

Factors Impacting Upon Australian University Student Participation in Educational Exchange Programs

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With globalisation and technological innovation changing the global marketplace, research (e.g., Australian International Education Foundation, 1998; Kling, Alexander, McCorkle, & Martinez, 1999; Webb, Mayer, Pioche, & Allen, 1999) has shown that employers are seeking graduates with international competencies. Moreover, it is argued that it is the role of universities to prepare students to work in the new international context, thus meeting the needs of business and society (Fantini, Arias-Galicia, & Guay, 2001; Higher Education Council, 1990). International education opportunities such as student exchange programs have been identified as effective means through which university students may develop such skills and knowledge (Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Fantini et al., 2001; Wallace, 1993). Currently, less than one percent of Australian undergraduate students complete part of their qualification in an overseas institution (IDP Education Australia, 1995). Much research to date has focused on issues such as psychological and social adjustment of international students. Thus, there is a paucity of literature relating to the effects of international education experiences for Australian domestic students. Hence, this paper will examine the issues affecting Australian students' participation in academic mobility programs, with a particular focus on the factors influencing the decision to participate in a student exchange program.

The Role of International Education

International education is a growing phenomenon. In 1990, (Paige, 1990) identified that each year over one million students are studying overseas and, it would be anticipated that in the last decade this number has increased. Indeed, from 1950–1990 the total number of international students around the world grew at an average annual rate of 6.3% (Kim, 1998). Thus, there is a growing interest in international education. For example, in a study examining public opinion of international education issues, the American Council on Education (ACE, 2000) revealed that 90% of respondents believe that knowledge about international issues is important for students today. Moreover, almost three quarters of the American public expect that higher educa-

tion students should have an overseas experience while studying at college or university.

Similarly in Australia, the business community is expecting university graduates to have international competencies (Beazley, 1992; Slee, 1989). Numerous researchers (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1997; Twitchin, 1996) argue that Australian managers need to develop cross-cultural communication skills and greater cultural awareness. If Australian graduates are to succeed in the global marketplace, and in particular the Asia-Pacific region, the [Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee, 2001 #188] proposes that students acquire international study experiences. Since 1995, most Australian universities have incorporated

internationalisation in their strategic plans (Rizvi & Walsh, 1998; Gatfield, 1997). Program initiatives include international curricula, attracting international students to on-campus courses, student exchange opportunities and, developing international research teams (Todd & Nesdale, 1997).

In Australia, education is the eight largest export earner (Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee, 2001 #188), with international students comprising over eight percent of all higher education enrolments (IDP Education Australia, 1995). In contrast, less than one percent of Australian undergraduates are completing some part of their course overseas, with Hamilton (1998 cited in Clyne & Rizvi, 1998) finding that the participation rate was 0.2% of all Australian university students. Similarly in their nationwide survey of Australian universities, Daly and Barker (in progress) found that 0.4% of students took part in exchange programs in 2001. Recently, the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (2001) recommended that the Federal Government establish a target of ten percent of all undergraduate students study overseas as part of their degree. This goal is quite high considering the participation rates for European and United States tertiary students are five percent and one percent respectively (Hamilton, 1998 cited in Clyne & Rizvi, 1998).

In a poll examining college and university freshmen's intentions for international study, half of the respondents planned to study another country's culture and history, and 57% indicated a preference to enrol in foreign language courses (ACE, 2000). Moreover, almost half of all new students identified that they were anticipating studying abroad as part of their course (ACE, 2000). Similarly, in their review of student participation and long-term effects of international education experiences, Akande and Slawson (2000) confirmed that students acknowledge that study abroad experiences are beneficial for the individual. Yet, very few students take the opportunity. Unfortunately

to date, most studies of international education and exchange programs have been conducted in the United States of America. There is limited published literature detailing investigations of Australian students' plans for enrolling in international courses and participating in exchange programs.

International Students and the Decision to Engage in International Education

Traditionally, almost three-quarters of international students originate from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, with the primary reason for their sojourn being to obtain a qualification from higher education institutions in the United States of America and Europe (Paige, 1990). In Australia, Asian students constitute the greatest proportion of international students. The typical sojourner is male and enrolls in business/commerce degrees (Baker, Robertson, Taylor & Doube, 1996). In addition to tertiary education, many international exchanges occur through programs managed by Rotary, Lions, American Field Service (AFS) and Youth For Understanding (YFU), (Australia-Japan Economic Institute, 1990).

There is growing literature on the motivating factors that drive students to partake in international education (Cannon, 1999; Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Gatfield, 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Historically, students chose to study overseas because they believed that the experience would improve their 'economic and social status' (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82). Holdaway (Holdaway, Bryan, & Allan, 1988) found that students who choose to study in Canada, are motivated by factors such as a desire to emigrate, an inability to study in the home country because of poor or limited facilities, and a desire to improve their future employment opportunities. Numerous authors (e.g., Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Martin & Harrell, 1996; Osler, 1998; Torbiorn, 1982) describe the desires to experience living in another environment, travel and achieve

cultural enrichment as often overlooked issues influencing a student's decision to participate in an exchange program.

In addition to the decision to engage in an educational sojourn, students must also decide upon their host country and institution. Geographic proximity, cost of living and social costs appear to be strong driving forces when a student is considering in which country they should study. Leong (1972) and Kwok (1972) revealed that Asian students travel to Australia because of its proximity to Asia, the relatively low cost of living and the prestige of the institutions. Indeed, students must consider the quality of the institution in comparison to the educational systems at home (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Social costs such as discrimination and safety, linguistic factors and climate are also identified as influencing factors in the decision-making process (Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Gatfield, 1997).

As detailed, most research has investigated the decision-making process of international education from the position of students who choose to study in other country to gain a qualification. Hence it must be questioned as to whether these findings are applicable to those students who sojourn for less than one year and indeed, to what extent these factors moderate the decision-making process. Therefore, this paper will examine the issues affecting Australian students' participation in academic mobility programs, with a particular focus on the factors influencing the decision to participate in a student exchange program.

Method

This paper is reporting on work-in-progress, which is part of a larger study investigating the long-term effects of participating in international exchange programs for Australian and New Zealand university students. This survey was distributed in late July and therefore a limited number have been returned so far. Thus, due to time constraints data from only one Australian state will be discussed in this paper.

Participants

The sample consisted of 325 undergraduate students who are enrolled at five Victorian universities. A purposive sampling technique (Moore, 2000) was used to ensure that students who were engaged in exchange programs in 2002 participated in the study. All participants were approached by their respective institutions with surveys being administered by two different means: personally by staff at the International Centre at each university during the pre-departure training sessions, or mailed directly to the student's postal address. To date 47 valid surveys have been returned which correlates to a response rate of 14.5%.

Females make up a significant proportion of the sample (83%, $N = 39$) with only eight male subjects identified. Since participants must have completed one year of study at their tertiary institution before going on an exchange, the mean age is 20.74 years, with ages ranging from 19–25 years. Over two-thirds of participants ($N = 31$) are engaged in part-time employment, with a similar proportion still living at home with their parents ($N = 36$). The median reported household income is \$40,000–\$60,000. However it is interesting to note that the distribution is bimodal with 15 respondents indicating that their gross household income is less than \$20,000 and the household income of another 15 participants is more than \$80,000. As expected, residence is significantly correlated with income ($p < 0.01$) with those students who do not live at home being more likely to have an income of less than \$20,000.

Over three-quarters of respondents were born in Australia ($N = 37$). Other countries from which participants have migrated include Indonesia, South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, USA, Iraq, Canada and Malaysia. Two students are from Hong Kong. The mean length of time in which these students have lived in Australia is 14.55 years, with a range from four to 23 years. In addition, one respondent is

currently studying in Australia as an international student from Mexico. She has temporarily moved to Australia to gain a qualification, and while there she has chosen to engage in the exchange program. Almost half of the respondents ($N = 23$) speak one language, with over 30% of participants ($N = 15$) speaking two languages. Interestingly, five of the remaining respondents reported that they spoke more three languages, and four students speak four languages.

There was equal distribution amongst the different key curriculum areas as participants reported that they were enrolled in the areas of Business/Commerce, Arts, Engineering and Science. In addition, 18 students indicated that they are enrolled in dual degrees. Table 1 details student enrolments. The average grade reported by participants is 75–85% ($N = 13$), with four students achieving an average grade greater than 85% and nine respondents indicating that their average grade is 65–75%.

Survey

The survey comprised six key sections. The first section utilises the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (van Oudenhoven & van der Zee, 2001) to determine cross-cultural competencies. Sections two and three examine co-ethnic and cross-ethnic interactions, and friendships. In section four, students were asked to rate the extent to

which various factors influenced their decision to participate in the exchange program and the choice of their host country and institution. Section five of the survey incorporated Ward and Kennedy's (1999) Sociocultural Adaptation Scale to determine the extent of difficulty, which students expect to experience in their host country. In the final section, Schein's (1996) career anchor scale was used to determine participants' career preferences.

The results from section four will be presented in this paper.

Results and Discussion

Previous research has identified consistent themes in relation to the factors influencing a student's decision to study overseas (see for example Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Holdaway et al., 1988; Kwok, 1972; Long, 1972; Mazzarol et al., 1997 cited in Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As discussed earlier, international students are motivated to undertake education abroad by the likelihood of improving future employment opportunities and a desire to travel. Additionally, geographic proximity is a key factor in the decision of destination. In this study, these ideas were utilised to reveal the degree of influence of these factors.

An intention to live overseas greatly influences a student's decision to engage in exchange programs ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.22$). Similarly, students indicated that

Table 1

Student Enrolment by Discipline

DEGREE	NO. ENROLLED	DUAL DEGREE	NO. ENROLLED
Commerce	7	Arts/ Commerce	4
Arts	7	Arts/ Science	4
Engineering	7	Arts/ Law	2
Applied Science	5	Engineering/ Commerce	2
Science	2	Arts/ Education	2
Medicine	1	Engineering/ Law	2
Nursing	1	Science/ Commerce	2
Architecture	1		
Social Science	1		
PhD	1		

participating in the exchange program is incorporated in their travel plans ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.22$). These findings reflect the opinions and desires of Victorian students in Clyne & Rizvi's (1998) study in which it was discovered that students participated in the exchange program because they had plans to travel and a desire to live overseas and experience another culture. Moreover, these influencing factors extend beyond the educational experience to the vocational level. In her study of international career plans, Adler (1991) reported that MBA students would accept an international assignment because of a desire to travel.

And, this educational experience is perceived as moderately important in relation to their intention to work overseas ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.36$). Traditionally, students studied overseas to improve their economic standing (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) with numerous authors identifying that international students chose to gain qualifications in other countries to improve their employment prospects in their home country (see for example Holdaway et al., 1988). Interestingly, participants reported that the belief that participating in the exchange program will assist with their education success greatly influences their decision to engage in this opportunity ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.22$). At this stage it may be speculated that underlying their belief that participating in the exchange program will result in academic gains, is the perception of the relationship between academic success and employment opportunities. Subsequently, students also are greatly influenced to participate in the exchange program because they feel it will assist with gaining employment overseas ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.32$). Similarly, the chance of improving employment prospects in Australia has a moderate influence in the decision-making process ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.38$). Again, these factors reflect those found in previous research (Adler, 1991; Gatfield, 1997) in which authors have found that both students and expatriate managers

choose to engage in an international sojourn to increase their marketability in Australian and global workforce.

Indeed as previously argued, the Australian business community is expecting university graduates to have international competencies (Beazley, 1992; Slee, 1989). It has been identified by several authors (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1997; Twitchin, 1996) that if Australia is to success in the global marketplace, managers need to develop cross-cultural communication skills and greater cultural awareness. Development of such knowledge and skill is particularly vital in the Asian business environment, in which Australia is strengthening economic relations. With this in mind, the Australian government wants all Australian students to participate in study experience with Asia (IDP Education Australia, 1995).

However, respondents in this study report that several cultural and linguistic factors will affect their decision regarding their destination. Knowledge of the language in the host country will greatly influence whether a student decides to travel to that country. Yet, very few Australian university students speak a foreign language, with less choosing to study an Asian language (Fitzgerald, 1997). Knowledge of the host culture influences the decision regarding choose of host country to a moderate-great extent and is the similarity of the host culture is moderately important. Kim (1998) purports that cultural distance affects the decision to study overseas. Specifically, the more different the host country is from the home culture, the less likely it will be chosen. Perhaps this provides justification as to why the USA, Canada and UK rank so highly as preferred destinations for Australian students (Daly & Barker, in progress). Yet, Fitzgerald (1997) argues that Australian managers should develop Asian language and cultural awareness rather than relying on their Asian counterparts. The university

educational exchange programs can assist with remedying this situation.

Several authors (e.g., Gatfield, 1997; Kwok, 1972; Leong, 1972; Kim, 1998; Mazzarol et al., 1997; cited in Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) have reported that factors such as living cost, climate, safety and geographic proximity to home country all influence international students in the decision-making process. Respondents in this study indicated that the living cost ($M = 2$, $SD = 1.4$), social cost (including personal safety) ($M = 2$, $SD = 1.23$) and climate ($M = 2$, $SD = 1.23$) only slight influenced their decision of host country. Somewhat surprisingly, the geographic proximity of the host country to Australia does not influence student decisions ($M = 1$, $SD = 0.79$). Kim (1998) argues that geographic proximity is normally an influencing factor because of the relationship to travel costs. Both Kwok (1972) and Leong (1972) identified that Asian students travel to Australia for their education because of its proximity to Asia. However, as discussed earlier participants in this study are moderately influenced by the culture of the host country. For Australia, the closest countries geographically, are those in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet the cultures in many of these countries are significantly different to Australia. Thus when choosing their destination for the education exchange, students appear to place greater value of culturally similarity rather than geographic proximity.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the extent to which various factors, which have been previously identified in international education literature, influence a student's decision to participate in an exchange program and their choice of host country. It is acknowledged that the small sample size is a limitation, however due to time constraints and initially slow response from students, not all data from the larger study of exchange programs was accessible. Future research will certainly involve gaining a deeper understanding of the role these

issues play in the decision-making process, through analysing the perceptions and expectations of Australian and New Zealand university exchange students. Moreover, it is worthwhile considering the outcomes of participating in exchange programs and indeed, the long-term effects for both the individual and society.

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