mixed methodology framed using capital theory, without regard to the push-pull model. Interpreting student decision-making through this singular and discrete paradigm and reaching a consistent conclusion, demonstrates the veracity of cost as a factor amongst students.

In comparison, Peterson (2003) used a quantitative survey instrument to measure the normative beliefs and characteristics of USA undergraduate study abroad participants (N=589), finding that these students are most beholden to cost pressures, while valuing the advice and information obtained from program faculty leaders. This perhaps suggests that younger students who have little resources, but are intent on

studying overseas, are more susceptible to cost pressures than postgraduate students who may have more ready access to funds.

Studies have also taken a supply side economic line. Research by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) used a mixed methods approach, involving a survey of international students studying in the UK (N=62) together with an analysis of secondary data to consider international student decision-making from a marketing perspective. The authors proposed that these students found that while an international degree is expensive, pricing is universally competitive. The authors further argued that these students agree to pay high tuition fees providing the university is reputable, well-resourced and that students believe enrolment at the institution will likely correlate to personal growth. The authors conceded that while their paper was not dissimilar to the existing literature, the inter-relationships between their study's factors may vary depending on the host country: for example, the importance of outdoor lifestyle and culture for students choosing to study in Australia compared to institutional reputation and career prospects for those seeking an education at an Ivy League American university.

In keeping within the theoretical constraints of supply-side economic modelling, Abbott and Ali (2009), in a large scale study with students from ten developed and developing countries, measured the effects of international currency exchange rates on students' decisions in choosing a university either in Australia or New Zealand from 2000 to 2003. They undertook this measurement by calculating the effect of exchange rate fluctuation upon international student enrolments. The authors found that those students from developed countries like the USA were more negatively impacted by fluctuations in currency markets than those students from developing countries like



India, such that a reduction in developed countries' currencies increased the cost of the proposed overseas education. As such, there was no uniformity on the effect of exchange rates and an acknowledgement that other push-pull factors are at play including political and economic considerations and migration imperatives amongst students from developing countries.

Waters and Brooks (2011) further considered cost (as one factor) from the perspective of English students studying overseas. These authors interviewed 20 final year school students as well as 11 graduate students who had studied overseas. The authors investigated both the reasons for seeking an international education as well as the experiences of those graduates. Walters and Brooks conjectured from their results that cost did not impact the student's decision to study overseas, but rather these students sought enhanced income, migration and international mobility that could be obtained by studying abroad, with the broad understanding that such future benefits have an opportunity cost attached to them in the short term. It is likely the students' Western affluence and financial security (at least within their family) resulted in the relegation of cost as an important factor.

Other studies suggest cost is not a significant factor for some specific cohorts of students. Lawley (1998) and Maringe (2006) indicated that well-resourced African and Asian students do not place emphasis on overall financial outlay. However, the same student will choose a competitively priced institution where all other requirements, such as campus life, accommodation and course enrolment are satisfied. This indicates a hierarchy to the choices students make. Both the Lawley and Maringe studies suggest that the cost of studying overseas remains a predictor of international university choice,

even for those students who are more financially secure, although it is possible the greater the wealth of the student, the less relevant the issue becomes.

In summary, cost appears to be an important element in international student decision-making, especially for those students emanating from developing countries. These students are beholden to the relatively steep tuition fees and costly living expenses associated with an overseas education. Consequently, even though tuition fees in the more popular destinations are relatively competitive, students are very price sensitive, with many willing to choose a cheaper destination based on lower tuition fees and less costly living expenses. This is particularly the case for international undergraduate students from developing countries who are by-and-large beholden to their families for meeting the education fees. While international postgraduate students are also subject to substantial cost pressures, they seem more adept at managing the financial impost because of their own financial experience, including the ability to acquire funding.

Students originating from industrialised countries appear less apprehensive about cost most likely due to their families more advantageous financial position, although currency fluctuations do impact their overall outlay.

**Financial assistance amongst postgraduate students.** The next section considers the effect of fee relief particularly upon a postgraduate student's decision to study overseas. Given the cost of obtaining an education abroad, where possible graduate students seek financial assistance through bursaries, subsidies or scholarships. The literature reviewed is illustrated in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6

*Literature depicting financial assistance as a factor of international postgraduate student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Grigg (1996)	International postgraduate students in Australia	Statistical analysis of government data	• Nil
Harman (2003)	International PhD students in Australia	Mixed methodology	• Course experience • Career prospects
Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003)	International postgraduate students in New Zealand	Qualitative study	• Academic and welfare impediments
Lee (2008)	International students studying in the USA	Mixed methodology	• Career prospects • Advice • Academic reputation
Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010)	International students at one University in the USA	Qualitative survey	• English language • Culture • Social support

Kolster (2014)	International students in Holland	Mixed methodology	• Variety of push-pull factors
Bista and Dagley (2015)	International students at one USA university	Qualitative study	• Various push-pull factors
DIISR (2015)	International postgraduate students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Nil

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In an Australian government study, Grigg (1996) evaluated the Australian Overseas Research Scholarship Scheme through an analysis of the relevant literature, Commonwealth research guidelines, a survey of past scholarship students and government data. The author proposed that international postgraduate awards are both highly competitive and prestigious because of their limited number and are, therefore, valued highly by overseas students in alleviating costs and for resumé building.

These findings compare favourably to a similar Australian government study conducted fifteen years later by the Department of Innovation, Industry Science and Research (2015), who, using a similar methodology to that of Grigg (1996), suggested even greater competitiveness amongst applicants with consistent high level applications, despite the scholarships not meeting full tuition costs.

Harman (2003), in an Australian examination of international PhD Candidates (N=168) at two leading Group of Eight (Go8) universities in major cities, suggested that international PhD candidates are more likely to apply for scholarships than those

enrolled in coursework only. In fact, most of the participants surveyed sought some form of fee relief and obtained it. The author commented that, but for the financial assistance, many students could not otherwise afford to study overseas.

Despite the research limited to two unstated Go8 institutions and the unknown students' antecedents, the data are well supported by other localized and international publications: for example, in a qualitative study concentrating on impediments faced by international students (N=88) from developing countries studying graduate geography courses at one New Zealand university, Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003) argued that course pricing and scholarships are important to students' well-being. The authors suggested that these students face cultural, language and learning pressures. By alleviating financial stressors, they become more adept academically which improves overall well-being. Notwithstanding the primary focus upon student welfare, the findings do appear to find application of the push-pull theory by developing inter-relationships between cultural remoteness, English language and cost.

The relationship between cost and wellbeing was further analyzed seven years later by Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) in a study of international students (N=121) at the University of Toledo, USA. The authors investigated the connection between university pricing and student welfare through a quantitative analysis that sought to measure the connection between the two variables. The authors found that while postgraduate students have access to an array of scholarships, awards and bursaries, those students without fee assistance faced significant life and study pressures including reduced levels of concentration, self-assurance and general wellbeing. This potentially suggests that when students are deciding upon an overseas destination, they are visibly cognisant of the effect between wellbeing and cost pressures.

Postgraduate students' sensitivity to price is indicated across the literature. A study by Bista and Dagley (2015) on international students at a small university in the USA confirmed this view, framing their study within the push-pull model. Using a mixed methodology, the authors surveyed 273 and interviewed a further 15 postgraduate international students, reporting that 70 percent of participants cited financial support through scholarships and fee relief as a major imperative in their decision-making.

Unfortunately, the study does not extricate the finding differentials between undergraduate and postgraduate students, despite noting that 31 percent of participants were enrolled in both Masters and Doctoral programs. Such information would be useful in considering the variation of cost and the availability of fee relief as a decision-making factor amongst the different cohorts of students. In doing so, the comparative data could help establish the veracity of the model by Cubillo et al. (2006) compared to postgraduate student specific studies.

Nonetheless, the findings from Bista and Dagley (2015) compare favourably with another localized study conducted by Kolster (2014). Using the push-pull framework to develop a model to benchmark attractiveness of countries to international students, Kolster found a strong correlation between the attractiveness of Holland as a study destination and the availability and award of a scholarship, indicating the inter-relationship between price sensitivity and scholarship. Noticeably, Kolster used a 'factual-perception' model to quantify the push-pull framework, specific to students in Holland. Despite this alternative approach, the findings appear consistent with other literature, suggesting that regardless of methodology used, scholarship and cost consistently appear as key indicators of international student decision-making.

In summary, the literature proposes that cost is an essential component of international student decision-making and that fee relief is an important aspect of a postgraduate student enrolling in a foreign university. There is also a growing awareness that cost and scholarship are not discrete components of a student's decision-making process, but rather part of a growing matrix whereby cost pressures, financial insecurity and general well-being all inter-relate.

**Marketing.** This section considers university marketing from a historical position with emphasis on the variables attributed to the Cubillo et al. (2006) study. This includes a discrete analysis of university marketing as it corresponds to international students with appropriate regard to the use of educational agents, teaching quality and institutional image. Figure 2.8 below illustrates the sub-section.



*Figure 2.8.* Specific variables considered as a construct of international student marketing.

***History of marketing in higher education.*** A substantial part of higher education marketing is related to capturing new enrolments and therefore as corollary presents

students with information to help them choose a university. As a result, university marketing involves designing campaigns that best correlate an institution's offerings to students' needs. To achieve this, universities must understand what factors are important to a student when choosing a university, such as course pricing, teaching quality and reputation. Most of the literature reviewed does not differentiate between undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Historically, the marketing of universities could be described as unremarkable. Early research showed that higher education institutions promoted to students, recruited professionally, and endorsed academic achievements, but in a wholly unsophisticated manner (Litten, 1980). Universities did not consider formal marketing a priority given the guarantee of funding, and the tight regulation upon both domestic and international student numbers (Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan, 1983).

Formal marketing of both institution, courses, and published research was regarded in much the same way as service professionals viewed advertising – boorish, intrusive, manipulative and ‘unacademic’ (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996). If universities were to improve efficiencies, compete effectively for international students as a new source of finance and research funds, they were obligated to undertake their own research to understand what motivates students to choose a particular institution.

The literature indicates that most major English speaking countries, including the USA, UK, Canada and Australia established modernised marketing policies in response to higher education deregulation: for example, in Australia Baldwin and James (2000); in the USA Allen and Shen (1999), Dill (2003); and in the UK Middleton (1996), Williams (1997), Taylor (2003). Universities in these countries began to implement marketing programs to attract students by applying existing marketing theories with a



goal to attract a larger share of the international student market, which was slowly transforming into a viable market source (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003).

Gradually universities equipped themselves with the necessary information to formulate appropriate and successful marketing programs to attract students. To begin with, institutions transferred and adapted traditional marketing practices. These theoretical-normative methods focused on above the line approaches (advertising) and below the line inquiries (public relations), embedding principles of business-services marketing to the higher education industry: for example, Nguyen and Le Blanc (2001) focused on transferring business marketing concepts of image and reputation as key determinants of service industries to university marketing processes. These early reference books were guides on how to market service institutions, but not necessarily higher education services and foremost did not consider existing models of student decision-making (Kotler & Fox, 1985).

In the 1990s, higher education marketing research adapted narrower assumptions. Academics theorized that for universities to become proficient, marketers needed to understand student decision-making including how a student searched for specific information. This period produced literature that concentrated on print communications including brochures, newspaper advertisements and direct marketing mail (Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Mortimer, 1997) in attempts to sway potential students to choose a particular institution.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) inferred that such adaptive marketing strategies were both inchoate and lacked a suitable framework. They contended that drawing on traditional professional services for marketing guidance was impractical and incompatible with the nature of university structures and practices. These traditionalists

argued that higher education is a product, much the same way that law firms sell legal services (Durkin, Howcroft, & Fairless, 2016). However, academics such as Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke, and Sims (1995), as well as Mazarrol and Soutar (2001), argued that the marketing of higher education imbued more characteristics of services such that universities should apply different approaches.

In view of the criticism attached to labelling higher education marketing as simply a 'product', Durkin, McKenna, and Cummins (2012), Durkin, Howcroft, and Fairless (2016) as well as Rutter, Lettice, and Nadeau (2017) all considered higher education marketing in terms of complex products with both concrete and intangible characteristics. The former set of authors applied the use of emotional connections to marketing universities; much like a soft drink company promotes their product, while Rutter et al. (2017) suggested applying a common marketing tool used in products, referred to as the 7Ps. The 7Ps referred to product, price, placement, promotion, placement, process and physical evidence. The authors speculated that once applied to educational marketing, this tool would provide a strong-add on to respond to the service characteristics of education models. This device would assist students in choosing an institution by providing the necessary information required to make an informed choice between prospective universities.

In contrast, Mazarrol and Soutar (2001) suggested that higher education is people focused and therefore service based, involving the cultivation of long-term customer relationships. By promoting a university as a reputable service of high teaching quality and with excellent facilities, universities could engage with traditional service marketing devices. As such, higher education marketing should focus on how best to

service the individual, which requires an understanding of what motivates the consumer (student) to choose a university.

Applying service characteristics to higher education marketing serves two competing purposes. Firstly, it provides a foundation to understand the context of higher education marketing towards international students and secondly it helps to particularise the features and processes specific to how universities have engaged marketing measures to attract international students. The following sections analyse the various methods universities have used to promote their institutions with an emphasis upon international students.

*Advice from educational agents.* This variable considers the relationship between universities contracting with external third-party recruiters situated in students' home countries and whom assist in enrolling overseas students to a specific university. Table 2.7 below illustrates the limited literature that analyses this fiduciary relationship between student, university and agent.

Table 2.7

*Literature depicting educational agents as factors of international student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Students</b>	<b>Research Design</b>
Sharma (1997)	Generalised study on education agents	Literature analysis
Slaughter and Rhoades (2004)	International students	Contextual historical and literature analysis

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Lewin (2008)	International students	Newspaper article
Hagedorn and Zhang (2011)	Chinese international students	Quantitative analysis
Hulme, Thomson, Hulme, and Doughty (2014)	African Agents and African international students in the UK	Case study
Altbach and Reisberg (2015)	International students	Literature review

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As global tertiary markets became increasingly competitive, universities began to engage in strategic marketing behaviour to ‘win’ the full fee paying international student (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). One aspect of this recruitment drive involved contracting external third-party recruiters through education agents, which allow prospective students to obtain independent and professional advice from brokerage services. These consultant representatives link the educational provider with a prospective student. As the literature suggests, this relationship remains relatively new, is by-and-large unregulated and open to opportunistic behaviour (Sharma, 1997).

The Australian higher education market first engaged recruitment agents in the early 1990s, the UK industry followed at the beginning of the millennium shadowed with much reticence by the North American sector (Hulme, Thomson, Hulme, & Doughty 2014). This latter research, which measured the results of interviews with 11 African students studying in the UK in 2011 to 2012 and who had engaged African agents, focused on the power asymmetries between agent and student, suggesting that agents held a disproportionate amount of power in the relationship.

Notwithstanding the power imbalances, the research by Hulme et al. (2014) concedes that students and universities value the role of agents, through the formation of alliances for both financial profit and the value provided to the student in navigating the international university sector. In that regard agents generally receive 15-20 per cent of a first year tertiary fee, estimated at \$AU6,000 to \$AU8000 per student for a placement. Universities often attach bonuses if an agent meets a target as well as signing preferred university arrangements, causing an express conflict of interest and raising important ethical considerations (Altbach & Reisberg, 2015). In terms of student decision-making, these commercial behaviours meant that students may be unknowingly influenced by the financial incentives awarded to agents.

The criticisms of nefarious agent practices are not limited to the African experience. Discussion is extensive with reproaches of opportunistic agent practices and unscrupulous behaviour. Lewin (2008), in a New York Times exposé, considered the practices of agents within the North American market, painting a somewhat derisive picture of agents as unscrupulous profit motivated sales agents. Nevertheless, while universities are at times troubled by these irreputable and odious practices, international students remain untethered from the agent's conduct, satisfied that their needs were met.

This level of student satisfaction is confirmed in the study by Hagedorn and Zhang (2011) who undertook a comprehensive survey of 471 students from 20 Chinese schools in Zhengzhou who intended to study overseas. The authors found that the majority (69%) of students intended to engage or had already engaged an agent to assist them with overseas university applications. Further, Hagedorn and Zhang suggested that while the student-agent relationship was asymmetrical with the agent controlling the university application and to a large extent the institution that the student chose,

participants appeared grateful for the agent's advice in navigating university bureaucracy often in a foreign language. Accordingly, while the agent's conduct appears prima facie perverse, students were content to utilise agents' advice in their decision-making.

Australian universities are now requiring agents to sign up to the National Code (2007) (Cth) prior to acting on their behalf. This code of practice requires agents to comply with strict guidelines and maintain government sanctioned standards in how they interact with Australia universities. Despite this attempt at forcing agents to maintain strict observance with fiduciary principles, the research discussed above suggests that international students regard agents as a positive influence on their decision-making process.

*Communications.* Early research on marketing communications to prospective students focused on print publications such as books, prospectuses and course guides. Hesketh and Knight (1999) considered the UK and USA position with respect to postgraduate students, by analysing 50 prospectuses to UK universities and then interviewing three different sets of student cohorts including: 62 final year undergraduate students (divided into eight focus groups) enrolled in various UK universities, 56 final year undergraduate students from eight universities in the USA and 164 postgraduate students (divided into ten focus groups) enrolled in various UK universities. The Australian study by Gatfield, Barker, and Graham (1999) used a different methodology, namely an interpretive content analysis that allowed the researchers to review and analyse both private and public tertiary institution's International Student Guides.

Both studies identified inconsistencies between factors influencing student choice and the information provided in the print communications resulting in imprecise material that failed to adequately correlate to student needs. Accordingly, if rational models of student decision-making behaviour are to be effective in understanding choice, then universities must provide consistent quality, information and standards towards their marketing materials.

Mortimer (1997) considered the impact of advertising material on the growing UK international student cohort, using a participant observation study by requesting information from 69 public UK institutions. The author found that these universities failed to adequately orient and focus their print material to prospective student requisites. Without proper information, these students were at risk of making poorly informed decisions at significant personal and financial cost.

The rapid onset of electronic communications changed the method and delivery of communications. Hamill (1997), in a review of the available literature, predicted that universities will need to change their approach to student marketing. This is consistent with the publication by Gray, Fam, and Llanes (2003) whose analysis of 1096 prospective overseas students (average age 20) from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong suggested that the Internet would become the primary source for future students to obtain information when considering an overseas university. As a result, both content and delivery of marketing materials was regarded as playing a role in influencing students in their decision-making.

Gomes and Murphy (2003) surveyed 156 Hong Kong students who were considering studying in Western Australia in 2001. The authors found that universities

can gain insight into student decision-making behaviour by engaging with those same students online.

In a recent study by Galan, Lawley, and Clements (2015), the authors, due to a lack of published research in the area, chose to interview 12 international postgraduate students studying at one Australian university to determine the role of social media in their choice decision-making. The authors endorsed the findings of Gray et al. (2003), who suggested the Internet would be a vital marketing tool, but also suggested the impact of technology as a growing and relevant consideration. In that regard, the study found that while prospective postgraduate students continue to seek and rely upon the advice of friends and family, they are more likely to engage with non-traditional sources of information gathering such as social media to obtain the data necessary to decide on a study destination.

***Customer satisfaction.*** Bansal and Voyer (2000) suggested that identifying customer satisfaction is crucial to successful service marketing and by extension influences the word-of-mouth advice obtained by prospective consumers of that service. Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard (1999) defined customer satisfaction as “the overall feelings, or attitude a person has about a product after it has been purchased” (p. 256). It follows that customer satisfaction is directly proportional to attitude. Using this matrix, when a customer is satisfied with the service, they will often provide a positive response eager to provide a critical overview of the service received. A university service may relate to its teaching quality, campus facilities or administrative efficiencies.

Guolla (1999) considered teaching quality as a variable of student satisfaction. The author surveyed 90 Master of Business Administration (MBA) students and 79



undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Ottawa in Canada, extrapolating from the findings that student satisfaction towards teaching quality is a post-consumption response. Individual approval levels for a particular university correlate with the student's word of mouth (WOM) communication, which consequently converts into either a positive or a harmful effect on the reputation of the service, especially when pre-enrolled students obtain counsel from their friends, family and colleagues. Consequently, the word-of-mouth response can influence other students' decisions.

Athiyaman (2000) expanded upon Guolla's (1999) hypothesis by surveying 1000 business graduates from a university in New South Wales. The author found that excellent teaching quality correlates to a high student satisfaction which influences WOM communication to a university's reputation, and subsequent increased enrolment levels.

While both these studies focused on general student populations, the findings in respect to international students are similar: for example, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) suggested that WOM communications are a valuable source of referrals for universities.

In practice, understanding student satisfaction is crucial when developing policies to attract international students. Universities must inform themselves through listening to the conversations between students, friends and family as well as the informal and formal communications between student and institution. Universities must also understand what decision-making factors influence a student to choose a destination and institution. This requires considering students as rational consumers who are influenced by factors such as cost, advice, immigration as well as university image/reputation and teaching quality. These last two factors are discussed below.

***University image and reputation.*** According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) international students are pulled to a host country's university in part because of the image and the reputation of a particular institution. The basis of improving an institution's reputation is through positive engagement with the wider international community, which improves standing, and ultimately translates into higher enrolment numbers.

This section considers the theoretical constructs concerning institutional image and reputation as it impacts upon international student decision-making, while the subsequent part examines international league tables as a measure of reputation. Table 2.8 indexes the literature relevant to university image and reputation including international ranking tables.

Table 2.8

*Literature depicting university image and reputation as a factor of international postgraduate student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Students</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Schoell (1991)	International students in the USA	Cultural analysis	• Nil
Mazzarol, Soutar, and Thein (2000).	International students from Asia studying in Australia	Comparative analysis	• Nil

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Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	International students in the UK	Mixed methodology	• Cost
Gomes and Murphy (2003)	International students in Australia	Mixed methodology	• Nil
Mundava and Gray (2008)	International students in the USA	Comparative study	• Nil

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The papers by Schoell (1991), as well as Mazzarol et al. (2000), discuss the practicalities of improving a university's reputation and image as a conduit to internationalisation of their student bodies. There are two important points regarding these studies: the Mazzarol et al. (2000) paper is an important forerunner to the Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) publication on international student decision-making, while the Schoell (1991) study is merely a repository of unsubstantiated ideas to improve a university's international standing.

With the growth of the international sector within the last decade of the twentieth century, Ivy (2002) narrowed the parameters of his research by considering the issue of reputation and attracting international MBA students to a reputable South African university. The author undertook this study through the development of appropriate market research as indices of reputation by analysing 43 South African university marketing practices. Similarly, in the UK study by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), the authors found that applying existing product theories towards the marketing of international students could have positive effects on the image and reputation of the university.

In contrast, Mundava and Gray (2008) using content analysis, analysed two universities in the USA who both implemented various programs to connect their international students within the college community and more specifically campus libraries. The authors found that for universities to attract overseas students, they should be welcoming institutions providing necessary services to ensure the overseas student feels a part of the community. This includes providing high quality and modern facilities, as well as cultural and language programs to integrate students. Although the authors do not provide any quantifiable data on the success of the programs, the suggestions do provide insight into the types of agendas used by the institutions to attract international students.

***International university rankings.*** Universities, like other service industries, seek to develop their reputation. One way for institutions to achieve this, is through the traction of international ranking scales. The following literature focuses on the effect of these international ranking tables.

There are two main international ranking systems: the Shanghai University World Class Universities Ranking and The Times Higher Education Supplement World Rankings (THES). Both tables emerged at the beginning of the twenty first century to evaluate, appraise and compare universities worldwide and are widely considered a measure of international reputation and status (Federkeil, 2008).

Most literature published on higher education international ranking systems is ‘normative’ in nature. That is, the research tends to investigate the ranking systems as the object of the examination. There is a lack of exploration probing the correlation between rankings and international student decision-making (Deetz, 1996; O’Connell, 2013). In addition, research tends to be discrete, focusing on the ranking system as a

function of education rather than as a measure of international student purchase intention.

As globalisation affected the international higher education market, universities found themselves competing for the lucrative international student. Competitive practices created the need for universities to distinguish themselves from one another. Students, institutions and industries, required a measurement to contrast universities to assist in the decision-making. Comparative tables provided a transparent and open measure of a university's worth. The tables disregarded the internal and often opaque self-rewarding marketing references which universities highlighted and which too often added an unnecessary layer of confusion for pre-enrolled students.

*How rankings work.* Publication of global tables rank universities from excellent to poor, which is meant to assist prospective students with their choice. Clarke (2007) suggests the effect of these ranking structures influence the student demand for individual institutions. As a result, the public regards rankings as a legitimate global measure of a university's worth.

Both systems rank universities as whole entities. They differ in their approach by offering discrete measures for particular areas of study. The systems apply a league ladder – much the same as in competitive sports. The THES Ranking system depends primarily on reputation. Academics, employers as well as research output are included as measurements within this system. It also includes an internationalisation component whereas the Shanghai tables only consider research (Liu & Cheng, 2005). The latter focuses heavily on publications, citations, Nobel Prizes and Field Medals. Federkeil (2008) suggested that these measurements reflect research output as the fundamental

measure of a ‘world class’ university compared to the THES ranking system which equates university performance by reputation.

*Effect of tables.* From a public policy perspective, rankings are important to funders and university consumers. Research capital must be specifically targeted and international students should be able to derive information from the tables to assist in university choice (Altbach, 2006). In that regard, both countries and universities value the rankings data, to establish tuition fees, course entry requirements and in establishing reputation

The limited literature available on the relationship between international students and league tables propose ranking systems are signifiers of prestige (Dill & Soo, 2005; Hazelkorn, 2011), used as a “comparative tool to help prospective international students to shortlist potential universities on a global scale” (Dobrota, Bulajic, Bornmann, & Jeremic, 2016, p. 201). While they are proficient indicators of reputation, they are only one aspect of a student’s decision-making.

**Teaching (research supervision) quality.** The calibre and reputation of professorial pedagogy on campus may be a useful guide in measuring university quality, particularly as it relates to postgraduate or higher degree by research (HDR) students. In the first instance, international HDR students expect high quality supervision (Aspland & O’Donohue, 1994), and a positive working relationship with their prospective supervisors.

There is substantial literature that considers the influence and relationship of supervisor and candidate, but very little publications on the importance of international students seeking a research degree who choose a destination based on their supervisor. Indeed, much of the literature related to teaching quality is focused on general teaching

attributes and outcomes that supports an enhanced reputation. Table 2.9 below illustrates the literature considered in this section.

Table 2.9

*Literature depicting university image and reputation as a factor of international postgraduate student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Aspland and O'Donoghue (1994)	International HDR students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service quality</li> <li>• Cultural understanding</li> </ul>
Rowley (1997)	University students generally	Conceptual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service quality</li> </ul>
Ives and Rowley (2005)	HDR students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Mori, Inman and Caskie (2009)	International HDR students in the USA	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Boehe (2016)	HDR students generally	Conceptual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision model</li> </ul>
Corner and Pio (2017)	International HDR students in New Zealand	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>

In research conducted by Aspland and O'Donoghue (1994), the authors undertook a qualitative study of five international Masters students enrolled in a Masters of Education degree at one Australian university, to learn about their supervision experiences. While this paper draws on post-decision experience, it provides an early understanding of the characteristics that international HDR students consider important when choosing a supervisor and research degree. In that regard, the authors discovered that in relation to their supervisors, foreign students sought out empathetic and professional teachers who showed a broad cultural and human understanding of their pupils, and invoked appropriate teaching strategies. The students also suggested that despite being enrolled in the university, they felt isolated.

While the study by Aspland and O'Donoghue (1994) focused on experiences and outcomes, Rowley (1997) evaluated the existing literature on university teaching quality to ascertain how to measure university quality. The author found that teaching quality is best measured through design instruments that consider students' expectations and perceptions of performance rather than merely looking at outcomes.

Boeche (2016) applied the literature on contingency theory to HDR supervision generally, arguing that by approaching supervision in terms of contingency theory may improve both student experience and outcome. Consequently, students generally perceive appropriate supervision as critical to achieving a successful outcome (Boeche).

While no single supervisory method is effective in all cases, the contingency approach, which envelops both process-related (e.g. uncertainty) and product-related (e.g. power) contingencies may lead to better outcomes than traditional methods of supervision. Boeche (2016) recommends that students are wise to consult and then



consider supervisors who account for these likelihoods when choosing a teacher and university.

In contrast to an earlier publication, Ives and Rowley (2005) considered the question of what type of student-supervisor relationship leads to success by interviewing 21 PhD students enrolled in Australian universities together with their supervisors. The authors discovered that those students who were involved in selecting a supervisor, whose research corresponded with their supervisor's expertise and who developed a sound and personal working relationship with their supervisor were more likely to attain a satisfactory outcome and enjoy the HDR experience. It follows that international HDR students who have a positive experience during their research degree are more likely to communicate to prospective students these experiences, which may assist in the decision-making process.

This may also be seen by analysing the limited research on international HDR students. Mori, Inman, and Caskie (2009) provide a rare example on the supervision of international HDR students through their survey of 104 international HDR students. No specific university was identified. The authors found that those students who had low acculturation levels, but high levels of cultural discussion with their supervisors, generally were more satisfied with their experiences as HDR students, passing on that experience to future students who used the information in their decision-making.

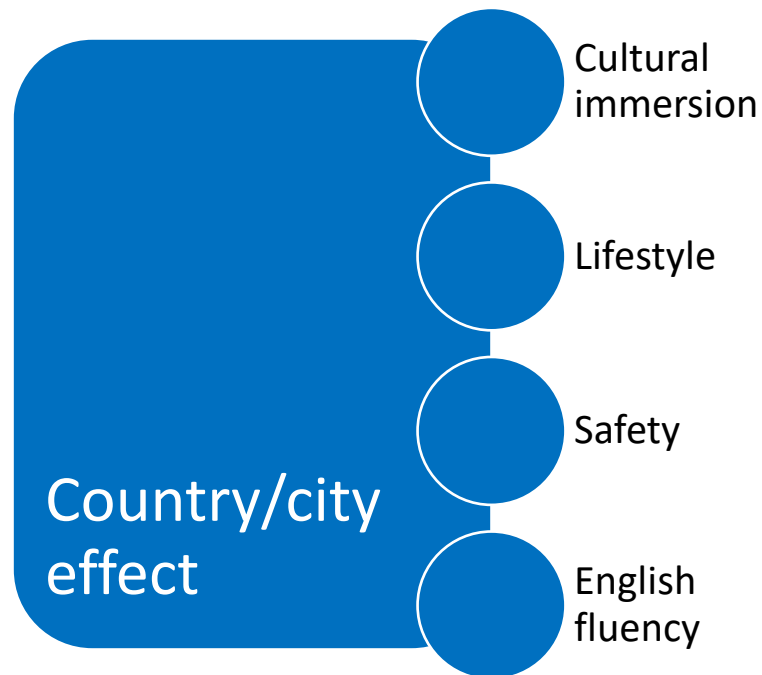
In a recent paper emanating from New Zealand on international students and supervision, Corner and Pio (2017) used the method of critical reflexivity, drawing on their personal experience as supervisors to analyse supervisory relationships with their students. The authors suggested that international students faced four substantial issues during their research degree: cultural issues, language issues, plagiarism and pastoral

care. Students are ill prepared to face these difficulties and become reliant upon supervisors to guide them through their cultural and academic diffidence in addressing complications that may arise.

While the paper does not consider supervision quality as a motivating factor for international students, it does provide important information that prospective students should utilise when choosing a university. In other words, when a student investigates prospective supervisors, they should raise these matters as a precursor to enrolment, which invariably reflects upon the decision-making matrix of the students.

### **Country/City Image Effect**

This final section seeks to identify the relevant literature as it relates to the influence of country/city image as a motivational factor amongst international students. Cubillo et al. (2006) suggests that country/city image is determined by cultural proximity, university reputation and socioeconomic level. However, the prevailing research tends to consist of alternative variables including cultural immersion, lifestyle, safety concerns and English fluency. Except for cultural immersion, these variables are discussed below and illustrated in Figure 2.9 below.



*Figure 2.9.* Specific variables illustrating country/city effect.

In relation to this section of the literature review, two points should be made:

1. Much of the literature reviewed in this section, particularly with respect to lifestyle and English language fluency has previously been considered in depth with respect to other variables. In those cases, limited descriptions are provided.
2. The section titled 'personal growth' in this chapter also merges with cultural immersion and therefore stands in place of this part.

**Lifestyle.** Buddhichiwin (2013) refers to lifestyle factors as environmental attractiveness and climate comfortability. Bodycott (2009), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Cubillo et al. (2006) as well as Chen and Zimitat (2006) all state that international students are pulled towards a country/city because of its locale, environment and high liveability rating.

In a study by Wilkins et al. (2012), the authors surveyed 160 undergraduate and postgraduate Asian students studying at one university in England. The results suggested that lifestyle factors along with other country/city variables including the desire to experience Western culture and English fluency act as partial motivators for international students. By using exploratory factor analysis, the study demonstrated that as the push-pull model develops, pull factors appear to be more relevant to students' decisions than push factors.

These abovementioned studies also illustrate through their research design the inter-relationship between lifestyle and other push-pull factors such as employability and cost (Choi, Nieminen, & Townson, 2012). Consequently, while there are no specific studies that suggest international students choose a destination based explicitly on lifestyle factors, there is sufficient examples to suggest that lifestyle acts as an inter-related pull factor drawing students to a host country.

**Safety.** Safety concerns have been a motivating factor for international students, even prior to the problems that arose in Melbourne and Sydney in the early 2000s (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, & Marginson, 2010). Table 2.10 below illustrates the substantial literature on the impact of safety upon international student decision-making.

Table 2.10

*Literature depicting safety as a factor of international student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	International students in Australia	Quantitative survey	• Push-pull model

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	International students in the UK	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• University image</li> </ul>
Chen and Zimitat (2006)	Taiwanese students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of Western countries</li> </ul>
Maringe and Carter (2007)	African students in UK	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six factor push pull model based on three stages of decisions</li> </ul>
Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, and Forbes-Mewett (2010)	International students in Australia	Exploratory study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, and Marginson (2010)	International students in USA, UK, New Zealand and Australia	Exploratory study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, and Shao (2010)	International students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Forbes-Mewett, McCulloch, and Nyland (2015)	International students in Australia	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>

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Research by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Chen and Zimitat (2006), Maringe and Carter (2007), as well as the seminal paper by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), found international student safety as a significant pull factor for students choosing to study overseas. These studies may be characterised by their specific study locations, the influence that safety has on decision-making and by extension how this variable informs the international education market.

After a number of crimes were committed against foreign students in Australia in 2008, Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, and Forbes-Mewett (2010) conducted a study on the risk posed to international students in Australia through an extensive review of published literature on the issue of safety amongst international students. The monograph considered several practical concerns that foreign students in Australia faced including personal safety issues and feelings of danger.

Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, and Marginson (2010) extended this review of the literature to the USA, UK, New Zealand and Australia, comparing the way education authorities and governments protect overseas students. The study stated that Australia was the last of these four countries to acknowledge that there was a systemic problem in keeping international students safe and that by failing to protect these students, host countries risked losing international enrolments. In other words, foreign students want to feel safe while studying overseas.

To gain a better understanding of how international students consider safety as a motivating factor, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, and Shao (2010) interviewed ten Chinese students and 40 parents, all interested in an overseas education for themselves or their children. The study found that the parents were more concerned with the security needs

of their offspring than the students, resulting in more considered advice given to their children. This finding is important when considering the relationship between familial advice and safety, particularly how that tempered advice may impact upon a student's decision-making.

The issue of international student safety was further examined in a comprehensive book by Forbes-Mewett, McCulloch, and Nyland (2015) who provided an extensive comparative analysis of crimes against international students through an extensive qualitative study of international students (N=200) from 35 countries studying in Australia. The authors' findings summarize the previous research on international student safety, suggesting that these students have a high regard for their safety and look to their education facility and the host country's government to protect them. To date, this book appears to be the most significant and far reaching examination on the safety hazards of studying abroad.

**English language.** Globalisation has meant that much of the world's commerce and trade is carried out in English. Students recognise the need to have English fluency if they are to engage successfully in the international economy. For this reason, many students are, at least in part motivated to study overseas to learn English (AIEF, 1998).

In a small qualitative study, Tarry (2008) conducted interviews of six Thai students who were considering studying overseas. While the study is limited by its small number of participants, the author suggests that both push and pull factors influenced these students, with the pull factors appearing stronger through variables such as the desire to learn English followed by other common factors including overseas experience, increased social mobility and university reputation.

These findings were found to be consistent for postgraduate physics students studying in Australia (Choi, Nieminen, & Townson, 2012) as well as for undergraduate students studying in America (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Indeed, even students seeking to study in traditionally white only South African universities were motivated by the chance to gain fluency in English (Imenda, Kongolo, & Grewal, 2004), perhaps suggesting the recognition of English as an important aspect of a non-English speaking student's education regardless of the racial and political history that engulfed that country.

Like the literature on lifestyle factors, the desire for English fluency must be regarded as one of a number of pull factors that motivate non-English speaking students to choose an English speaking overseas destination (Padlee, Kamaruddin, & Baharun, 2010). This was first purported by Mazzarol and Hosie (1996) in an early rendition of the push-pull model, evincing the way push-pull factors inter-play. In that respect, non-English speaking students are drawn to an English speaking country not only to learn the language, but to experience the host country's culture and lifestyle.

In summary, as Altbach (2007) states, the growing international custom of using English as both a method of teaching instruction, research and as the prevailing international language has given rise to international students from non-English speaking backgrounds seeking to improve their English fluency so that they can become more transnationally mobile and engage more successfully in the world around them.

### **International Postgraduate Multiple Factor Students**

The final section in this literature review considers the discrete literature that focuses only upon postgraduate international students' decision-making. The



justification for this approach is that much of the literature explored so far encompasses undergraduate students or does not differentiate between cohorts of students. A distinct section improves the critical aspect of the review by ameliorating postgraduate students and focusing upon their distinct attributes. Those references in Table 2.11 with an asterisk are examined below, while all other studies have previously been scrutinised.

Table 2.11

*Literature depicting summary of multiple factor studies of international postgraduate student decision-making.*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Target Participation</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Other Factors</b>
Grigg (1996)	International postgraduate students in Australia	Statistical analysis of government data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil</li> </ul>
Harman (2003)	International PhD students in Australia	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course experience</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> </ul>
Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003)	International postgraduate students in New Zealand	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic and welfare impediments</li> </ul>
Ichimoto (2004)*	Investigation of Japanese female postgraduate	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western culture</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• Superior education</li> </ul>

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	students in Australia		
Brown (2009)	International postgraduate students at a single university in the UK	Ethnographic (observation and interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences</li> </ul>
Rounsaville (2011)	International postgraduate students from five developing countries studying in the UK, Ireland and USA	Qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Hilden (2011)*	International postgraduate students in Finland	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Choi, Nieminen, and Townson (2012)	Investigation of international postgraduate physics students in Australia	Quantitative survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Roberts (2012)*	International graduate students in USA	Macro-statistical analysis and literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social mobility</li> <li>University quality</li> </ul>

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Buddhichiwin (2013)	International postgraduate students in the UK	Mixed methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of degree</li> <li>• Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>
Tharenou (2015)*	Chinese international graduate (coursework) students	Conceptual analysis with development of integrated model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability</li> </ul>
DIISR (2015)	International postgraduate students in Australia	Statistical analysis of government data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of push-pull factors</li> </ul>

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Historical scholarship such as the study conducted by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) characterised postgraduate students homogenously, branding them simply as ‘international students’. Research tended to ignore the heterogeneity of postgraduate students. Published scholarship investigating postgraduate student decision-making consequently remains diminutive and by-and-large constructed around single countries and universities.

In a small study conducted by Ichimoto (2004), the author interviewed four postgraduate Japanese women, finding that these students were drawn to Australian institutions due to personal growth and cultural enhancement, Western culture and career prospects. The findings may be restricted by its very small sample size, gender and source-country specificity.

In a rare Finnish study of international Masters students by Hilden (2011), the author undertook a survey study at one university in Helsinki of 1378 Masters degree students, framing her analysis with the push-pull model. The author found that students were influenced by the usual array of inter-related push-pull factors including career prospects, personal improvement, country image and education quality. Cost imperatives were noticeably absent, explained in large part by most of the students receiving some form of financial aid and the remainder not considering the financial impost as a burden. Secondly, most of the participants came from Russia, who appeared to choose Finland as a study destination due to the cheaper tuition fees compared to Russia, as well as the difficulty in obtaining entry into premier Russian institutions. Thirdly, while the results reflect characteristics of postgraduate student decision-making, the author proceeded to generalise the findings to all international students in Finland, despite the existing literature suggesting that there are different variables at play. Finally, Finland is an unusual destination for international postgraduate students (currently home to only 7,000 international students) because of its sub-arctic climate, requirements to study in Finish or Swedish and the restrictive entry requirements, suggesting that the small country attracts a specific type of student compared to Western English speaking countries (Centre for International Mobility, 2013).

Despite these limitations, the Hilden (2011) study adds to the literature on international postgraduate student decision-making by describing characteristics that are pertinent only to the postgraduate cohort. In addition, the study reflects specific factors relevant to the host country, suggesting that country/city effect may be an important attribute of student decision-making.

Choi et al. (2012) undertook their qualitative study of eleven international postgraduate physics students at one research university in Australia within the push-pull framework. They suggested these students apply a multi-dimensional decision-making process framed with a unique set of push-pull factors including access to scholarship, institutional reputation, English fluency, enthusiasm to undertake research, family influence and life experience. While the parameters of the study are contextualised to one university and a specific subject major, the outcomes appear to be generalised across Australia (See DIISR, 2015; Roberts, 2009; Rounsaville, 2011.)

In another recent Australian study on postgraduate accounting students from Asia and the Middle-East, Chan and Ryan (2013) surveyed 71 postgraduate accounting students enrolled in a large regional Australian university. Their findings continued to build on the proposition that postgraduate students are driven by a separate series of push-pull factors than undergraduates including the perception of a superior quality education system and the possibility of migration. They also viewed liberal and Western norms such as pluralism and freedom of speech as influencing factors.

Finally, Buddhichiwin (2013) considered Masters level Thai students studying in the UK using a mixed methodology incorporating 20 interviews (students and university officials) and 339 survey participants (students only). The author derived several push-pull factors that influenced students consistent with the extant literature on international student decision-making. In that regard, Buddhichiwin found scholarship, country characteristics, institutional reputation and the recommendation of education agents, family and friends, particularly when the advice was first hand from someone who had undertaken studies overseas all important motivational factors influencing postgraduate Thai students studying in the UK. This author also broadly considered the impact of the

student's life experience and maturity as important elements in their decision-making process.

However, the study is limited to Masters degree scholarship holders only, perhaps diminishing the impact of tuition fees as a subset of the cost variable, in that study participants did not suggest that tuition fees were negative influences on their decision-making, unlike other studies mentioned in this literature review. In addition, given the study focuses only on Thai students, it may be limited in its generality to other source countries.

### **Summary**

This chapter appraised the main issues that this thesis seeks to consider. The literature review sets the theoretical context and suggests there is a gap in the research, that is, a qualitative understanding why international postgraduate students choose to study in WA. A number of issues were explored in this chapter, starting with a broad focus on decision-making theories and then reflecting upon how those theories might relate to higher education.

In review, these early parts firstly considered normative and descriptive models together with compensatory and non-compensatory models. The chapter then investigated various approaches to decision-making behaviour, illustrating three theories from a consumer viewpoint, namely satisficing, prospect theory and Kotler's (1997) comprehensive model of consumer decision-making. The first two models of consumer behaviour were criticized on the basis that they do not incorporate sufficient elements to adequately predict consumer behaviour. As a result, this led to the creation of Kotler's (1997) theory as it was more accurately able to predict how consumers make

decisions. This wide-ranging model amalgamates the earlier models, offering a method to understand higher education decision-making.

The chapter then began to narrow its focus towards university student decision-making, discussing the factors that motivate students when choosing to enrol at a university. The section then considered the factors influencing postgraduate student buyer behaviour.

The chapter then illustrated the various approaches to the study of international student decision-making, suggesting there are a few structures to analyse students' motivations including sociological modelling, human capital theory and push-pull theory. It is this latter concept that this thesis uses to comprehend international student decision-making.

The next part explored the origins, relevance and historical modelling of push-pull theory as it relates to international student decision-making, with a detailed focus upon each of the substantial variables that make up the model. In particular, this section considered how the push-pull theory functions as a framework to understand international student decision-making. This resulted in a review of the literature pertaining to the influence of the push-pull model on international students. A number of individual variables were ascertained from the models working which were then considered in a thematic analysis.

A thematic analysis of the various push-pull variables followed. The existing literature referred to several themes that pertain to international student decision-making with associated variables. These included:

1. personal reasons which consists of advice from family, friends and colleagues/teachers as well as personal growth and employability/career prospects;
2. Migration;
3. Program evaluation which consists of costs, marketing and teaching quality; and
4. Country/city effect which consists of culture, lifestyle, safety and English fluency.

Each of these themes and associated variables were considered in light of the available literature.

Finally, the chapter concluded with a discrete analysis of those studies specific to postgraduate students, focusing particularly on multiple factor studies not previously considered in the previous sections of the literature review.

Having completed the literature review, the next chapter considers the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin this research study.



## **Chapter Three: Philosophical Framework**

### **Introduction**

Conceptualising and implementing research requires investigators to define their study through specific parameters, including a philosophical framework. These boundaries are the philosophical underpinnings of a research project. Such models provide heuristic and exploratory structures to contextualise qualitative research. They help guide the researcher through the study's problems, steer participant examination and provide direction to answer the research questions.

In qualitative research design, the researcher must pre-determine a philosophical outlook, which forms the basis of the study's theoretical framework (Merriam, 1998). In that regard, the framework organises the variables and their relationships by acting as a conduit to focus the research design and provide "structure and meaning to the interpretation of findings" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1990, p. 4). It intersects the theoretical and practical components of the project (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), orienting the researcher from the general subject matter towards answering the research problem.

In essence, the theoretical framework provides the philosophical foundations for both establishing and guiding a qualitative study. As Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggest, theoretical frameworks incorporate the development of academic (research literature) and implied theory (experiential), which informs, guides and sets the scene for the researcher to ask and then answer the relevant and appropriate questions.

### **Parameter of Philosophical Framework**

It is not the intention of this study to argue the philosophical entreaties framing decision-making within a global framework, but rather to justify why social

constructivist theory was chosen for this study, what the terms mean within the context of global consumer decision-making behaviour and how to apply the philosophy to this research study. This format allows the investigation to operate within a paradigm that frames the study clearly.

The research interprets social constructivist theory by reference to the works of Guba (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as well as Risse (2007). The following discussion includes an analysis of the ontological (nature of being) foundations for using this theory, epistemological (the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants) and methodological underpinnings (how the philosophy informs the approach to collecting data) (Guba, 1990).

### **Ontology**

Individuals' experiences are limited by their own personal perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructivism resolves this central ontological issue by suggesting that through social interactions, people gain awareness of how their experiences integrate with the world around them (Risse, 2007).

The philosophy posits that individuals are inherently social creatures who arrange their lives through communal structures (Adler, 1997). Individuals construct meaning from these social experiences through building, developing and duplicating their social realities regularly (Risse, 2007). Consequently, the social environments together with the individual's own agency operates to define the person's identity (Adler, 1997; Wendt 1999). Through a process of questioning, the researcher can elicit from participants their socially integrated experiences as it pertains to their decision to study overseas.

The theory sits within social ontology, which contends that individuals are not sovereign agents and are dependent upon their social environments by developing an understanding of the world through lived experiences with other people (Schwandt, 2003). The mutual dependence upon each other allows an individual to understand the world around them by sharing, creating and interacting with others (Andrews, 2012).

However, life is fluid and human behaviour is constantly in a state of flux. As a result, individuals regularly change culture, social environments and behaviours. This environmental fluidity allows the individual to view reality through both an objective and subjective lens (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The former arises through regular and consistent social interactions, which creates routine and habit. These patterns of behaviour form latent knowledge, entrenched by society so that future generations experience this type of behaviour as objective.

The understanding of society through a subjective lens occurs through socialisation where the individual engages in conversation via language, which transmits cultural nuances, new ideas and variations in social norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). In this way, social constructivism is neither an individualist nor structuralist interpretation of the world, but rather considers the person within various social spheres, dependent to a large degree upon the volatilities occurring within their social realms.

This statement is important in respect to the current study as there are many ways to view decision-making within a global framework: for example, a social constructivist approaches making choices through understanding a person's relationships with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1991), which deviates from a structuralist framework, that binds

individuals to the tides that surround them or from a positivist framework, which asserts that internal rational reasoning is the bastion of all truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Historically, structuralist approaches governed research into globalisation modelling, including identifying how individuals behaved within an environment. Those theories posit that people, particularly from developing countries, have little to no agency over their actions and are therefore subject to the forces of world economic markets (Ohmae, 1990; Strange, 1996). Consequently, these individuals are constrained by their social realities. A structuralist model assumes that a consequential logic directs people in their decision-making (March & Olsen, 2006), such that dominant forces or actors devise strategic policy that results in predicted models of behaviour.

Structuralist interpretations usually inform studies relating to the intersection between international phenomena and their effect on individuals, suggesting that individuals are subject to the global environment (Risse, 2007): for example, these theorists posit that international students from developing countries are subject to the volatilities of international markets and have little or no autonomy over global structures (i.e., economics), resulting in reactive policies and adaptive measures, rather than autonomous decision-making (Gill, 1995).

Social constructivist theory does not passively accept these inert behaviours as a *fait accompli*. Rather, the theory advocates that human agency through the derivation of knowledge via human interactions drives market forces, which creates global patterns of behaviour. One example may be where a social constructivist asserts that students in developing countries learn from the successes of their predecessors who sought a higher education overseas. Successful transformations are self-perpetuating, whereby individuals continue to engage in social, economic and political interactions

(predominantly using language), changing and developing as the discourse fluctuates, seeking out specific overseas educational facilities pertinent to their individual needs.

Social constructivists move away from an inter-psyche individualistic approach that claims interpersonal relationships are the basis for knowledge (Burr & Dick, 2017). The theory posits that it is intrinsic amongst communities that people obtain and share knowledge, which unites the group through a social matrix (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The behaviour cannot occur in a void (positivist) and is not subject only to external variables (structuralist).

Another ontological feature of social constructivism concerns understanding the context of the participant's decision that involves investigating the individual's contextual environment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The model assumes that people generally act within a set of social norms, learnt from community interactions. These customs regulate a person's behaviour, helping to shape their identity both as individuals and within a community.

Constructivism suggests that these community standards provide the gateway to understanding an individual's behaviour (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). They are the 'rules of engagement' in defining how people interact with the world around them. Without these rules, the philosophy suggests that it is not possible to define social behaviour. Accordingly, context is crucial in understanding how individuals make decisions based upon *their* relationship with *their* world (Burr & Dick, 2017). This involves investigating real people subject to real forces with an emphasis upon participants' contextual environments, which includes both the participant's source country and the study destination (WA).

This study's methodology encapsulates this idea in three ways. Firstly, the study contextualises participants' behaviour learnt from within their own communities. Secondly, the study frames the participants' decision-making within an interconnected world, focusing on the constitutive effects of globalisation and finally, the research contextualises the data within WA.

This is significant in creating a specific understanding of international postgraduate students within WA, whereby unique inter-dependent factors affect each student differently. By gaining acuity about students' decision-making within the context of WA, the research transforms from a generalised study on transnational student decision-making into a precise model specific to this State only.

In summary, the social constructivist ontology informs the study by evaluating each participant's subjective social understanding of their realities within specific social contexts, which helps to decipher the motivational factors involved in students' decision-making. This ontological approach frames the way the study collected data and the type of data collected (Guba, 1990).

### **Epistemology**

Epistemologically, social constructivist theory connects the researcher with the participant. Meaning is collectively constructed through reciprocal interactions allowing the findings to be assembled jointly (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The epistemology emphasises an intrinsic interpretive paradigm, hermeneutically binding the researcher and the participant through the knowledge that both are part of an interconnected and mutually dependent world (Giddens, 1982).

The theory implies that in qualitative data collection, the interviewer must take a subjective position to "unlock the constructions held by individuals" (Guba, 1990, p.

26). There is no room (at the interviewing stage) for objective reasoning (that occurs much earlier in the individual's knowledge construction) if the interviewer is to obtain purposeful and realistic data. Consequently, the interviewer and the participant become enmeshed in a conversation whereby both are part of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This process contrasts with a positivist and structuralist approach that both require the researcher to maintain objectivity, remain indifferent and professionally distant from the participant. These theories suggest that objectivity is the only mechanism to keep the data as free as possible from bias and personal values (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In fact, social constructivists suggest that it is nigh impossible to remain an impartial and objective researcher. Despite the theoretical intentions of the underlying philosophies, the researcher's biases, values and preferences will interfere and influence the process and outcome (Guba, 1990). By recognizing these subjective considerations, the researcher validates his own influences on the research process by admitting personal observations inform the way data is ostensibly obtained and interpreted (Charmaz, 2000). Unlike structuralism, there is no objective reality. Rather, the knowledge is built and comprehended framed by both the interviewer and interviewees learned understandings of the world around them. Therefore, the social constructivist approach was deemed to be the most appropriate philosophical framework for this research project.

The effect of this self-reflecting bias means that the interviewer can assist the participant to reflect on their experiences, directing the conversation through various interview techniques such as asking informed questions. By placing this mechanism

into the research paradigm, the study's framework is constructed purposefully to reveal the participants' opinions fashioned through their subjective realities.

This study uses these techniques through qualitative methodology that record the researcher's biases, experiences and role in collecting, verifying and interpreting the data. In so doing, the interview space is equally shared between interviewer and participant, transforming the process into a mutually created reality that permits the communication of social meanings through shared interaction.

In other words, the empirical spaces of the interview are interdependent. The data produced are symbiotic and inter-connected, resulting in a negotiated reality. Consequently, this research explicitly describes the influence of the researcher upon the interviewees in producing data. Such action is not a disadvantage, but an acknowledgment of the reciprocal relationship crucial to the construction of new social knowledge.

### **Methodological**

Social constructivist theories posit that individuals obtain their meaning through communal interaction. As a result, the most appropriate technique to obtain data is therefore through the reflexive use of language such as interviews and focus groups. This invariably involves discursive practices such as semi-structured open-ended conversations between interviewer and participant (Daly, 2007).

As Hoffman (1992) suggested, knowledge is derived between people, "in the realm of the common dance" through ongoing conversation (p. 8). By emphasising communication through language and conversation, social constructivism seeks to understand specific behaviours within society, by attributing meaning to the associated conduct.



The use of interviews permits the participant to explore issues and subject matter using their own language, constructing argument, interpreting events and justifying decisions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This allows the participant to give meaning to their world through language, as they understand it, as a response to the questions posed by the researcher. The result is the creation of a collective theoretical research space where participants become co-collaborators, actively sharing in the creation of the knowledge (Lather & Smithies, 1997).

### **Contributions of Social Constructive Practices to the Study**

Implementing social constructive practices within this research provides three specific contributions to our understanding of higher education decision-making amongst international students in WA. Firstly, discursive dialogue operates to collect and interpret data, providing a deeper, more thorough and open analysis of the social structures from which participants emanate, compared to the more rigid and objective structuralist and individualist approaches.

Secondly, by underscoring the importance of community and social interaction to the participants' decision-making behaviour enables the study to investigate how these social constructs inform and mould participants' identities and underscore the importance of the features that shape them. Indeed, this works in both directions.

Thirdly, emphasising social discourse and language enables the study to research the way decision-making is informed by social (community or global) influences and provides a basis for understanding how participants interpret these processes through language and meaning.

The current research utilises these techniques, emphasising communicative processes through a qualitative methodology. These practices allow participants to

express their views and understandings of why they chose WA as a destination to undertake postgraduate studies.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Introduction**

The famous biologist Bernd Heinrich when asked about how he conducts his fieldwork answered that, “Carefully collected results can be misleading if the underlying context of assumptions is wrong” (Heinrich, 1984, p. 151). In that regard, researchers must ensure that the conceptual framework of a research project – the concrete model underpinning a study, together with the underlying assumptions and the associated variables are cohesive, solid, inflexible and intrinsically connected (Punch, 2009).

This research incorporated a multi-theoretical framework to explain the relationship between consumer decision-making within a global framework and international students choosing to study in WA. The framework is made up of the push-pull theory and a discrete model of international student flows developed by Cubillo et al. (2006). The amalgamation provides an all-encompassing structure to investigate the use of individual decision-making theory within a multi-dimensional global context.

By referencing the push-pull model of international student decision-making, the research can provide an all-encompassing consumer orientated framework to capture international postgraduate student intentions in WA. This section discusses the research project’s conceptual framework in relation to the existing literature and justifies the use of a multi-paradigm approach to contextualise the study.

### **Push-Pull Framework**

Existing research links the internationalisation of higher education to global factors. A deeper understanding of the relationship between globalisation and international student mobility helps frame this study. The idea is that individuals, particularly from developing countries, attain life-changing opportunities, including the chance to study overseas. By doing so, the individual, amongst other things, enhances their employment prospects, living conditions and social standing. Students are pushed from their countries of origin due to political, economic and social strife. They are subsequently pulled to countries that offer a stable economic, educational and political system where they can gain the skills necessary to succeed in a globalised world.

A study abroad model, which encompasses a push-pull structure to comprehend the interplay “between supply of student places and the demand for those places” (Li & Bray, 2007, p. 793) helps to explain this relationship. The model is widely considered the dominant framework to understand an international student’s decision to study in a foreign country.

The push-pull model suggests there are a number of factors that influence a student to study abroad. These features occur both individually and within a composite relationship. However, early models focused solely upon the external forces that influence student choice, limiting the model’s applicability, and resulting in a reformulation. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) considered these limitations and developed an extant model on student decision-making. To alleviate these shortcomings, the authors incorporated students’ personal characteristics, which interacted with the contextual (external) features.

The model, illustrated in Figure 3.2 below suggests that students embark on a three-stage decision-making process. In stage one, the individual considers tertiary

education, and resolves to study overseas (or not) (Klenosky, 2002). Several external pressures and personal reasons motivate the pre-student. These are indicated as the push factors and include source country unemployment, underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, and lack of educational resources.

The second stage requires the individual to decide upon a host country. This decision involves traversing a series of pull factors, which compares the attraction of one destination over another. The pull factors include both private and social features that render the destination country more appealing including employment opportunities, cultural imperatives, political stability and higher wages.

Stage three necessitates the pre-student to consider which institution to enrol. This step also involves analysing a series of pull factors such as university reputation, cost, staff expertise and program type.

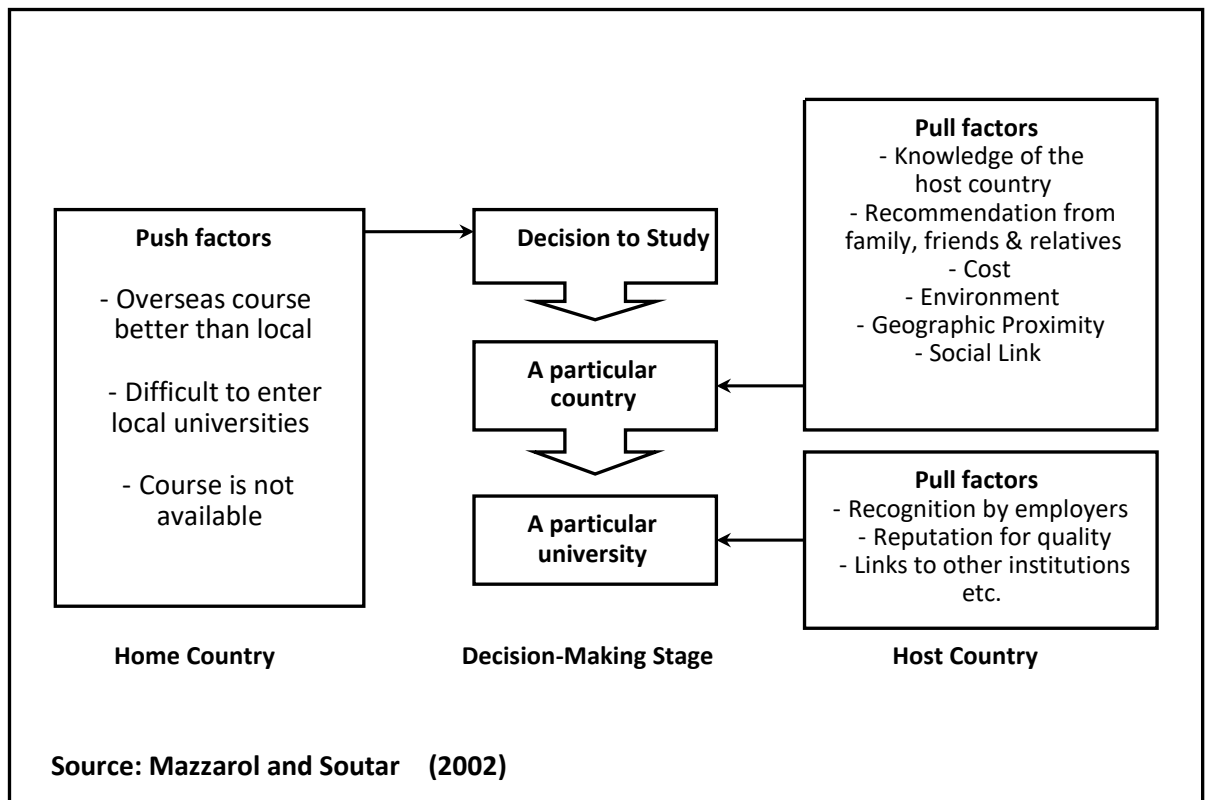


Figure 3.1. *Three-stage push-pull model of international student decision-making*

Figure 3.1 above describes the way the push and pull factors influence a student in deciding to study overseas. This model tries to identify student-purchasing behaviour through a comprehensive decision-making framework with the advantages being able to characterise the relationship and the variations between the factors. The model illustrates the interaction between the external environmental influences and individuals' personal beliefs (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Based on this conceptual foundation, the research narrows the parameters of inquiry by focusing upon a discrete model of international decision-making.

### **Discrete Model of International Student Flows**

While Figure 3.1 illustrates a push-pull model of international student decision-making to examine student flows, the model of international student decision-making (Figure 3.2, page 159), designed by Cubillo et al. (2006), built on the theory to explain the general purchasing intentions of international students. It defines the student as a consumer of education and the host country as the provider of the education services, subsequently examining why a student chooses to study overseas.

The purchase of overseas education is a rare event and involves complicated cognitive decision-making. Such a decision requires substantial consideration to risk and future outcomes. In addition, students must consider a range of factors including price, country, program, attitudes about the proposed destination and other people's opinions.

Applying the model to this research, student purchase of education services in WA is the constant. There are four key factors, divided into 19 identifiable variables that influence international student decision-making that are the basis for examining student purchase intention in WA. The four factors are program evaluation (Krampf & Heinlein, 1981; Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996), institution image (Krampf & Heinlein, 1981), country image (Bourke, 2000) and personal reasons (Gronroos, 1994).

By incorporating a multi-dimensional framework focusing upon the consumer (student) as the principle actor, this research can determine how international students choose their study destination and then predict future outcomes. Further, by predicating the research upon a social constructivist philosophy, the thesis questions can be answered by deriving new knowledge obtained through social interaction, which then establishes patterns of behaviour amongst international students choosing to study in

WA. The interaction between the conceptual and theoretical frameworks solidify the consumer orientated ideas that permeate this research

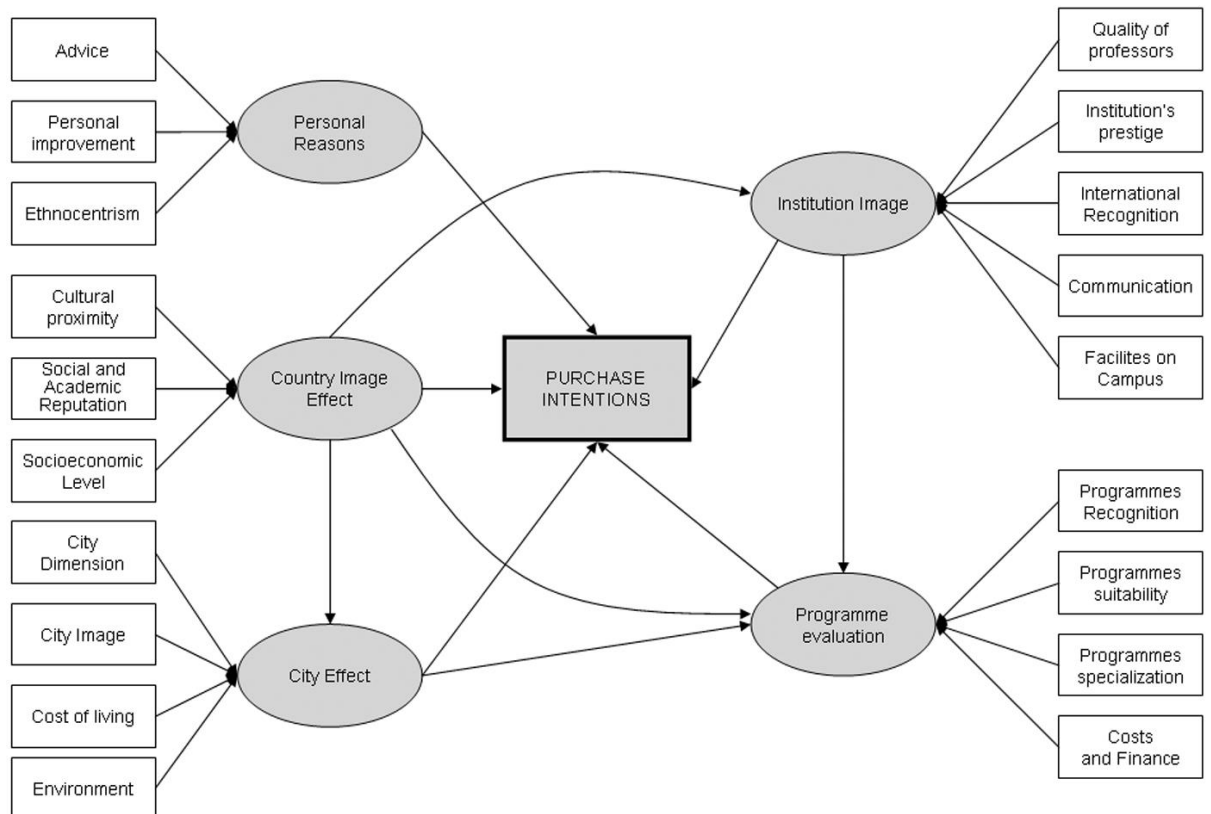


Figure 3.2. *A model of international students' preferences (Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino, 2006)*

### Summary

This study investigates the reasons why international postgraduate students chose WA as a host destination. The constructivist principles applied to this study seek to understand the reality of student experiences in motivating them to choose WA, from their own perspectives, with the researcher interpreting these as their truths.

By framing this study within constructivist principles, participants' narratives are contextualised by their beliefs learnt from within their communities, together with their understanding of the world around them.

The conceptual framework assists with the design for this study, using a multi-theoretical framework to explain the relationship between the participants' decision-making behaviour and the world around them. The thesis uses:

1. the push-pull framework to comprehend the reasons why participants chose WA as their host destination; and
2. a discrete model of international student flows based on the literature related to international student decision-making. This model is used to measure the variations in factors associated with participants from this study compared to the extant literature.

In the next chapter, the research methodology is examined together with an account of the methods used for the data collection and analysis, as well as a discussion on the methodological limitations to the study.



## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

In considering the current literature on international student motivations to study overseas, Chapter Two revealed that much of the published studies are quantitative in design and directed towards proficiencies in higher education marketing. This section discusses the methodology utilised to examine the research questions in this study.

The chapter firstly briefly reviews the relationship between the research paradigms (Chapter Three) and the methodology, followed by an analysis of the qualitative methodology used in this research. The section further rationalises the study's approach, supported by an examination of the research design and procedures, including participant information, data collection and processes relating to data analysis. The final two parts of the chapter discuss both the ethical considerations and the methodology's limitations.

### **Research Paradigm – Social Constructivism**

To investigate the research problem, the thesis considered a qualitative methodology, which involved engaging participants in conversation through face-to-face interviews. As discussed in Chapter Three, the qualitative paradigm intersects with social constructivism by the formation of knowledge, whereby both the interviewer and participant interact to develop a mutual appreciation of the issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

**Limitations of employing a constructivist paradigm through qualitative methods.** The critical advantage of employing a qualitative methodology is to juxtapose the researcher with the participant to develop the research constructs, ultimately to make sense of the data. In so doing, the researcher must remain judicious of his/her subjective ability to reason objectively and the effect this may have on

answering the research questions. Through active involvement, the researcher becomes explicitly enmeshed in participants' narratives. The researcher must be mindful of their worldview in developing new knowledge and aware of a false consciousness when interpreting phenomena (Cohen et al., 2011; Heidegger, 1996). In higher education policy research, bias or misinterpretations may occur if the researcher's understanding of society, including political, economic and social issues is transferred to the research data: for example, a researcher with experience in the profit driven private sector may endorse similar attitudes within the research findings.

### **Methodological Background**

Social scientists use either a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods approaches to conduct research experiments. The methods differ by standards and approaches to data collection. Whereas quantitative research interprets statistical evidence to explain phenomena, qualitative methodology is fundamentally explorative (Cohen et al., 2011). The following sections outlines the chosen qualitative design, justifying its use, strengths and measures of trustworthiness.

**Qualitative methodology.** Qualitative methodological research design encompasses investigatory techniques that result in thick descriptions of participants' decision-making processes. The practices provide a valid system to examine both the 'why' and 'how' of decision-making (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011), forming the basis to develop suitable research questions, thereby providing insights into decision-making processes.

Furthermore, thick explanations, that are used to inform both the data and analysis, allows the reader to comprehend the foundations for the research, the way the

study is conducted and the method by which the problem questions are tackled. As a result, the reader is able to interpret the research findings within a detailed context.

*Justification for Qualitative Methodology.* Choosing the methodology for this higher educational research project required the investigator to consider which exploratory design best suited answering the research questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). The methodology must limit potential weaknesses when addressing the questions posed, focusing on procedural issues such as sample size, time constraints and availability of resources.

Historically, qualitative methodology was the mainstay of educational research, a procedure that suited the social reality of education institutions (Bouma & Ling, 2004). However, with the growth of higher educational research, there is little consistency across journals. Approaches are varied, dependent upon the authors' specialisations and the type of problem investigated. Chapter Two refers to a myriad of literature that uses a range of methods including multivariate quantitative analyses, regression statistics, case studies and other qualitative specialties including interviews, observation and ethnography. No technique is preferred nor stands out within the available research, although quantitative statistical analysis predominates.

This research used qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. The following section justifies the use of the qualitative design by considering the strengths of a qualitative approach as it related to this research.

**Strengths of qualitative methods.** There are numerous advantages when employing a qualitative design. Those beneficial to this study relate to the value of the interdependent relationship between interviewer and participant and to the generalities of the research itself.

In relation to the latter advantages, a qualitative design allows the data to be examined both in-depth and in detail, permitting the exploration and development of complex thematic imperatives, that is, how a participant makes a decision; as well as complex ideographic causation (why a participant made the decision).

Unlike quantitative studies, a qualitative methodology identifies the contextual and setting factors as they relate to the phenomenon of interest, which allows for differentiation between sub-sets of cohorts: for example, discerning each participant's decision-making factors from developed versus non-developed countries.

In addition, in this research the use of semi-structured interviews provided the most advantageous methodological approach to gather participants' information by removing the requirement for question specificity, thus allowing participants the flexibility to answer as they see fit. This overarching flexibility encouraged the discovery of rich, complex and subtle data that is often more compelling than the methodical quantitative approach. Ultimately, the stories collected impress upon the diverse array of human experiences that describe both the diversity and commonalities amongst participant groups.

Conversely, structured and unstructured interviews were deemed disadvantageous for this study: for example, an overtly structured approach was deemed to impose too great a constraint upon the natural flow of conversation, limiting the resulting data. Further, a highly planned method was deemed prone to researcher bias due to the specific design of the questionnaire, which model relies on explicit researcher experience, opinion and content understanding (Myers 2008). The bias inevitably reflects the levels of reliability and validity because they do not investigate the research questions in any depth or detail. More complex issues require more complex

explanations, which require overt investigatory techniques such as by using open ended questions.

Unstructured interviews also lack any pre-determined questions and may negate any viable responses or possibly cause the researcher to omit concepts that should be presented. Rather, the openly flexible and free flowing conversation style relies on a 'conversation' to accumulate data. Problems arise with reliability and compatibility whereby different interviewees are asked different questions. The interview also tends to meander in unknown directions, making generalised comparisons difficult. In addition, an overtly flexible approach is inherently time consuming. Consequently, the semi-structured interviews encompassed a flexible collection method that generated a comprehensive and trustworthy data set.

By evaluating the different methods used in social science research, the various strategies, research questions and outcomes, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for his study.

**Trustworthiness of the research.** Quantitative methodologies use validity and reliability to measure the worthiness of a research project. In conducting qualitative enquiry, researchers must also attach a qualifying check upon the research, safeguarding the credibility, dependability and transferability of their findings (Shenton, 2004).

**Validity.** Qualitative research interprets validity as the credibility (internal validity) and transferability (external validity) of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It tests the research's rigour through "exploring the subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social interaction of interviewing" (Davies & Dodd, 2002 p.281). This involves examining the precision or the credibility and trustworthiness of the study in order that the researcher can confidently defend the findings (Johnson, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility involves ensuring the results are precise. Unlike in quantitative methods, credibility within qualitative research relies upon the researcher gathering rich and detailed data sets. It ensures the construction of the researcher's data set corresponds with the participant's interpretation (Cohen et al., 2011). Accuracy is gauged using data triangulation.

***Transferability.*** Transferability refers to the degree in which the research results are transferrable to other contexts (Guba, 1981): that is, generalizing the findings to other populations or research settings.

Qualitative projects that encompass contextual case studies are often particular to a specific group of people and location. It is arguable whether such findings are transferable to other environments or groups. Notwithstanding, Stake (1994) hypothesised that whilst all research cases are distinct, providing certain conditions are met, such case studies can be illustrative of a wider group, allowing for the possibility of transferability.

Providing the context and assumptions framing the study are specific and clear, transferability is possible (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). The researcher must communicate meticulously the relevant methods and describe the situation precisely. It is then dependent upon the reader's subjective reasoning to judge the effectiveness of the ability to transfer the results to another context. The reader considers the specific aspects of the research and methodology, equating them to analogous states that are familiar. Comparable details equate to improved credibility.

In addition, where location is of primary importance, the researcher should include any facts about the environment, which are crucial to providing apt comparisons with other locations, thereby enhancing transferability. The current study allows for

comparison based on contextual factors such as weather, population, liveability and proximity to Asia. In this research project, transferability was sought through obtaining thick descriptions and providing concise contextual factors.

***Dependability.*** This concept refers to the consistency of the findings (Guba, 1981) and emphasizes the need to replicate “over time, over instrument and over groups of respondents” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 201). The specifics of the research project generally shape the qualitative methods employed. The study incorporated several procedures to enhance dependability and credibility as follows:

***Triangulation.*** This multi-prong strategy incorporates the use of diverse methods to assist in a constructive understanding of the research focus (Guba, 1981; Cohen et al., 2011). Common strategies in qualitative methods, and those used in this thesis, include individual interviews (dialogue between researcher and participant) and a focus group (discussion between participants as well as researcher).

Both approaches suffer from methodological deficiencies including the interviewer observing only atypical behaviours amongst participants, as well as selective observation by the interviewer, which may distort the data. However, these distinctive characteristics may also be regarded as their most prominent assets. Guba (1981) suggests that employing diverse methodologies collaboratively, compensates for their individual weaknesses, whilst exploiting their respective strengths.

This study also employed other mechanisms to triangulate the data including verifying specific findings against the existing literature, whereby the previous research acts as explanatory material to support participants’ behaviours and attitudes (Cohen et al., 2011).

Another system of triangulation encompassed verifying data against other participants thus allowing the participants experiences to be compared (Cohen et al., 2011). Through multiple participation, this process helped construct a rich and dense representation of the overall conduct of participants.

*Procedural correctness.* Accurate recording of phenomena promotes research confidence. Qualitative studies should embrace well-entrenched research methods corresponding to comparably researched investigations. Where possible, the researcher should draw interview questions, data collection and analysis mechanisms from previous and closely related studies. As Yin (1994) suggested, by incorporating tried and tested methodologies, the approach taken is likely to be more credible.

This investigation used previous literature as the foundation for developing interview questions and deriving themes. Similarly, the methodology employed a thematic analysis based on well documented push-pull modelling to scrutinize the data.

*Self-reflection.* The researcher should incorporate mechanisms to appraise and formulate ideas as well as document and assess developing observations. This is accomplished by reflective commentary, including journal writing, recording of field notes and audio play back (Janesick, 2000). The commentary is fundamental to the investigators 'progressive subjectivity' or the development of the thesis' emerging argument, crucial in establishing researcher credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994): for example, draft annotations within sections of the commentary related to pattern and theory building informed this study's results.

*Investigators antecedents.* Patton (2002) claims that the reputation of the investigator in qualitative research is vital to the efficacy of the project, as the researcher is the primary mechanism by which data are collected and analysed. Indeed,



it is arguable that the reputation of the researcher is equal in credibility to the actual processes (Alkin, Daillak, & White, 1979). As a result, the research should and indeed does include sufficient biographical information relevant to the study including funding source, ethics approvals, participant consents and professional information. This research study also included a Positionality Statement (see end of Chapter Four) which provide the reader with an explicit contextual framework as to how the author's background may have influenced the research.

*Member checks.* In this research, checks pertaining to data accuracy occur instantly and after the data collection phase. Participants were requested to peruse their audio recorded transcripts, emphasising their intentions were correctly recorded on to paper. In other words, has the audio recording captured precisely the participants' articulations and communications?

In addition, to bolster credibility, a critical and independent third party reviewed the interpretative data against the research information to check for dependability (Janesick, 2000). The autonomous third party was independent of the research, with an expertise in qualitative research methods, allowing them to provide expert guidance and opinion on the methodology and the protocol used.

The review by the independent third party was achieved by allowing the third party to review the researcher's audit trail (Cohen et al., 2011), enabling the research to be comprehensively verified. An audit trail is the research record: for example, information relating to the development of the research instruments, the raw data and the analysis documents, draft notes and journal entries drafted by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011).

These methods add credibility to the project as it is impossible to verify field data after the fact. As Van Maanen (1983) states, “When making sense of field data, one cannot simply accumulate information without regard to what each bit of information represents in terms of its possible contextual meanings” (Van Maanen, p.46).

*Interview questioning.* The researcher employed mechanisms to distinguish honesty from exaggeration or deliberate untruth. These techniques were adapted from the researcher’s professional experience as a trial advocate and involved the following practices:

- Avoiding leading questions and placing participants’ in specific positions based on a projected outcome, in order to limit researcher bias; and
- Clarifying argument, which refers to requiring the participant to deconstruct and expound upon their argument to obtain a clear statement.

These approaches sought to distinguish consistent from undependable reactions, allowing the researcher to discard the unreliable data (Mauet & McCrimmon, 1992).

Another approach to improve transparency was to highlight and explain substantial inconsistencies in the final report.

*Regular debriefing meetings.* As suggested by Garcia, Malott, and Brethower (1988), collaborative sessions involving the head researcher, research partners and supervisors occurred regularly to share knowledge, improve creativity and to provide constructive feedback and critical analysis on the study. These discussions often resulted in consideration of alternative approaches, examining potential flaws or problems that may not be perceptible to the head researcher. The more experienced supervisors acted as a sounding board for the researcher to develop concepts. Input by

more experienced researchers also assisted the head researcher to identify biases and predilections.

*Sample sufficiency.* An adequate sample size is imperative for the data to reach saturation. In qualitative studies, there is a point of diminishing return, that is, the juncture whereupon additional information fails to yield new results. Qualitative studies connote meaning: they are not concerned with constructing generalised hypotheses (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). This principle guides qualitative studies to improve efficiency, quality and adequacy of the data.

This study utilised several guiding principles to determine saturation. These included clarifying the project's aims and scope (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 2000); the topics features and the study design (Morse, 2000). In addition, deference to supervisory expertise limited the number of participants required (Jette, Grover & Keck (2003). Notwithstanding, sample size is independent of participant numbers and is not simply an information gathering exercise. Rather, saturation ensures gathering sufficient data to achieve the highest research standards while meeting the study's conceptual understandings (Mason, 2010).

*Thick descriptions.* As revealed in Chapter Five of this thesis, describing phenomena in detail encouraged credibility by communicating the participants' tangible circumstances and the context framing those events. By illustrating the complex factors involved in the findings, the reader can assess the evidence and themes more appropriately (Guba, 1981).

### **Research Design**

The research design is the modus operandi to compose a study. It involves defining elements of the methodological procedure to guide the collection, analysis and

sampling of the research data in an organised and coherent fashion (Burns & Bush, 2002). A successful research design involves constructing a comprehensive strategy that clearly elucidates the parts of the experiment.

The most widely used design methods are exploratory, descriptive and causal approaches (Chisnall, 2001). Depending on the research problem, a study will incorporate one or all of these categories, which is a characteristic of the present study.

**Exploratory design.** Exploratory research is an investigative tool used to delve into the specific research questions in the formative phase of a study's development. The method neither resolves the research problems nor provides answers or explanations to the questions posed by the study. Rather, its primary purpose is to characterise the dilemma and then define its parameters. In essence, exploratory research is a technique used at the commencement of the research to help the investigator gain an appreciation of the issues involved (Singh, 2007). As stated by Brown (2006, p. 43), "Exploratory research tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done." In fact, exploratory techniques often result in the reformation of some or all of the study's preliminary assessments. As a result, the researcher is often required to adjust their enquiry to correlate with the disclosure of new information (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

In that regard, exploratory design is an investigative method that probes the research questions deeply to develop a foundation for additional comprehensive research. The process advances various possibilities to investigate the research problem. It is a valuable instrument that provides the researcher with guidance in developing approaches to sampling and data collection methods (Singh, 2007). However, in so doing, it is crucial that the process is undertaken as rigorously as

possible, in a methodically sound approach, for the data to be useful in resolving the research problem (Nargundkar, 2003).

Within this study's qualitative framework, the exploratory research was used as a preliminary tool to investigate the research problem without necessitating comprehensive investigations. This occurred through a number of ways including the refinement of the research topic by a broad review of the existing literature and the development of open-ended questions that helped facilitate the interviews and the focus group. Consequently, the exploratory techniques aided in developing the research questions, helped create a strategy to answer those questions and was complicit in gaining insights into the findings.

**Descriptive research.** Both qualitative and quantitative studies employ this type of research, which involves describing a particular behaviour or phenomena (Chisnall, 2005). The function of descriptive research is not to correlate data, nor categorize relationships amongst the variables, but rather to identify the ideas (or themes in qualitative projects) within the research that forms the basis for further investigation.

Unlike exploratory research, descriptive approaches require the researcher to have prior knowledge of the research problem. The process follows an investigative inquiry, which results in the organisation of information into themes, ready for testing, explanation and validation (Krahtwohl, 1993).

The current study used interview techniques to collect data to investigate the main reasons international students chose to study in WA. The descriptive research was useful to collate personal information about the students including gender, age, and course of study, as well as describing their decision-making behaviours. After data

collation, the information was analysed to explain student intention and applied to improving strategies for attracting overseas students to local universities.

This study incorporated both of the abovementioned aspects. The study's exploratory nature facilitated defining the research problem and aided in categorizing the associated questions within the push-pull framework, tested against a generalised model of international student decision-making. It provided a foundation to understand international student decision-making with reference to postgraduate students studying in WA

Descriptive techniques helped to investigate participants' personal characteristics including their degree choice, gender and age as well as to identify the motivating factors behind students' decisions. Exploratory methods were applied to investigate the relationships between the independent variables (e.g., cost) and dependent variables (e.g., decision-making).

### **Contextual Study**

The context of the study was Perth, the capital city of the State of WA. Specifying the context delineates the parameters of the investigation by orienting towards the research problem and the resultant design. It provides the research with the framework to examine a problem that falls within a specific 'box'. Accordingly, this thesis utilises Perth as the context in order to measure patterns of international postgraduate student decision-making behaviour (the phenomenon). It is noted that a reference to WA is a reference to Perth and vice versa.

WA is the fourth largest State of Australia by population, but the only State on the west coast of Australia. Its capital city is Perth which is also home to the four public universities main campuses, which were the contextual subject of this study. The four

universities are: University of Western Australia (UWA), Curtin University, Murdoch University and Edith Cowan University (ECU).

The study's context focused on a class of participants (postgraduate students) apropos the propositions set out in the research questions. This was achieved using a sample of postgraduate students who were enrolled in or had recently graduated from a university in WA. The exact methodology is discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

**Justifications.** A contextual study is a valuable tool used to investigate a specific type of behaviour. It has a number of advantages (Hodgkinson & Hodgkinson (2001):

1. *Descriptive.* The contextual study may be beneficial to investigations that seek to define correlations amongst variables as well as relationships. It is easier to analyse data without recourse to other cross-units. The contextual study acts as the foundation to allow the researcher to describe the patterns occurring within the data set.

2. *Homogeneity.* The contextual study is useful when comparing variables. In this research project, the study compared international students who attend a university in WA. No cross-unit comparisons were required, nor broad assumptions about the applicability of other Australian States or Territories to WA.

3. *Causal Insight.* The context provided a background to appreciate the interaction between the variables. It permitted the researcher to appreciate how the variables interacted. In that way, the contextual study acts as a highly defined structure that framed the interaction between the variables, offering the chance to peer midway into the relationship between cause and effect: for example, international postgraduate students choose WA for specific although inter-related reasons. These motivations are exclusive to the State, such as lifestyle choice and cost imperatives. The context helps

to attribute these factors to participants as opposed to cross-unit analysis, which disregards specificity within the constant variable.

4. *Contextual knowledge.* Social science research is not a pure science as it cannot predict theory nor devise generalised contextually independent theory. Rather, social science is more appropriate to develop contextually dependent and tangible knowledge. Using a contextual study complements this outcome.

This research frames WA as a single contextual study. By doing so, the research can provide a nuanced, empirically balanced analysis of complex phenomena relevant to a specific geographic location.

### **The Research Setting**

**Selecting the sample.** This study's research design incorporated a purposive sampling technique to select participants, which supported the qualitative research paradigm through collecting "information rich cases to be studied in more depth providing greater insights" (Patton, 2002 p. 230). This non-probability sampling method allowed the researcher to select the study's participants according to specific needs, making the selections both discriminatory and subjective. Further, the sampling technique could be small, especially when compared to probability analysis, rendering the technique advantageous compared to other methodologies (Cohen et al., 2011).

The technique's objective emphasised the specific features of the study's population that best facilitated tackling the research problem. In that way, the sample did not represent the general population, but rather provided an appropriate group of participants that adequately met the needs of the research (Cohen et al.). This research incorporated homogenous sampling, a category of purposive sampling, whereby the researcher chose comparable cases based on similarity pertinent to answering the



research questions (Cohen et al., 2011). The sampling mechanism assisted in the transferability of the findings, particularly in respect to clusters of international students that registered similar criterion used in qualifying study participants.

One feature of purposive sampling used was to devise specific strategies to converge with the research purpose (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling, a class of purposive sampling, targeted individuals who met the study's participation criteria. The sampling process began with the researcher identifying a person who met the conditions for study inclusion. The investigator requested the participants recommend a friend, colleague or acquaintance who may also meet the study's criteria. Consequently, the sample set acted like a rolling snowball and became a viable source for locating participants with dense knowledge about the research problem. Given (2008) suggested that snowballing assists the researcher in enlisting future informants from within their own communities.

International students tend to conglomerate amongst themselves, regimented within class progressions (e.g., first year, second year etc.) (Harman, 2003). This may result in an over representation of one nationality over another. It was imperative the study obtained a broad sample of students to gain deep and varied results. Consequently, this study employed a more flexible and discretionary sampling strategy.

The technique manipulated indicative participants to increase credibility within the study. It firstly identified those persons who provisionally met the study's participation criteria. Closer inquiry eliminated individuals who failed to meet the participating conditions or *prima facie* appeared too similar to other potential participants. Secondly, initial participants proposed other individuals who most likely

met this study's criteria. These students then recommended additional persons with analogous experiences. The process continued until saturation.

**The participants.** The sample for the study consisted of postgraduate international students either currently studying or had recently completed their postgraduate studies at a WA public university. 'Recently' meant within the last three years.

The participation criteria attracted a wide range of students. The study did not distinguish between gender, age, specific source countries nor between participants enrolled in either research or coursework degree. Similarly, the study did not discriminate between students currently enrolled or those who had completed their degrees. The wide breadth preserved the qualitative nature of the study, particularly with reference to applicable changes in global conditions, including, but not limited to currency fluctuations, migratory patterns and course popularity.

However, the criteria purposively limited participation to a feasible sample size, which included that all participants were:

1. currently enrolled or recently completed studies as a postgraduate student at a public university in WA;
2. foreign nationals;
3. not dual Australian citizens;
4. full fee paying students or had obtained a scholarship, bursary or grant to study in WA, such that no participant qualified for an Australian Commonwealth Supported Place defined as a Commonwealth Subsidised Higher Education Enrolment Place specific to Australian domestic citizens; and

5. current or past holder of the appropriate Australian visa class including, but not limited to an Australian Postgraduate Research Sector: temporary visa (subclass 574) or a Higher Education Sector visa (subclass 573).

The sampling criteria afforded the study a wide discretion to compare participants. Criteria one and four were broad enough categories to establish variances within the sample to preserve a wide scope of views and to provide appropriate contrast with the existing literature. This included participants with varying degrees of experience, cultural differences, study interests and relevance of source country. Importantly, the criteria did not limit generality to those students studying either in another Australian State or in any other overseas destination.

### **The Research Procedure**

Attempting to make sense of the decision-making processes of postgraduate students required the collection and interpretation of quality information relating to the motivations underlying the participants' decisions to study in WA. Participant interviews including individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group session that generated rich and deep accounts of student processes when choosing to study overseas. The lineal process involved:

1. recording the interviews using Alon Dictation Software for iPhone 6;
2. transcribing the conversations;
3. perusing, reading and thoroughly examining the discussions;
4. interpreting the emerging patterns to create themes; and
5. coding the themes using NVivo 10 software.

As stated above, the approaches to collect data on postgraduate student decision-making included individual semi-structured interviews together with a focus group that

were predominantly conversational, although a modicum of formality using semi-structured questions controlled the discussion. Participants' perspectives obtained through individual interviews enabled the researcher to develop a pattern of ideas that subsequently cultivated data saturation. The focus group concluded the data collection phase, helping to facilitate credibility within the data collection mechanisms and identify any variations and limitations in the initial sample as well as comparing the information compiled through interviews.

The analysis generated three primary spheres of discussion, including the reasons why postgraduate students chose to study overseas, the motivations for choosing WA and the relevant influences that induced the students to decide in the manner that they chose.

**Individual semi-structured interviews.** Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews provided the primary means to assemble participants' views. This evidence constituted the participants' insights, reasons and comprehensions of their decision-making processes, constructed within their communities and the influence these social interactions exhibited over the students (Seidman, 1991).

The research applied two mechanisms to collect data: in-depth interviews and focus groups, allowing participants to express freely their opinions and to recount their stories without disruption or justification within a manner that was comfortable to them (Seidman, 1991, p.1). More specifically, the researcher drafted the semi-structured interview questions to delve into the likely issues. The extant literature and more definitively, the model proposed by Cubillo et al. (2006) provided the thematic template to draft the interview questions. These interrogatories related to the study, but were framed in a manner that permitted participants to provide a narrative of their lived

experience (Seidman, 1991). As Shutz (1967) indicated, the process of analysis and reform between the researcher on the one hand and the participants on the other, allowed the encapsulation of students' contributions to become the primary focus of the study.

In addition, by properly arranging interviews with all the logistical and ethical requirements, the sessions encouraged a certain formality, but in a flexible format that allowed participants to feel comfortable in raising pertinent issues and discuss freely. Structured questions stimulated comparative discussions and concise arguments, while students discussed freely their attitudes and sometimes amorphous opinions not accessible in a quantitative study. These thick descriptions formed the foundations for answering the research questions.

By appropriating the interview as a mechanism to develop knowledge, the researcher developed themes, built topics and investigated the complexities involved in each participant's decision-making. Consequently, the interviewer was conscious of the participant's narrative to direct and re-direct the flow of conversation to ascertain appropriate outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The consequence of this mutual empathetic social relationship was the development of complex data patterns, otherwise unattainable through statistical collection methods (Schwandt, 2000).

**Focus groups.** The researcher pursued individual interviews (n=16) until saturation ((Mason, 2010). Immediately following data saturation, the study utilised a four participant single focus group (n=1) to obtain data clarity and credibility in a timely manner (Krueger, 1994).

Focus groups function as investigative tools to inform the research. They are collective dialogues arranged to survey specific issues, concentrating on people's views

and involvement with the research problem (Barker & Rich, 1992). The individuals participating in the group 'focus' on a single issue, discussing, contending and considering relevant questions and problems posed by the interviewer and apposite to the study's issues. The group's interactions formed the basis for collecting the research data and not simply as a mechanism to confirm previous findings or as a time saving technique (Morgan, 1997).

The methodology of a focus group uses between four and ten participants, who provide their opinion and viewpoints on the relevant issue, guided by the interviewer whose primary aim is to moderate discussion rather than intervene (Morgan, 1997). The benefit of a focus group organised after the individual interviews is that participants could mutually engage in previously discussed matters and converse laterally with other participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Specifically, this mutually beneficial exploratory discussion assisted focus group participants to narrate their personal stories, analysing and comparing the relevant social influences specific to themselves.

The focus group proceeded on the presumption that the interviewer moderated rather than intervened. Participants could generate new ideas and qualify existing ones within a safe and contained environment. The semi-informal nature of the discussion imbued a relaxed atmosphere with the interviewer, raising themes and subjects. The researcher consciously avoided being officious and interfering, but similar to the semi-structured interviews, the researcher maintained a focus on the topic being discussed. The emphasis was on stimulating discussion and confronting individual's perception of their reality through gently persuading participants to talk about their experiences, their discrepancies, other participants' narratives and their own decision-making behaviour.

The flexible technique encouraged contribution and interaction between individuals. By developing a strong and cohesive group dynamic, participants relaxed, enabling them to discuss the original findings together with their own views cohesively and without quarrel. Interactions complemented each other and guided the research into common experience and understandings (Kitzinger, 1994).

The focal point of the focus group included a subtle exploitation of the individual interactions to identify norms, common attitudes and confirm insights in order to verify the analysis. This assisted with clarifying participants' decision-making processes, and ultimately provided the bridge to connect the factors motivating postgraduate students to study in WA.

### **Ethics**

The overriding ethical consideration when conducting experiments is to ensure no mental or physical harm comes to participants and that procedures are in place to deal with any negative outcomes (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The researcher completed the study under the auspices of Edith Cowan University. Due to human involvement, the study required specific ethics clearances and approvals, obtained through the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, which approved the ethics application.

All participants received a letter (see Appendix A) detailing the nature of the study and a consent form to participate in the study. The letter covered issues including the voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality guarantees, deception, anonymity and reporting accuracy.

Having regard to the highest standard of ethical practices, the study employed diverse methods to minimise participation risk. Students were advised of the research purpose, the nature of the study and the methods of data collection. Furthermore,

participants were informed that they were at minimal risk of either physical or psychological harm, but in any event, could either withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions or engage in any discussion, which they did not want to without recrimination or reason. Participating in the study was voluntary. Individual names were coded and substituted with pseudonyms upon aggregating the results. Transcripts for interviews and the focus group were also allocated codes to identify the participants. The identity of participants remains known only to the researcher and his supervisory panel.

The researcher ensured that student confidentiality remained protected and valued. Consent letters, draft written materials with student identification were safeguarded in a secure locked cabinet accessible only by the researcher. All computerised materials including recordings and data transcripts were stored on two password protected thumb drives and deposited in a separate locked drawer at Edith Cowan University.

Once a student agreed to participate in the study, a consultation time was scheduled to conduct an interview. Similarly, a date and time was arranged for the focus group. Prior to the commencement of the respective interviews, the researcher re-considered the Information Letter and Consent Form, with reference to the interviewees' rights, including the purpose of the study, ability for participants to withdraw at any stage and the right to refuse to answer any question. The researcher then requested that participants complete and sign the Consent Form with a copy provided to the student and the original stored by the researcher. Participants were further provided with the opportunity to check the accuracy of the data transcripts as well as whether they wished to be informed of the research outcomes.

### **Data Collection**



Data were obtained during two phases of collection from students who participated in individual semi-structured interviews followed by a four-person focus group. The information obtained through these collections formed the fundamental basis to investigate the research problem. All individual interviews and the focus group were recorded digitally and the interviews transcribed for analysis.

**Phase one: Individual in-depth semi structured interviews.** Both recently graduated and current international postgraduate students studying in WA were invited to participate in the first phase of data collection through snowballing sampling techniques (Given, 2008). The researcher requested that each individual participant suggest one or two names of persons who may fulfil the study criteria. By using local networks, the researcher located seven persons to participate in the study. Those students recommended a further 36 individuals of who 29 volunteered if required.

The researcher initially contacted seven students from his own network by telephone. These persons were known to the researcher through a combination of university collegiality, social networks and local sporting club membership. During these conversations, preliminary details of the investigation were explained to the potential participants. An 'information letter' detailing participants' rights and an 'integrity declaration' particularizing the researcher's ethical obligations were emailed to each individual. All seven persons agreed to participate in the study.

The researcher made all efforts to schedule an opportune meeting time and convenient location with prospective interviewees. This meant accommodating work rosters, family commitments, and university course timetables. Meeting sessions were arranged at varied locations including shared university rooms, public libraries and work shared office spaces. 'Shared' meant a space available to conduct collegial and

collaborative work, open to persons requiring the infrequent use of neutral rooms. At all times during interview sessions, the researcher engaged professionally, with integrity and ensured participants' remarks and observations were afforded the appropriate respect. This was fundamental to the success of the interviews.

Sixteen individuals with a variety of personal characteristics, participated in individual in-depth interviews. The researcher encouraged participants to feel relaxed, allowing for more transparent and unpressured interview answers. The aim was to elicit meticulous and carefully constructed narratives.

The researcher recorded each individual in-depth interview using Alon Dictaphone digital recording software for iPhone 6. The application included a comprehensive voice recorder and transcribing mechanism. After each interview and transcription, the data were named, coded and separated into files. The files were then stored on a password protected thumb drive and stored in safekeeping. The data were subsequently deleted from the researcher's iPhone.

Post-transcription, participants were provided with a copy of their transcripts to review the accuracy and tone of the interviews. Only one set of minor corrections was made to a single transcript. The changes were negligible and inconsequential to the decision-making themes.

The researcher also retained a reflexive note keeping journal, drafting notes during data collection phase and while transcribing. The process improved credibility and limited personal bias.

**Phase two: Focus group.** The same snowballing technique resulted in individuals participating in the second phase of the data collection. Initial participant requests garnered support for the focus group or the interviews. During these requests,

participants obtained focus group particulars from the researcher, including but not limited to:

1. explanations of the core differences between individual interviews and the focus group;
2. confirmation that focus group participation required attendance at the researcher's university for a minimum of two to three hours; and
3. potential participants must be willing to engage in discussion, argument and conversation with other international postgraduate students.

Initial requests for participants resulted in sufficient respondents early in the process. From these students, the researcher chose one student from each of Perth's four public universities to participate in the Focus Group with the remainder interviewed.

All students received e-mails confirming their participation in either the focus group or the semi structured in-depth interviews. These emails also attached the requisite Information Letter and Ethics Declaration in accordance with the university's professional academic research guidelines. Approximately a week later, the researcher followed these emails with telephone calls to individuals to both verbally confirm participation and arrange a mutually convenient time for the focus group session.

The single focus group session occurred at a mutually convenient time with respect to participants' work, study and family commitments. The session took place in a private room at Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley Campus. The researcher offered all participants reimbursement of travel and parking expenses. Four female current postgraduate research students participated in the one focus group.

Prior to commencement, participants received a hard copy of the Information Letter and Ethics Declaration, to peruse and clarify any outstanding issue. No concerns arose and all participants duly executed the Ethics Declaration, signed and returned the original form to the researcher and retained a copy together with the Information Letter. The researcher advised participants that both their anonymity and safety were paramount and more specifically instructed that all students who felt uncomfortable during the discussion may withdraw from the session without judgment or penalty. Anonymity included advising individuals that all transcripts would de-identify them by means of codes recognizable only to the researcher and the study's supervisors.

The researcher presided over the focus group session and took notes of specific content and non-verbal communications during the session. The session was also recorded using Alon Dictaphone digital recording software for iPhone 6 in exactly the format as the recordings conducted during the interviews. After the session, the researcher transcribed the recordings, then coded the data into themes and saved all the information onto two separate password protected thumb drives for confidential storage. The researcher deleted the original data stored on the iPhone 6.

During transcription, the researcher perused and added to the transcription the hand-written notes and information pertinent to the focus group. These details included interpretations of individual's expression, perspectives, attitudes and tone. The aim was to incorporate non-verbal cues as an element of the focus group. As Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggested, these exchanges influence the reflexive character of qualitative research, particularly when conveying rich descriptive narratives: for example, it was more conducive to the conversational flow that students not self-interrupt by uttering their name. Rather, an indirect approach was taken, whereby the

researcher scripted by hand verbatim individuals opening sentences, principally to assist with voice recognition during transcription.

After the focus group, the researcher advised participants that the entire conversation would be transcribed and edited using the researcher's hand written notes. After transcription, copies were emailed to each person to verify the conversation's accuracy, to preserve anonymity, to ensure participants' opinions were consistent with their conscious thinking and that the non-verbal cues were correctly integrated into the data. The researcher made no corrections.

### **Data Analysis**

The research methodology embraced the strategy of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The iterative-based analysis began early in the study and continued exploring to exhaustion all themes and sub-themes. In the current study, data were analysed to derive meaningful ideas relating to the participants' decision-making processes and which concepts were then coded into patterns and finally categorised into themes. Further sub-thematic analysis occurred to measure the similarities and differences in the prevailing data (Strauss, 1987).

The transcription data of the recorded interviews were transferred to NVivo 10 software, which assisted with the data analysis. The software package provided a mechanism to comprehensively and efficiently study, infer, code and classify themes to uncover meaningful patterns within the data.

Immediately after each interview, the recording was transcribed to retain immediate memory of the conversation. This also helped refine the interview questions, style and manner in which the interviews proceeded. Each transcription included a

variety of handwritten notes, highlighted sections of important text and reflexive record keeping that could assist with the data analysis.

After the transcription of all interviews, the researcher began the comprehensive thematic coding using the NVivo 10 software. Codes stemmed from interviewees raising specific subject matter or topics, which then identified pertinent ideas within the study (Hennink et al., 2011). This required several readings of the data to identify the relevant codes. Subsequently, the coding created a mechanism to locate, classify and then describe the relevant issues that repeated and which could then be categorised into themes. These themes were evaluated against the generalised model of international student making developed by Cubillo et al. (2006) with additional themes and sub-themes added or removed according to the patterns uncovered in the data.

The final stage in analysing the data required refining the draft themes into meaningful hierarchical configurations that encompassed main and sub-themes. This tiered classification formed the basis of the new model of postgraduate international student decision-making in WA.

As previously stated, the study utilised a number of devices to enhance credibility and to improve rigour and trustworthiness. These are (as referred above):

- *Triangulation.* This occurred through a measured and critical analysis of the in-depth semi-structured interviews, the focus group and the literature.
- *Regular debriefings.* The researcher regularly met with his supervisors to confer over the resulting data.
- *Interview questioning.* Appropriate interview techniques discerned honest and thoughtful answers.

- *Procedural correctness.* The methodological examination having regard to previous studies and in particular, in relation to theme building and the testing of the existing generalised model of international student decision-making on the study's cohort.
- *Self-reflection.* As an ongoing process, the researcher consistently appraised the data through reflective note taking and questioning. This helped reduce bias and bracketing of the researcher's assumptions (Bednall, 2006)
- *Investigator's antecedents.* The research incorporated all appropriate and relevant biographical information of the researcher.
- *Member checks.* Consistent and ongoing checks of the data ensured accuracy including supervisor review of the transcripts and confirmation of the accuracy of the transcription by participants.
- *Sample sufficiency.* The researcher collected data until saturation incorporating the relevant principles suggested by the academic literature.
- *Thick descriptions.* Where possible, the study described all codes, themes and sub-themes in appropriate detail.

In summary, the transcripts became a record of participants' motivations for choosing WA as their study destination. It incorporated their lived experience and their reflective conscious thinking about their decision-making processes.

### **Analysis of Transcripts**

Analysing the qualitative information involved intricate subjective examination of the data. The process of interpretation involved developing an outline of the data, whereupon the researcher could make observational sense of the findings. While this

technique formed the theoretical basis for analysing the data, qualitative research is distinct from other statistical methods in that the relationship between data collection and analysis is opaque, meaning there is no clear differentiation between data collection and examination (Patton, 2002). Indeed, the analytical process of assessing data was ongoing, substantiating the raw data, while incorporating it into organised and coherent information patterns (Myers, 2008). In that regard, the mechanisms used to analyse the conversations and interviews assisted to convert this raw information into themes and sub-themes that could be examined and discussed. Ultimately, these rich descriptive and highly personal interpretations formed the foundations to decipher the research problem.

The research followed a sequential process when analysing the data adapted from the works of Creswell (2013). Firstly, the transcripts from the interviews were initially perused and analysed together to provide adequate preparation for the focus group. Once data collection was complete, the interviews were then considered separately, followed by an acute comparison with the focus group data.

The initial analysis aimed to discern draft themes. Once these themes emerged, the study explored the data closer, mining the themes for sub-themes and then coding and re-coding the information to determine the primary and secondary motivational factors influencing the students. Peripheral patterns were also isolated and coded. Finally, the coded data were modelled into a diagram and compared with the generalised model of international student decision-making.

### **The Researcher's Position**

After discussion with my supervisors on the veracity of a positionality statement, particularly given that I have used a social constructivist lens as my philosophical



framework, I recently came across a paper by Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch and Sikes (2005) that convinced me that such a statement was important to the overall thesis. In that paper, the authors argue,

*The biography of researchers, how and where they are socially positioned, the consequent perspectives they hold and the assumptions which inform the sense they make of the world, have implications for their research interests, how they frame research questions, the paradigms, methodologies and methods they prefer, and the styles that they adopt when writing up their research (Wellington et al. p. 21).*

Their argument is that there is a need to pay attention to reflexivity, positionality, how *my* knowledge is created – all critical processes in undertaking ethical research.

To begin with, I am a son, an immigrant, an Australian, a learner, a teacher, a reader, a lawyer, a husband, a father. I am not any one thing, but an amalgam of my experiences. I am a determined, reasonably intelligent and physically healthy man. None of that is by accident. My father is a retired dentist who worked hard his entire life to afford me, one of three boys, the education, the training, the Sunday morning tennis lessons to be successful in my own right. My mother and her father were academics, both reaching the pinnacles of their profession. My mother was relentless in teaching me to take care of myself, to find my place in the world and to make my mind up about most things. She would let me make mistakes, sitting back while I slowly worked out how to resolve them, sometimes quickly, often requiring multiple tries. Both my parents expected me to be self-sufficient, independent and above all else to be kind - and they would stop at nothing to nudge me in that right direction.

At an early age, I began to understand that education was not simply a means to learn, but a preparation for life. I enjoyed reading, debating, acquiring new ideas and thinking critically about the world around me. I saw my education as a means to attain both experience, knowledge and opportunities. I was grateful for my privileged upbringing, my communities, close knit family, private school, prestigious law degree and later postgraduate opportunities. As a young man, I understood that the role my parents played in my early life was to guide me, to help me grow into an ambitious and curious adult, but all the time to pay attention to the social contract that binds society.

In my early 20s, I completed a politics and law degree, and regard those years as some of the most interesting and valuable times of my life. I enjoyed undergraduate university life immensely and perhaps always felt a need to return to that place which made me feel most content.

Upon graduation, I gained employment as a lawyer, specialising in family law where I continue to work in one guise or another. The legal work was and remains fulfilling, the clients complicated and the rewards generous. As I gained professional experience two momentous shifts took place: firstly, I began to take on the role of nurturing young articled clerks through their formative early years of practice, teaching them to become defensive, ethical and professional legal practitioners; secondly, as I became more adept at the practical aspects of lawyering, I took an interest in the policies and research that underpinned the profession. Both of those matters combined to ignite an interest in pursuing a postgraduate research degree. At the time, I was unsure as to the area of study, although I was heavily influenced by my mother and grandfather's vocations as tertiary level teachers.

About five years ago, I made the decision to return to tertiary life in pursuit of an advanced research degree. For some of that time I continued to work as a lawyer, while for the remainder of my postgraduate degree I lectured to law students. In that regard, I now recognize the influence of my legal training on how I interpret the world around me and as a corollary, how I constructed this thesis: for example, my writing skills, examination of participants and interpretation of their answers are all undoubtedly influenced by my court room experience and legal training.

When choosing a thesis topic, I felt swayed to investigate an aspect of policy rather than jurisprudence. While I maintain an interest in legal reasoning, I thought my research skills were better equipped to synthesize a policy based paper rather than an analysis of common law. My experience has taught me that legal writing can be very dry. If I was to maintain interest in a long term self-regulated project, then the topic would need to continue to pique my curiosity and interest.

I sought to combine policy with my interest in universities, settling on investigating the problems and challenges associated with attracting international students to my State of Western Australia. Indeed, the topic fell into place relatively quickly once I let go of my fears surrounding the degree.

Completing my PhD is unlikely to provide me with extensive professional opportunities or increased income. That is not what I am seeking. I am, however, striving to continue to fashion me – as a learner, a teacher, a husband, a father, a lawyer...

And so, I will close by returning to the beginning of this statement – that I am an amalgam of my experiences - a stark reminder that I define myself by what makes me. And so, by implication, this thesis is a product of everything that I am.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four focused on the qualitative research methodology that was used for this study. The chapter began with a brief exploration of the exploratory qualitative methods that justified the data collection methods adopted in this research project. The purpose of using a qualitative design was to examine a cross section of international students who were enrolled or recently completed a postgraduate degree in WA. The aim was to understand the way participants made their decisions, specifically focused upon the motivations for choosing WA as a study destination. This required the researcher to encapsulate the rich narratives and comprehensive descriptions elicited from participants.

The chapter then presented the research design, beginning with a justification for using WA as the study's context. The researcher then presented specifics of the research design, including sample selection, research procedure and data collection, ethics approvals as well as transcript and data analysis. The chapter concluded with a discussion on the study's limitations with respect to the use of a qualitative methodological research design.

The results and findings extracted from the chosen method are discussed in Chapter Five and Six of this thesis.

### **Chapter Five: Participant Findings**

In this chapter, the participants' qualitative findings are explained under pseudonyms. The results were interpreted from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the interview group (n=16) and the single focus group (n=4). The chapter is organised into three sections: Vignettes (Section A), Demographic data (Section B) and the Development of the postgraduate model of international student decision-making (Section C).

Section A titled Vignettes, provides an illustration of eight participants' biographies in the form of short vignettes. These short stories are a valuable tool because the selected accounts best represent the 20 participants in the study, encompassing all major themes discerned. The narratives serve to provide a useful framework to understand the reasons participants chose WA as their study destination.

Section B titled Demographic Data, offers a tabular representation of participants' antecedents characterised by such descriptors as country of origin, language, gender and degree particulars. These data offers a snapshot of participants, consolidated in a functional register that can be referenced against each specific theme.

Section C is the substantive part of this chapter comprising the findings of the study. It is divided into the central themes, which then branches into associated variables. The section corresponds to the new postgraduate model of international student decision-making and which headings and analysis follow through to the Discussion Chapter allowing the reader to position themselves in understanding what themes have occurred and subsequently why they have occurred.

**Section A: Vignettes**

**Vignette 1: Ali.** Ali is a 35 year old single Iranian male national. He has been in Australia for two years. Ali is currently a PhD candidate at a public university in WA. The main catalysts that helped Ali choose WA were that he wanted to both experience life in a Western culture and obtain a postgraduate qualification from an English speaking university. Ali sought opinion from an Iranian colleague who had completed a similar degree in WA and whose career trajectory Ali seeks to emulate. He initially applied to study in Melbourne, but was unsuccessful in obtaining a scholarship to his preferred university. He then applied to a similar institution in WA and was successful in obtaining a full bursary to cover both tuition and some living costs. As Ali settled into life in Perth, his thoughts turned to migration and the benefits that this would bring him in his future. He is currently pursuing permanent residency as he completes his PhD.

**Vignette 2: Sania.** Sania is a 36 year old single female, who has been in Australia for eight years. She came to WA from India to embark on a postgraduate degree in Education with a view to staying in Australia permanently. Sania considered WA as a possible destination because of the positive recommendations she received from a family friend who previously migrated from India to Perth. She wanted a more prosperous life in Australia because life in India for a young woman was difficult culturally, economically and socially. She encapsulated her desire to study in Australia as follows, *“I liked the idea of, you know, simple things: of talking to whoever you want without being judged, going wherever you want and no one looking at you funny.”* Sania funded her own postgraduate studies, which required her to borrow money from her family in India as well as obtain part-time work as a student upon arrival in Perth.

She remarked that while this was not ideal and required hard work, it was the price to pay for gaining permanent residency.

**Vignette 3: Yus.** Yus is a 29 year old single female from Malaysia. She recently completed a Masters degree in Psychology from a WA university. She subsequently obtained full time employment with a local government agency immediately upon completion of her studies. She arrived in Australia five years ago and considers she will most likely remain in Perth for the foreseeable future, but with the ability to live elsewhere if she later changes her mind. Yus said that she “*was always going to study overseas. There was just a thing that if you were going to go to university the chances are you were going to go overseas.*” She chose WA because of its convenience to Malaysia, the cheaper tuition and living costs comparative to the USA and UK as well as being accepted into a competitive and internationally reputable Master of Psychology course. Yus suggested that migration was not a priority when she chose to study in WA, but was open to the idea. She particularly regarded the Western and egalitarian values synonymous with a libertarian lifestyle as an important consideration. Upon settling into life in Perth, Yus found she enjoyed living here more than in Malaysia. She then re-prioritized her commitments with a view to obtaining permanent residency.

**Vignette 4: Peng.** Peng is a 33 year old single female who arrived in Australia four years ago from China. At the time of interview, she was in the final semester of a PhD. She completed an undergraduate degree in China and wanted the experience of studying overseas as many of her peers had done. She wanted “*to try something different and live overseas for a while.*” She specifically sought the experience of living in a Western, English speaking country. Peng then developed a topic for a research degree and used the Internet to search for an academic instructor to supervise

her thesis. She located an academic who agreed to supervise her research, who was situated at a WA university and communicated directly with him over the Internet. Peng also used the Internet to research the university that her prospective supervisor worked at, discussed the matter with her friends and family and then made the decision to enrol. Once she was accepted, Peng resigned from her job in China. Using her savings, she was able to fund her first year of research including living expenses. Prior to commencement of her second year of study, Peng applied for and was successful in obtaining a scholarship which assisted her with tuition fees. At the outset, Peng did not consider migration as an over-riding rationale for studying overseas, but as she settled into life in Perth, she changed her mind and undertook the necessary steps to obtain permanent residency. She suggested that her lifestyle in Perth was superior to that in China.

**Vignette 5: Li.** Li is a 36 year old Chinese national pursuing a Masters degree in Information Technology at a university in WA. He is single, but is a father to one small child who lives with his mother in China. He comes from a middle class family. Prior to arriving in Perth, Li held a long term and well paying job as an IT consultant for the previous 13 years. He stated that he was unable to obtain further promotion because of a lack of postgraduate qualifications. After consulting with family and work colleagues, Li decided that to improve his prospects he needed to obtain further qualifications from a Western university. He felt that overseas higher education institutions were regarded as more reputable in China and perceived by Chinese nationals as offering more opportunities than local universities. Li then used the Internet to explore various professional Masters Programs in the USA, UK and Australia. He engaged in direct communication with the university and decided on the



chosen destination because it offered the most appropriate course to his needs. His primary requirements were that the total cost not be excessive, that the university be well regarded and that the destination city be English speaking. He also mentioned that WA was advantageous to him as it was closer to China than the USA and UK as well as being within the same time zone as his home town. He also regarded the opportunity to live amongst “*Western people*” as being an important consideration. Li is a full fee paying student who is also receiving some financial assistance from his parents. He is not working in Perth. He intends to initially return to China after completing his degree, but demonstrated an interest in obtaining a visa to work and live in Australia or Hong Kong because of the enhanced employment prospects and more relaxed lifestyle (WA only). The longer he remained in WA, the more he considered immigration as a viable option.

**Vignette 6: Shahar.** Shahar is a 29 year old, single female from Israel. She recently completed a Masters of Business Administration (MBA). From the outset, Shahar admitted that the basis for her pursuing postgraduate studies was to secure migration points, enabling her to remain in Australia. Like several other participants, Shahar completed an undergraduate degree in Perth and decided to continue her studies at that same institution because of a familiarity with the university and by remaining there, she was more likely to receive a scholarship to pursue postgraduate studies. Shahar subsequently won a full tuition scholarship that enabled her to study an MBA. She admitted that she would not have enrolled in the course if she had not obtained a full scholarship. She continued to work part-time to meet her living expenses as her family was not in a position to contribute to her study costs. After completing her national service, Shahar felt that like many Israelis she wanted to explore the world.

She stated that life in Israel is sometimes very difficult. The people are always on alert facing existential threats and the cost of living is very high. She wanted a less pressured life. She had previously travelled to Perth for a holiday and after experiencing the outdoor lifestyle she decided to study in WA with a view to living in Australia.

**Vignette 7: Alyssa.** Alyssa is a 26 year old combined PhD and Clinical Psychology Masters single female student from Malaysia who completed her undergraduate degree in the UK. She recognised the need to pursue postgraduate studies in her field, but acknowledged that if she were to achieve career advancement in a Western country, then she would need to pursue these studies overseas. She believed that Malaysia simply does not have the requisite reputation nor academic specialties to provide her with the appropriate international training she desired. She applied for and was successful in obtaining scholarships to study at a university in the USA and WA. She chose the WA University because of its superior reputation. Alyssa also suggested that it was more cost effective to live and study in Perth compared to the USA and admitted that the proximity to Malaysia helped her make up her mind. She also proposed that remaining independent from her family in Malaysia in a Western liberal country was an important consideration in her decision-making. In terms of migrating, Alyssa acknowledged that when she arrived in Perth she did not consider remaining past some initial training, but as she has progressed through her PhD, she now is pursuing migration. She does not believe she will return to Malaysia, but seek employment either in Australia or another Western country.

**Vignette 8: Jessy.** Jessy is a 41 year old female, married, PhD candidate from Indonesia who is currently enrolled in a PhD program at a WA university. She has one primary school age child who attends school in WA. Her husband moved with her and

was fortunate to find employment in Perth. Jessy started thinking about studying in Australia immediately after completing her undergraduate studies in Indonesia. She admitted to a passion for learning and a desire to leave Indonesia as important factors in her decision-making. She was adamant about leaving Indonesia, a belief she retained since high school because she felt she did not fit in the conservative, theologically based patriarchal environment. Jessy chose Perth because she has extended family who live in the city. For her, it was a matter of choosing a university that met her needs. She researched the various universities in WA, using both the Internet and an international education agent in Indonesia. Before choosing a university in WA, Jessy used the Internet to search for an appropriate PhD supervisor. She understood the need to work with a proficient academic who was willing to supervise her. Through her on-line search, Jessy located a supervisor who was employed as an academic at a university in WA. She contacted that person who agreed to guide her research. She then applied to the institution where her supervisor was employed. Initially she was a full fee paying student, relying on her husband to support her, but after her first year of study, she was successful in obtaining a full fee tuition paying scholarship. Jessy spoke at length of her aspiration to migrate to Australia. She believed that the yearning to leave Indonesia was an important reason in choosing to undertake postgraduate studies overseas. She wanted to live in a more open and liberal culture with less restrictions on the individual. It did not necessarily have to be Australia, but with Australian residency, Jessy felt the world would open up to her. She felt that a postgraduate degree was an avenue to permanent residency.

In summary, the vignettes illustrate the various factors that contributed to the research participants' decisions to study in WA. These factors form the framework for

determining the motivational themes prevalent amongst the participants in their decision-making processes.

### **Section B: Demographic data**

**Demographics.** Demographic data were collected from all 20 participants and which information is illustrated in Table 5.1 below. The table considers key variables that are relevant to the findings including age, gender and other substantive evidence related to degree specificity and country of origin. Tabulating these key variables allows the reader to become more acquainted with the participants through communicating their narratives more concisely.

Table 5.1

*Participants' demographic information for key study variables*

	Age	Country	Language	Degree	Progress (Yrs)
Shahar	29	Israel	Hebrew	MBA	1.6
Ali	33	Iran	Farsi	PhD	2.8
Melissa	26	Singapore	English	M.Psych/PhD	2.1
Alyssa	26	Malaysia	Chinese/English	PhD	1.5
Li	29	China	Mandarin	M.IT	1.3
Novak	29	Macedonia	Macedonian	MBA	1.1
Eugenie	28	Canada	French/English	PhD	2.8
Kim	36	S.Korea	Korean	PhD	2.10
Jessy	37	Indonesia	Indonesian	PhD	4.6
Serena	25	USA	English	LLM	0.8
Peng	35	China	Mandarin	PhD	3.4
Lihini	34	Sri Lanka	Sinhalese	LLM	1.2
Laila	35	Norway	Norwegian	M.Psych	Complete
Sasha	55	Seychelles	Creole/English	PhD	2.1
Sania	34	India	Hindi	M.Ed	Complete
Boris	54	Austria	German	M.Ed	Complete
Johan	47	S.Africa	Afrikaans	MMBS	Complete
Yus	29	Malaysia	Mandarin/English	M.Psych.	Complete
Eitan	31	Israel	Hebrew	PhD	Complete
Aravani	33	Iran	Farsi	MBA	Complete

### Section C: Developing the Themes of the International Postgraduate Decision-Making Model

The study's findings are illustrated in Figure 5.1 and titled, 'Postgraduate model of international decision-making'. The structure is designed to provide a comparative framework to analyse international postgraduate students' decision-making behaviour in WA from more general modelling theorising international students' decision-making.

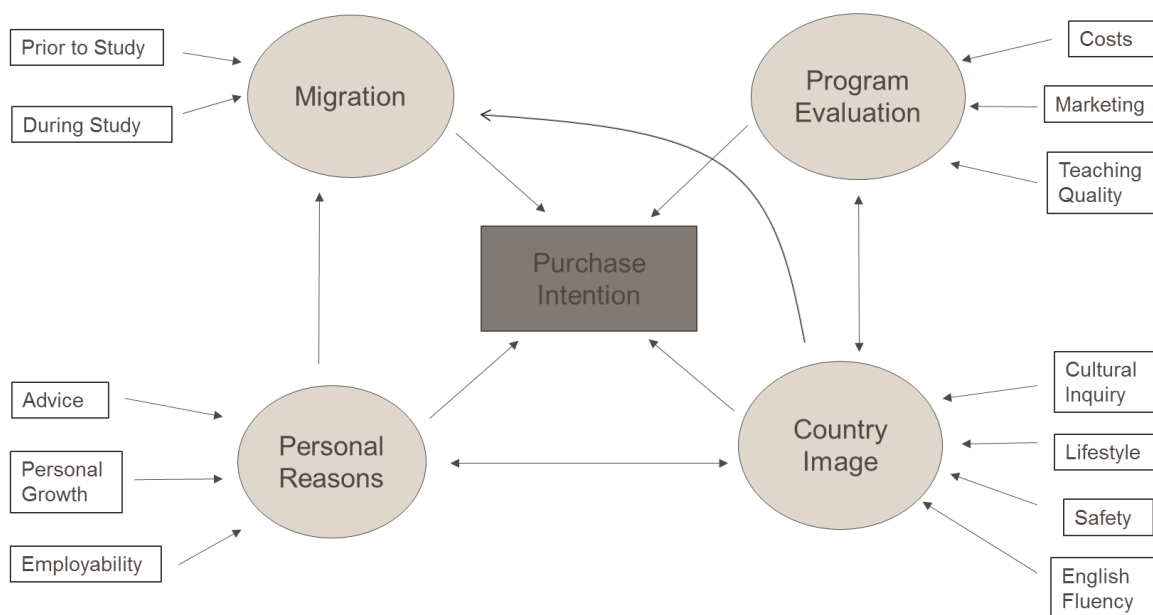


Figure 5.1. *Postgraduate model of international student decision-making.*

The current study recognises that several of the variables illustrated in the model of international student preferences (Cubillo et al., 2006) (see Figure 3.2) have been moved and placed under different themes within the model of international postgraduate decision-making, which can be compared by viewing the two models against each other: These include:

1. Costs (and finance) previously placed under city effect;
2. Cost of living previously placed under city effect;
3. Institutional recognition and prestige, previously placed under institutional image;
4. Quality of professors (renamed teaching quality), previously placed under institutional image;

By reallocating several variables under different themes, this study is better able to encapsulate the specific motivations of this study's participants. This is more advantageous than relying upon a framework built upon a generalised model of international student decision-making, which cannot be relied upon to accurately illustrate this study's participants' intentions given the context (WA) and degree specificity.

The following section describes the evidence that determines each of the themes and their associated variables relevant to international postgraduate student decision-making in Western Australia. The discussion then explains how the themes relate to each other.

**Theme one: Personal reasons.** Participants were motivated by a variety of personal reasons, which are categorised as follows:

- Advice – from family, friends and colleagues
- Personal growth
- Employability

*Advice.* The findings confirmed that participants engaged with family, friends, colleagues or teachers prior to reaching a decision to study in WA, although the advice received was mainly considered as a buttress to the original decision. These were

persons who were trusted and regarded as competent to provide appropriate and accurate advice. Each of these three sources are described below.

*Family.* Participants valued the advice extended to them by family members. In some cases, a family member had previously studied overseas and was, therefore, able to provide firsthand guidance.

Family members were cognisant of the benefits in obtaining a Western postgraduate education. They argued that time spent overseas would provide the participant with opportunities to develop themselves and assist with career development. In all respects, participants regarded the advice received as valuable, pragmatic and constructive.

In that regard, participants respected the opinions provided: for example, Ali considered the views of his wife to be crucial in his decision to study in WA. Likewise, Melissa looked to her parents' previous experience as international students as important advice, given their education provided a foundation for a comfortable life.

Similarly, Amanda considered her parents' previous experience as international students as paramount in her decision-making. She stated, "*In fact, almost all of my relatives in my generation including my brother are studying overseas – in America, Australia, Singapore. It is almost a rite of passage to go overseas to study.*"

In Melissa's case, her father was particularly proud of his daughter's decision to even consider enrolling in a Doctorate. He encouraged her, which helped her decide to enrol in a WA university. She explained, "*In terms of my family, my dad was really happy for me to come to Australia to do a PhD. I would be the first one in my family to get a PhD.*"



Similarly, for Sania, a Master of Education student, her parents engrained into her as she grew older that a postgraduate education at a Western university was a passport to a better life. She said:

*I could have stayed in India and remained as a school teacher, but together with my family we all thought that if I wanted a better life I should look at ways to get out of India and move to a good country, like Australia.*

However, at the same time, Sania asserted, *“I knew that it would be difficult and that.... I couldn’t rely on my parents in helping me make decisions.”*

Jessy recognised the benefit of choosing a study destination where she would have connections such as an extended family living in Perth. She was drawn to the advice of her family that having connections in Perth would assist her acculturation and make her experiences more profound. She considered this as fundamental to her decision-making by stating:

*It was always going to be in Perth for me because I have a large family in Perth. Lot of cousins here. I wanted to be near my family. It is easier for me and especially for my daughter to have a support network.*

This view was shared by Lihini, a Sri Lankan Masters student and Sasha, a PhD student from Seychelles Islands who both contacted their family members in Perth to discuss their decision to study there. These participants gave a great deal of weight to the views of those family members living in Perth upon their decision to choose WA as a study destination.

Lihini also indicated that her family championed her desire to study in WA, citing future employment benefits. She explained, *“My parents, brother and friends*

*were all very supportive of me and thought that doing a postgraduate degree would in the future benefit my career”.*

For Alyssa this parental confidence and support was also crucial as she discussed, *“My family was very important in helping me decide to do postgraduate studies. They wanted to know and be involved in my next step after my undergraduate degree. I said overseas. They were very supportive”.*

The involvement of family members in helping the participant reach a final decision to study in WA was common amongst most participants, including Melissa who advocated that, *“For me, family input was important.”* Li added that, *“in terms of my family we had to reach a consensus, but that wasn’t difficult. They saw it as a good opportunity”.*

Laila agreed with her mother’s opinion that travelling overseas to undertake postgraduate studies would be instrumental in helping her grow personally into a woman. She said:

*I think my mum thought that I could do with doing something different, that I would be better off than just staying in Oslo. I was still living at home and a bit of a pain. I was quite immature and probably needed to just go out and grow up a bit...*

For Aravami, her parents’ influence and assistance extended to practical matters including cost issues and aiding in how to manage the expenses associated with studying overseas. In addition, Aravami, also paid tribute to her father’s advice, given his previous experience at a foreign university. She explained, *“My dad studied a MBA in America over 35 years ago. Once he came back to Iran he got a management position and so the idea to do an MBA was strengthened by him”.*

Implicit in these findings is that the advice and support received by participants is a fundamental part of a participant choosing where to study. The theme suggests that individuals prefer to make important life decisions in consultation with their closest family members.

*Friends.* Participants recognised that conferring with local friends who had studied overseas, including those who studied in WA, is helpful in formulating a decision on destination. These participants understood there is a wealth of knowledge about overseas study that they can capitalize upon when deciding on a host city/university.

Kim, a South Korean PhD student, characterised her peer influence in the following terms:

*One of my really good friends studied in Perth. She recommended to me that if I wanted to improve my English I need to go to Perth cause there's not many Koreans around at all. She said if I went to Melbourne or Sydney there would be lots of Koreans around and I would not have lots of opportunities to practice my English so Perth was the best for English.*

Jessy, an Indonesian PhD student, re-iterated the importance of speaking with experienced home town students and the value in so doing. She observed, “*I had a lot of friends from Indonesia who were here [in Perth] already and we talked a lot about it together so probably they influenced me indirectly by feeding off their good experiences*”.

Similarly, Sania, a Masters of Law student from Sri Lanka, considered the influence of a family friend living in Perth as primary to her decision. She admitted that

it was “*my good friend of the family who lived here*” who helped her to decide to choose WA to as her study destination.

Melissa on the other hand, understood that by heeding her friend’s advice and discussing this information with her parents, would cause less worry for her family. Melissa’s comments are indicative of the inter-relationship between family, friends and the destination choice.

In contrast, Serena, a Master of Law student from the USA, discussed how she was influenced by the prospect of a romantic relationship, suggestive of other types of advice givers who affect student decision-making. She happened by chance to engage in a romantic relationship with a person from Perth, while travelling in South East Asia. The relationship resulted in her moving to Perth to study. She admitted, “*It briefly almost materialised into a relationship but didn’t. You can say I went on a spiritual journey and it took me here. So I just stayed.*”

The nature of Serena’s decision to remain in Perth is aptly compared to Kim who was much more calculating in her decision-making. As she remarked, “*I chose this place ... because my friend who recommended me to come here ... also said Perth was cheaper than any other city in Australia*”.

Laila, a Masters student from Norway, was influenced directly by her very close friend who suggested they both apply to study in Australia together. She commented:

*I came over with a friend. She thought it would be a good experience (to study overseas) and that we could improve our English and that sort of thing...it was easier because I was with someone else and we sort of travelled and lived together for three years.*

In summary, peer influence appeared as a consistent and guiding force for participants, providing them with appropriate and measured information to help in them to decide upon a study destination, particularly when the friend had previous international study experience.

*Colleagues.* Participants recognised the strength in consulting both colleagues and professionals in their chosen field of expertise, particularly when the colleague had previous overseas experience. Ali, a PhD student from Iran, consulted with a fellow Iranian academic who previously completed a PhD in WA and was now employed as a researcher at a university in Melbourne, Australia. Ali looked to the colleague for guidance, given his success in obtaining both a Doctorate from a university in WA, permanent residency and ultimately tenure at an Australian university.

Melissa, a Singaporean Psychology PhD student, also conferred with colleagues from home to obtain advice, explaining as follows:

*I spoke to some qualified psychologists who worked in Singapore, who were mentors to me. They knew about the degrees in Australia as they studied here. I asked them about that. One person particularly, a mentor... So I looked to him for guidance.*

Li, a Chinese Master of Information Technology student, discussed how a fellow colleague in China influenced him, emphasising their personal experience studying in WA as follows:

*My friend who recommended me Perth had studied at [name] University. His experience was very good so he recommended Perth to me. This recommendation was very important to me. It was fundamental in my decision to come to Perth.*

Similarly, for Johan, a South African medical doctor who wanted to specialise in WA, his decision was also conversant upon colleagues who previously worked in Perth. He conveyed that he “*was influenced by people (work colleagues) who had been here on (professional) exchange*”.

Novak, an MBA student from Macedonia, also agreed that colleagues were important, especially his mentor boss. He went so far as to interview these professional co-workers before choosing his course and institution.

Similarly, Eugenie a Canadian PhD student, confirmed that professional colleagues were crucial to her decision-making, asserting that she discussed the opportunity to undertake a PhD overseas with her work supervisors who all suggested that it would be a terrific opportunity.

Such advice provided the support for participants to reach a final decision. Study participants acknowledged the importance of the guidance offered to them, using the information and encouragement as part of their overall decision-making processes.

***Personal growth.*** Participants expressed admiration for the potential personal development that often occurs when individuals place themselves in an unfamiliar environment and feel challenged by the confines of their new surroundings. There appeared to be an explicit understanding amongst these participants, that by studying overseas, such challenges would help them develop into more rounded individuals. This potential core benefit was an important consideration in the decision to study overseas.

Peng felt she needed to change personally. She considered her life was stagnant and professionally unaccomplished prior to commencing her postgraduate degree in WA. She perceived the challenge of living and studying overseas would embolden her

to change as follows, *“I wanted to try something different and live overseas for a while ...so it was really just a good time personally for me to leave China and come overseas for a fresh start”*.

Similarly, for Alyssa, the idea of living away from family, studying in Australia made her believe she would gain independence from a culturally close family. She discussed as follows:

*Especially in the Malaysian culture it is ... family orientated which is much different to living in a Western country like Australia. People there are very tight knit and your identity is tied up inextricably with your home, family and society.... But I think I discover much about myself living alone and abroad.*

Li considered the idea of studying in Australia as an important life choice. He had not been out of China for any length of time and understood that the experience would help shape him. He suggested as a corollary, that by remaining in China he would feel deprived of potentially wonderful experiences which would help him to develop into a better man. As he stated:

*You can change your environment to have another angle to look at something. Of course when you enter a new environment, a new culture, new knowledge to learn, you will develop faster and differently to how you would if you just stay in the same place your whole life. I think this is critical in why so many people especially in China choose to study overseas. I know for me it was a key factor.*

While participants believed they would develop their identities from the experience of living and studying overseas, they also understood that elements of this growth would derive from challenges faced. As Laila confessed:

*Yes, I thought it would be a challenge. It (studying in Perth) would force me to be a lot less reliant on my mum. In retrospect, it was a good decision to come to Perth. I grew up here and became independent and more sure of who I am. I don't think these changes could have happened to the same extent as if I had stayed in Norway cause when I am home my mum likes to mother me and spoil me and so being away from her helped me grow up.*

In comparison, Novak considered the prospects of personal development in terms of his professional work and as a catalyst to be a more productive employee. His choice of an MBA program was predicated upon it including personal development workshops to improve self-awareness, crucial in developing business acumen. In Novak's words, *"There is a program called LAUNCH which they provide as a service to help you be more self-aware. It gives you tools to develop"*.

In all respects, participants were perceptive to the personal development opportunities that a postgraduate education in a foreign country may provide them in helping them develop more rounded and mature identities to function and compete in an increasingly global world and marketplace.

***Employability/Career advancement.*** Participants made both explicit and implicit links between their decision to study in WA (as a highly reputable Western destination) in both obtaining optimum employment as well as advancing their prospective careers. The view expressed by Novak was common amongst participants, explained as follows:

*I knew if I was to advance in my career then I would need to obtain a postgraduate qualification. It is normal in my industry for management consultants to get an MBA after they have obtained five to eight years of working experience.*



Importantly, participants believed that by undertaking a postgraduate degree in WA, they would obtain a competitive advantage in the international marketplace. This was captured by Li as follows:

*I decided after speaking to some colleagues and my family that I would have better prospects if I went to a Western university for further training, as Western universities are generally regarded as having a better reputation and providing more opportunities...*

Participants also considered that obtaining a local postgraduate degree in WA would improve their chances of securing employment in Australia: for example, Shahar stated that she sought to obtain a job locally.

For those wishing to pursue academia, the requirement for a Doctorate was acknowledged as a prerequisite, as suggested by Eitan, “*I was interested in the academic path and so I went to pursue a PhD in geology in Perth with the hope of becoming a researcher/academic*”.

In summary, all participants agreed that completing a postgraduate degree in WA would benefit their careers. Further, participants provided evidence that suggests it is difficult to separate the themes discretely: for example, career prospects linked with participants desires to remain in Australia, provided participants with the perception that they could more easily access global employment opportunities and travel more freely than if they remained simply a citizen of their home country.

**Theme two: Migration.** An important consideration for participants was their desire to remain in Australia post-qualification. Nineteen interviewees raised the prospect of remaining in Australia post-qualification. They believed that completing a postgraduate degree in WA would be advantageous in obtaining permanent residency.

These findings can be divided into two distinct groups: Group one refers to those who sought permanent residency prior to leaving their home country and Group two denotes those who sought migration after acculturating.

***Group one: Those who came to Australia seeking residency.*** These participants were motivated in large part by their yearning to emigrate to Australia. Jessy considered migration as the paramount consideration motivating her to study in WA due to the Immigration Department offering migration points for completed postgraduate degrees undertaken in Australia.

Similarly, Yus also acknowledged her studies would have a positive impact on Australia's immigration points system, allowing her to be placed on the skilled occupation list. Shahar also recognised the relationship between her studies and the points system, choosing to undertake a course that would provide her with an in-demand occupation.

This view was shared by Sania, who intimated that she wanted the benefit of an Australian residential visa and considered the most effective way to obtain one was through a postgraduate qualification. In explaining her reasoning for migrating, Sania focused on the difficult economic situation in India, including the lower standard of living and the truncated salary she would earn as a teacher compared to the Australian standard.

Alyssa further confirmed these views claiming that her life would be much better in Australia and saw her degree as "*a pathway to achieving that*".

Issues of migration also linked with the influence of spouse and other family members' opinions. Participants stated that family members encouraged them to remain in Australia: for example, Aravani, was swayed by her husband's relational

demand to immigrate to Australia. Likewise, for Boris, he was also guided by his wife's aspiration to settle in Perth. He expounded, *"I had never lived here [Perth] ... but was prepared to do whatever my wife wanted to do and if that meant migrating here then I was happy to do it for the peace of the family"*.

**Group two: Effect of acculturation upon participants' decision to remain in Australia.** Students like Ali only reached their decision to migrate after spending a year in WA and was predicated on becoming trans-mobile. He explained that, *"When I came here and saw the opportunities available not just here but elsewhere in the world of what the Australian citizenship offers, I thought I have to do it"*.

In comparison, Laila's decision to remain in WA resulted from matters of circumstance, rather than any conscious and explicit decision to remain in the country. As Laila explained, *"I was at the time in a long term relationship ... Life just happened and I kind of just stayed here. I got a job which gave me the opportunity to stay here"*.

Similarly, Eugenie's change in personal circumstances resulted in her considering migration, stating that:

*I didn't [plan to migrate] at all because I was not even planning to entertain the idea but now I am planning to get my PR (permanent residency) ... my partner is Australian... I have spent a lot of time here now and it is easier to apply for PR at this stage and ... I might as well go through the process and have that door open ...*

Similarly, for Eitan, his decision to migrate was unplanned, dependent on his changing circumstance as he became entrenched into Australian life, by meeting a life partner and having a child. He explained, *"I wasn't ruling it out though (immigration)... but things change and life happens, you know?"*

Finally, for Johan, a South African Medical Practitioner, his views on migration also only developed when he started to work in Perth and assimilate. In fact, Johan's initial decision to come to Perth was predicated upon his decision to "*see different places and have different experiences,*" suggestive of the link between country image and migration.

In all respects, the findings suggest that when participants begin to put down roots and acculturate, they are less likely to want to return home. These reasons together with a comparative analysis of the literature are examined in Chapter Six (Discussion).

**Theme three: Program evaluation.** Participants were cautious in choosing their university program, evaluating the suitability of their program based on three pertinent issues:

1. Costs and scholarships;
2. Marketing; and
3. Teaching quality

These variables are described below.

**Costs and scholarships.** Overseas students, particularly from developing countries are price sensitive to both the course fee structure and the variable living expenses while studying. Kim enunciated this consumer behaviour when explaining her reason for choosing WA as a study destination as follows, "*I chose Western Australia because at the time when I was comparing all the tuition fees and living costs, Western Australia was the most reasonable place to study*".

Aravani further elucidated this position specifically stating that her choice to study in WA was predicated on the competitive tuition fees, "*Perth was one of the cheapest places in Australia.*"

Participants confirmed that without financial assistance, they would not have been able to study in WA and as a result their decision to study overseas rested upon some or all of their costs being met by third parties: for example, Yus stated that her father paid the tuition fees, but that she also obtained part time employment to meet her living expenses.

Another student, Li, used his savings to pay for his tuition, but deferred to his parents to assist with living expenses which was an important aspect of his decision-making, stating that, *“I am also still under the support of my parents who help me with living expenses while I am in Australia studying”*.

In Lihini’s case, she was unable to meet the costs of the overseas study program herself, requiring her husband to agree to meeting her tuition and living costs, while he worked full time in Dubai, allowing her to concentrate on her studies. She stated, *“My husband is paying for me to study here in Perth. The cost of the (program) is about \$31,000. We knew it would cost over \$55,000 when you factor in living and tuition costs”*.

Sania’s decision to study in WA was grounded on her family assisting with the high cost of obtaining an overseas education. She had previously chosen Perth as an overseas destination, but needed to organise finance. She suggested that without family assistance, she would not be able to study in WA, due to the cost, thereby thwarting her ambitions to obtain an education in Perth and then to migrate. She explained how she arranged the finances:

*I took out a bank loan from India in my name. ... My parents had to stand guarantor for it as I was leaving the country. Actually, my mum also took out a small personal loan in their name, which paid for some of the fees. We also*

*borrowed some money from my auntie and uncle. The cost was about \$19,000 for the course. A lot of money for me at the time. The loan from the bank was about \$9,000. It was just for one semester and the rest my dad took out a personal loan and I was also working part time over here ... I had to then pay all of it back. ... I also worked part-time at a restaurant. I worked 20 hours during the semester ...*

*Scholarships.* Where possible, participants obtained scholarships, which allowed them to study overseas. This occurred primarily amongst those enrolled in Higher Degrees by Research. As Ali suggested, “Without a scholarship studying or going overseas would be out of the question”.

Shahar confirmed this view, justifying her reasoning based on the resources and time constraints necessary to self-fund as follows:

*As an undergraduate (overseas) student I was fully self-funded. I had to pour a lot of beer to pay for the course so to have to do that again and do an MBA, I don't think I have the energy. Luckily, I got a scholarship.*

Similarly, Sasha and Eitan were both adamant that their decision to enrol in WA based Doctoral programs were in part due to obtaining scholarships. Without hesitation, Sasha exclaimed, that “*I would not be here*” without a bursary. While Eitan stated unequivocally, “*Receiving the scholarship was what made me decide to come to Australia*”.

Despite the availability of scholarships helping to reduce expenditure, participants acknowledged that in making the decision to study in Perth, they needed to ensure that they could meet all their expenditure. Participants, such as Peng, recognised that the bursary amounts awarded were inadequate and that they still needed to work part-time

to attain a reasonable standard of living. This was part of their decision-making processes.

The frequent references that participants made to costs, suggests that being able to afford both program fees and living expenses is a vital element to postgraduate student decision-making to study in WA, particularly those from developing countries.

Competitive pricing, scholarships and an awareness of living standards in WA appeared to shape these participants' decision-making.

***University Marketing.*** Universities employ sophisticated marketing strategies to target potential international students. The findings suggested that a combination of:

- Education agents;
- University communications;
- Relationship marketing
- 'Twinning'; and
- Institutional image

all contributed to postgraduate students choosing to study in WA. These discrete issues are described below.

***Education Agents.*** The use of home country educational agents are important instruments for universities to attract overseas students. In that regard, participants appeared to passively accept these agents' recommendations and assistance. As Alyssa claimed, "... *I went through an agent in Malaysia which most people do when they want to study overseas...*" While Kim made specific reference to her agent's recommendation as follows, "*I remember seeing brochures on other universities in Perth but the agent strongly recommended [ ... ] University for education. I just accepted the agent's recommendation*".

Participants such as Sania were wholly satisfied that her agent could attend to providing her with both a recommendation and assist with the application and enrolment process. She stated, *“I had an agent also so they did everything for me. So it was not a stress doing all the paperwork. They do all the work and recommend where I should go. It was too difficult to do myself.”*

Participants were also appreciative of the agent’s evaluation of the student’s specific requirements: for example, Kim’s use of an agent was important for her in helping to choose a university, providing her with the appropriate information and administrative support to enrol and attend a university in WA.

Participants further advised that their educational agents assisted with both university recommendations as well as the practical and administrative matters of enrolling in a foreign institution including help with visa issues and enrolment. In that regard, participants welcomed their agent’s expertise, helping to guide them through the process of choosing a university, and then completing the paperwork for both university enrolment and visa application.

In summary, participants appeared to retain independent agents, welcoming their assistance in helping them both reach a decision about destination and then attending to the myriad of often daunting form-filling that is a necessary pre-requisite to studying overseas. In all respects, participants received agents positively.

*Internet Communications.* Participants relied on Internet search engines to compare prospective universities: for example, Li first decided upon Perth as a destination city and then used the Internet to search for an appropriate university as described, *“I explored the universities in Perth and explored the courses, which were*



*for IT Masters in Perth and then finally I found [University] had the best course. I did this all on the Internet”.*

Conversely, Eitan used Internet search engines to ascertain a destination university. Localising a destination was secondary. He explained as follows:

*I was exploring the available projects for PhD students all over the world. The one in [Western Australia] jumped out. It was a very nice layout internet site and the project was explained very well. The people working on the project were known to me in name.*

Without derogating the importance, Peng’s choice to study in WA was the result of “*lucky Googling*”. She admits, “*Essentially I just Googled around. It could have been anywhere in the world*”.

In summary, participants recognised the importance of the Internet as a marketing tool, availing themselves to use these products to derive information about prospective locations and institutions that would best meet their individual needs. Essentially, participants used these marketing methods to seek information, either to confirm a previously held belief or to reject the idea.

*Relationship building.* This type of promotion involves the university establishing strong and personal relationships with potential students by communicating directly. These relationships were important in developing positive associations between the university and the participants, helping to enhance their motivation to choose that specific institution.

Ali cited his chosen university’s efficient communication as imperative. He stated, “*We had to email the university. They were very good in getting back to us. Very cooperative. Very quickly*”.

Similarly, Melissa also considered communication as vital as follows, “*I was quite impressed. It was very professional and responsive and quite comprehensive in giving out information and what to do next. I was mainly dealing with only one person at the university*”.

Azhani credited the establishing of a relationship with her contact person at her destination university as fundamental. She remarked, “*‘Mary’ at the Department of Psychology was really helpful and I think that was the tipping point for me to choose to study at [University]*”.

Personalised contact was also important for Serena. After attending a university fair in Perth she observed:

*[University] was the most welcoming and friendly university and I happened to get this girl who was a law student and she happened to talk to me for about an hour about the different law schools...She sort of sold me on the program and that is really one of the things that made me choose [University].*

These findings suggest that by directly communicating with the university, participants were able to obtain the relevant information required to help to decide upon a destination. By the time participants emailed their respective universities, they had already undertaken preliminary research into possible destinations, including Perth. The ability to directly communicate with their faculties and supervisors (for research students) personalised the search, improving the relevance and accessibility of the university during the decision-making phase.

*Twinning.* The pre-existing relationship between participants’ undergraduate universities and corresponding institutions in WA influenced participants to inquire about specific programs available.

Yus posited that, *“There was a relationship between my college in Malaysia and my chosen host university.”* Likewise, for Laila, *“There was an agreement between [Home University] and [...University] so it was quite easy for me to come.”*

For Sasha, the relationship was also influential, explaining that, *“I took for granted the fact that [University] and [Home University] had a long standing relationship”.*

Participants regarded this relationship as a simplified and obvious mechanism to locate a foreign institution because of the innate links with their alma mater, who they held in high regard: for example, Aravani stated that, *“[The university] had a good relationship with a college in Tehran so this helped with my application and visa and just the entire process of application”.*

*Institutional Image.* Most participants regarded the standard of education as important in their decision-making. This theme incorporates the prestige a university gains by faring well on international ranking tables.

There was an overall perception amongst participants that English-speaking countries' higher education programs were of a superior standard. As Ali indicated, *“English speaking countries and universities are in a way prestigious in the eyes of many Iranians”.* Peng confirmed this view as follows, *“I have the general perception that education quality in Australia is better than in China ... I didn't think very highly of the tertiary education in China”.*

Li, also a Chinese student, compared China's universities reputation to those in Australia in the following terms, *“There is no big gap between good and average university unlike in China. All universities in Australia are good”.*

It follows that participants assigned a high level of importance to university prestige through analysing international ranking measurements, which offered a confirmatory check upon the recommendation offered to them by their friends, family or colleagues. As Novak argued:

*I also researched some worldwide universities on the Internet... You know the top university lists for a particular course. I wanted to see how [University] did worldwide. I chose it because of its international standing. I got the impression that it had a better international reputation... On the whole, it was probably the best option to go for.*

Li also considered his decision to study in WA in respect of how it would be perceived back home, suggesting that, “*I could have done the same degree in China but I don’t think it has as much weight as an international degree from a Western university*”.

More particularly, Lihini considered recognition of her qualification in potential future destinations in the following way:

*The LLM is recognised overseas both in Sri Lanka and in Dubai, which has its own strange legal system. For example, if I was to practice commercial law (e.g. banking) in Dubai then I could get a job in an English speaking European firm which would probably accept my qualifications over a local Arabic firm ...*

In all cases, rankings tables, reputation and prestige were signifiers of influence upon the decision-maker, acting as relative instruments, assisting participants in deciding where to enrol.

**Quality of Teaching.** Participants regarded teaching quality as a relevant motivating factor in their decision-making. For HDR students like Melissa, this

translated to procuring a proficient supervisor as she explains, *“I came to Perth because I found my supervisor on the Internet...and I found him really quite interesting to study with and then he encouraged me to come here”*.

Likewise, Peng also partly based her choice of university on the location of a supervisor, but shortly thereafter, the supervisor became less important within her decision-making matrix, while familiarity with her chosen institution moved to the forefront. As she explained:

*So I guess I chose the university because of my supervisor and then when I came to [University], the topic changed and the reasons for staying at the university also changed. I guess I just became settled and it was too hard to change at that point.*

Azhani also regarded supervisor proficiency as important, using that notion as a conduit to communicate with the university directly, suggesting a link between various factors. Azhani's case was not unique. Eugenie contacted a potential supervisor and chose the university because of his agreement to oversee her research, stating that:

*I also contacted one of my supervisors just to inquire. They were really good in getting back to me. I don't know if this was crucial, but if I didn't have contact with them or they weren't as good then maybe I wouldn't have applied so I guess so that this helped me in deciding to come here.*

Melissa further added, *“I think I also skyped one of my potential supervisors before I lodged my application. It was really brief, just a chat”*.

Only research candidates considered the quality of teaching (supervision) as paramount in their decision-making. Chapter Six (Discussion) critically examines this issue in detail.

**Theme four: Country image effect.** The image of Australia as a Western, plural and open society with both professional and leisure opportunities positively influenced participants in choosing WA as a study destination. In that regard, participants were:

- curious to experience life in a multicultural country;
- pleased to live in a warm, Mediterranean climate with a penchant for outdoor life;
- secure in the knowledge that Perth is a safety conscious city, protective of its international students; and
- keen to further develop their English skills.

Each of these factors are illustrated below.

***Cultural Inquiry.*** Those participants from non-industrialised and non-democratic countries desired to experience life in a modern, liberal and multi-cultural country. As Ali indicated, *“I wanted to see what a democratic context looked like, how people interacted and operated”*.

Lihini further compared the various places she had lived, explaining that:

*I was interested to live in a Western country for a while at least. I wanted the experience to see if Australia was like Neighbours (TV soap opera) .... Sri Lanka and Dubai are so different. Much more conservative values. I didn't have many expectations. I certainly didn't think that I would be so free to do whatever I wanted without having to answer to anybody or worry what others might be thinking about me.*

These non-Western participants generally expressed a view that they were curious about Australia's free and politically robust system, as Ali observed:

*This (Australia) is a different society, a different culture; the interactions are different to how they happen back home... I was very keen to experience this... You know seeing how you guys live and interact with each other... As an academic this was very important to me. I am interested in critical theory, which raises the issue of democracy. That was my priority in terms of my intellectual thinking. It was one of my main motivators.*

Kim compared her experience living in WA to her life in Korea as follows:

*I wanted to experience the real English culture. I find it here is really nice in a way that the people don't really care what the other people think about you. You are not getting too conscious about other people's opinion about you. This gives me a sense of freedom. When I was living in Korea, and whenever I go back there for a holiday ... I always think what other people think about me ... It is culture there. I don't always feel free there. Here it is freer to just be me. Here I don't really care about other people's opinion about me but in Korea I do care.*

Finally, Sania was also conscious of the cultural disparity with her life in India, stating that:

*I liked the idea of, you know simple things of talking to whoever you want without being judged, going wherever you want and no one looking at you funny. No one touching you without permission. You know in India that is quite common ... No one judges you for who you are... Just being a single woman coming to Australia I thought that I would be judged but then afterwards I realized no one actually cares. You can do what you want to, talk to whoever you want to, wear whatever you want and no one cares. You can drink, eat whatever you want and no one cares... I like everything about living here. It's a great place to live.*

In all respects, participants from the developing world, whose home countries were mostly uni-cultural found themselves comparing the social norms in Australia to those at home. Their curiosity coupled with positive observations of the local Australian ethos motivated them to choose their respective institution.

**Liveability.** Participants referred to Perth as having “*good weather*”, being an “*outdoor city*”, having “*wide spaces*” and a “*good life*”. Peng, a participant from China, had never left her home country before studying in WA. She researched Perth and concluded it “*sounded quite natural and open and beautiful*”. She continued, “*It seemed free and open. I do believe the natural environment was quite appealing to me*”.

Serena who had also not visited WA before, confirmed these views, stating that, “*I just liked Perth with its small time feel and charm*”. Yus who had visited Perth as a small child, delighted in the local ambience, describing the city as very liveable, as follows, “*Perth is laid back, people are friendly ... The lifestyle and standard of living is better here*” (compared to Malaysia).

Sania contrasted the city’s liveability to her life back in India, impressing upon her knowledge of Perth, stating that:

*I knew that Perth ... was quite laid back. I knew that the way of life would be easier than life in India. It’s a lot cleaner here you know. People are just friendlier. It’s easier to live here. I always knew this was going to be the case before coming here.*

Perth’s outdoor lifestyle was also relevant in attracting participants. As Yus exclaimed, “*...especially in WA, sport is such a big thing, to be outdoors, and I like sport*”. Likewise, Eugenie explained:



*I like the lifestyle, I like being outdoors all the time, the beach. It sounds like shallow things. I just find they have such an impact on my wellbeing. I mean if I am freezing cold all the time, I just stay indoors. If you can go out, it's much nicer.*

Johan confirmed the reputation for an outdoor lifestyle was dominant over other cultural considerations, suggesting that, *"I don't think the culture mattered much to me, but I liked the lifestyle...I just really liked the lifestyle here. There are lots of nice beaches, water sports"*.

Along with the outdoor lifestyle, participants were also attracted to the laid back and quiet city environs. As advocated by Yus:

*I was looking forward to a quiet gentle lifestyle. KL is very hectic and everyone is busy and tense and angry at each other. Coming here is like a beach holiday. Or so it seems. I like that. I find people are very friendly and relaxed.*

Such comparisons with home cities were common amongst participants. As Alyssa suggested, *"I like that here there is importance on work-life balance"*. Sania, also commented:

*Also I like the fact that Aussies accept everyone over here. I knew this. It influenced me in wanting to come here. In India it is not like this. It's like a mono-culture. I knew Australia was an open and liberal society ...I knew Perth was a laid back city, that the work opportunities were good and that it was clean and safe.*

The findings showed that participants were mindful of the environment where they were planning to study. Participants were drawn to Australia because of its lifestyle, which directly impacted their decision to consider studying in WA, hence the

development of one of the propositions of this study that country image directly impacts city image.

**Safety.** Perth was perceived as a safe place to study and live, reflecting the participants' desire for personal wellbeing when choosing a study destination. Eitan, an Israeli postgraduate student summed up this view, "*It (safety) influences you, even if you don't say that, it does affect you. So living in WA really helped me to soften up*".

Boris, an orthodox Jew from Austria, welcomed the freedom to practice his religion safely compared to the overt anti-Semitism he faced in Austria, clarifying his position in the following terms:

*Also the mental climate is easier and more tolerant here. This is the liberalism and openness of the community here and being an orthodox Jew. There is prejudice in Europe so it is easier living here and practising a minority religion.*

Alyssa chose WA in part due to the anodyne political environment as she states, "*I was more interested in changing my living environment. I was not interested in politics. I chose Australia because it is a comfortable and safe country to live in*".

Likewise, Johan was clear in his desire to live with a high regard for personal safety, stating that, "*I like the fact you know that it is very safe to live (here). You can get around safely compared to Capetown and even to England*".

In general terms, participants regarded Perth as a safe place to live and study by comparing the perception of the city to their home towns. Participants sought security and a feeling of wellbeing that involved feeling safe at all times. As a result, participants were conscious of the role that personal safety played within their decision to study in WA. Indeed, the variable is inextricably tied to their decision-making matrix.

*English language.* Participants appreciated English language proficiency as a central skill in a globalised world. They recognised their own deficiencies, such that by undertaking a postgraduate degree in English will assist them to develop fluency, which they perceived as improving their international mobility, employability and migration prospects. As stated by Novak:

*I speak Macedonian at home, Portuguese with my girlfriend, but at work, at uni and when I travel, always English. I think it is so important that I have excellent communications skills, especially when most business is in English.*

#### **Inter-relationship between the themes.**

The study's findings also suggested that participants employed multi-factorial decision-making when choosing a study destination. This means that participants were not beholden to one variable when choosing to study in WA, rather engaged in an iterative process, building upon each factor as they considered the decision-making process, namely, the degree, the city and the university.

These relationships are described on the postgraduate model of international student decision-making at Figure 5.1 and clarified as follows:

**Personal reasons inter-relate with migration.** The desire to remain in Australia post-qualification was intrinsically related to the variables designated within the theme of personal reasons. This included participants receiving advice about the benefits of migrating post qualification, with such benefits including, enhanced employment opportunities and personal growth.

This notion was exemplified by Sania, who considered her degree in light of the benefit her career would receive by migrating to Australia. She explained, "My

*opportunities, you know, salary and career-wise are limited if I remain in India. If I stay in Australia, then I will definitely earn more money ...”.*

Likewise, Lihini suggested that her family advised her that she should consider remaining in Australia or at least use the degree to establish herself in an economically stable country, where she would potentially be financially more secure than if she returned home.

**Personal reasons inter-relate with country image.** Participants’ personal reasons were inter-dependent with the country image of Australia. Advice centred around choosing WA as a study destination because of its perception as a State where participants could obtain world class employment opportunities, actively engage in the local community, improve their English, and experience Western culture in a safe environment.

This is well illustrated by Johan who received advice from fellow professional colleagues, who told him that, once qualified, he would most likely gain employment at a local hospital earning a high wage, whilst Perth’s Mediterranean climate would be ideal for his outdoor lifestyle.

**Country image inter-relates with migration.** As previously described above in the themes related to migration and country image, participants were drawn to study in WA because of the opportunities to experience local cultural and lifestyle factors, which embedded within the reasons participants pursued immigration post-qualification.

As explained by Alyssa, *“My degree would provide me with a pathway to achieving that [migration]. I think if I study in Perth and then apply for PR, this will give me the best chance of achieving my goal of living and working in a Western country.* Similarly, both Lihini and Kim considered the decision to study in WA as a

result of the chance to experience Western culture, which partly explained their desires to migrate (along with career opportunities). As Lihini stated, *“Yes, I think I wouldn’t have studied in Perth without the chance to stay here ... and experience the lifestyle”*.

**Country image inter-relates with program evaluation and vice versa.** The final relationship between the themes involves participants choosing WA based upon the marketing of local universities as safe, well regarded teaching institutions, where they would receive value for money, not only in terms of their prospective degrees, but also through experiencing life in a warm outdoor climate coupled with a stable political system.

As Peng indicated, *“I was convinced by my prospective supervisor to come to WA, but also felt that by choosing [university] I could experience a different lifestyle to that in China”*. Similarly, Jessy chose WA, amongst other things, because of her supervisor’s input, cheaper cost (compared to other international universities) and Australia’s political framework. She stated, *“When I think about it, really, it is a whole lot of factors that convinced me to come to Perth. First my family, then the cost and stifling lifestyle in Indonesia ...”*

In summary, comments made by participants on the relationships between the various factors suggest that decision-making is not a single variable proposition. The data showed that participants gather and build upon information to reach a decision. In doing so, participants gave due regard to a number of factors, which impose and impact upon each other.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter began with a series of eight vignettes that best illustrated the participants’ reasons for choosing WA as a study destination. Following these

narratives, the chapter then tabled participants' demographic data, which together with the vignettes, allowed the reader to become familiar with the participants and their stories.

The chapter then introduced the reader to the main findings of the study, briefly comparing them to the conclusions from the Cubillo et al. (2006) research. This was useful as it suggested which variables were common to both studies and how, by reallocating some of the common variables to different themes, this study could more accurately investigate participants' motivations for choosing a university in Perth.

The next section of the chapter considered the various discrete findings separated into substantive themes, which included several variables in each theme. These were as follows:

1. Personal reasons included:
  - a. the importance of participants obtaining advice from family, friends and colleagues in relation to the benefits that they may obtain by choosing WA as a study destination. By acquiring the advice offered, participants appeared to be more swayed by those persons who had previously studied overseas.
  - b. the development of personal growth that occurs when an individual is placed in an unfamiliar environment.
  - c. employment opportunities that might otherwise be off-limits, but for the participant obtaining an international postgraduate education.
2. Migration related to participants' decisions to remain in Australia post-qualification. Two variables were noted, including those participants who did not intend to leave Australia after the completion of their studies and those

participants whose decision to remain in Australia was predicated upon positive acculturation.

3. The third theme was constructed around program evaluation which included the following variables:
  - a. costs and scholarship, with the former variable representing a negative decision-making factor, while the latter consideration was applicable to mainly HDR students, who stated that their scholarships were inadequate to meet all their reasonable living expenses.
  - b. marketing comprised a number of variables including the importance of education agents in helping participants choose a destination and complete the application processes; the Internet; existing relationships between local and host town universities; and the image and reputation of the preferred WA institution.
  - c. teaching (supervision) quality reflected those HDR students who sought out a proficient supervisor prior to enrolling at their chosen university.
4. The fourth theme was titled country image effect and encompassed participants' curiosity to engage with Australian culture, the warm WA climate, the reputation of Perth as a safe city and the further development of their English skills.

As is evident from the data and the themes discerned, there was no single determinative variable, but an assortment of issues that pushed and pulled participants to and from their home country to choose Perth as a city to study.

The final section in this chapter considered the various inter-relationships between the factors, evidencing how specific variables relate to each other.

The following chapter discusses the findings from the participants in more depth, with a detailed analysis of the themes as they relate to the existing literature.



## Chapter Six: Discussion

### Introduction

Chapter Two discussed and analysed the literature with respect to the factors motivating international students to study abroad, focusing upon the postgraduate student cohort. The published research within this study area is both sparse and underdeveloped. The prevailing literature predominantly frames analyses of international student movements using push-pull modelling and suggests several reasons, many of them inter-related, justifying why students study overseas. Using these themes that emanate from prior literature, the current study positions this research's data by establishing factors that persuade postgraduate students to study abroad. This chapter categorises these aspects into several propositions to illustrate both the thematic and categorical interrelationships. As illustrated in Figure 6.2, the main themes affecting both research and coursework students are personal reasons, migration, university image and country/city effect. Teacher quality affected only research students.

The research questions as previously outlined in Chapter One are as follows:

1. How do international postgraduate students describe and explain why they selected WA as their host destination?
2. What factors does a qualitative research study identify as pertinent to international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA?
3. What are the inter-relationships between the reasons that influence international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA?

The first research question enquires about those factors that are significant to postgraduate student decision-making. To answer this problem effectively, it is

necessary to engage in a brief theoretical comparison between the existing model of overseas student decision-making and the new model developed in the current research.

**Generalised model of international student decision-making.** The generalised model developed by Cubillo et al. (2006) suggests several push-pull factors that impact international student purchase intention generally. This research starts from the assumption that these factors *may also* impact upon postgraduate students' decision-making. The model is illustrated below at Figure 6.1

Cubillo et al. (2006) identified four specific factors and 19 sub-themes relevant to international student movements. Their model proposed that the 19 independent variables either positively or negatively influence students to study overseas, that is, either pushing them to a new destination or pulling them away from their host country. This study extracted these factors and the associated variables to develop the questions posed to participants to ascertain their motivations for choosing WA as their study destination.

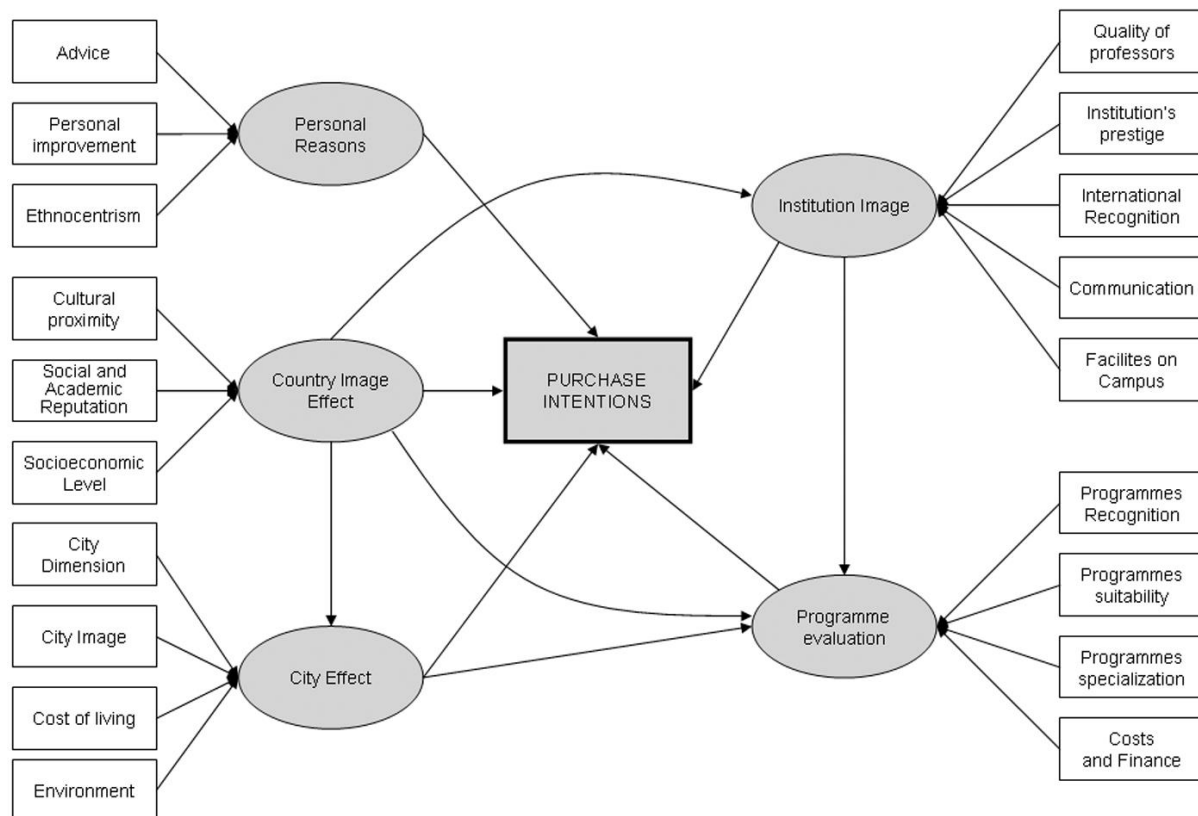


Figure 6.1. *Generalised model of international student decision-making (Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006).*

**Postgraduate model of international student decision-making.** This new model, presented below at Figure 6.2, represents an illustration of the current research findings. The study outcomes suggest a broad acceptance of the variables suggested by Cubillo et al. (2006), although the new model rejects several variables, whilst augmenting the model with new sub-themes.

The new model proposes to answer all three research questions using four propositions that firstly consider the individual decision-making factors and then expand them into relationships with other factors, hence arguing that participants'

decision-making involves the interaction between a number of various decision-making factors. Those propositions (P) are:

P1 - Personal reasons including obtaining advice, achieving career objectives and self- attainment are positive influences upon the postgraduate student.

P2 - Prospects of migration positively influence the decision to study in WA.

P3 - Program evaluation and teaching quality have a positive effect on participants' decisions to study in WA, while cost has a negative impact upon student decision-making processes.

P4 - Country image positively affects city image through language acquisition and cultural appropriation, which impacts postgraduate students' decisions to study in WA and migrate.

These propositions guide the reader through the model's features, provide clarity and explanation in answering the research questions. The discussion examines each feature and the associated interrelationships, discerning what outcomes correspond to the existing literature with appropriate explanation.

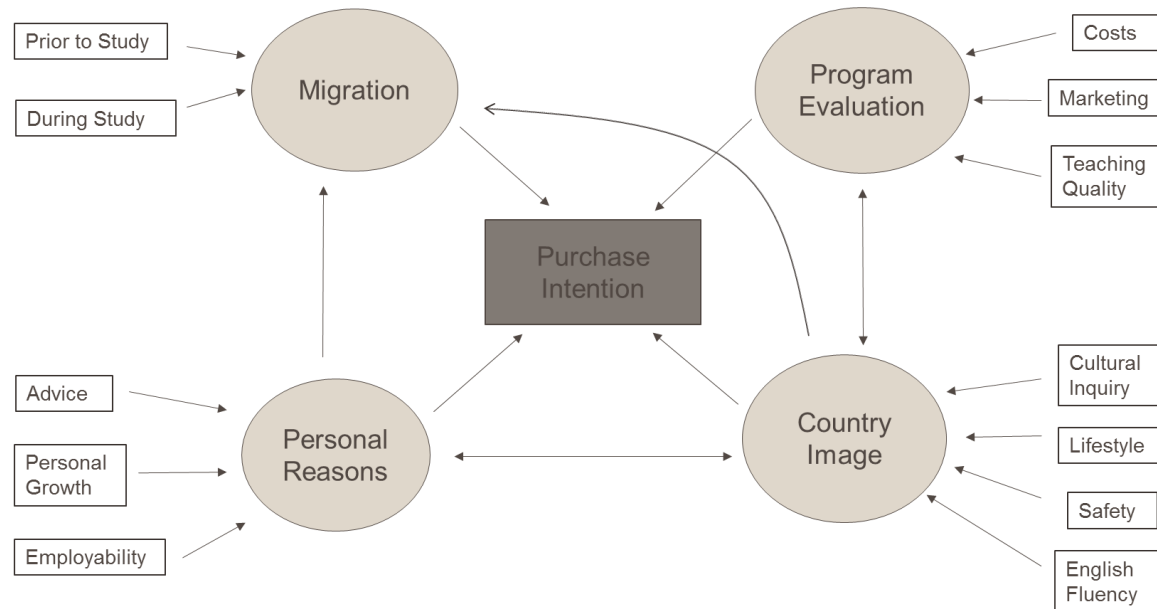


Figure 6.2. *Postgraduate model of international student decision-making.*

### **An Examination of the New Model Themes and Propositions**

**Proposition one: Personal reasons.** The current study found that international postgraduate students are motivated to study in WA for three individualised reasons which relate to the advice received from friends, family and colleagues, enhanced employability and personal growth. The term personal-growth is appropriated from Cubillo et al. (2006) who use the expression in their generalised model of international student decision-making.

These explanations may be reconstituted into the first proposition, stated as follows:

1. Advice from family, friends and colleagues positively influenced postgraduate students to study in WA.

2. Postgraduate students are pushed from their home country to improve their employment aspirations and pulled towards stable geo-political locations like WA.
3. Participants are pulled towards a country like Australia, which offers them opportunities to develop their self-identities.

The qualitative data indicated that participants were motivated by these factors when choosing to study in WA. Through the advice of their parents, family and colleagues, participants sought better lives than they were currently living, driving them to obtain more satisfying employment, higher levels of income and greater social mobility, all within a stable geo-political context.

Cubillo et al. (2006) illustrated the theme of 'personal reasons' by reference to three variables: advice, personal improvement and ethnocentrism. The data obtained from this study did not consider ethnocentrism as a variable, although confirmed the views of Cubillo et al., that international students value both the advice of family, colleagues and friends together with personal growth as important factors in helping them choose WA as a study destination. These variables are analysed below.

***Advice from friends, family and teachers/colleagues.*** Foskett (1999) suggested that decision-making is an iterative concept. The present study confirms this view, whereby participants both explicitly and implicitly described the way they continually built upon each stage of the decision-making process until they reached the goal of choosing a study destination. To achieve this, participants sought the opinions of their family, friends and colleagues in both convincing them to study overseas, helping them to choose Perth as a destination and finally assisting them in their decision to study at a specific institution.

*Family.* The results indicated that most participants considered familial networks in helping them form an opinion as to whether to study in WA. This compares favourably to the earlier studies of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Pimpa (2002) as well as Chen and Zimitat (2006) who all suggested that close family connections accounted for a substantial level of influence on the student's decision-making processes.

The Pimpa (2002) study correlates most closely with the current findings apropos family, in that participants' decision-making proved to be both complex and diverse, rather than an inclusive and singular decision. Families implicated themselves in diverse aspects of the participants' decision-making process including providing advice and support for cost related issues, personal matters such as guidance around accommodation, safety and course selection. The provision of advice appeared structured around both instruction, direction and assistance to ensure the participant maximized their overseas opportunity.

Participants further acknowledged that parents offered constructive advice on choosing a study destination rather than simply attempting to persuade them to behave in manners consistent with their own ideas. This suggested that participants deemed their familial relations as inherently trustworthy and reliable, which then allowed family members to take part in the decision-making process of choosing an overseas study destination. These close relationships and the willingness to accept advice seemed to indicate a robustness amongst participants and their families, especially in those participants emanating from developing nations. This idea raises the notion, suggested by Ivy (2002), that cultural imperatives are important attributes when considering familial advice. While that study is limited to students from African and Pakistan, there appeared some indication in this research, that culture weighed heavily upon

participants, especially with respect to the influence family members appeared to have in relation to the decision-making process.

There was no indication that the findings from Kasravi (2009) or Hembroff and Ruz (1993) should be applied to this study. That is, no participant suggested that family members raised concerns about possible discrimination or communication difficulties. All participants reported positive and fruitful discussions with their family, who offered objective and edifying information to assist them in reaching a decision. Perhaps this may be due to family members' previous positive experiences as international students or that such matters were of minor significance and negated by the positive benefits obtained from studying overseas.

This finding partly assists in explaining how participants reached a decision to study in WA. In addition, as postgraduate students are older than their undergraduate counterparts, have attained a degree of life experience including overseas travel, it is possible that participants considered the advice provided to them with a sense of independence and maturity. While this research does not seek to investigate this connection, it compares favourably with the findings by Lu, Mavondo, and Qiu (2009) who suggested that as Chinese students gain experience overseas, they mature in their decision-making capacities. Similarly, Buddhichiwin (2013) also considered the positive impact of a Thai student's life experience in their decision-making process.

The results also showed that participants were influenced by the advice from family members who had previously studied overseas. This correlates with the study by Pimpa (2002) who suggests that one of the factors prevalent in the provision of well-regarded advice is obtaining information from family members who have previously studied overseas.



In comparing the samples of this research to that of the Pimpa (2002) study, Pimpa generalised his research to post choice overseas students rather than to postgraduate students only. Despite that difference, the current study's findings confirm the results of the Pimpa study, suggesting that postgraduate students seeking to study in WA also place a high regard upon the advice of family members who studied overseas.

Indeed, this hypothesis was taken up some eleven years later in a Thai study. Buddhichiwin (2013) suggested a high correlation exists between parental involvement and international postgraduate student decision-making, particularly if the family member has some knowledge or personal experience about the prospective country to appropriately advise the student. Applying that supposition, participants from this study stated family members provided positive insights about WA, including its reputation as a safe, hospitable and inexpensive location compared to other possible destinations. This information appeared to assist students in choosing WA as the host State, specifically where family members had previous positive international study experience.

This advice also extended to family member offering the student a network of friends and acquaintances in the host city, providing participants with a modicum of security and familiarity, especially when having to navigate different cultural nuances and societal systems. While the sample of participants where this occurred is relatively small, there is clear evidence that host city-family connection is an important aspect of international student decision-making.

Finally, this study also suggests there may be a link between participants' affluence as well as social mobility and the level of positive family support they received. Szelenyi (2006), Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) together with Beech (2015) all proposed that family prosperity and social class were important determinants of

household support for the prospective student, amongst other things in providing positive and thoughtful advice. The evidence from this study corroborates those findings: for example, all participants regarded themselves as middle class and well resourced. When questioned about their family circumstances, participants remarked that their domestic lives were both comfortable and unremarkable. Participants originated from affluent homes that valued education, with at least one parent university educated. Life decisions were openly discussed and their families well integrated into local communities. Participants did not indicate any major personal problems or divulged insecurities, disadvantage or social isolation.

This study confirms the Szelenyi, Luo, and Jamieson-Drake (2013) as well as the Beech (2015) paper's findings, suggesting that international postgraduate students studying in WA valued their family's support and advice, which assists in the complicated decision to study overseas.

In summary, the findings propose that family recommendations impacted positively upon participants' decisions to study in WA. The inherently constructive familial support and encouraging responses from participants' family members provided them with a substantial impetus in choosing WA as their study destination.

*Friends.* Participants also considered the influence of friends as an important factor in their decision-making. The finding is comparable to the dissertation presented by Kasravi (2009) who considered peer influence as an important determinant shaping student decision-making. Despite distinguishing Kasravi's thesis based on his participants (minority USA students studying abroad), the overall findings compare favourably with the current research including the prevalence of 'advice from friends' as a construct within the push-pull paradigm.

In contrast to recent papers by Buddhichiwin (2013) and Beech (2015), the current study's findings vary slightly. Those authors hypothesised that the influence of friends (and family) act as both a positive and negative indicator on student decision-making behaviour. In comparison, participants in this study did not consider advice from friends as a negative input and nor did they regard the information obtained from their friends as undesirable. Rather, participants considered the advice provided to them as constructive guidance, framing the information as discerning knowledge to be balanced against all the available evidence. This may indicate that given participants' greater experience and maturity than early tertiary education students, they appear to have developed the skill and confidence to weigh up crucial variables, rather than be swayed by negative connotations and over-stated beliefs. Such a view is supported by Schwiesfurth and Gu (2009) whose study, while focused on Chinese international students in the UK, found that as these students gained international experience, they could adapt, mature and fashion critical skills that would assist them throughout life.

The weighing up of the myriad of advice by participants in this study also appears more sophisticated than that suggested by Jackson (2005) and Nyaupane, Paris, and Teye (2011) in their single country studies. While those authors argue that international students rely on experiential information and critical feedback from their peers when choosing a destination, by postgraduate level, prospective students similarly undertake these processes. However, in this study, the participants appeared to demonstrate deeper insight into their decision-making processes as evidenced by the quality and depth of their responses: for example, Ali demonstrated a great deal of maturity in critically deciphering all available information, weighing up the positive and negative effects of studying overseas to arrive at his decision to study in WA. This confirms the

view of Schwiesfurth and Gu (2009) and Lu, Mavondo, and Qiu (2009) who found that international postgraduate students are more independent and adept at informing themselves.

Participants in this research framed their deliberations with friends by seeking specific feedback about WA and the proposed university rather than an open and exploratory analysis of all available pre-choice options, which is common amongst undergraduate students (Lu et al., 2009). This perhaps indicates, as suggested by Schwiesfurth and Gu (2009), a fortitude, independence and clarity in the thought processes of the participants, whose experience and intellectual savvy (compared to their undergraduate counterparts) allowed more forthright and narrow consultations rather than simply pursuing an outcome.

Participants arrived at their decision independently, seeking affirmation for their choices rather than heavily weighted input. To that end, participants remained adamant that their decision to study in WA was their own. Peer support was limited to providing encouragement, corroboration and confirmation of their decision instead of active persuasion. This is a fundamental difference with international undergraduate students who are not as autonomous and objective as postgraduate students when deciding to study overseas as found in the study by Lu et al. (2009).

*Teachers/colleagues.* Participants in this study perceived colleagues and teachers as skilled educators who could offer relevant knowledge about studying overseas. When considering the decision to undertake an international education, participants specifically sought out contemporaries with international study experience and where possible discussed their matter with those associates familiar with the State of WA.

In much the same way that participants regarded the advice from their friends, this group of participants did not pursue a critical examination on the nuances of their questions related to destination, but sought out useful anecdotes concerning their colleague's time as international students. The evidence derived from interviews suggested that participants previously made up their minds about studying in WA prior to discussing their queries with colleagues or teachers. They did not appear to pursue constructive advice, but sought helpful hints, positive re-enforcement for their decision and specific information about both destination and university choice.

These findings are not entirely consistent with that of Maringe and Carter (2007) who argued that, where possible, African students will seek advice (both personal and education related) from their teachers prior to deciding on the destination. In that regard, these African students had not previously agreed upon either their destination or university prior to consulting with teachers. Notwithstanding, the study by Maringe and Carter should be distinguished by its specificity to the African market where cultural imperatives such as showing deference to teachers when reaching important decision about their education decisions are crucial in understanding student behaviour (Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

In relation to university specificity, participants sought opinion from colleagues and teachers in relation to both location, supervision quality and university reputation. The findings showed that participants placed high regard on these assessments, helping them to formulate a decision.

These findings contrast with the studies of Maringe and Carter (2007) as well as Peterson (2003) who both hypothesised that prospective international students reach out to teachers (amongst others) for advice when considering an overseas education. The

difference is however, while research participants in this study did, where possible, discuss their desire to study overseas with teachers and colleagues who had studied abroad, they were more likely to initiate contact with potential supervisors at their prospective host university. They regarded the opinions from these educators as superior to hometown colleagues or teachers.

It is likely that implicit in this suggestion is the possible notion that whilst colleagues and teachers may provide useful information, such material may be outdated, irrelevant or irreconcilable to the participant's specific circumstances. Consequently, this may account for participants appearing to prefer obtaining information directly from the source, hence communicating with prospective supervisors where possible. In this way, the findings correspond generally to the research by Boehe (2016) who argued that better HDR outcomes may be derived through consulting with prospective supervisors prior to enrolment.

The results confirm the importance of both familial, social and professional interactions used by this study's participants when investigating potential international host cities and universities prior to reaching their purchasing decision to study in WA.

In relation to the advice received from family members, participants regarded this advice as very important in their decision-making. The reasons for this was twofold: cultural imperatives, especially for those participants from developing countries, held their families' advice in relative esteem; secondly, there appeared a high degree of trust between participants and their families, particularly if a family member had previous international experience. Notwithstanding, participants were adamant about making the final decision to study overseas, possibly suggesting a sense of independence and maturity.

With regard to friends, participants accepted their advice as positive guidance assisting them with their decision-making. Again, this seemed to indicate a maturity amongst participants, who balanced the information fairly, rather than being swayed prematurely.

Finally, in relation to colleagues/teachers, the findings continued to suggest that participants' independence and maturity was at the forefront of their decision-making. In that regard, participants also used colleagues/teachers to confirm their preliminary views.

It is this specific detail that distinguishes the current study from other authors who argue that the advice obtained from friends, teachers and colleagues is well regarded in helping potential students in their decision-making process. The participants interviewed in this study were a unique group of international postgraduate students who interpreted advice positively, whilst using it as a filtration mechanism in their decision-making. By recognising this difference, universities and policy makers can better attune their strategies to attracting postgraduate students to WA.

***Employability (job prospects).*** The second sub-theme of the first proposition proposes that participants were positively influenced by improved employment prospects as a result of completing a postgraduate degree in WA. Participants are pushed from their home country, seeking further education and the advantages of that accrued study. Conversely, participants are pulled towards economically and politically stable locations that offer an advanced industrial framework and the structure to progress professionally.

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) argued that a student is heavily influenced by the accumulated benefits that a degree confers upon them when considering the purchase of

international education services. The data from this study confirmed this notion, thereby extending the principle to international postgraduate students studying in WA.

Participants, regardless of their source country, stated that an international postgraduate education would provide them with a comparative advantage in the international market place, permitting them to compete effectively for positions that would otherwise be marginal at best. This view is supported by the observations of Bourke (2000) and Buddhichiwin (2003) who both contend that overseas students perceive future employers to judge potential applicants based on, amongst other things, their alma mater and host country/city.

Participants in the current study were not motivated in choosing WA as a study destination based on the location of their future employment. They expected their potential employers to distinguish between the veracity of an international education compared to the perceived quality of less-known local universities. They anticipated that their decision to study in WA would be considered far more favourably by future employers than a similar degree from their hometown. The view exemplifies aspects of the push-pull rationale, whereby participants choose to study overseas because they are unable to obtain a suitable local postgraduate education to help them compete globally. This corresponds to the studies by both Findlay et al. (2011) and Roberts (2012) who both argued that students seek an international education to gain employment mobility on the basis that a local education will not provide them with that advantage. In this research study, participants chose WA as a destination because they believed that by attending a university in Perth, they would obtain the tools to gain improved employment prospects. Participants did not consider that these means are available to them if they remain in their own country to be educated.



Furthermore, no participant indicated the problems associated with obtaining a postgraduate degree within their home country. They remained unaware of the rise in curriculum internationalisation in their home country, especially with respect to Masters and Doctoral programs (Altbach & Knight, 1997) and were unable to offer evidence based employment outcomes for pursuing an international postgraduate degree.

Stated another way, the likelihood of improved career prospects resulting from an international postgraduate education appears to be an established assumption.

Participants in this research seemed to act like all international students: they are motivated to pursue an education abroad through supply driven mechanisms: for example, Kolster (2014) hypothesised that employers judge the credibility of overseas education with respect to programme quality and university prestige (Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996), rather than the postgraduate student's skills. Consequently, participants seemed to choose their destination with future employers at the forefront of their decision-making. Therefore, the 'career prospect' variable may be considered largely in terms of perception and risk in how participants' postgraduate degrees are regarded in the marketplace.

The analysis of the data presupposes that participants perceive that their chosen destination acts like a brand, differentiating them from local students, allowing the former to stand out from the latter. This corresponds positively with the analysis by Buddhichiwin (2013) who argued that by linking an education to an internationally renowned university, based in a well-regarded city, these images then become connected with the student, acting as an important factor when marketing oneself to future employers.

***Personal growth.*** Proposition one further states that participants from this study anticipated that obtaining an overseas education may assist them in improving their emotional skills and psychological stability. The current study found that participants, especially those from non-Western countries, expected that studying in WA would offer them opportunities to immerse in Western culture, live independently from their families, and henceforth provide them with the personal space to develop as individuals.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Mpinganjira (2009) and Brown (2009) all raised the notion that international students are motivated to study abroad to gain international experience within an overt Westernised culture. Similarly, participants in this study considered their overseas experience as an important aspect in developing their character through cultural immersion distinct to their own. These participants spoke about their inherent beliefs that studying abroad will improve their intercultural skills and global consciousness, making them more rounded and better individuals which would benefit them in both employment and in their private lives.

The current study's findings expand upon the assessments by Brown (2009), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) as well as Cubillo et al. (2006) who hypothesised that international students conceptualise and cultivate their self-identity through learning about the wider world by absorbing an altered national ethos, dissimilar to their own. The findings in this study confirms those views, but also suggests that this process of acculturation and maturation occurs due to being away from home comforts and cultural norms.

Participants from this study were provided opportunities to develop their characters because of the inherent isolation away from family pressures and local routine. These participants were freely able to partake in the cultural nuances of their

host country whether through sport, dress, communication, freedoms or language. Their own cultural restrictions are unshackled not only from a traditional ethnic sense, but from limitations on their personal freedoms: for example, through religious observance, state control or speech oppression. This finding corresponds generally to the study of Brown (2009) who regarded international education as a potentially character transforming event, allowing international students to develop and understand themselves without the pressures of cultural and familial ties.

This study's findings advocate that postgraduate students studying in WA are not immune to these character developments despite being older and more experienced. These participants felt they could engage in experimenting with new values, different cultural norms as well as investigate varying social and political beliefs. In so doing, they could foster new ways of viewing the world through recalibrating their pre-existing beliefs.

The present study's findings confirm the veracity of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) student formation identity model, which alludes to the improvement of student identity through self-development and confidence building consequent upon new experiences and being away from home. Within this research, participants indicated that the opportunity to study abroad presented them with a chance to enhance their self-identities through a much broader lens: that is, by immersing themselves in new and varied cultural experiences whilst developing higher order cognition and reflective practice through theoretical study.

However, this finding is tempered with one caveat. University students tend to naturally mature as they study and age (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Therefore, developmental changes that are specific to international student decision making are

difficult to measure and extract from the overseas experience. The current study did not seek to investigate this aspect, although it remains an interesting consideration for future research.

Perhaps the proposition by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) whereby tertiary students seek to develop morally, cognitively and socially also holds true for international students. The experience of studying overseas may provide students with a framework to challenge and improve their reasoning through cultural immersion and academic rigour. By extension, the findings in this study suggest that participants were interested in seeking out new life experiences despite their ages, skills and worldview. They continued to desire exposure to different cultures and political settings to understand and develop stronger communication skills, enhanced sensitivities and tolerance towards those different to themselves. This possibly indicates an intentional decision amongst participants to round their characters, invoking within them a desire to grow personally and fashion a well-structured self-identity: ergo, to self-actualize.

In conclusion, it appears from this study's findings, that personal growth may be an important determinant when choosing to study in WA. Participants were motivated to develop a greater level of self-awareness, a more robust self-esteem and most importantly the desire to challenge their own beliefs to live a more productive and satisfying life. Participants believed that developing a greater sense of self while becoming more globally aware, would make them more stable and effective employees, assist in cultivating their identities, help achieve a more rounded character, which could hopefully provide them with better prospects in successfully navigating the world around them.

**Proposition two: Migration.** Proposition two states that prospects of migration positively influence international students to study overseas. The results indicated that almost all participants (n=19) intended to remain in WA post-qualification.

A closer reading of the data provides a more complex picture. While these participants sought to remain in WA, they were unsure as to their future intentions, that is, to either remain in the State temporarily for employment or to obtain permanent residency. Whatever the case, both attitudes presuppose an application of the push-pull model. Participants interviewed appeared to be pulled to WA because of economic, political and social conditions. They argued that their life prospects would be substantially improved if they obtained permanent residency in Australia.

This view compares favourably with the study by Arthur and Flynn (2011) who argued that a primary consideration of international students' decisions to study overseas is a premeditated and purposely planned appropriation of the visa laws to remain in the host country because of two specific pull factors: superior job prospects and better life opportunities.

However, the reality gleaned from this study's results is not as clear as advocated by Arthur and Flynn (2011). The study data indicated that as participants spent more time in WA, so too did their reasons for remaining in the country. While this does not impact the pre-choice decision-making factors for selecting WA as a study destination, the results do suggest that motives for remaining in Australia shift during the participants' education: for example, as participants settled down, formed social connections, professional relationships, and engaged within local communities, they began to feel a sense of belonging, building a new life and making it more undesirable to return home. Further, it is noted that although experiential attributes amongst

participants was not the focus of this study, it is important to recognise that participants were open to shifts in attitudes regarding Australia, which affected their attitudes towards migration. Participants were unclear when this shift in mindset occurred: that is, either pre or post decision in choosing WA as a study destination. In any event, this thesis is predicated on pre-choice motivations and as such attempts to delineate those decision-making factors, but invariably refers to some post-choice reasons for purposes of clarity and understanding.

While the findings appropriate concepts of diminishing acculturative stress and migration theory (Chaitin & Sternberg, 2016), they are contrary to the results of the study by Alberts and Hazen (2005). In that qualitative study of international students and migration within the USA, the authors found that students rarely achieve a sense of belonging, but rather choose to immigrate because they consider the advantages (or pull factors) of remaining in the host country outweigh any social and economic benefits of returning home (push factors). As the Alberts and Hazen research investigated international students in the USA, it is difficult to generalise the findings to postgraduate students studying in WA. Nevertheless, the Albert and Hazen publication does provide a useful analysis of push-pull modelling, integrating aspects of migratory theory into the practice of understanding international student decision-making, including the necessity to consider post-enrolment factors. This helps in understanding how pre-choice push-pull factors may interact in a similar Western market like WA.

One further example of the inter-relationship between push-pull variables is the interaction between advice and migration. Participants stated that their decision to choose WA as a study destination was precipitated on their goal to migrate to Australia. However, in so doing, participants refrained from obtaining migratory advice from third

parties, limiting guidance to information relating to course, university and city. This is contrary to the findings of Lawley (1993) and Bodycott (2009), who both suggested that international students seeking to migrate usually consult with more knowledgeable parties prior to advancing through the migratory process. This possibly suggests that participants in this study were confident with their own authoritative voice, able to weigh the benefits of remaining in the host country to returning home. Much like they regarded advice with respect to studying overseas.

As a result, it appears that migration as a decision-making factor was inextricably tied to participants' decisions to study overseas. This is evidenced through the way participants navigated the push-pull factors, including both professional, personal and societal issues that influenced their decisions to migrate to Australia as postgraduate international students. The analysis below considers two aspects of the relationship between migration and pre-choice decision-making, that is, those participants who initially sought to return home after completion of their degree and those students who intended to remain in the country post-qualification.

***Returning home.*** From the 20 participants interviewed only one student confirmed that she intended to return home. This finding compares favourably to the early studies by Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke, and Fraser (1994), as well as Harvey and Nesdale (1995), who both advocated that, where possible, international students have a propensity to remain in Australia post-qualification. While these studies are pre-1995, they do not suggest different push-pull factors motivating international students to migrate compared to this research: for example, participants in this study compared favourably to the students surveyed in both Nesdale papers, indicating that they are for the most part a distinct group, well resourced, highly educated and socially mobile who

seek more stable economic and political conditions. The 19 participants in this study who were interested to migrate to Australia, affirmed that they did not, prior to coming to Perth, think they would have problems acculturating (and indeed this proved accurate). Indeed, they were optimistic about their lives in Australia as compared to home, felt positive about securing appropriate host city employment and regarded Australia's economics and political systems superior to their own country. This is consistent with the findings by Tan and Hugo (2016), who suggested that international students believed their lives would be more stable and prosperous by remaining in the host country as opposed to returning home.

Granted, while the qualitative sample in this study is relatively small, there is recent evidence to suggest that over 70% of international students seek to immigrate (Tan & Hugo, 2016). While this research is only a reflection on postgraduate students studying in WA, the numbers of students seeking immigration is perhaps higher than the general international student population.

It is useful to identify the one participant who intended to return home. Sasha obtained a full scholarship and achieved an executive level position in her home country with a formal guarantee that she could return to that position or similar. She was affluent and a person of extraordinary repute (within her home country). She had garnered high level connections in her home country and attained positions of authority, public office, influence, financial success and power, which would simply not be possible if she remained in Australia. Further, Sasha was somewhat older than the other participants, undertaking a PhD to achieve an even higher level of professional attainment (possibly high political office). Sasha's story may imply that those students who choose to remain in Australia do so because they believe that their lives, be that



economically, professionally or personally, will be better by immigrating. Sasha's story provided an irregular finding, but perhaps provides confirmation that international students are swayed by the application of various push-pull factors. When these influences are not at play, students are unlikely to migrate. The inter-related push-pull features of the model, in particularly the relationship between employability, migration and the decision to study in WA are discussed below.

*Professional factors.* Despite participants in this study developing high level skills, they did not expect to receive any professional incentives to return home. This finding is unanticipated, given the propensity of developing countries in cultivating programs to repatriate their foreign trained citizens (Gribble, 2008). In fact, none of the students were even aware of any incentives offered to returning international students. As a result, the pull of WA's advantageous economic conditions and employment opportunities provided participants with a duality of purpose: to study in the host State and then to remain in the country long term, both acting as pre-choice determinants. Participants perceived an overseas education offered them a chance to live and work in Australia, where remuneration was better than at home. This correlates to the findings of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), as well as Arthur and Flynn (2009), who both suggested the pull of beneficial economic conditions act to entice students to study overseas and then remain in their host country.

Consistent with these two studies, the current research findings suggested that participants, especially from low wage countries including India, Indonesia and Iran reflected that they were more likely to prosper both professionally and economically by remaining in Australia. These participants cited various pull factors intrinsic to their decision including high professional standards, political stability, efficient government

practices and policies, world class facilities, high ethical standards (amongst research students) and low levels of corruption.

This study's participants also alluded to their postgraduate education as a means to upskill, affording them the social and employment mobility to improve themselves personally, to enhance their career prospects, improve income and assist in meeting the conditions for permanent residency (Labi, 2010). With respect to the last measure, this study's participants seemed acutely aware of the fluctuations in visa regulations, recognising that postgraduate qualifications will enhance their prospects of satisfying the relevant criteria.

While these perceptions were constructed prior to enrolling in their courses, the results follow the findings of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) who proposed that students' perceptions of Australia as an economically superior, politically stable and socially diverse country is confirmed once these students settle into Australian life. Similarly, this study's well-educated participants considered that Australia could provide them with an abundance of professional opportunities which they were keen to partake in, far from the structural difficulties faced in their home countries.

The addition of a postgraduate qualification may also reflect participants' optimism when seeking local employment, improved professional standing and better pay than at home. Research indicates that postgraduate degrees improve job-search competitiveness, assisting students in avoiding the quandary of underemployment, common amongst international undergraduate migrants (Galan, Lawley, & Clements, 2015). A postgraduate education appears to assist students in avoiding this predicament amongst university graduates by providing them with a competitive advantage in the local job market (Subramaniam, Yusoff, & Othman, 2014).

Participants' optimism also extended to navigating Australia's constantly changing visa restrictions, which did not act as a deterrent. This is contrary to the findings of Birrell and Perry (2009) who proposed that tightened visa restrictions hinder international students from pursuing migration by creating formal barriers through added regulations: for example, by reference to constantly changing preferential skill lists. Rather, this study's participants navigated the migration laws as mere bureaucratic requirements, not unlike the students surveyed by Hung et al. (2000) who hypothesized that international students are adept at circumventing immigration rules.

The findings from this study confirmed the proposition stated by Hung et al. (2000), whereby this study's participants, who chose to study overseas as a route to migrate to Australia, were well versed in local migration policies and how these laws affected them, calibrating their situation towards visa approval. For some this meant ensuring a spouse could obtain sponsorship (Jessy), for others this encompassed enrolling in preferential courses or ensuring they were appropriately skilled to successfully apply for a permanent residency visa (Eitan, Johan and Shahar).

*Economic factors.* As Arthur and Flynn (2011) suggested, international students are pulled from their home country when they face diminished economic prospects. The findings of the current study reflect this view, with participants from developing nations indicating they were reactive to economic and political conditions. Participants perceived a poor future for themselves if they settled in their native country and consequently were pushed to seek a better life elsewhere.

Participants were then pulled to WA, initially to obtain an international education because of its impact upon their career prospects, quality of life, country stability and

social mobility. However, as Beine, Noël, and Ragot (2014) suggested, students sought their overseas education partly to obtain Australian migration.

Unlike Beine et al. (2014), this also included students emanating from developed countries. WA appeared to offer participants with better economic opportunities compared to their source nations. Participants in this study spoke about the immense competition in their home countries, which encompassed long working hours with minimal reward. This corresponds to the views of Gribble (2008) who suggested international students were pulled to their host country because of the preferential conditions compared to home. Indeed, these conditions may be construed in similar terms to the pull factors motivating students to study overseas. Examples provided in this study include superior labour conditions in Australia, that are more conducive to a work-life balance, internationally competitive salaries and appropriate income tax levels compared to those in their home countries.

These participants also cited corruption, as a signifier of social and political discord in their home countries, whereby such dishonesty acts as a promulgator to study overseas and migrate. From obtaining entry into a university course, to gaining employment in the public sector as well as the myriad of dishonest ways in which individuals conduct business in their home country, all contributed to participants seeking to remain in Australia. Participants described Australia as a meritocracy whose high levels of bureaucratic efficiency, regulations and wage systems reduced the overt corruption that they were used to, levelling the playing field and providing certainty to the players. While existing research does not specifically explore home country corruption as a variable of international student decision-making, it is implied through the myriad of ways in which students seek economic and political solace by virtue of

the host country's stable economic and political systems (Alberts 2007; Alberts & Hazen, 2005).

The findings from this study also suggest that participants from these developing countries regarded themselves as highly skilled and desirable employees, but the structural difficulties within their home economies presented fundamental problems that may prove disadvantageous for their career and personal aspirations. A combination of lacking the appropriate connections together with the perception that Australia valued free agency above corrupt practice motivated participants to remain in Australia post-qualification.

These structural complications seemed to provide participants with the impetus to consider migration post-qualification. Alberts (2007) reflected upon this matter in relation to international student migration to the United States, post 9/11, a period of international upheaval, but with an opportunity to discuss the migratory dynamics amongst students seeking to remain in the USA. The author found that international students will compare the micro-economic fundamentals of their home to the host country, including a broad analysis of employment opportunities, career growth, migratory regulations and political stability. If the economic fundamentals at home are on par or appear more certain than those in the host country, students are more likely to return home after completion of their degrees. Applying this supposition to the current study, participants sought to migrate because they regarded both the economic, political and legal structures in Australia more attractive than those at home. Consequently, there was an inextricably intertwined relationship between participants' decision to study in WA and their desire for a more substantial economic future.

In comparison, Nesdale et al. (1994) found that 60% of international postgraduate students in Australia did not intend to migrate. The current study's findings suggest that twenty three years later, despite tighter migratory regulations and slow economic growth, participants still regard WA as a preferable destination to live, most likely due to favourable migratory policies that seek to attract well educated and highly mobile individuals (Martin, 2007).

The overall findings in this study with respect to postgraduate student migratory intentions to Australia suggest that Australia's policy to attract and retain highly qualified and acculturated international students is working. Like the participants in this study, post-qualification migrants are generally under 30 years of age, their Australian qualifications are acceptable to potential employers, they possess English fluency and are familiar and comfortable with Australian life. As a result, participants incorporate the growing proportion of the skilled migrant category which comprises two-thirds of the total migrant intake (Birrell and Healy, 2016).

*Personal reasons.* Choosing to migrate as a reason for studying in WA, also involved participants addressing the personal benefits of studying in a foreign country and then staying there.

This study found that participants considered migration as a benefit to their future selves, in that Australian residency offered them greater mobility than citizenship rights in their home countries. This appears to be consistent with the study by Baas (2016) who hypothesised that international students seek not only the permanent residency of another country, but to obtain transnational mobility, allowing them to become 'citizens of the world', enhancing their social status, career progress and financial success. This suggests that like the Indian students in the Baas paper, participants in this study also

considered migration through complex linkages involving international movement, rather than simply within the dyadic push-pull theory.

Participants in this study who emanated from developing countries considered that obtaining Australian permanent residency would enhance their social mobility together with improving their own notion of class. While these participants were already well placed socially in their home countries, they regarded transnational mobility as promising them even further upward social mobility and class affirmation. Participants were class based, well educated individuals, but did not consider their local social status provided them with the international opportunities they so desired.

In contrast to Baas (2016), participants in the current study perceived their overseas education as an opportunity to remain in Australia. These participants valued Australian residency as a key to upward mobility, providing them with increased flexibility in their international movements, class structures and career projection, suggesting a complex link between the pull factors influencing students studying in WA.

This idea is not a repudiation of the push-pull model, but more accurately a consequence of the theory, illustrating the links between factors. Participants admitted to being pushed from their home countries due to diminished economic, social and political conditions and pulled to WA, which offered them professional and lifestyle opportunities. Ultimately, the prospects of an Australian residency visa presented to participants an otherwise unattainable plethora of transnational opportunities, but for achieving the legal threshold of permanent resident.

One final point of clarification should also be made in comparison to the Baas (2016) study. Baas found that participants in his study sought Australian migration in

large measure as a safety net that could be activated or de-activated at will depending on their own specific circumstances. Participants in this study did not use their Australian education as a principle means to obtain an 'emergency passport'. Rather, they sought to make a new life in Australia, but with enhanced transnational mobility, such as working in Europe for a short period or accessing countries that would otherwise be off limits to them.

*Participants from developed countries.* Unlike those participants from developing countries, those who emanated from heavily industrialised countries sought to study in WA as a channel to migration because of their intrinsic ability to engage in transnational movement. These participants did not consider themselves pushed towards Australia due to any destabilising force. Rather, they intimated that international mobility is a natural part of their lives. They considered their decision to remain in Australia post study was due to 'personal reasons' such as weather and lifestyle. This illustrates one aspect of the push-pull model linking personal reasons and migration as functions of a participants' motivations to firstly study in WA and then to remain in the country long term. This corresponds to the findings of Eskelä (2013) who suggested that transnational mobility amongst Western students is considered both attainable and 'normal'.

Further, this group of participants (those emanating from developed countries) did not find the idea of acculturation complex or trying. Indeed, in certain aspects they regarded Australia's political, social and economic frameworks as superior to their home countries, which provided them with the impetus to remain in the country. However, they did not consider they were inherently better off by remaining in Australia, rather they became settled and acclimatized within their local communities.



No participant derided their home countries, remaining culturally attuned and patriotic towards their home nation, offering nostalgic and wistful reminiscences of the lives they left behind, much like the findings by Gribble (2008).

This finding resembles the patterns suggested by Alberts (2007), whereby international students are motivated to study overseas and then remain in the host country if they perceive the political and economic dynamics as being superior to that at home. However, that study does not account for the social dynamics of this study's tested cohort, and in particular issues pertaining to the prospective issues of acculturation and acclimatization. To that end, Beine et al. (2014) stated that cultural matters relating to migration are merely one aspect of the push-pull model. Indeed, here lies 'the rub': there appears no specific factor that all participants ingratiate themselves towards. In the present research, participants chose to study in WA for a host of reasons including to migrate. It follows that this motivation relates not only to political and economic features of globalisation (and how that construct intrinsically affects them), but also how to how they thought about local assimilation. In that regard, by understanding these inter-related reasons, it is possible to further clarify the third research question, namely determining the nexus between the inter-relationships between factors and the reasons that influence international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA.

For example, when considering the inter-relationship between migration and employment prospects, those study participants still enrolled in a higher degree were not overly concerned about employment prospects, mirroring the opinions of those participants who had already found employment, usually in high level government bureaucracy or industry without too much trouble. Labi (2010) opined that there is a

substantial relationship between international student migration and employment prospects. The findings in this study do not dispute this view, but further adds that this study's participants' overriding confidence in obtaining employment post-qualification, seemed to allow them to engage in a deeper consideration of the inter-relationship between the push-pull variables. That is, they were not subjected to any one overriding motivating factor, rather, as their circumstances evolved, their motivations for remaining in Australia changed. These student migrants are, as Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2007) suggest, "the quintessential avatars of globalisation" (p. 7) where a myriad of co-incidences, opportunities and constraints are responsible for them remaining in WA post-graduation.

The findings from this study suggest that participants originating from Western countries were privileged and increasingly mobile. By choosing to study in WA, they attained highly developed skills, including vocational training, which allowed them to feel positive and optimistic about their chances of remaining in Australia. However, they also understood that they could, if required, return home. They did not admit to feeling pressure to transition successfully as immigrants, which was certainly not the case with those participants from less developed countries.

In summary, the findings indicate interrelated social, economic and political reasons that influenced participants' choice of WA and their length of stay. These factors are push and pull related depending on their country of origin and the participant's perception of Australia as a long-term destination. In that regard, the findings presented two categories of postgraduate students with migratory intentions: those emanating from developing nations and those originating from industrialised countries. The results suggested that participants from developing nations are

motivated to remain in Australia post-qualification because of improved employment prospects, Australia's favourable reputation and improved social mobility.

Those participants who originated from developed countries also used their education as a conduit to migrate, however, these participants were motivated more by personal than economic imperatives, perhaps due to their existing transnational mobility, affluence, and high level of education. While there is apparent diversification in the decision-making amongst the different cohorts, the outcome remained the same: participants welcomed the opportunity to migrate to Australia.

**Proposition three: Program evaluation.** The third proposition considers amongst other things, the influence of cost (as a subset of program evaluation) as a motivating factor for international postgraduate students when considering WA as an overseas destination. Both Back, Olsen, and Davis (1997) together with Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) deemed price as an indicative factor for international students when choosing a study destination. Expenses include charges relating to course fees, cost of living and travel. Using the push-pull framework, Mazzarol et al. (2001) suggested that the model was conducive to decipher the motivations of postgraduate Indian science and technology students studying in Australia. Subsequent literature concerning postgraduate students recognised the benefits of utilising this model to understand cost as a decision-making variable including studies by Hilden (2011) and Buddhichiwin (2013). These papers presented disparate findings on the influence of cost, suggesting the importance of scholarships to postgraduate students.

This study's findings found favour in these authors' hypotheses, indicating that although cost and financial assistance were important pull factors in a student's decision-making process, the success of obtaining a scholarship was a fundamental

influence upon research students' decisions to study in WA. Each of these factors are discussed discretely.

*Costs: Tuition fees and living expenses.* The findings from the current study suggested that participants were price sensitive to the cost of studying overseas, particularly those students who were required to pay full tuition fees. This group admitted spending considerable time investigating the comparative costs of undertaking a postgraduate degree in other countries, most noticeably the USA, UK and Australia. Participants suggested that tuition fees at WA universities were slightly cheaper than their international counterparts in the UK and USA, but comparative in price with institutions in the Eastern States of Australia.

The decision of participants to choose a university that offered a relatively cheaper cost of studying suggests that they are price sensitive. At the same time, participants maintained that their chosen international degree was commensurate in quality to other international universities. This finding confirms that even in earlier studies on the relationship between international students and cost, such as the research by Mazzarol et al. (2001), cost remains a sensitive issue amongst both universities and students, whereby competitive pricing of tertiary courses provides Australia with a comparative advantage over its main competitors.

The behaviour behind the purchase of overseas education and specifically the relationship between this study's participants to cost suggests that selecting an overseas university and host destination is a rational consumer behaviour where participants weighed the total cost of studying overseas against the perceived benefits of completing their degrees in WA. When considering the decision to study overseas within this cost to study ratio, it is arguable that participants regarded, as Chen and Zimitat (2006)

intimated, that cost is both highly price elastic and a negative variable. This means that students are price sensitive, limited in their resources, resulting in them seeking out affordable education destinations.

Despite this study's participants' sensitivities to cost, this factor must be considered in light of the perceived benefits of studying abroad, including other issues such as career prospects, migration, improved English skills and personal growth. In other words, as stated by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), while cost is an important aspect of participants' decision-making, it is not the sole motivating factor, illustrating the complexity of the push-pull model.

As such, the web of links within the push-pull model are crucial in understanding the effect of cost on a student's intention to choose a given destination: for example, as Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) indicated, cost is only one factor amongst many that contributes to a student choosing an overseas destination. Cost is aggregated as part of a decision-making structure that focuses upon outcome.

Despite these interactions, participants conceded that their financial situations are fundamentally important in the overall decision-making process and should be given substantial weight. Many students must be financially capable of meeting both tuition fees and living expenses. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), as well as Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010), both suggested that students consider the entire cost of studying including tuition fees, living expenses, travel and social costs. This proposition remains consistent within this study for those participants unable to attain a scholarship to assist with the cost of studying abroad. Noticeably, less than half the study's participants paid full tuition fees, possibly resulting in this matter being of less importance than in studies that considered undergraduate students.

Participants understood that their proposed overseas education would be costly in the short term, but would benefit them after graduation. These findings are consistent with the literature which indicates that students understand that the financial expense incurred when studying overseas must be regarded as a long-term investment, in other words as an opportunity cost (Blundell, Dearden, Meghir, & Sianesi, 1999; Kenkel, 1990; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Waters & Brooks, 2011).

More importantly, the relationship between cost and other factors purports to demonstrate the associations within the new model and the fundamental difficulty when considering each factor individually. This assists in answering the third research question, in that it suggests inter-related factors that influenced participants' decision-making. Stated another way, the findings in respect of price considerations confirm the research conducted by Cubillo et al. (2006), as well as Soutar and Turner (2002), that students' decision-making is complex and involves weighing up the competing and inter-related factors when deciding to study overseas. The findings in this study accept that proposition wholly, although with a variation in factors. Despite cost being an influential factor, whereby participants admitted to their overt price sensitivities, they did not under-estimate the value of other motivating variables when choosing WA as a destination. As such, while this qualitative study is limited in its ability to quantitatively weight each factor according to their importance, it appears from the findings that cost played a crucial component in participants' decision-making.

**Scholarship.** Study subsidies were awarded primarily to participants enrolled in HDR degrees. The prevailing literature considers both the benefits conferred upon the successful candidates, as well as the limits of the scholarships (Bista & Dagley, 2015; Sherry et al., 2010). These authors' findings are consistent with the outcomes from this

study, in that participants in possession of scholarships valued immensely the benefit received through fee relief, stating that without the financial reprieve they could not afford the enormous pecuniary burden that studying abroad imposed.

This research also partly confirms the findings of Sherry et al. (2010) and Bista and Dagley (2015), who found that the provision of graduate scholarships reduced students' vulnerability by easing their financial difficulties. Like participants in this study, those papers also noted, that despite the help scholarships afforded them, the living allowance appeared insufficient to allow students to partake in an adequate and reasonable standard of living. Indeed, participants in this study were aware of their scholarships' limitations prior to choosing WA as a study destination, but conceded that the award at least provided them with payment for course fees and health insurance, two significant financial imposts. Participants were adamant that they were not in a financial position to undertake postgraduate studies in WA without the benefit of fee relief. Hence, the decision to study in WA was partly predicated on obtaining a scholarship.

This current study also confirmed the findings reported by Sherry et al. (2010), that students awarded a scholarship typically supplemented their stipends through either local employment or third party payments, usually from family members. Again, this recognises the fact that participants were cognisant of the limits that scholarships could afford them prior to choosing WA as a study destination. They understood that the bursary may not meet their full expenditure during their degrees, causing a great deal of anxiety in relation to their perceived financial insecurity that could only be alleviated through part-time employment or other third parties assisting them with expenses. Indeed, there appears to be some indication that participants' decision to study in WA

involved not only having their costs alleviated through a scholarship, but in the security that their visa permitted them to work part-time whilst in Australia.

This finding corresponds to the hypothesis drawn from the paper by Scheyvens et al. (2003) who proposed that a scholarship's value is important to a student's overall well-being. However, in this study, participants could lessen their worry by ensuring prior to choosing WA as a study destination that they had other sources of income, perhaps suggestive of the mature way older postgraduate students are able to resolve their problems.

The current study further suggested, that notwithstanding most participants were middle-class, those participants emanating from low income countries, where exchange rates and mean income levels constricted their ability to obtain financial assistance from their families, remained vulnerable to financial pressures. The principle may also be stated as an inverse corollary, that is, those participants who derived additional funding from overseas sources were less concerned about their financial situation.

Published literature is sparse on the effects of living costs (resulting from under-funded scholarships) as a contributing factor to a student's decision to study abroad. González, Mesanza, and Mariel (2011) stated that third party payments should not be underestimated with respect to students seeking to study abroad, although those authors did not consider international students. Nevertheless, that hypothesis appears to correspond with the findings from this study, whereby exchange rates and income differentials hampered participants' families in providing reasonable financial assistance, rendering this hindrance an important determinant in whether participants could afford to study in WA.



Despite these cost pressures, participants chose to study in WA, *inter alia*, because of the internationally competitive pricing of tuition and living costs compared to Australia's Eastern seaboard. However, upon arrival participants in this study found their cost of living to be very high. As a result, the findings suggest that participants remained naïve about the real living costs in WA, precipitating a continuing state of anxiety about the financial impact of their decision to study in WA.

Although this outcome is consistent with a recent unpublished paper on the quandary of international student stress by Yan (2017) who purported that cost (amongst other things) remains an issue for Chinese international students studying in the USA, it is in part mitigated if the student believes they will receive value for money and their other needs, such as academic learning is met. To that end, the finding by Yan may be considered as part of the participants' complex and multi-faceted decision-making process, whereby although cost is a crucial determinant, participants did not regard it as the sole factor in how they chose their study destination.

These study findings suggest two relevant matters that participants needed to consider when choosing to study in WA: firstly, participants considered they had very little recourse in alleviating their financial concerns other than to curb costs and find ways to supplement their scholarship payments (if they were in receipt of an award). Employment conditions imposed on scholarships, studying time constraints, inefficient and ill-equipped bureaucracies all compounded the financial problems that participants interviewed for this study faced when choosing to study in WA; and secondly, the high cost of living in WA (compared to home) combined with the relatively minimal scholarships awarded to mostly research based participants resulted in anxiety and financial concerns. Nevertheless, despite these cost considerations, participants still

chose to study in WA. They conceded that while a scholarship could limit their financial insecurities, they would still need to manage their finances carefully, to avoid foreseeable problems.

In summary, those participants awarded a scholarship understood its importance in their decision-making matrix. However, that is not a complete picture, given the inadequacy of the bursaries. As participants could supplement their scholarship income through part-time work, they were more comfortable in choosing to study in WA. Notwithstanding, while cost and the award of a scholarship are major imperatives for participants in choosing a destination, they are not the only reasons. Consequently, cost and scholarship do not stand alone, but are one consideration of a number of factors that appear to motivate international postgraduate students to attend universities in WA.

**University marketing.** This section concerns itself with proposition three, which considers the various attributes of marketing including how and why program evaluation and teaching quality positively influence participants in choosing WA as a study destination. Participants appeared to engage with local WA university marketers. This included searching a specific university website and then contacting an educational agent to assist them with enrolment and visa requirements.

In general terms, this current finding confirms the hypotheses drawn from the historical literature on university marketing and international students, that the forces of globalisation compelled universities to improve their competitive practices by engaging in more sophisticated marketing measures through both indirect and direct communication techniques (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

**Education agents.** Contracting external third-party recruiters by universities is an ongoing and vital instrument in the marketing toolbox of higher education institutions

seeking to attract overseas students. The findings from this study suggested that participants, specifically from Asian countries employed education agents in their home countries to both obtain university recommendations according to their educational needs and acquire assistance with navigating the bureaucratic corridors of overseas higher education institutions and Australian immigration laws. Such relationships did not derogate from other factors motivating participants, including both obtaining advice and information from other sources.

While early literature on the use of agents considered the deleterious effects of the unregulated industry including agent opportunism, power asymmetries and unethical practices (Pimpa, 2002; Sharma, 1997), participants appeared satisfied with their agents in furnishing them with appropriate advice and support to complete often cumbersome and tedious applications. There was no suggestion that participants' agents engaged in commercial opportunism or unscrupulous tactics to entice a student to WA in lieu of hefty commissions or kickbacks as reported in the literature.

The specific findings of this thesis, whereby participants reported a positive relationship with their agent confirms the outcomes of the study by Hulme et al. (2014), who acknowledged the worthwhile effect of agents upon overseas students who lack the knowledge and skill to complete complicated and lengthy documents. While that publication is specific to African students studying in the United Kingdom, this thesis suggests that the conclusions may be transferrable to international postgraduate students studying in WA.

This study also found that participants who engaged with agents were mostly from Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Malaysia and China. Like their African counter-parts, these participants appreciated and trusted the work undertaken by their

agents. They appeared drawn to this indirect marketing measure, while at the same time participants did not report any negative experiences in their agent dealings. This finding correlates to the study by Altbach and Reisberg (2015) who proposed that universities seek to attract international students by appointing contracting educational agents to assist with both process and to provide advice on destination. Secondly, the Chen (2017) study is useful in connoting that participants' attitudes to agents is indicative of the success of universities' attempts at relationship marketing.

Despite both Sharma (1997) and Pimpa (2002) arguing the incompatible objectives between agents versus students, participants did not consider this perceived ethical burden as a concern. Rather, participants' views seemed to indicate that they valued the agents' opinions and experiences, but were not subordinate to their control, allowing them to weigh up the evidence and reach a conclusion for themselves. In that regard, participants firstly chose their destination, then consulted an agent to obtain practical and administrative support. Again, this indicates the proposition that participants are experienced consumers and prefer to make their own decisions about destination, although are agreeable to any assistance provided.

This augments the findings of the study by Serra-Hagedorn and Zhang (2011) who suggested that despite the asymmetrical relationship between the two parties, students are by-and-large satisfied with their agents when their needs are met, perhaps suggesting that participants in this study were competent in dealing with agents and were comfortable in incorporating agents in their decision-making process. Both participants in this study and the cohort in the Serra-Hagedorn and Zhang publication acknowledge agents' activities as both a sign of entrepreneurship and more importantly,

as a direct marketing service used to assist them in their goal of obtaining an overseas education.

Ultimately, participants' positive attitudes towards agents negated any concerns regarding accountability with the third-party providers. In fact, this consideration was simply not an issue. What arises from this current study is that with each new factor considered, it becomes clearer that participants use complex multi-factorial decision-making when choosing a study destination. By doing so, this process ordinarily involves alleviated the controlling influence that agents have traditionally wielded over students: for example, see Altbach and Reisberg (2015), as well as Lewin (2008).

***Marketing communications.*** Oplatka (2002) found that globalisation resulted in tertiary institutions appropriating traditional service marketing principles to attract and retain overseas students. The findings confirm this statement, although with focus on the use of the Internet. In that regard, participants engaged positively with the Internet as an important service focused product that assisted them in deciding upon a study destination: for example, participants used the Internet to research prospective universities, cities and countries. As they narrowed their searches to specific destinations and host universities, they engaged deeper with the specific institutional website, focusing on course structure, faculty members and university services.

This finding is consistent with Gray et al. (2003), who suggested more than fifteen years ago, that the Internet was the most effective tools for international students to source information about potential study destinations. The current research appears to suggest that postgraduate students seeking to study in WA, are technologically adept at navigating the Internet, by locating relevant and informative material to help them decide upon a study destination.

Whilst this study is not a market analysis of institutional positioning through web based marketisation, participants' online behaviour indicates that they were increasingly reliant upon Internet searches when choosing a study destination. This may be characterised through universities' advanced websites that provide interactivity and relationship building capabilities through connections with social media and personalisation techniques.

In fact, all participants in this study, regardless of background used the Internet as a method to obtain knowledge about various universities and cities, which provided them with vital details in forming a decision. This finding confirms the recent paper by Chang and Gomes (2017) who suggested that all international students pursue a 'digital journey' when choosing a destination, which they regard as the most formative way to investigate and educate themselves about the various international education options available to them.

Within this study, participants used the Internet similarly, Googling prospective destinations through methodical, organised and preparatory searches. This study's participants appeared to be technically savvy, which then allowed them to focus on the necessary and specific information they required to choose their destination and university. Their responses indicated that they were time effective, could avoid the Internet static and clickbait that has become prevalent within the current technology.

This technique differed to the method suggested by Gray et al. (2003) who, in early analysis on the Internet and student marketing, found that prospective students' use of the Internet is related to "differences in cultural values, levels of Westernisation and communication infrastructure in their home country" (p. 111). The authors hypothesised that Internet-users are distinctly different in the way they use the Internet,

making it problematic for universities to generalise their websites to diverse populations of potential students. In other words, the authors propose that given the variations in how people search and relate to information, international universities may find it difficult to use a one-fit-all size approach.

However, and in light of the rapid take up of web-based marketing, the findings from this study suggest otherwise. There appeared no distinction amongst participants, regardless of country as to the way they engaged with the Internet and the specific websites of universities. Participants recognised the need to obtain information and were skilled in where to find it. Indeed, these specific findings correspond more with a recent publication by James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) who found that international students regarded universities' websites as the most important and most useful source of indirect information available to them. Participants found the information they were seeking was well communicated, easy to navigate, and well laid out. While these websites varied in design, participants, regardless of origin, appeared concerned only with garnering information. Whether this is related to participants' abilities to navigate technology or universities improved website design is not a matter which this thesis considered, although it appears that the use and ease of the Internet was important for all participants in helping them reach a decision to study in WA.

Perhaps then the technological advances in Internet communications worldwide over the last fifteen years have negated any suggestion that middle class well educated citizens from developing countries are less adept and too culturally distinct to navigate their way through the modern Internet and websites developed in Western countries (Gray et al., 2003). Consequently, regardless of the nuances associated with Internet marketing and higher education, participants could locate, decipher and source

information from the Internet as a primary means of facilitating their choice of an overseas destination.

***Relationship marketing.*** Participants from this study stated that after preliminarily selecting a host university, they approached that institution directly to obtain information related to their circumstances. These participants used direct communications via the Internet and email to inquire, clarify and consider administrative and educational matters. The university website served as an entry point, which allowed participants a direct line of communication to obtain the information sought. This finding corresponds to the results of James-MacEachern and Yun (2017), but also builds upon the theory by Mazzarol and Hosie (1996) who suggested well prior to the explosion of the Internet that by directly focusing upon the needs of students, universities will attract more international students than if they rely upon traditional marketing methods.

In this study, participants were convinced that university websites provided direct, clear and detailed information pertaining to their preferred course. As Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1985) suggested well prior to the advent of the Internet, universities' marketing programs will be successful if the services offered match students' needs.

In theoretical terms, these needs include issues relating to the (university) products' consumption, heterogeneity and perishability (Mazarrol & Hosie, 1996). In this study, participants inquired about the nature of the institutional product they sought to purchase, including matters relating to the products identifiable and singular features (heterogeneity), the degree's value outside of WA, the time limitations if left unused



(perishability) and the university's role in delivering the educational service to the student (consumption).

None of these inquiries involved this study's participants engaging in complex theoretical marketing matrixes, suggesting that the views of Canterbury (1999) and Ramachandran (2010) hold true: university marketing is not a coherent set of traditional marketing practices. Rather, the formulation of efficient direct relationship marketing strategies with prospective students provides a direct and efficient framework to assist students who initiate conversation.

Further, Information Technology is now fundamental to university marketing towards international students, given the way this study showed how prevalent participants engaged with the Internet and how universities can create relationships by simply using their websites as an entry point for the potential student. This confirms the propositions stated by Mazzarol et al. (2003), Verbik and Lasanowki (2007) as well as Gutman and Miaoulis (2003) who all affirm that the use of interactive high level technology provides universities with the ability to interact and attempt to sway prospective students' decision-making, by encouraging relationships as early as possible. Applied to the findings, participants anticipated and received efficient, positive responses from universities. They expected personalised treatment and accessible information during communications with the respective institution and by all accounts were satisfied with the results, helping them choose their university.

The consequence of this idea is that the study participants regarded the Internet as the an important communication tool for them to interact with their potential schools. Their chosen universities encouraged relationship building using the digital interface as

a method for participants to feel comfortable in gathering information, form a perception and finally a decision as to whether they should apply to a university.

This notion endorses the views of Phang (2013) who speculated that with the rise of online communications, universities must adapt and offer sophisticated channels of communication or face diminished competitiveness. This is important for international postgraduate students who are experienced purchasers of education services and whose previous tertiary skills may provide them with the analytical and critical skills to obtain specific and relevant information. As the results of this study propose, higher education institutions are attentive to these participants' needs, thereby seeking to encourage relationships with potential students, which not only helps them obtain information specific to their circumstances, but makes the potential student feel a sense of association with their prospective institution, swaying them in purchasing their degree from that specific institution.

The findings from this study also showed that participants who negotiated directly (using the Internet as a means of communication) with their prospective institutions were wholly satisfied with the responses received. This implies that the direct mode of communication provided this study's participants with a sense of satisfaction about the relationship, resulting in the participant considering enrolling in the university program. This extends the study of Gomes and Murphy (2003) whose work on university email communications towards students indicated that personalised and efficient replies were perceived by the prospective student as professional, reflective of the type of institution they may want to attend, partly because of the relationship building.

In summary, the high levels of satisfaction amongst participants are a result of each university's concise and well-tailored marketing plans, involving efficient and

personalised communications directed to potential postgraduate students. Combined with improved relationship building, participants could obtain the relevant data sought. The net outcome of these highly developed, student-centric and well-structured technological programs, provided another reason for participants to consider choosing their respective institution.

*'Twinning'*. While universities' marketing policies shifted to accommodate new technologies, higher education institutions continued to develop transnational relationships with similar bodies in foreign jurisdictions, for promotion, research purposes, and to attract international students (Cheung et al., 2016).

The findings from this study found that where available, participants used their undergraduate alumni university as a conduit to locate a prospective host university. Participants whose alma maters associated with twinned universities overseas, were more likely than not to inquire about the programs available at the institution in WA. Some participants proceeded to enrol in the related university (although not at saturation levels), offering a simplified application process, discounted tuition, assistance with administrative matters and more importantly a sense of belonging.

The literature suggests that twinning a local institution with a foreign university is a successful marketing strategy that forms a mutually beneficial relationship for both establishments by developing the image of the respective institutions (Thomas, 2016). The relationship building is highly successful in attracting postgraduate students, by engaging the student in the marketing process, rather than simply treating them as a commodity (Helmsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). This study appears to support these views, providing evidence that where possible, twinning assists in motivating students to choose a specific university.

*Institutional image.* As an indirect marketing attribute, participants from this study viewed the image and reputation of their prospective university as a motivating factor when choosing a host destination. This theme incorporated three variables: prestige, recognition and quality of teaching. Overall, the findings from this study suggested that WA based universities have positioned themselves to attract specific cohorts through international league tables, the development of an ‘image’ and delivering world standard teaching quality.

*University prestige.* The current study found that participants relied on the international reputation and prestige of their chosen institution as an important consideration in their decision-making. Those study participants hailing from developing countries preferred to study in a Western English speaking university with a high international ranking compared to a local institution, as suggested by Kamal Basha, Sweeney, and Soutar (2016) in their paper on Malaysian and Chinese university preference. Those participants originating from Western countries favoured universities whose reputation and recognition was similar to or greater than their countries’ universities. The research on this latter point is scant with respect to overseas degrees, rather focusing upon study abroad programs.

In determining the specific reputation of a local WA university, study participants consulted international rankings tables as confirmatory checks upon the recommendation provided to them. These participants sought to verify whether the international image of the proposed institution matched their selection, but were not wholly reliant upon the tables as a singular decision-making variable.

This is consistent with the findings by Dobrota et al. (2016) who argued that league tables are merely “a comparative tool to help prospective international students

[to] shortlist potential universities on a global scale” (p. 201), or as Dill and Soo (2005), OECD (2004) as well as Mazarrol et al. (2000) all state, the tables are only one indicator of international student decision-making, serving as a measure of suitability rather than prestige or cost (Hazelkorn, 2011). It is this last point which is crucial in understanding the behaviour of the participants in this study: that is, study participants provided several different reasons for their decision to study in WA.

As such, participants in this study did not regard the rankings tables as the intended student-centred blunt instrument, whose objective is to simplify the complexities involved in choosing a university and to help sway a prospective student (Clarke, 2007). Rather, participants in the current investigation used the league tables to assist in reaching a decision by reassuring themselves about the reputation of the university. This is consistent with the findings of Hazelkorn (2007) who suggested that university students use the tables as a supportive mechanism when choosing a university and its future benefit to them.

As such, while study participants appeared interested in the prestige rating of various universities, such rankings appeared insufficient to meet their specific needs in choosing an institution. As the research suggests in the UK, USA and Australia, international students do not rely upon a single factor when considering an institution, but use a multi-factor approach, providing a number of reasons for choosing their destination (Dill & Soo, 2005; McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998). As Ehrenberg (2002) stated more than fifteen years ago, but which proposition remains true today,

*Once one realizes that different students may value the characteristics of universities differently, the notion that one can come up with a single number that summarizes the overall ranking of an academic institution seems quite silly. (p. 53)*

In summary, participants from this study appeared cognisant of league tables as a measure of university reputation, but did not place a singular weight against these indexes, preferring to use the tables as confirmation against their decisions. To that end, university league tables, as a gauge of reputation should therefore, be regarded as one of a few variables that these participants considered when choosing WA as their destination.

***Quality of teaching (supervision).*** Participants interviewed in this study who were enrolled in a HDR considered their prospective university's teaching quality (supervision) as an important factor in their decision-making. More specifically, this cohort considered the potential supervisor's teaching strategies and experience as important to their scholarship, guiding them through the perils of complex and lengthy research degrees. Those participants enrolled in coursework did not regard teaching quality as important to their decision-making.

This finding confirms the early research conducted by Aspland and O'Donoghue (1994), as well as Rowley (1997), who both found that international research students believe the success of their studies is commensurate with excellence in teaching (amongst other things), including professionalism, critical feedback with respect to both topic, thesis writing as well as goal setting.

HDR students consider complex research questions over a two to four-year period, without substantial teacher input (Phillips & Pugh, 2000). Consequently, the relationship with their supervisors and their critical feedback is crucial to not only the student's experience, but to their success and outcome. It is noteworthy that despite over twenty years of increased numbers of international HDR students attending Australian universities, the factors that attract students remain consistent, suggesting a clear prerogative amongst international research students: that is, to attain a high quality research degree.

It would appear for this reason, that this study's HDR participants tended to render their decision to choose an institution in WA, partly on the selection of an appropriate supervisor. They desired a close working relationship with a potential supervisor who could ably guide them through their degrees, structuring what is traditionally a highly unstructured process (Boehe, 2016). As suggested by Maxwell and Smyth (2011), participants pursued supervisors who could "embody the research process and the research product" (p. 227) with emphasis upon safeguarding their academic writing skills and English usage.

To that end, this study's participants sought well-connected, highly reputable supervisors who they perceived could be depended upon for both thesis support and access to scholarly networks for career advancement. The rationale for this decision-making behaviour is supported by Boehe (2016), who advocated that research students endeavour to acquire their supervisor's academic skills, cognisant that the acquisition of both theoretical and methodological knowledge lies with their supervisor. Further, the student is hopeful that the supervisor is encouraged to collaborate and assist them with publishing their research findings, a perceived requisite for academic employment.

In summary, this research found that HDR participants were motivated in choosing their destination, in part, by acquiring a well-regarded academic supervisor who could guide them through their independent project. While this is an important consideration, it is vital to acknowledge that it is only one of a number of reasons that influenced participants to choose a WA public university as their destination.

**Proposition four: Country/city image effect.** The fourth proposition indicates that the image of a host country, in this case Australia, reflects positively upon the impression of the city, namely Perth, where the prospective university student is enrolled. In this research, participants were pulled to WA due to the state's culturally diverse, liberal attitudes, Mediterranean climate, outdoor lifestyle and a stable economic and political system. In addition, the capital city of Perth and the home to the main campuses of the public universities, offered participants opportunities for non-English speakers to improve their language abilities, while living within a modern democratic and diverse country.

These findings reflect the views of both Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Choi et al. (2012) as well as Hilden (2011), who proposed that students choose a country/city for a host of push-pull inter-related reasons, including the perception of a relaxed and outdoor lifestyle, English language acquisition, Western culture and political stability.

However, unlike Mpinganjira (2009), participants in this study did not regard these country/city image effects as a singular determinant decision-making factor, but contingent upon other variables, most noticeably personal reasons, as illustrated on the new international postgraduate decision-making model (Figure 6.2). This notion is perhaps more clearly understood by analysing participants' previous international experiences and developing worldviews. Each of these matters is discussed below.



*Cultural immersion.* This thesis proposes that the decision to study in WA is linked with each study participant's intention to migrate by offering them an evaluation of the 'space around them' prior to reaching a decision to remain in Australia. As Wolpert (1965) suggested, potential migrants choose their destination by appraising (or comparing) the 'value' of the country chosen in relation to their home. This is not simply an economic calculation, but a function of the individual's experiences and motivations to forge their own distinct identity.

Participants in the current study endeavoured to gauge WA by experiencing the city-scape, while accepting guidance through the subjective lens of their friends and family. Participants effectively signed onto the local social contract, which allowed them the opportunity to critically and rationally evaluate the local culture, society and politics. As such, cultural inquiry becomes a crucial aspect of this process and forms an intrinsic part of participants' decision-making processes. It achieves this by evaluating the way participants thought about Australia as a liveable destination. This included obtaining advice from others as to their experiences as well as understanding Australia as an inherently liberal, politically and economically stable society.

The findings from this study are not new, suggesting the importance of this variable to students when deciding upon a decision to study overseas: for example, Mpinganjira (2009), in his paper on students studying at one university in South Africa, found that international students seek new experiences when choosing a destination. These experiences include learning about other cultures, suggesting that cultural inquiry is not limited to a specific host destination, but is more than likely to be construed as an innate motivator amongst many international students regardless of destination.

In fact, this idea corresponds to the research by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) who considered cultural inquiry as a factor in defining a student's identity. In that study, the author hypothesised that international students chose a destination partly on how they viewed the impact of immersing in a new culture may assist them in maturing as adults.

Like both the students surveyed in the Mpinganjira (2009) and Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) research projects, participants in this study sought to explore their previously held beliefs in relation to Western culture. Those participants from countries that enmeshed religion with the state, coveted the experience to live within a society that valued individual rights above theocratic principles. They regarded Australia's political and social conditions preferable to those at home, relating stories of disenfranchisement, social breakdown, inadequate security and corruption, usually within the context of unstable social and political systems.

The findings from this study are important for several reasons. Firstly, as Brown (2009) suggests, students seek out cross cultural experiences to improve their understanding of the world around them. Those participants from a non-Western background were able to utilise their experience in order to validate their beliefs about Australia or change their attitudes. The results showed this study's participants chose WA as a suitable destination in part because of their desire to calibrate their beliefs with their experiences. As a result, these participants were motivated to study in WA due to their intrinsic positive beliefs about the local society.

Secondly, the inter-relationship of the push-pull model shows a connection between country image and advice: for example, participants' family and friends advised them that engaging within local communities would speed up the acculturation

process, enhance student experience and increase personal growth. Participants adhered to this advice, appearing to engage with local communities, including connecting with neighbourhood sporting groups, developing networks and joining interest groups. These positive encounters confirmed participants' preference for choosing WA as a destination, suggesting that by taking the advice of others, they would be able to experience and enjoy a different culture. Invariably, such a decision impacted this study's participants' decisions to study in WA, where these cultural experiences could be had.

Thirdly, previous research suggests that international students sometimes report prejudice as students, which can negatively influence their decision to study overseas (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; Jackson, 2005; Kasravi, 2009). Study participants did not indicate that they considered stigma, prejudice, discrimination or assimilation difficulties as relevant to their decision-making. In fact, participants felt optimistic about choosing WA as a study destination. Explanations for the variance in this finding may be due to the sampling variations: for example, the above publications consisted of international students sampled at American universities, while this study sampled post-choice postgraduate students in WA. Further, it may well be that this study's postgraduate cohort is generally older, more self-assured with better interpersonal and coping skills than their undergraduate counter-parts.

In summary, participants' decision-making was predicated upon their understanding of the benefit in becoming successful and active community members as advised by their friends, colleagues and family members. When making their decision to study in WA, participants sought to understand and learn about their prospective local city, while retaining their own values and ethnicity. The pre-choice belief that

they would have an enhanced experience by engaging in local communities without threats of racial bigotry positively impacted this study's participants to choose WA as a study destination.

*Lifestyle.* This study's participants considered the Perth locale and its environment as an advantageous destination because of its reputation as an easy city in which to live. Participants admitted awareness prior to enrolment of WA's environmental reputation and Perth's small city-scape, suggesting a preference for a discreet type of host city.

This finding corresponds to the research conducted by Cubillo et al. (2006), as well as Chen (2007), who hypothesised that international students are drawn to a country and/or city because of a high liveability index (the sum of factors that add up to a community's quality of life). The perception of Australia, and more particularly of WA, as a distinctly open place to live, with a clean and welcoming environment, suggests that participants from this study preferred this lifestyle to denser urban cities such as Melbourne, Sydney and London. The findings suggest that WA is distinct amongst study destinations for its wide open spaces, low density housing, relatively limited congestion and negligible environmental hazards.

An analysis of this study's finding suggests that lifestyle appears to be one of several pull factors influencing participants in their decision-making. This is consistent with the study by Wilkins et al. (2008) who suggested that lifestyle is but one of several factors that influence students in choosing an overseas destination along with English language acquisition and Western culture.

This study's participants conceded that whilst studying involves considerable time, they sought a destination that would be conducive to the lifestyle they were

seeking. While these environmental factors are passive considerations, Mori (2000) suggests that such lifestyle features are crucial to international students' well-being and, therefore, are an important determinant in student decision-making.

In comparison to the prevailing research, Bodycott (2009), Chen (2007) and Cubillo et al. (2006), all highlight the attractiveness of a city/country advantages such as lifestyle in attracting overseas students, but underestimate the importance of liveability as a determinant of study satisfaction. As such, this study's finding on lifestyle extends the existing research, suggesting that liveability is a significant component of postgraduate student decision-making in WA, helping to pull students because of its reputation as a highly liveable city. Consequently, study participants regarded a satisfying lifestyle as embodying a more sustained experience, reinforcing the desire to remain in the country.

**Safety.** The results from this study suggested that participants were safety conscious and sought a secure destination. This is consistent with the literature including the research conducted by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Chen and Zimitat (2006) Maringe and Carter (2007)), Marginson et al. (2010) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) who all suggested that personal safety is a motivating factor amongst international students when choosing a study destination.

In reaching the decision to choose WA, study participants investigated local WA attitudes towards international students as well as the availability of campus security and community policing and were satisfied with the level of protection available to them. Notwithstanding, this study's participants were cognisant, prior to their decision to study in WA, of the requirement to be careful always, to avoid unknown areas and not to engage in risky behaviour, which may increase the chance of assault.

The findings appear to suggest that the WA State Government's attempt to negate the influence of past assaults on international students in both Melbourne and Sydney are working (NEAS/ISANA, 2008; UA, 2009). Participants seemed to recognise the specific safety strategies that the WA government and its local public universities have taken to combat any potential threats against its international student cohort.

Whilst the research in this discrete area remains underdeveloped, it appears that an amalgamation of processes and policies to limit incidences of violence against international students, together with a concerted effort to improve the perception that international students are safe, have succeeded in reducing anxieties amongst potential overseas students who choose WA as a study destination.

*English fluency.* AIEF (1998), Chen (2008), Choi et al. (2012) as well as Counsell (2011) suggested that international students are motivated to choose a specific destination in large part to improve their English language skills. The desire for English language fluency pulls non-English speaking students to English-speaking countries, where both tuition and daily life is conducted in English. Students were aware that immersion into the local society through language acquisition is a key determinant of language fluency (Genesee, 1985).

The literature regards the desire for English skills as a motivating factor in the decision-making process of international students, presupposing a link between a student's yearning to be bilingual, which then forges further employment opportunities as well as facilitating migration (Padlee, Kamaruddin, & Baharun, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010).

This study confirmed these views, finding that participants understood English fluency as an important consideration for transnational mobility, migration and career

advancement, despite their existing English skills. Implicit within this proposition sits a number of contrasting observations. Firstly, the participant cohort from this study consisted of postgraduate students only, as opposed to the research by Padlee et al. (2010) as well as Sherry et al. (2010), whose studies did not discriminate between student enrolment types. A majority of participants from this study, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, acquired their undergraduate degrees in English. Consequently, by the time they enrolled in their postgraduate course, these study participants already possessed a high level of English fluency.

Secondly, study participants could not enroll in an Australian university accredited postgraduate degree without a minimum English language requirement (Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, Walkinshaw, Michael, & Lobo, 2017). By enrolment, all study participants professed to successfully completing mandatory English language assessment (IELTS), providing them with the necessary English skills to enroll in their course.

Therefore, *prima facie*, the fact that participants already possessed a high degree of English fluency would appear to discount English language skills as a major decision-making factor. However, consistent with the studies by Padlee et al. (2010) as well as Sherry et al. (2010), participants sought to hone their language skills by immersing themselves within the Australian community. As Altbach (2007) suggests, a high degree of English fluency provides greater employment opportunities as well as immigration points.

Accordingly, study participants understood that Australia is a uni-lingual country and that English language inefficiencies may hinder their acculturation, schooling, job and migration prospects. This may account for the fact that all participants defended

vigorously their ability to communicate to a high level in English including knowledge of idioms, slang and academic English.

### **Summary**

In review, the key findings from this study have identified significant factors that encompassed international postgraduate student decision-making specific to WA.

Firstly, students are sensitive to the cost of studying abroad, including those who were awarded scholarships. As a result, participants sought universities that offered cheaper tuition fees, cities with relatively lower costs of living and third party contributions to assist with their expenses. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which suggests cost is a negative factor in students' decision-making (Mazzarol et al., 2001).

Secondly, students sought the advice of family, friends and colleagues in choosing both a destination and a university. Participants had a high regard for familial advice, similar to the studies conducted by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Pimpa (2002). Possible reasons for these attitudes include close family connections (Chen & Zimitat, 2006), cultural imperatives (Ivy, 2002) and interest in family members who had previously studied overseas (Pimpa, 2002).

Participants also regarded friends as important advisors, extending the findings of Kasravi (2009). However, unlike the publications by Buddhichiwin (2013) and Beech (2015), this research found that participants seemed to consider the information obtained from friends as guidance, suggesting a level of self-assurance and independence in their decision-making. This idea has some foundation in the research by Schwiesfurth and Gu (2009).

In the same way that participants regarded the advice of friends, they also sought the opinions of teachers/colleagues in helping them with their decision. Participants



merely sought information about their proposed choice, rather than being overly influenced, which was dissimilar to the study by Maringe and Carter (2007). In addition, HDR students preferred the advice of potential supervisors over their home-town teachers, corresponding to the research by Boehe (2016).

Thirdly, almost all participants considered the opportunity to study abroad as the impetus to migrate from their home country to Australia. This is consistent with the research by Arthur and Flynn (2011), whereby participants appeared to be pulled to Australia because of superior job prospects, better life opportunities and trans-national mobility (Baas, 2016).

Fourthly, participants were motivated to study in WA because of enhanced job prospects, a common thread in the extant literature. There appeared an optimism amongst participants that their education would provide them with a comparative advantage in the market place, similar to the findings by Bourke (2000) and Buddhichiwin (2003), provide them with employment mobility (Findlay et al., 2011), and allow them to trade on their overseas education (Kolster, 2014).

Finally, the discussion considered lifestyle, cultural and marketing variables as decision-making factors. In all respects, participants suggested these elements contributed to their choice of destination, pulling them to WA. These findings suggested that participants engaged in complex processes, which involved the creation of a decision-making matrix, taking into account all the relevant issues.

In all respects, the factors described above form the development of the model that explains postgraduate student decision-making in WA. Contrasted with the literature on international undergraduate students, this study's participants appeared more able to understand their needs and the function of the time they spend overseas.

The following and final chapter of this thesis, considers how participants' decision-making can be reflected in recommendations for both WA universities and government, to ensure that local WA universities maintain their international competitiveness in both attracting and maintaining postgraduate international student numbers. The chapter also reflects upon the study's limitations and implications for future research.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The final chapter summarises the findings of this research based upon the main objective of this study: to analyse the variables that influence postgraduate students who chose WA as a study destination.

In this chapter, the research is described, including the significance of the study. The key findings are then condensed and discussed with reference to the available literature. The chapter then reveals this study's key contributions to the existing body of knowledge, recognises various study limitations, and, finally considers implications and recommendations for future research.

### **Research Overview**

The impetus for this study was the growing demand amongst international postgraduate students to study overseas, resulting in increased competition amongst universities to attract them (Cubillo et al., 2006). This is not limited to traditional study destinations such as the UK, USA and Australia, but to other countries such as France and China who are also vying for a segment of the educational tourism market.

For WA to maintain and build on its existing market share, it is crucial to understand how their local universities and government have achieved past success and further how they can maintain their competitive advantage. To do this, WA tertiary institutions and government must understand what approaches are best suited to attract potential students.

In exploring international postgraduate decision-making, three research questions were considered:

1. How do international postgraduate students describe and explain why they selected WA as their host destination?
2. What factors do a qualitative survey identify as pertinent to international postgraduate students' decisions to study in WA?
3. What are the relationships between the factors that influence international postgraduate students' decision to study in WA?

These exploratory questions were framed using two research frameworks: firstly, social constructivism acted as the philosophical framework informing the qualitative methodology. This method utilised interview questions and a focus group to elicit the motives that influenced participants' reasons in choosing WA as a study destination.

Secondly, the push-pull model of international student decision-making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) acted as the substantial part of the theoretical framework. This theory informed the research questions posed to participants. Push factors involve those variables which convince a student to leave their home to study elsewhere, including political and economic instability. Pull factors are those components that draw a student to a destination, such as cultural inquiry, English language acquisition and world leading education programs and facilities.

To determine potential variables that may be relevant to international postgraduate students, this study undertook a comprehensive examination of the existing research on international student decision-making that used push-pull modelling as its framework (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

To ascertain the appropriate themes that could be put to participants in determining their motivations to study in WA, this thesis firstly considered the model designed by Cubillo et al. (2006). These authors proposed several inter-related factors

that influenced international students when choosing an overseas destination. The themes and their associated variables are described as follows:

- Personal reasons: advice, personal improvement and ethnocentrism;
- Country image effect: cultural proximity, social and academic reputation and socioeconomic level;
- City effect: city dimension, city image, cost of living and environment;
- Institutional image: quality of professors, institutions prestige, international recognition, communication and campus facilities; and
- Programme evaluation: recognition, suitability, specialization and costs/finance.

These variables were not considered sufficient to determine this study's research questions because of the nuanced considerations relevant to the postgraduate cohort. In that regard, this thesis subscribed to the views of both Chen (2007) and Rounsaville (2012) who deemed postgraduate students as a distinct group of international students who are subject to their own decision-making factors. As such, the literature suggested a discrete set of factors that were explicitly relevant in motivating postgraduate students to study overseas including:

- Employability/career advancement;
- Migration;
- Safety; and
- English fluency.

These additional variables were added to the model and were intrinsic in the formulation of questions posed to participants during the interviews and focus group.

Based on the results and discussion set out in Chapters Five and Six, this concluding chapter presents the final inferences drawn from this research study. The key findings are presented in three sections which reflect the research study's objectives.

### **Conclusions from the Data**

Two main conclusions were drawn from the data: the definitive factors relevant to international postgraduate students seeking to study in WA, and the inter-relationships between those factors.

**Conclusion one: Factors motivating international postgraduate students to study in WA.** There is no published research that considers solely the motivations of postgraduate students when choosing to study in WA. Many of the studies reviewed in Chapter Two that refer to postgraduate students only contextualise the host country as the destination, rather than the specific state or province: for example, in Australia see Choi, Nieminen and Townson (2012); Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart and Choo (2001), in the UK see Rounsaville (2011) and, in the USA see Roberts (2012). While these studies suggest a variety of push-pull factors influence students to choose a host country, none of the Australian focused studies considered solely the impact of WA on international postgraduate student decision-making.

This research study aimed to remove that gap in the body of knowledge by investigating the factors that impact international students in choosing WA as an educational host. The findings in this thesis, obtained from interviews and a focus group, revealed that there are several factors that are relevant only to the decision of international postgraduate students choosing to study in WA. The importance of this

study's finding is that the themes discerned, together with their variables are different to the themes and factors illustrated by Cubillo et al. (2006) and illustrated at Figure 3.2 in their generalised model of international student decision-making.

***Proposition one factors.*** The results in Chapter Six, proposition one, illustrate advice, employability and personal growth as key variables of the personal reasons that motivated participants to choose WA as a study destinations. These factors are summarised below.

*Advice.* While participants in this study appeared to have a high regard for familial advice, they were less enamoured by the guidance offered from friends and teachers/colleagues. Rather, they considered this instruction more akin to confirmatory information.

Notwithstanding this characterisation of advice, the findings suggested that guidance received from family, friends and colleagues/teachers represented a positive influential marker for students studying in WA. These findings confirmed the view of Pimpa (2003), that participants' families are key sources in developing the student's decision to study overseas.

On the other hand, unlike the findings of Kasravi (2009) and Beech (2015), friends' influence upon participants' decision-making was limited to supporting them with guidance, rather than directing them towards an outcome. This raises matters of independence and confidence in participants' decision-making. Confirming the views of Gu (2009), this study found that it is more than likely that participants were self-reliant, had a high degree of self-efficacy in reaching a decision, were older, worldly as well as more adept at critical problem solving.

In general, participants had a high regard for the trustworthiness and reliability of the advice received, but appeared to maintain a sense of independence and objectivity when choosing their study destination. This is an important aspect of postgraduate students' decision-making processes. It raises issues of maturation and self-awareness as psycho-social factors within participants' decision-making processes. While it is not the scope of this research to consider these attributes as factors in students' decision-making, an extension of this study could investigate these personality traits as aspects of the decision-making process.

In summary, the knowledge gained through informative advice was an important aspect of the participants' decision-making process. It helped in the decision-making process and provided participants with the confidence in reaching an outcome.

*Employability.* Participants were drawn to study in WA because of the future advantage that such an education will have upon both their employability and their career prospects. This factor appeared to be about perception, that is, how future employers will perceive a foreign postgraduate education as opposed to a local degree. Participants seemed driven by global employment factors where a comparative skill advantage was identified as providing an opportunity to achieve more gainful future employment.

*Personal growth.* Participants from non-Western countries were drawn to WA because of its Western culture, its liberal democracy and national ethos. Confirming the views of Brown (2009), participants appeared to pursue their own identities by engaging with Australian values. Participants felt they could achieve this personal growth because they were not restricted in their individual freedoms, unburdened by familial pressures and cultural traditions.



These findings echo the views of more generalised studies on international student decision-making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Despite participants' ages, their worldlier view and greater skills than undergraduate students, they still sought to continue to develop themselves socially, morally and cognitively, taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them as international students in achieving personal growth.

***Proposition two factors.*** Proposition two suggests migration as a key motivator for participants when choosing WA as a study destinations.

***Migration.*** Cubillo et al. (2006) did not consider migration as a factor that motivated international students when choosing a study destination. The result of this study found otherwise, proposing that regardless of participants' origins, at some point along their education journey they began to consider emigrating to Australia. While this was sometimes a pre-meditated decision, participants' reasons were complex and altered as they acclimatized to the Australian way of life.

This raises the importance of acculturation and experience upon participants' decision-making, but also impacts upon the relationship between migration and other push-pull factors. These relationships are thoroughly discussed below in Conclusion Two.

***Proposition three factors.*** Proposition three proposed cost, marketing and teaching quality as indicators of international student decision-making, which are summarised as follows:

***Cost.*** Participants were price sensitive to the cost of obtaining an international education, despite tuition fees in WA perceived as being more moderately priced than in the UK and USA. This should be regarded as a relative strength of WA's public

university system, whereby participants still professed the quality of their education as world class, but at a more affordable cost.

For those participants in possession of a scholarship, the financial impost was reduced slightly. This is consistent with the prevailing literature (Bista & Dagley, 2015), suggesting that participants in receipt of bursaries valued them immensely, but continued to remain price sensitive to non-tuition fee matters such as living expenses.

In that regard, these participants did not consider their scholarships to be sufficient to meet their overall expense while living in WA, which typically required supplementation from third parties. Indeed, this was a result of scholarship holders feeling they had little recourse to alleviate their financial concerns due to employment conditions, visa restrictions and time constraints due to study.

*University marketing.* This thesis found that participants were influenced by four important aspects of university marketing: education agents, communications, institutional image and teaching quality.

With respect to third party education agents, the present study found that participants were nonplussed about the ethical questions that are prevalent within the historical literature (Pimpa, 2003). Services provided by agents were well regarded by participants especially vis-a-vis university and visa application processes. It is likely, as Altbach and Reisberg (2015) argue, that because of students' complex decision-making processes, much of the authority that agents have previously wielded over students has diminished.

Participants used their prospective university websites to obtain knowledge and information about both the city and the institution. This 'digital journey' appears to be the most edifying and direct way for students to investigate their study options.

Participants exploited international university ranking tables as a measure of the reputation of their prospective university in WA. They treated the tables as data, to verify whether the university's image matched their selection. Participants were not wholly reliant upon the tables as a means of decision-making, rather, much like they regarded the advice received from friends, colleagues and teachers, they utilised the tables as a support mechanism to help them reach a decision.

Participants enrolled in a HDR considered the efficacy of a potential supervisor as crucial to their decision to choose a university in WA. These participants felt their success would be in large part dependent in the way they are supervised.

***Proposition four factors.*** Proposition four accounts for country/city effect which is made up of cultural inquiry, lifestyle, safety considerations and English language acquisition/fluency.

***Country/city effect.*** Participants also indicated that they were influenced by aspects of Australia, the State of WA and its capital city Perth when choosing their study destination. Variables included cultural inquiry, lifestyle, safety and English fluency.

Participants appraised Perth prior to enrolling in their preferred course, noting it is a city that offered them a politically and economically stable government with a liberal attitude towards individual rights. Those participants, particularly from Asian countries, regarded this environment as a location where they could seek out cross-cultural experiences, engaging with the wider community and become civically active members of their communities. They were keen to acculturate, to learn and gainfully mature through their experiences as international students.

Participants regarded livability as an important element in their decision-making. They rated Perth as a small city with wide open spaces, steering them away from larger more congested cities like Melbourne and Sydney.

As a facet of lifestyle, participants gave a great deal of weight to their own personal safety due to several historical incidents involving international students in Australia. Participants were cognisant of the steps the WA government has taken to protect its international students, resulting in broad agreement that Perth is a safe city in which to study.

Corresponding to the literature, the findings from this study suggested that participants from non-English speaking backgrounds regarded English fluency as a relevant consideration to increase their employment prospects and migratory intentions. Participants welcomed the opportunity to immerse themselves in an English spoken society to improve their language skills, but were adamant that English fluency was not a major factor in their decision-making.

**Conclusion two: Inter-relationships between decision-making factors.** The third research question inquired as to the interaction between the variables that influenced participants. The findings suggested that decision-making is a complex exercise that involves numerous inter-related factors. The model at Figure 6.2 in Chapter Six illustrates these possible relationships, which may be summarised as follows:

***Personal reasons and country image impact migratory intention.*** Migratory intention appeared to be a pre-choice study consideration, whereby participants were drawn to various lifestyle and cultural factors relevant to WA, including liveability,

English language fluency and safety: all important aspects of participants' decisions to choose WA as a study destination.

In addition, while participants believed their postgraduate degrees would provide them with a comparative advantage in the global workforce, they considered obtaining employment within their host city, thereby providing them with a motive to remain in WA. In other words, participants were pulled to WA by a variety of factors, powerful enough to convince them to remain in the country.

Most participants also believed that an Australian permanent residency visa would provide them with improved social mobility and transnational mobility, allowing them to become global citizens, a notion that would be very difficult to achieve if they remained in their home countries.

***Program evaluation and country impacted upon each other.*** Participants considered the impact of living costs, safety, lifestyle and English fluency as key characteristics of choosing WA as a destination. Conjointly, participants weighed up the impact of tuition fees and teaching quality (supervision) when deciding upon a university.

***Personal reasons and country image impacted upon each other.*** Participants were drawn to Australia because of its diverse culture and liberal polity. By studying in WA, participants felt they could mature, become more independent and better individuals, which would not only improve their employability but assist them in becoming more socially mobile and culturally adept at navigating an increasingly globalised world.

In the final analysis, there does not appear to be any singular and unique factors that influenced participants in choosing WA as a destination. As described in the

literature, participants were motivated by an array of inter-related push and pull characteristics, although pull factors seemed to dominate the inquiry: for example, Chen and Zimitat (2006) suggested pull factors dominated students' decision-making, citing employability, immigration, cultural inquiry and self-improvement as key motivators. In that regard, the pull of Australia as a culturally liberal country, combined with the high liveability rating that participants awarded WA, plus the nationally and internationally competitive tuition fees and living costs all contributed in some part to the decision to study in WA.

In summary, international students applied specific variables in their decision-making processes. These variables should not be considered as stand-alone motivating factors, but inter-related with other considerations. The new model illustrating the factors and their inter-relationships is a theoretical understanding of the rational choices and social influences that motivated participants to choose WA as their host State. It is a nuanced reflection of the participation cohort that incorporates some of the factors suggested by Cubillo et al. (2006), but also hypothesises that the existing model of international student decision-making is inadequate when dealing with postgraduate students in WA.

This study sought to define both the factors and the interrelationships between these factors, from both a rational and socially influenced perspective. The thesis provides evidence of the outcomes of these decision-making processes, namely the development of a model that purports to suggest the reasons why international postgraduate students choose WA as a study destination.

The findings from this study may be used by both policy makers and university marketers to further enhance both enrolment and student experience to maintain WA as

a preferred destination for international postgraduate students. The next section considers these recommendations in detail.

### **Recommendations**

As result of the two main conclusions of this study, there are four recommendations that could be used to increase international postgraduate student numbers at WA universities:

1. Enhanced marketing strategies.
2. Amendments to existing visa regulations to allow more favourable conditions that allow graduates to obtain employment and remain in Australia
3. Offer improved and more targeted scholarships to postgraduate students.
4. Provide additional marketing materials to education agents.

Each of these recommendations are considered below.

**Enhanced marketing strategies to attract more overseas students.** The historic literature lacks a distinct and comprehensive consideration of the need to improve marketisation and policy for local universities in WA to retain a competitive advantage. In that regard, developing countries like India and China continue to promote education amongst its growing middle class.

WA universities have an opportunity to capture a growing number of these international students, but must adapt marketing strategies that are appropriate for an increasingly dynamic and competitive global market. The findings of this investigation suggest that WA universities apply relatively generalised and undifferentiated marketing strategies incorporating normative modes of advertising such as education agents and websites. While these arrangements are appropriate and relatively successful,

there is a need to invest in more creative strategies to remain internationally competitive.

Such approaches should include carefully crafted branding and positioning within foreign markets, partnerships with multinational industry, improved relationships with overseas schools and other subsidiary partners, development of offshore campuses, building upon the relationships formed between alumni and their alma mater, advertising lifestyle factors as well as improved relationship building with education agents.

For smaller universities, this process may be more demanding, but could allow them to focus on niche markets, developing and building reputations that capture students seeking specific skill sets. Universities that remain small, locally focused and reliant on traditional modes of marketing are unlikely to be competitive in the future.

**Amendments to existing visa regulations to allow more favourable conditions that allow graduates to obtain employment and remain in Australia.** For Australia to remain an attractive educational hub, it should ensure that migratory policies are stable and consistent. Australia should continue to pursue its long term and deliberate strategy to priorities postgraduate international students in the same way as Canada pursues its migration policy towards overseas students.

By investing in migration policies that attract postgraduate international students who are highly capable, acculturated, or willing to acculturate, motivated and desire to remain in the country, Australia will likely remain a preferred destination.

Focus should be on educating students to fill local labor market shortages, improve the skills of the workforce and accumulate the necessary human capital to fill employment shortages. By offering permanent residency to these foreign students, the



federal government's policy objectives can be met with minimum labor market disruptions.

In that way, these strategies serve to transition Australia into a country which previously recruited imported talent rather than rely upon the existing supply of labour, including postgraduate international students. By continuing to shift policy, skilled international students are more able to transition from student to permanent resident as part of a developing segment of Australia's immigration policy.

Continued immigration reform is necessary, including expanding the skilled based visa classes (points system) highlighting productivity as key indicators. Measures to attract highly skilled immigrants should emphasize Australian made higher education qualifications, cultural assimilation and a greater weight to postgraduate degrees.

How this impacts WA is both a political issue that the State government needs to impress upon its federal counterpart as well as a targeted marketing strategy that promotes the economic and social benefits of living in WA. In practical terms this could translate to State subsidies to local industries offering high level international students who agree to contract to a local company. While these types of measures are fraught with political intrigue, they should not be discounted without proper evaluation to the future benefit of the State.

**Improved and more targeted scholarships to postgraduate students.** The analysis derived from this thesis suggests that the cost of studying overseas remains a consideration for international postgraduate students when choosing a destination. The development of a greater number of enhanced scholarships targeting courses that are strategically important to the future growth of the state should be actively considered.

These scholarships could involve collaboration with local industry, offering sector employment both during and after completion of the degree.

In addition, local universities should consider and actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with universities where international students are sourced, together with industries within those source countries. Such prospects should target HDR students seeking opportunities in research and development. In both instances, scholarships should be highly competitive to vie with those bursaries offered by other major global educational institutions.

WA universities together with the federal government must also consider increasing postgraduate scholarship values. To remain attractive to international students who have an increasing array of choice, policy makers should consider implementing strategies that deliver more financially prudent scholarships through such measures as supplemental stipends and educational discounts to counter the high cost of international education. This is a far-cry from the solutions offered in the literature, which refer predominantly to “praxis-orientated, solutions discourse” (Karram, 2013, p. 1) including interventional packages and services such as support groups designed to soften student experience.

**More targeted marketing towards education agents.** The findings from this research indicates that education agents play a crucial role in promoting specific institutions and providing much welcomed administrative support to prospective students. Despite education agents remaining a controversial area of university promotion, the research suggests that they are undoubtedly a crucial source of information aimed directly at students seeking an overseas institution.

In that regard, WA universities would be wise to create stronger links with agents, much the same way that drug companies promote certain medicines over others. These relationships do not have to impinge upon unethical practices, rather should be constructed to avail the agent of the specific institutions advantages over its competition. At its core, this involves relationship building and cultivating reputable and professional third parties to assist in swaying prospective students towards their institution.

In summary, this thesis confirms the view of existing literature that maintaining and improving the competitive advantage of local universities through various strategies is a multi-faceted and complex task. The intangibility of higher education coupled with its discrete characteristics demand nuanced planning to ensure that specific marketing mechanisms are successful.

### **Limitations of Scope**

Several issues limited the research and as a result affected various aspects of this thesis including the context, objective and data collection as follows:

**Limitation one.** The main objective of the study was to comprehend transnational movements of postgraduate international students in WA. In that regard, the study did not distinguish between variations in post-degree structure. Provided the student enrolled in a postgraduate research or coursework degree, they qualified as a participant. Chapter Six (Discussion Chapter) considered this non-distinction and where applicable analysed the variations in results between the different enrolment variations.

A critically detailed comparative examination is essential if the study's data are to be useful. This includes focusing on segmented groups within the study population: for example, an analysis on the differentiation between research versus coursework students

as well as differences between those students from industrialised versus non-industrialised countries.

**Limitation two.** Another limitation is the constraints of undertaking a research project for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Time and financial constrictions limited the ability to carry out a more comprehensive study incorporating both a qualitative and quantitative component. It would be useful to complete a survey based quantitative study to measure against the responses obtained in the qualitative phase, thereby offering a check and balance upon the results.

**Limitation three.** The third limitation relates to country of origin. The research did not explicitly target students from specific countries, rather by random sampling. The data did not intend to act as a proportional representation of international postgraduate students currently studying in WA.

Be that as it may, more than 50% of all international students studying in Australia in 2016 originated from China, Singapore and Malaysia (DET, 2016). The sample chosen for this study is a more diverse and varied group of students, including participants from all inhabitable continents.

While it is envisaged that international student numbers from China, Singapore, Malaysia and India will continue to supply the bulk of foreign students to Australia in the short term, the study considered the position locally from a dynamic point of view, envisaging that a wider focus and interpretation will offer a more consistent position over time.

**Limitation four.** The final limitation involved the effect of conducting a retrospective study. Participants were only surveyed once they had arrived in WA and were either enrolled in a postgraduate degree or had recently completed their studies.

As the study focused upon the motivations for choosing WA, participants may have had some post-purchase bias. To that end, participants could have sought to justify their choices or inadvertently shaped their answers towards recent experiences.

Notwithstanding these above limitations, the findings are significant in understanding why international postgraduate students chose WA as a study destination. In any event, the limitations do provide a basis for further research.

### **Future Directions for Research**

As stated in the previous section, there are several limitations which should be markers for future research. In other words, this thesis presented a qualitative study to evaluate current trends in postgraduate decision-making amongst international students in WA. The findings should be tested and further research conducted to address the mechanisms by which WA universities can maintain their competitive advantage.

Accordingly, future research should undertake the following:

**Direction one.** Quantitatively test the propositions and model illustrated by the findings in this study, using a larger segment of the population. This should test whether the model is indeed accurate, the strength and relevance of each factor and whether the factors are subject to change depending on the variations in global influences from time to time.

The examination of the variables and their specific rating could be tested using a quantitative factor analysis to determine the relevancy of each factor and then logistic regression modelling to predict and arrange the variables into levels of importance.

Indeed, it was the original intention of this research to incorporate a statistical analysis, however due to time and cost limitations, it was not possible to include this part of the study.

**Direction two.** Examine participants' motivations both prior to deciding on a host city with follow up once the student has completed their degree. This would enable policy makers to have a clearer understanding of how motivations change prior to and during the university course: for example, the influence of migration upon student's decision-making.

**Direction three.** Focus upon a random selection of postgraduate students from both developing and developed countries. There was no consideration for whether the source country was dominant in sending a high volume of students to WA. It is recommended that future research build upon this study by focusing upon the source countries and whether those countries impact the decision to choose WA as a host destination.

**Direction four.** Further research should be conducted to ascertain country specific migration policies and how they impact upon the growth of the postgraduate sector. This is important to determine what reforms are necessary to ensure stable and politically palatable regulations with respect to increasing student numbers. Focus should remain upon the USA, UK and Canada as key competitors.

### **Concluding Comments**

Despite the constant shifts in the global polity, there is a need to remain vigilant as to the reasons international postgraduate students choose a specific host. It is at their peril if universities fail to maintain up to date strategies to attract future students.

Attracting international students is a complex and highly competitive industry. It involves ensuring the host city can attract foreign nationals by offering them opportunities that will enhance their current and future lives. These aspects are at the

core of decision-making and which this research sought to investigate in determining what factors motivate a discrete group of students in choosing to study in WA.

The challenge for WA universities will be to both maintain and win market share from their international and domestic competitors in relation to international postgraduate students. To do so, WA must maintain a competitive advantage over its counterparts. This will require local universities as well as the WA government to collaborate in developing policies that are conducive to allowing the sector to flourish. Failure to acknowledging and then build upon the various factors that are proven to influence students to choose WA as a destination will be detrimental to the health of the local international student industry.

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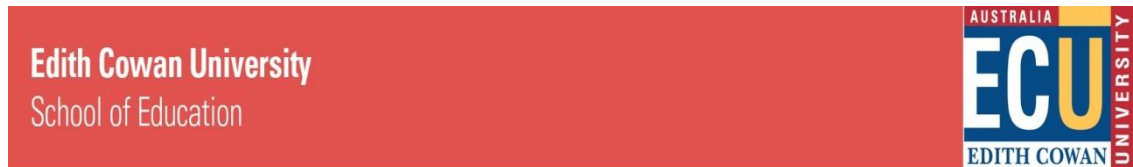
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## Appendix A

## Participant Information Letter and Consent Form



Principal Supervisor: Ass/Prof Graeme Lock Supervisor: [g.lock@ecu.edu.au](mailto:g.lock@ecu.edu.au). Phone - 9370 6529  
Supervisor: Dr Mandie Shean: [m.shean@ecu.edu.au](mailto:m.shean@ecu.edu.au). Phone – 6304 8888  
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Dear

**Investigating International Postgraduate Students Decision-Making Processes when  
Choosing a University in Western Australia**

My name is Steven Cohen. I am conducting a research project as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University. My research project aims to investigate why post graduate international students choose to study in Western Australia as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University. I would like to invite you to take part in the project.

**What are the aims of the research project?**

The aim of the research project is to investigate why international postgraduate students choose to undertake their studies in Western Australia. The results are important to understand what policies and strategies are effective in attracting more international post graduate students as well as ensuring their stay in Western Australia is a positive experience.

**Why you are selected as potential participants**

As a current international postgraduate student currently studying at a Western Australian university, I am keen to hear from you as to how and why you decided to study in Perth. Discussing your experiences with me will provide the study with first-hand information from international post graduate students currently studying in a Western Australian university.

**The stages involved in the project**

The study involves two stages. The first stage consists of one-to-one interviews with current international post graduate students studying in Western Australia. The second stage involves interviewing a focus group.

You can only participate in one stage of the study.

**What are participants expected to do?**

If you agree to participate in the one-to-one interviews you will be asked a series of open ended questions which allow you to discuss your reasons for choosing Western Australia as a destination to undertake your studies. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The discussion will be recorded, transcribed and a copy sent to you for approval prior to the data being used in any analysis.

The focus group is like a group interview. It involves between 3-5 people who will be asked to discuss their decision-making processes for choosing to study in Western Australia. It is conducted in much the same way as the one-to-one interviews, but allows for more open discussion. If you agree to participate, the focus group will take approximately 1 hour of your time.

**Do participants receive any payment?**

Unfortunately, the study will not pay the participants. However, as an appreciation of your participation, you will receive a small gift. Any travelling expenses will be re-imbursed.

**What are the benefits of participating?**

By participating in the interview you will help the research by:

- Providing insights into why you chose to study in Western Australia.
- Allowing the analysis of your reflections to contribute to the development of policies relating to international students.
- Enabling you to determine if the university currently meets your needs as an international student.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Participating in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to take part in the project, then simply do not complete the consent form. This decision should always be made completely freely, and any and all decisions are respected by members of the research team without question.

**Where will the interviews/focus groups take place?**

All interviews will occur at the university where you are currently undertaking your post graduate degree. The interviews will take place in a secure, confidential and quiet location within your university such as a classroom or a private study room. You will be advised of the exact location a few days prior to the interview.



The focus groups will be conducted at Edith Cowan University Mount Lawley campus. These focus groups will also take place in a secure, confidential and quiet location within the university, such as a classroom or a private study room. If you agree to participate in the focus group, you will be advised of the exact location well prior to the scheduled focus group.

**Will I be reimbursed for my transport costs?**

Yes. If you agree to participate in a focus group, you will also be reimbursed for your travel costs to Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley Campus at public transport rates.

You will also be provided with tea, coffee or a soft drink and biscuits.

**What if I wanted to change my initial decision?**

Once a decision is made to participate, you can change your mind at any time within the minimum 5-year storage period of the research data (see below). All contributions made to the project will be destroyed unless explicitly agreed to by you.

If during the interview you feel any discomfort, I will offer to terminate the interview. If you feel discomfort during participation in a focus group, you may withdraw from participation for a while or for the remainder of the discussion. You may request that some or all of your contribution from the data set be excluded.

If the project has already been published at the time you decide to withdraw, your contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication.

**What will happen to the information I give, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?**

The data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at Edith Cowan University. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Your information will only be accessible by my supervisors and me.

Your identity will not be disclosed at any time, except in circumstances where the chief investigator is legally required to disclose that information, if applicable. Your name will not appear in any publications including the PhD. A pseudonym will be used instead. Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times.

**What are the benefits of this research for my role as a participant?**

The main objective of the research is to identify why international post graduate students choose to study in Western Australia. Contemporary research suggests that there are a

number of factors which are involved. The research is not clear on exactly the relationship of these factors to universities in Western Australia.

This study is designed to find out exactly why students like you choose to undertake their post graduate work in Western Australia.

**Can I access the results of the research?**

Any participant, upon request, may receive the results of this project, once the project is completed.

**Are there any risks associated with participation?**

No. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time and any information/data pertaining to the individual will be destroyed.

**Is this research approved?**

The research project has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please contact me on 0437 608 107. You may also contact my supervisors Associate Professor Graeme Lock on 9370 6529 or Dr Mandie Shean on 6304 6888.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an Independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer  
Edith Cowan University  
270 Joondalup Drive  
JOONDALUP WA 6027  
Phone: (08) 6304 2170  
Email: [research.ethics@ecu.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@ecu.edu.au)

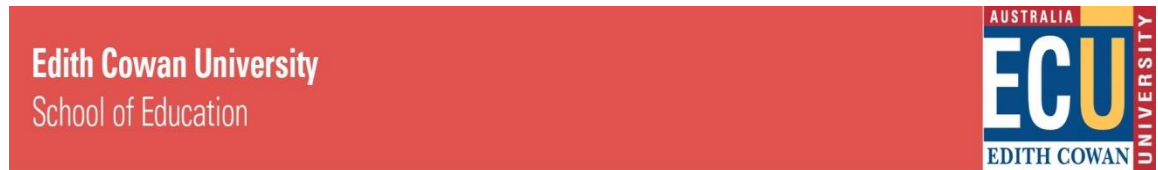
**How do I become involved?**

If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to become involved, please complete the **Consent Form** on the next page.

This information letter is for you to keep. If you wish to discuss any aspect of this letter please do not hesitate to contact the writer on 0437-608-107.

Yours Sincerely

STEVEN COHEN



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## Informed Consent Document

### Investigating International Post Graduate Students Decision-Making Processes when Choosing a University in Western Australia

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter, explaining the research study.
- I have read both the Information Letter and this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received. If I have any further questions, I understand that I am free to contact the research team at any time
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I freely agree to participate in the project, as described in the Information Letter.
- I understand I am free to withdraw from participation at any time within 5 years from project completion, without affecting my relationship with the school, with the chief investigator or Edith Cowan University.
- I understand that participation in the research project will involve either participation in a one-to one interview or in a group interview or focus group.
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that my identity and the identity of other participants will not be disclosed without consent.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and I further understand how the information is to be used.
- I give my permission for the contribution that I make to this research to be published in academic journals, presented at conferences and presented in research reports, provided that I or the school is not identified in any way.
- I understand that a summary of findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Name of Participant (printed):

Signature of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: / /

## Appendix B

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Both Individual Participants and Focus Group

#### **PART A**

##### **Participant Information**

Please read the following information.

- The aim of this PhD research study is to understand how and why international students make decisions regarding where to study. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
- All information provided by you will be solely used for the purpose of this research study and will be treated as confidential and with complete anonymity.
- Your information will be stored securely by the researcher, with only the researcher and his supervisors having access to it for the sole purpose of this study. Every effort will be made to prevent the identification of participants in any published material.
- After the interview, your responses will be typed verbatim. A copy will be provided to you to ensure it is correct. If you wish to make any changes to the written draft, you may do so. You must then return the completed proof to me signed and dated. Only once you are satisfied as to its veracity, will I begin to use it in my research analysis.
- Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any stage without prejudice or negative consequences. Withdrawal or non-participation will not affect you now or in the future.

- You may contact the researcher or his supervisors if you require further information about the research, and may also contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, Edith Cowan University if you wish to make a complaint relating to your involvement in the research

*Contact details:*

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**PART B - Interview Schedule***Qualification to participate in interview*

These questions are designed to determine whether you fit the criteria of the study. If you (the participant) answers **'no'** to any question, unfortunately you do not qualify.

*(Note: This preliminary information should be ascertained prior to arranging interview with participant. Preferably by way of telephone or email)*

1. Are you currently enrolled as a postgraduate student at a university in Western Australia?
2. Are you a citizen of a country other than Australia (including dual citizenship)?
3. Are you a full fee paying student or have obtained a scholarship or grant to study?
4. Have you acquired or are in the process of acquiring the appropriate visa to study in Australia?

**PART C**

*Part C encompasses background questions so that I can get a sense of who you are.*

1. Today's date \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Are you i) Single    ii) Married    iii) divorced    iv) in a defacto relationship
5. Do you have any children?  
(FU) If so how many
6. What country do you normally live in?
7. How long have you been in Western Australia?
8. What university are you currently studying at?
9. What postgraduate degree are you currently studying?
10. Are you enrolled Full-Time or Part-Time?
11. Current class standing:  
Eg.. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of degree
12. What is your first language?
13. Is this your first postgraduate degree?  
(FU) If no, how many postgraduate qualifications have you completed?
14. What were you doing before starting your post graduate studies?



**(FU)** If working, why did you give up your job and salary?

**(FU)** If not working and just continued on with PG education

➤ Why?

➤ How will having a PG qualification help you more than just a UG qualification alone?

15. Before deciding to study overseas, did you consider any options other than pursuing PG education, such as work, on the job training, apprenticeship.

## **PART D**

The next section is designed to help me understand why you chose to enrol in postgraduate studies in Western Australia. Each section involves answering a series of questions asking you to describe how a particular factor influenced your decision to study in Western Australia. I am trying to get an understanding of the factors that influenced your decision to study overseas.

### **1. Previous studies**

*I want to start off by asking you some questions about your undergraduate degree*

- Where did you complete your undergraduate degree?
  - Did you enjoy it? [probing question].
  
- Did your previous studies influence your decision to continue to study in Perth?
- What factors influenced your decision to undertake an undergraduate degree?
- (If UG overseas) Why did you choose to undertake your first degree overseas?

### **2. Funding**

*I want to ask you about your funding.*

- Are you a completely or partially self-funded student?  
(**Follow up [FU]**) If you are partially funded, were you able to make your own decision about where to study?
  
- If you have a scholarship or grant or your fees are being paid by your employer, government or other organisation, were you able to make your own decision about where to study?  
(**FU**) (Fully/Partially self-funded) - Where does your funding come from?
  
- If fees paid by employer, government or other organisation what is your obligation to them after graduation?

(FU) Where you able to choose Perth university as your destination or was this chosen for you?

### **3. Program evaluation**

*I want to ask you about how you chose your PG program. What were you influenced by?*

- The price of the program.

(FU) Did you make inquiries as to other international course costs?

- How did they compare?
- Where was most expensive? Cheapest?
- How did your chosen program rate?

- The program's suitability to your particular needs.

(FU) what are your needs?

- Overseas recognition?

(FU) What specific recognition do you require?

(FU) Were there other universities that could of given you the same recognition?

(FU) If so, why did you choose this particular university?

- The prospect of undertaking exciting and challenging research (or studies) that would otherwise not be available to you in your home country?

(FU) Like what?

### **4. Personal reasons**

*I want to ask you about the personal reasons you have for deciding to study in WA. How much were you influenced by:*

- The advice of others, but not including family members?

**(FU)** Can you tell me who influenced you?

**(FU)** How are they important to you (in the context of influencing your decision to study overseas)?

- The advice of family members?

**(FU)** Which family members influenced you?

- Did any of your family study overseas [probing question]?
- In what ways did they influence you?

- The prospect of personal development.

**(FU)** How did you think you might grow as a person while living in Australia?

- Could these 'growth changes' have happened elsewhere? [probing question]?

- The prospect of a positive life experience.

**(FU)** For example?

- A desire to learn about western culture.

**(FU)** such as ....? [probing question]

- What do you like best about .....(particular example of Western culture)?

- Better future life opportunities, but not including job prospects.

**(FU)** Such as .....? [probing question]

- are these opportunities available to you at home or will you need to immigrate?
- (if Immigrate), do you think you will stay in Perth or seek prospects elsewhere?

- Better job opportunities and career advancement.

(FU) Such as ....? [probing question]

- A pathway to Australian migration.

(FU) Do you want to live in Perth or try another city, town?

➤ Where? Why? [probing question]

- An opportunity to improve and develop your English language skills.

(FU) Has your English improved since arriving?

➤ Do you think this will impact your future career and life decision?

➤ How? Give examples. [probe]

### **5. Country image**

*To what extent did the image and reputation of Australia affect your decision to study here?*

- Is the culture here similar to that at home? [probing question]

(FU) If so, how?

- The lifestyle.

(FU) What do you particularly like about the lifestyle?

- The image of Western Australia as a stable economy

(FU) For example?

- A multi-cultural society.

(FU) What does this mean to you?

➤ Why is this important?

- Were you at all influenced by the perception that WA is an open liberal society? [probing question]

## **6. Image of Perth**

*To what extent did the image and reputation of Perth and the State of Western Australia affect your decision to study here?*

- Did you ever visit Perth prior to undertaking your postgraduate degree?
- What do you like about Perth?
- What don't you like about Perth?
- Would you consider living here?

## **6. Institutional image**

*I want to talk about your university and how you chose it.*

- What were your experiences with your current university in helping you to decide to pursue postgraduate studies in Western Australia?  
(FU) Please describe the process of choosing your current university. [Probing Question].  
(FU) How did you discover your university? [Probing Question]  
(FU) did you choose your current program and country? [Probing Question]
  - Were you influenced by the international reputation/prestige of the university? [probing question]
  - Were you influenced by the quality of the university resources such as ICT, academic staff, international student networks.
  - What other factors influenced you in making that decision?
  - What information was available to you in your home country about your chosen university?
  - Was this better information than other universities?
  - Did this information sway and influence you?

- Did you communicate with your current university before you applied?  
(or after you received the offer from the university) [Probing Question]
- What communication channels did you use?[Probing Question]
- Did the university reply your inquiry?[Probing Question]

### **7. City Effect**

*To what extent do you agree with the following influences in selecting the State of Western Australia as your chosen destination to undertake postgraduate studies?*

- The Cost of living.  
(FU) How do you find the cost of living in Perth compared to your home city?  
[probing question]
  - (if expensive) if you knew it was expensive, would this have influenced you prior to enrolling?
  - (if expensive) What do you find expensive?
  - Did you research cost of living indexes for other cities that you potentially could have studied?
  
- The environment (e.g. streetscape, beaches, open spaces etc.)  
(FU) What do you particularly like about the Perth environment?
  
- The reputation and image of Perth as a liveable city.  
(FU) Such as ....? {Probing Question]
  
- The size of Perth.  
(FU) Compared to your home town ..... [probing question].

### **8. Returning Home**

*Do you plan to return to your home country when you have completed your studies or do something else?*

- (If you plan to return home), do you expect your experience in Perth will be useful

**(FU)** What aspects of your experience here will be useful?

- Do you think you can benefit your home country?
- If so, how?

*Thankyou for your time. I will now type up your responses and as soon as I am able email you a copy for you to check.*