Key Issues and "Push/Pull" Messaging on South East Asian Education Agency Websites

Dylan Rust[a]
Northern Arizona University

Abstract: As more students from South Asia seek to study at overseas universities, they increasingly contract the services of local education agencies to facilitate their choice of institutions and their application process. This study seeks to better understand the nature of the relationship between South Asian education agencies and students who wish to study abroad. By using qualitative content analysis of education agency websites from five South Asian countries, this study identifies key issues of potentially unethical practices committed by these agencies. It also identifies the most prevalent "push/pull" factors that South Asian agencies use to encourage students to study overseas as well as the most common services that agencies use to support students. The findings indicate that there are widespread ethical issues amongst education agencies and that students are most motivated to study abroad for quality education that may lead to emigration. The implications of this study are then discussed.

Keywords: agent, push/pull, services, issues, South Asia

Introduction

Many students seeking to study abroad decide to contract with third-party education agencies to assist in their selection of, and applications to, institutions around the world. Education agencies operate as specialized advisors to students and parents who are unfamiliar with the many options available for international study (Feng & Horta, 2021). It is common for students and their families to first identify a country they prefer to study in, with the agent advising them about the most appropriate options within that country. Agencies then can provide additional services, including assisting with application and admission processes, immigration compliance, language test preparation, and travel assistance (Thieme, 2017).

South Asia is of particular interest in terms of use of third-party agents because nearly 80% of growth in the international student market is likely to come from Asia by 2025 (The PIE News, 2022). This trend is of particular interest to the "big four" countries who receive the largest market share of international students: the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (IFF Research, 2021). India represents either the first or second largest population of international students in each of the "big four" (Institute of International Education, 2022b), and is likely to continue in that position for the foreseeable future. However, the entire South Asia region is a growth market for outbound international students. India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are all represented in the top 25 sending countries to the USA (Institute of International Education, 2022a). Nepal is expected to continue significant outbound student increases by 2025 and may become one of the three highest sending countries to Australia (The PIE News, 2022). Pakistan is increasingly sending students to the USA, with numbers reaching levels not seen since the early 2000s (Institute of International Education, 2022a). International student mobility from Bangladesh is increasing, with the USA being the top

a   Correspondence can be directed to: Dylan.rust@nau.edu

receiving country for their students (The Business Post, 2022). In Sri Lanka, students are increasingly pressured to study abroad due to the economic crisis in the country (ICEF Monitor, 2022).

As the number of outbound students from South Asia increases, it is most likely that the use of education agencies by students increases as well. While Indian students have reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences with education agencies (Kamble & Bobade, 2020), multiple issues regarding agent ethics and professionalism have been documented (Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020). This paper examines how potentially widespread these issues are within education agencies that operate within five South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the literature by examining potential ethical issues and the nature of the relationship between education agents and students. Most research into education agent relationships has been from the perspective of institutions of higher education hiring agents (Huang et al., 2016; Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020; O'Connell, 2012) and the research on the relationship between agents and students is limited to the Chinese market (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). The study provides an important perspective on both the South Asian education agent market as well as the nature of the relationship between agents and student customers.

Literature Review

As the number of students and institutions contracting education agents has increased, so has the scrutiny of unethical practices by agencies. Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) has been utilized to understand relationships between agents and higher education institutions that contract with them (Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020). Agency theory studies the relationship between two parties where one party (the principal) contracts another party (in this case the agent or agency) for a service. In international higher education, the principal may be a student looking to study abroad or a university looking to recruit internationally through an agent. Students may engage education agents to provide one or more of a variety of services to study overseas. Services may include assistance in choosing a country to study in, advice on choosing institutions to apply to within a given country, and assistance with preparing university application materials (Ying & Wright, 2021). Because the agent's goals may not align with those of the principal, there is difficulty in the principal controlling the agent's behavior. Since the agent has more information than the principal, this leads to situations of information asymmetry (Eisenhardt, 1989), which has been used by agents in India to provide mislead students and commit fraud (Marom, 2023).

Nikula and Kivisto (2020) identified multiple issues that should be monitored in the relationship between students and education agents: misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud or misconduct, limited transparency, or other types of unprofessional service. Misinformation is defined as a situation where an agent accidentally provides incorrect or incomplete information to a student, which may be due to lack of effort, incomplete training, or misunderstanding (Huang et al., 2016). Disinformation is intentionally misleading students (Huang et al., 2016). Financial fraud or misconduct may refer to collecting payments from students and institutions without consent, stealing money, etc. (Nikula & Kivisto, 2020). Limited transparency may refer to agents not disclosing their relationship with overseas institutions or disclosing their roles and responsibilities (Roy, 2017). Other types of unprofessional services may refer to unfriendliness, lack of confidentiality, poor speed of communication, or other issues (Huang et al., 2016; Roy, 2017; Nikula & Kivisto, 2020). Another key issue identified by Nikula and Kivisto (2020) is manipulating the application process. Manipulation may include writing students' university applications and/or letters for them, managing students' online university accounts, or fabrication of students' qualities or involvement (Ying & Wright, 2021). While researchers in higher education are aware of these issues, it is unclear if student principals and their families are aware of these potential issues before engaging the services of an education agent.

Students' decisions to study overseas are likely influenced by various "push and pull" factors. "Push factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. Pull factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive

to international students" (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, p. 82). "Push" factors that may encourage a student to study overseas include the perception of education opportunities abroad as better than local ones, the difficulty of accessing higher education opportunities locally, and the expected benefits of studying overseas. Intention to migrate has been noted as a key push factor for Indian students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). More recently, one study reported over 30% of Indian students expressed that intention to migrate and settle abroad motivated their choice (Wadhwa, 2016).

Once students decide to pursue education abroad, they then identify which country or countries to prioritize before selecting which institutions they will apply for (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). Various pull factors affect students' country preference: cost, language, visa application process, quality and reputation, environment, and potential prospects and opportunities in the host country (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). This choice is also affected by the opinions of family members and other advisors, such as education agents. Each of the "big four" countries have their own unique pull factors that influence students' choices. The abundance and popularity of US media assists with its popularity among international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), as does the presence of many highly ranked universities. The large number of students who have studied in the USA also helps to contribute to its continued popularity. Students who consider studying abroad may be influenced by family or friends who studied in the USA and recommend it (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Students who seek to migrate may also be interested in the USA due to the presence of Optional Practical Training (OPT) opportunities. Primary pull factors that draw students to universities in the United Kingdom are the perceived strength of UK qualifications, high quality learning environments, and an easier visa application process than other countries (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Hailat et al., 2021). Additional pull factors to the UK include learning English from native speakers, opportunities for work or additional education after graduation, and perceived religious tolerance in the country (Hailat et al., 2021). Due to its proximity to the United States, much of Canada's pull factors are based on a comparison to its southern neighbor. Canada is seen as a country that is easier to emigrate to than the USA, and also has a healthier political climate (Zhang et al., 2021). Canada is also seen as a safer alternative to the USA while having the same perceived opportunities and options to learn English as the USA (Chen, 2017). Pull factors influencing students' choice of Australia include academic requirements and attainment, host country environment, future career prospects, and social connections (Zhai et al., 2019).

Methodology and Research Questions

This study investigates the websites of prominent education agencies in five countries in South Asia to understand the extent of key issues that are found in literature on education agencies and discover how agencies encourage students to study abroad. Asia was chosen as the research area because more students have sought agent services, leading to an increase in commercial brokers (Lindquist & Xiang, 2018). Furthermore, over 20% of South Asian student respondents in a survey indicated that they used an agent, higher than any other region except for East Asia (Roy, 2017). Countries included in this study are India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What key issues are identified from education agency websites that may be unethical practices?
2. What push factors and pull factors do agents highlight on their websites to encourage student principals to study overseas?
3. What services are most often offered by education agencies in the South Asia region?

To select the education agency websites, web searches were used with the term "(country) education consultant" over a one-month period during the autumn of 2022 for each of the five selected countries. Consultant was used in lieu of agent as a search term because consultant is more commonly used by the agencies to describe themselves; agency/agent is a more common term in academic literature. For each search, the top five results that were links to an individual agency were

selected for study. The top five results should approximate the most popular and representative education agencies in each country, with the limitation of the search and websites being in English. Validity for the study was ensured through using the top five search results for each country (removing selection bias) and using established qualitative analysis procedures.

Each website was reviewed using qualitative content analysis over all webpages that are available to the public without requiring a log-in or subscription. Content analysis is a group of analytic approaches varying from systematic to interpretive methods (Rosengren, 1981). Within those approaches, qualitative content analysis is used to study text data, which may exist in verbal, print or electronic form (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Qualitative content analysis is defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1278). More specifically, a directed content analysis was used. This method is used to "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hseih & Shannon 2005, p. 1281). This study used a deductive method of analysis, in which prior theory or study is used to develop the coding scheme (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Prior study helps to develop the initial coding scheme through predicting relationships amongst variables, which is known as deductive category application (Mayring, 2000). In this case, initial categories and codes were identified in advance of viewing the websites of education agents, and using reducing procedures (Mayring, 2014) to interpret the data through summary.

Three initial categories were identified prior to coding: key issues, "push/pull" factors, and services offered. These three categories remained the only categories after studying and coding the agent websites. Under key issues, initial codes were identified based on the work of Nikula and Kivisto (2020): misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud/misconduct, limited transparency, and manipulating the application process. Based on identified "push" factors by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the following "push/pull" factor codes were initially used: quality of overseas education compared to local options, difficulty of accessing higher education locally, availability of a course of study that is not available locally, better understanding of the West, and intention to migrate. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) was used as the basis since "push/pull" studies since that time have focused on individual countries or student populations (Cao et al., 2016; Hailat et al., 2021; Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019; Zhai et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). No initial codes were created for the services category; all codes were identified through a deductive process while examining agent websites.

Results

Twenty-five education agency websites were studied, representing five different countries in South Asia. The first category of study was key issues that may be observed on the agency websites. Five initial codes based on the work of Nikula and Kivisto (2020) were studied: misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud/misconduct, limited transparency, and manipulating the application process. During the study, a sixth key issue code was identified as no pricing listed. This code represents a lack of transparency to potential student principals about the cost of services rendered. Key issues were found in every category except for financial fraud/misconduct (Table 1). The most common key issue is limited transparency, with over half of the agencies in every country except for Sri Lanka having this issue. Limited transparency in this study was usually related to a lack of obvious disclosure about the nature of the relationship between the education agencies and different universities listed on their websites. Multiple agency websites have long lists of foreign universities on a webpage, with no statement about their relationship. It is not clear if the agencies have formal agreements with the universities, if the agencies have assisted students to apply and enroll at these universities before, or if there is no relationship between them at all. One Nepalese agency stated that they had over 700 institutional partners. The nature of this partnership is not disclosed. Another agency in Pakistan stated that they "represent" more than 600 universities and

schools in Australia, the UK, the USA, Canada, and New Zealand. Again, there is no explanation for what it means for the agency to represent these institutions. The majority of agency websites studied (Table 1) had some type of limited transparency regarding their connection (assumed or otherwise) to institutions abroad.

The next most common key issue was a lack of stated pricing for services. While the limited transparency key issue relates to an unclear relationship between agencies and institutions, this key issue represents a lack of transparency in the agent's cost of services to student principals. Fifteen out of 25 agent websites lacked price information, including every Indian agent website studied (Table 1). It was a common practice for agencies to require potential customers to create accounts and provide personal information to access more information about costs and services.

Misinformation was the next most common key issue (Table 1). Out of the five instances of misinformation identified, four were regarding scholarships or financing and the other was for internships. In all cases, the agent website made it seem that financial assistance was easily available for international students. This contrasts with the tendency for institutions to view international students as a means to create additional revenue (Choudaha, 2017). An example of this type of misinformation is one agency stating that students with strong application profiles get offered assistantships at universities. While this may be true, the nature of what constitutes a "strong" profile is unclear and there is no guarantee that student applicants will receive an assistantship. But to a student this type of language sounds more certain and secure. The same type of wording is used by other agencies regarding the opportunity to apply for scholarships. Multiple agencies stated that there were many scholarships available at overseas institutions, conveniently not discussing how competitive the scholarships are and whether international students are eligible to receive them.

Disinformation was identified on two out of the 25 websites; both instances of disinformation were from agencies in Nepal (Table 1). The first instance of disinformation was through an agency's search tool that allows users to search for "all universities" in different countries through the website. When tested, the search did not return "all universities" but a number selected by the agency. The second case of disinformation was an agency stating that students who use their services "have access to choose from over hundreds of universities and thousands of courses offered in different destinations." Students, of course, have this opportunity without engaging the services of an agent, and there was no stated relationship between the agency and any overseas institution on the website. Both cases of disinformation centered on agencies overstating their level of influence or access to encourage prospective clients to engage their services.

There were two identified instances of manipulating the application process (Table 1). The first was an advertised service by an education agency in India to edit students' application documents for them before submitting them to universities. The agency website states that they provide feedback to students on the applications, but specifically that they help with essays, statements of purpose, grammar, tone, structure, and content. This level of feedback makes it unclear how much of the finished application is a student's own work compared to that of the agent. The second instance of manipulating the application process is even more straightforward. One agency in Nepal offers a "bank" of statement of purpose letters that have been previously used by students who were accepted to institutions overseas. The samples are categorized by different fields of study, and some even include sections where students can fill in their names and personal information to make the letter their own. The same agency also provides other sample documents, such as work experience letters.

This study found no examples of financial fraud or misconduct through the agency websites. This is not surprising, as it is unlikely that this key issue would feature on websites. Overall, India had the most examples of key issues with 12 issues identified over five agency websites (Table 1). All Indian education agent websites studied lacked pricing information and all but one had issues of limited transparency. Sri Lanka had the fewest identified key issues, with four over the span of five agencies. Out of all 25 education agency websites included in the study, only three did not have a single key issue that was coded. Two of those agencies are in Sri Lanka, and the other is in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Occurrence of Key Issues on Education Agency Websites by Country

	Limited Transparency	No Pricing	Misinformation	Disinformation	Manipulating the Application Process	Financial Fraud/ Misconduct
India	4	5	2	0	1	0
Nepal	4	3	1	2	1	0
Pakistan	3	4	0	0	0	0
Bangladesh	4	2	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	1	1	2	0	0	0
Total	16	15	5	2	2	0

Eighteen different "push" and "pull" factors were identified throughout the agency websites (Table 2). Three of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) original factors were not identified on any agency websites: difficulty of accessing local higher education, availability of course of study, and a better understanding of the West. The most common "push/pull" factor was the quality of overseas education. It is common for agencies to highlight that top ranked universities are in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. The second most common factor was value/career preparation. The concept of value was always connected to career prospects from studying overseas on the agency websites. The third most common factor was the intention to migrate, which was found on most agency websites from India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The next three most common factors all relate to the social aspect of the overseas experience: diversity of the host culture, variety in the culture, and leisure or lifestyle opportunities for students outside of the classroom. Opportunities for work and research are the next most often cited factors. Research opportunities is the first "push/pull" factor that is only mentioned in three or fewer countries. The remaining "push/pull" factors that were identified were listed on five or fewer agency websites. Those are technology (that is available in classrooms or laboratories), opportunity to develop English language skills, on-campus support for students, opportunities for personal development, safety, healthcare, a healthy economy, and increasing one's status through studying abroad.

The occurrence of "push/pull" factors on agency websites varied significantly by country. The five Nepalese agencies combined for 34 mentions of 15 different "push/pull" factors, most often referencing the quality of overseas education and the opportunity to migrate. In contrast, the five Bangladeshi agency websites studied only referenced nine "push/pull" factors a total of 12 times (Table 2).

Table 2. Occurrene of "Push/Pull" Factors on Education Agency Website by Country

Total	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Nepal	India	
16	2	2	4	5	3	Quality of Overseas Education
12	2	1	4	3	2	Value/Career Preparation
11	0	3	1	4	3	Intention to Migrate
10	1	1	2	3	3	Diversity
9	2	1	3	1	2	Variety
9	1	1	4	3	0	Leisure/Lifestyle
8	1	1	3	1	2	Flexibility
8	1	1	1	3	2	Work Opportunities

Table 2. Occurrene of "Push/Pull" Factors on Education Agency Website by Country (continued)

Total	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Nepal	India	
7	2	0	2	3	0	Research Opportunities
5	0	0	1	2	2	Technology
5	1	0	1	2	1	Funding
4	1	1	2	0	0	Language
3	0	0	2	1	0	Support
2	1	0	1	0	0	Personal Development
1	0	0	0	1	0	Safety
1	0	0	0	1	0	Healthcare
1	0	0	0	1	0	Economy
1	0	0	0	0	1	Status

The agency websites collectively advertised eleven different services to students interested in studying overseas (Table 3). The most common listed service was counselling or offering advice about where to study abroad. Websites would often describe the counselling process as helping students and families identify which country was their priority to apply for, then helping them choose institutions to apply to based on the student's academic qualifications and the programs offered at different universities. The next two most common services were preparation for language tests and assistance with applying for a student visa. Language test preparation often involved classes that were offered by agencies, as well as practice tests. This type of assistance was commonly offered in every country except for Bangladesh. Visa assistance was offered by most agencies in each country; this assistance involved guidance for how to apply for a student visa as well as how to prepare for the visa interview. Pre-departure assistance was the next most offered service. This service often included assistance with finding a place to live in the new country, finding flights and making travel plans, as well as how to open a bank account in a new country. University application assistance was the next most common service offered. This assistance varied from providing advice on how to apply to different institutions and understand what documents are required, to helping students write applications. The next most common service offered was assistance with writing a statement of purpose document for university applications. While this may seem similar to application assistance, nine agencies specifically stated their offer to help with these statements separately from the application process. Of the remaining five services offered, three are financial in nature: assistance finding scholarships, financial advice, and help preparing loan documents. The remaining services were assistance with getting quality letters of reference, and academic test preparation for tests such as the GRE. Education agency websites in Nepal were most likely to offer a variety of services, while those in Bangladesh were most likely to offer the least (Table 3).

Table 3. Occurrence of Services Offered on Education Agency Websites by Country

	Counselling	Language Test Preparation	Visa Assistance	Pre-departure Assistance	Application Assistance	Statement of Purpose Assistance	Assistance Finding Scholarships	Letter of Reference Assistance	Financial Advice	Academic Test Preparation	Help Preparing Loan Documents
India	4	5	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	2	1
Nepal	5	4	4	4	4	3	2	2	1	2	1
Pakistan	5	4	3	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	0
Bangladesh	4	1	3	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	5	4	5	4	4	1	3	1	1	0	0
Total	23	18	18	17	15	9	8	8	5	4	2

Conclusion

The "push/pull" factors that were identified on the agency websites were more numerous and varied greatly compared to those originally posited by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Three of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) "push/pull" factors were not identified on any agency website: difficulty of accessing local higher education, availability of course of study, and a better understanding of the West. The lack of mention of these factors may mean that some drivers of student mobility have changed in the past 20 years. For example, students may be less interested in learning about Western culture than they are in finding education and employment overseas in healthy economies. By contrast, some factors may not be mentioned on agency websites because they are matters of deficit and not opportunity. Instead of addressing the difficulty of accessing local higher education in South Asia, agencies instead advertise the many available options overseas. The prevalence of different "push/pull" factors on the agency websites helps show what the primary drivers of student mobility in South Asia are. The most represented factors were quality of overseas education, value/career preparation, and the intention to migrate. This indicates that students from South Asia are most interested in studying abroad for a quality education that can prepare them for a career in the country they study in. The interest in migration mirrors the findings of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) for Indian students and the emphasis on quality of education is similar to intentions of students in other areas of Asia (Zhai et al., 2019). Little research has been completed on the intentions and preferences of students from South Asia; this is an area for further study. Universities that seek to enroll more students from South Asia may want to identify how they are currently preparing their students for their careers and may also want to identify how they can market this career development to potential student applicants.

Once students decide that they are interested in studying overseas, they are then assisted by a South Asian agency sector that provides an expanding and comprehensive variety of services. Agents no longer simply provide information about potential destinations and universities, but can fully facilitate students' preparation, application, financial planning, and travel logistics. Counselling is still the backbone of the agency practice, but 18 out of 25 agencies included in the study also prepare students for language tests. From online training to in-person classes, education agencies are finding an additional revenue source through test preparation for language and to a lesser extent for academic tests as well. Agencies are also providing thorough guidance on how to successfully apply to universities overseas. Many are offering assistance with completing applications, writing statements of purpose, and receiving well-written letters of recommendation. The increased assistance in this area is also cause for concern that there may be increased occurrence of ethical issues in the application process.

In terms of key issues of ethics, the obvious issues of manipulating the application process that were found in this study are most concerning as they may be indicative of the type of practices that more agencies are engaging in but are not overtly listing on their websites. While one agency listed a "bank" of statement of purpose letters for students to choose from, another stated that they assisted students with writing their application materials. It is possible that other education agencies offer the same services, unbeknownst to university admissions staff members who review applications. As institutions potentially deepen their ties with education agencies and also seek to increase enrollment of international students from South Asia, they should also give scrutiny to application materials of students from this region to ensure that they are not fraudulent.

Other key issues that were identified in this study affect the students themselves. Misinformation and disinformation from education agencies can take advantage of students and their families through information asymmetry (Marom, 2023). This asymmetry is further exacerbated by the lack of clear pricing that was found on most education agency websites in this study. Students and families who contact an agency may lack understanding of the options: countries, universities, degree programs, etc. They also may not understand the value of the advice of the education agency nor the scope of influence the agency has. The information asymmetry between students and education agencies is continued through the lack of transparency found in 16 out of 25 agency websites included in the study. The lack of transparency continues the asymmetric relationship between agent and principal (in this case students and families) and benefits the agents. A lack of transparency was found as an issue in the majority of agency websites for every country but Sri Lanka and seems to be an issue across South Asia. Greater transparency would benefit students who have educational aspirations abroad, but this will not likely come from agencies themselves. If South Asian governments developed a regulation structure for agencies, this may in turn benefit students to better understand their options and avoid fraudulent practices.

There are several limitations to the study. First, since the education agency websites were chosen by web search, the most notable agencies were likely selected. It is unclear how representative these agency websites may be of the overall education consultant industry within each country. Less notable agencies may have more or fewer ethical issues on their websites, for example. However, the variety of agencies covered in the study makes it representative of the South Asia region. Second, since the search was conducted in English only education agent websites that were in English were identified for this study. Including education agent websites in other languages such as Hindi, Tamil, Sinhala, Bengali, Nepali, and Urdu would add to this area of study and may be an area for further research. Finally, the study only indicates a variety of factors that are found on websites; more factors may be identified through in-person visits to and interviews with education agents, such as the mystery shopping method suggested by Nikula and Kivisto (2020).

References

Business Post (2022). *Students going abroad for study keep rising*. Available at https://www.businesspostbd.com/front/students-going-abroad-for-study-keep-rising [Accessed 10 November 2022].

Cao, C., Zhu, C. & Meng, Q. (2016). A survey of the influencing factors for international academic mobility of Chinese university students. *Higher Education Quarterly, 70*, pp. 200-220. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12084

Chen, J. M. (2017). Three levels of push-pull-dynamics among Chinese international students' decision to study abroad in the Canadian context. *Journal of International Students, 7*(1), pp. 113-135. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v7i1.248

Choudaha, R. (2017). Are international students "cash cows"?. *International Higher Education,* (90), pp. 5-6. https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2017.90.9993

Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Agency theory: An assessment and review. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1)*,* pp. 57-74. https://doi.org/10.2307/258191

Feng, S. & Horta, H. (2021). Brokers of international student mobility: The roles and processes of education agents in China. *European Journal of Education, 56*(2), pp. 248-264. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejed.12442

Hagedorn, L. S. & Zhang, L. Y. (2011). The use of agents in recruiting Chinese undergraduates. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 15*(2), pp. 186-202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315310385460

Hailat, K. Q., Alsmadi, S., Nassar, M. & Chung. S. B. (2021). An investigation of the push-pull factors influencing student selection of higher education: The case of Arabian Gulf students in the UK. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *22*(4) https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2657

Hsieh, H.F. & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), pp. 1277-1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Huang, I. Y., Raimo, V. & Humfrey, C. (2016). Power and control: Managing agents for international student recruitment in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(8), pp. 1333-1354. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.968543

ICEF Monitor (2022). *Economic crisis at home pressures Sri Lankan students abroad.* Available at https://monitor.icef.com/2022/04/economic-crisis-at-home-pressures-sri-lankan-students-abroad/ [Accessed 17 November 2022].

IFF Research (2021). *The revival of the 'big four' in international student mobility*. Available at https://www.iffresearch.com/blogs/the-revival-of-the-big-four-in-international-student-mobility/ [Accessed 17 November 2022].

Institute of International Education (2022a). *Leading places of origin*. Available at https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/ [Accessed 17 November 2022].

Institute of International Education (2022b). *Project atlas.* Available at https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Project-Atlas [Accessed 10 November 2022].

Jensen, M. C. & Meckling, W. H. (1976). Theory of the firm: Managerial behavior, agency costs and ownership structure. *Journal of Financial Economics, 3*(4), pp. 305-360. https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-405X(76)90026-X

Kamble, V. R. & Bobade, P. (2020). A study on the role of consultancy in overseas education. *ISOR Journal of Business and Management, 22*(4), pp. 19-37.

Kondracki, N. L. & Wellman, N. S. (2002). Content analysis: Review of methods and their applications in nutrition education. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 34*(4), pp. 224-230. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60097-3

Lindquist, J. & Xiang, B. (2018). The infrastructural turn in Asian migration. In G. Liu-Farrer and B. S. Yeoh (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Asian Migrations*. London: Routledge, pp. 152-161. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315660493-11

Marom, L. (2023). Market mechanisms' distortions of higher education: Punjabi international students in Canada. *Higher Education. 83*, pp. 123-140 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00825-9

Maringe, F. & Carter, S. (2007). International students' motivations for studying in UKHE: Insights into the choice and decision making of African students. *International Journal of Educational Management, 21*(6), pp. 459-475. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540710780000

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 1*(2), Art 20. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.2.1089

Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: Theoretical background and procedures. In A. Bikner-Ahsbahs, C. Knipping, N. Presmeg (Eds) *Approaches to Qualitative Research in Mathematics Education*. Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 365- 380. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9181-6_13

Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *The International Journal of Education Management, 16*(2), pp. 82-90. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540210418403

Nikula, P.T. & Kivisto, J. (2018). Hiring education agents for international student recruitment: Perspectives from agency theory. *Higher Education Policy, 31,* pp.535-557. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-017-0070-8

Nikula, P.T. & Kivisto, J. (2020). Monitoring of education agents engaged in international student recruitment: Perspectives from agency theory. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 24*(2), pp. 212-231. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318825338

O'Connell, N. (2012). *Exploring the Role of Relationship Marketing between Universities and Education Agents. A Case Study Analysis.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton.

PIE News (2022). *79% of international student growth "should come" from Asia by 2025*. Available at https://thepienews.com/news/79-international-student-growth-come-asian-countries/ [Accessed 10 November 2022].

Potter, W. J. & Levine-Donnerstein, D. (1999). Rethinking validity and reliability in content analysis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 27*(3), pp. 258-284. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909889909365539

Rosengren, K. E. (1981). Advances in Scandinavia content analysis: An introduction. In K. E. Rosengren (Ed.), *Advances in Content Analysis*. CA: Sage., pp 9-19.

Roy, M. (2017, June 6). *Decoding international students' experiences with education agents: Insights for U.S. institutions.* Available at https://wenr.wes.org/2017/06/decoding-international-students-experiences-with-education-agents-insights-for-u-s-institutions [Accessed 08 December 2022].

Thieme, S. (2017). Educational consultants in Nepal: Professionalization of services for students who want to study abroad. *Mobilities, 12*(2), pp. 243-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2017.1292780

Van Alebeek, W. & Wilson, K. B. (2019). Explaining the college choice decisions of international students at a regional university in the United States. *Journal of Research in International Education, 18*(3), pp. 292-309. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240919892468

Wadhwa, R. (2016). Students on move: Understanding decision-making process and destination choice of Indian students. *Higher Education for the Future, 3*(1), pp. 54-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631115610221

Ying, M. & Wright, E. (2021). Outsourced concerted cultivation: International schooling and educational consulting in China. *International Studies in Sociology of Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2021.1927143

Zhai, K., Gao, X., & Wang, G. (2019). Factors for Chinese students choosing Australian higher education and motivation for returning: A systematic review. *SAGE Open, 9*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019850263

Zhang, Y., O'Shea, M. & Mou, L. (2021). International students' motivations and decisions to do a PhD in Canada: Proposing a three-layer push-pull framework. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education (1975), 51*(2), pp. 61-73. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189027