

EXPORT EDUCATION: HOW DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE NEW ZEALAND'S SERVICE TO THEM?

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Abstract

Export education continues to be an important aspect of the New Zealand education sector. It has an effect both on the income to institutions and on teaching methods/approaches in the classroom. Surveys of international student experiences have been conducted previously and this article extends the research to consider student experiences at private and government owned institutions by looking at the gap between student expectations and their perceptions of the actual experience. In order to encourage international students New Zealand needs to manage the student experience and increase the social and intercultural aspects of international study.

Key words: Education, Experiences, International, Students, Service Quality

1. Introduction

Export education is one of the more important sectors in New Zealand, with regard to the economic contribution made by international education. New Zealand is one of top five destinations for overseas study, following behind the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. Nevertheless, the competition in international education was, in 2006, declared to be becoming intense (New Zealand International Division of Ministry of Education (NZID), 2006), There is no reason to think the competition has recently become less intense. This paper reports on a study carried out to find out how tertiary institutes can improve their service quality in order to increase the competitiveness of New Zealand. There were two main aspects to be investigated: (1) identification of the current factors that are part of international education in

New Zealand; (2) determination of the kind of quality of life expectations held by overseas students when they come to New Zealand to study. This research project should be seen within the context of the New Zealand export education industry. Recommendations and Conclusions form the last two sections of this paper.

2. Background

2.1 New Legislation

Prior to the late 1980s, New Zealand did not have enough international students, this had a major influence on the ability of the educational system to cover its costs; due to the low proportion of full school payments. For this reason, the then NZ Government added new provisions to the 1989 Education Act to empower tertiary institutions and other schools to recruit more full fee-paying international students to New Zealand. Initially, Malaysia was a main source of overseas students, in the mid 1990s Chinese and Korean students accounted for the greatest growth across the export education sector, this has continued in most recent years (NZID, 2006). Current anecdotal evidence, around Unitec at least, shows a huge growth in Indian and Russian students as well as students from many other countries.

2.2 Is there a Crisis in the Export Education Sector?

A report from the International Division of the Ministry of Education (2008) made it clear that overseas study has become fashionable for many young people from outside of New Zealand. And that New Zealand has become one of the most popular choices for this; and so there has been a considerable increase in export education since the 1989 amendments to the Education Act. In New Zealand, the export education sector experienced a significant increase from 2001 to 2003. This is shown in the total enrolment for international students, which increased sharply (by 61%) from 2001 to 2002. However, this figure has been declining in recent years. From 2002 to 2007, the figures have dropped by 30% (International Division & Ministry of Education, 2008). There is a school of thought that believes there is a crisis in New Zealand's export education sector due to significantly decreased enrolment, negative comments from the insiders (education providers), and negative media reporting (Butcher & McGrath, 2004). Bad publicity was received a few years ago about an incident when a Chinese student was kidnapped and murdered by his fellow language students (China Post, 2007).

Over the past decade, Chinese international students have made up the greater proportion of overseas students (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). The number of Chinese students who were granted student visas increased dramatically from 28,607 in 2001 to 61,935 in 2003. However, the figure dropped sharply to 28,887 in 2007 (NZID, 2008). Export education has been an important source of income for the NZ Government. Owing to the decreased export education figures, the economic benefits generated by the export education sector has also declined, from \$2.21 in 2004 to \$1.82 in 2007 (NZID, 2008).

2.3 Possible reasons for studying in New Zealand

The overriding factors considered here is that it is education in the English medium, which is required by overseas students, and as such New Zealand is an acceptable destination for these students. The costs in New Zealand were closer to the living standards to Asian countries, and it is an English-speaking country. Butcher and McGrath (2004) also indicated that some international students choose New Zealand because "it is cheap and easy", and some choose

New Zealand because they would obtain a degree from a Western tertiary education institute and improve their English speaking and writing skills (Butcher & McGrath, 2004, p.541). However, there are still other important factors influencing the decision making of foreign students, and these involve the quality of education delivered, living conditions, safety, cultural environment, reputation in the international educational market and so forth. English being the medium of education is the context in which the decision to choose an education destination is made. Changes in exchange rates together with all these other factors affect the choice of study destination.

3. Problem Statement

There seems to be a downward trend for NZ in its popularity as a foreign educational destination for Chinese students. It is crucial to find out the reasons for the reduction, especially for the reduction in Chinese students. Even though the Chinese market is playing an increasing role in NZ's export education, some educational and socio-cultural aspects of Chinese students' education here has not always been reported positively. Hence there are rising questions about the perception of Chinese international students towards their New Zealand education and their satisfaction towards their educational and socio-cultural experiences in New Zealand (Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

4. Objective of this Research

The objective of this project is to measure and evaluate the expectation gaps about the service quality and living conditions of Chinese students in Auckland. The project mainly focuses on the expectation gap about certain "service quality" issues such as living standards, accommodation, health and safety, living expenditures, hygiene, culture, and acceptance by the local people.

5. Research Questions

Export education is an engine of growth and prosperity, not only for the student but also for New Zealand. The study ultimately seeks to improve the service of the export education sector. Due to the size of the study that was carried out, only two of the main areas are covered in this paper. Other papers cover more issues and questions. The two main areas are:

- i. To investigate Chinese students' expectations on a number of service quality aspects related to living conditions.
- ii. To compare Chinese students' expectations with their actual experiences of living in New Zealand.

6. Research Design

6.1 Questionnaires

Quantitative surveys were conducted amongst Chinese international students. Self-completed questionnaires and consent forms were handed out to 135 students. The quantitative data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Furthermore, a set of questions were contained in the questionnaire as well as an information sheet to explain the objectives of the study and how the information will be used.

6.2 Design of questionnaires

The questionnaire is designed to focus on perceived costs and benefits for students studying in New Zealand; the expected living conditions and standards, their satisfaction towards life in New

Zealand, the perception about their own living conditions in terms of accommodation arrangements, living standards (financial ability), life styles and frequent leisure activities, socio-cultural experiences, health and safety; and their perception about what the local government and education providers have done to enhance their life quality and living conditions.

6.3 Target Population

The target sample is 135 international Chinese students who enrolled in language schools, private training establishments (PTEs) and public tertiary education institutions. Those 9 schools were chosen based on their popularity among Chinese international students (Table 1, below). Fifteen students that fitted the filter criteria were selected from each of those 9 schools, giving a total of 135 respondents.

6.4 Data collection

A free envelope with stamp was provided with the questionnaire in order to encourage return rates, and also prevent students' personal information from being disclosed on the envelope. The questionnaire packs were handed out to students after they had answered three filter questions. Some of the surveys were carried out face to face if the students were free to take five to ten minutes with the researcher, otherwise, questionnaires were sent back by mail.

The recruitment in each school was finished when 15 questionnaire materials were handed out in that school. Combining all three sample recruiting methods, candidates were found easily and the survey was less time consuming. In total, 135 questionnaires were handed out. However, only 122 questionnaires were posted back to the researcher, a response rate of 90.37%. Most of responders might be friends or classmates of the questionnaire distributor, so that respondents might like to help the questionnaire distributor to complete the questionnaire.

Table 1: Target schools for the survey

	Educational service providers	The samples
Language schools	Edenz College	15
	Taylor's College	15
	ACG College	15
Private tertiary institutes	AIS St Helens	15
	Wollongong College Auckland	15
	Victoria College	15
Public tertiary institutions	University of Auckland	15
	Massey University	15
	Auckland University of Technology	15

7. Literature Review

7.1 The current International Education Market

The New Zealand International Division (NZID) belongs to the Ministry of Education. It releases statistical data, as well as quantitative information and research about the international education sector. In 2006 the New Zealand International Division pointed out that international education was becoming a significant contribution to the economy. There were almost two million tertiary students studying outside their countries [just over 75000 of these were in NZ (NZID, 2008)],

and it was predicted that the number would reach five million in the next 20 years. Global demand internationally for higher education was expected to increase from 2 million in 2003 to 7.6 million in 2025 (IDP Education Australia, 2003).

It further states that 3.4 million are expected to study in one of five top English-speaking countries – the United States, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Nonetheless, the market share of overseas students for these top five countries is predicted to drop from 46.8 per cent in 2003 to 44.3 per cent in 2025. Hence, it is expected that there will be fewer international students choosing those top five countries as other countries' own export education industries grow. Being one of those countries, New Zealand is expected to be affected negatively.

The same research shows that 93 per cent of international students are forecasted to come from the Asian region in 2025. The market share of Asian students is expected to increase from 79 per cent in 2003 to 93 per cent in 2025. Asian countries will dominate the top ten countries for international student sources with China and Malaysia the two main countries accounting for the increased demand. In 2025, the number of Chinese students is forecast to be 115,298, and the ratio of Chinese students to Malaysian students will be 3:1. The market share of European Union students will decline from 8.5 per cent to 2.9 per cent from 2003 to 2025 (IDP Education Australia, 2003).

7.2 The Export Education market in New Zealand

There are only 8 universities and 20 polytechnics (community colleges) in New Zealand (Naidoo, 2005). The Ministry of Education's International Division, postulates that it has become fashionable to study overseas, for many young people. New Zealand is one of the most popular choices for export education. Naidoo (2005) points out that the export education sector contributed NZ\$530 million to the local economy, while the sector created more than 20,000 jobs and contributed NZ\$1.7 billion to the New Zealand economy by 2003. Between 1999 and 2003, the enrollment of international students in New Zealand's public and private education providers saw an increase of 318 per cent (Mallard, 2004).

However, the figure has been dropping in recent years. The figure dropped by 30% from 2002 to 2007 (NZID, 2008). The amount of Chinese international students makes up a substantial proportion of overseas students in New Zealand (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Commensurate with China's rapid economic growth, there are many Chinese students tending to study abroad - 1.4 million Chinese students at the end of 2008. In New Zealand, the number of Chinese students who were granted student visas increased dramatically from 28,607 in 2001 to 61,935 in 2003, and after the peak, the number of Chinese students currently maintains a relatively stable level at about 30,000 in New Zealand (International Division & Ministry of Education, 2008).

At present, the New Zealand government and the Ministry of Education are adopting many methods to attract Chinese international students to study in New Zealand. These include making it easier to obtain a Visa, offering government scholarships, having an Open Work Visa policy and so on. In particular, the New Zealand government signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with China in the middle of 2008. Importantly, the FTA will not only stimulate the international agreement between New Zealand and China, but also increase New Zealand's reputation in the

China market so as to induce more Chinese international students to study here (NZID, 2008). The lower exchange rate makes New Zealand's outstanding education industry more competitive in market place. The resultant lower investment in their child's education could encourage more parents to send their children, especially for Chinese parents, to New Zealand for higher education.

7.3 What service do the Chinese students expect?

According to Sugahara, Boland, & Cilloni, (2008), there are many reasons to support the international students' selection of a course at a foreign university. The researchers found that job expectation can be viewed as one of the most important factors influencing international students' choice. Employment expectation consists of both local and foreign job expectations. In this regard New Zealand could provide an appropriate policy for international students to have a better chance of finding a job in New Zealand, as this would meet their employment expectation. Language and culture barriers can be seen as two vital factors influencing the study and living conditions of Chinese international students in New Zealand. According to Yang, Noels & Saumure, (2006), there are three major factors that could influence the cross-culture communication of Chinese international students studying in New Zealand. These involve personal characteristics, communicative competence and adaptation to the foreign language environment.

Wang (2005) finds from his research that Chinese traditional culture and family expectations are the motives driving more and more Chinese students to study abroad. The researchers are of the opinion that the Chinese education system is based on Confucian principles, and traditionally Chinese parents pay close attention to support and sponsor their children's studying so that they receive the necessary education. The traditional view of education in China is that a better education creates more fortune and happiness in the long term. Therefore, studying internationally became a trend in China.

In the New Zealand international education context, McKinlay (2002) has pointed out that the total studying cost is an important factor for international students in choosing New Zealand as an overseas education destination. The costs in New Zealand are closer to the living standards of Asian countries, and it is an English-speaking country.

The English learning environment and a degree which is accredited in the English-speaking world also attract students to come here to study. Foreign students also expect to make friends with Westerners. In other words, Chinese students are coming to NZ to have a personally fulfilling experience.

7.4 Actual experiences of Chinese students in New Zealand

Quality of life and living conditions can be related to many aspects of the students' experiences, and are particularly strongly related to students' self-assessment of their study progress, friendship with the local people and the level of support they receive (Deloitte, 2008). Of course, the expectations of overseas students towards New Zealand living conditions are varied much as they have varied attitudes toward life. Some students come to New Zealand with a lot of money. They buy cars, go to casinos, and flaunt their wealth. However, some international students are not as wealthy as the stereotype. They struggle to pay their rent and buy their daily meals. They

work part-time and study full-time, and cannot afford the expensive air ticket to return home for holidays.

Living in New Zealand can be a detached, aloof and distant experience for some overseas students, who sincerely want to melt into the local culture and wish they had more from New Zealand, and a wider social network (Butcher & McGrath, 2004). According to Berno and Ward (2002), a great proportion of international students feel ambivalent about their relations with the local people, and many of them feel discriminated against.

International students are facing many kinds of stress, including acculturative stress (culture shock), language barriers, and lack of social networks. Therefore, they are more likely to suffer more psychological and social stress, as well as more psychosomatic and anxiety disorders and depression than local students (Sam and Eide, 1991). Berno and Ward (2002) showed that 31 per cent of overseas students are expected to be stressed, whereas 49 per cent actually felt stressed.

It is generally suggested that the annual living and accommodation costs for an international student is around NZ \$9,000 to \$10,000 which is expected to cover accommodation costs, textbooks, travel, food and limited entertainment (International Education Media, 2004). In Berno and Ward's research, 62 per cent of overseas students expected to have enough money, while only 51 per cent of students felt they did.

Accommodation problems were also underestimated for the overseas students, in that 51 per cent expected to have a problem with their living arrangements, while 70 per cent actually experienced them. Moreover, only 37 per cent of overseas students felt they were accepted by New Zealanders, which is 35 per cent less than the expectation. There is also a significant gap between the expectation of, and the actual experience of, socialization. Ninety-one per cent of students expected to make friends with New Zealanders. However, the actual proportion turned out to be only half that (Ward, 2001).

Overseas students experience social isolation, cross-cultural communication and relationships, culture shock, financial difficulties, anxiety, employment issues, immigration laws, and so on (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Another recent research study was carried out by Deloitte on behalf of the Ministry of Education in 2007 with the aim of improving support and care to international students. According to the results of this research, 72 per cent of overseas students were supported financially by their parents, while nearly one-fourth of respondents found it difficult or extremely difficult to pay their education fees in New Zealand (Deloitte, 2008).

8. Analysis of the Results

The data collected was analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. It was entered into the SPSS system and summarized based on demographic factors and an analysis was carried out based on the different demographics. The data was then summarized and analyzed for each question by Mean Value Analysis and Frequency Analysis. Some of the questions were analyzed using correlations.

8.1 Demographics

Table 2 depicts the data based on gender, location (within China), and types of educational institutes:

Table 2: Summarized Table Based On Demographic Factors

Male 55						Female 67					
North 21		Central 16		South 18		North 26		Central 18		South 23	
Others	Uni	Others	Uni	Others	Uni	Others	Uni	Others	Uni	Others	Uni
15	6	11	5	12	6	17	9	11	7	14	9

The respondents included 67 females (54.9%) and 55 males (45.1%) (Table 3, below). Therefore, there were more female students participating in this survey than males. The students are undertaking different courses in New Zealand, including university degrees, diplomas, language courses, etc.

Table 3: Frequency Analysis based on Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	55	45.1	45.1
Female	67	54.9	100.0
Total	122	100.0	

Table 4, below, indicates the results of the different school types containing Chinese students undertaking their courses. Forty-two (34.4%) of the respondents are studying at university. Half of the respondents are attending private tertiary institutes typically studying on NZDB, degree, and MBA programmes. Only 19 (15.6%) of respondents are language school students.

Table 4: Frequency Analysis based on School Types

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
University	42	34.4	34.4
Private institutions	61	50.0	84.4
Language school	19	15.6	100.0
Total	122	100.0	

This section links to question 2: To compare Chinese students' expectations with their actual experiences of living in New Zealand.

Discrimination can be seen as one of the issues influencing people's life and experience, and this has a negative impact on satisfaction levels. From the data collected, 63.2% of the Chinese respondents agreed that international students often experience discrimination in New Zealand. Only 7.4% of the respondents mildly disagree with the statement. Slightly less than 30% of the respondents kept a neutral view (Table 5 & Figure 2, below).

Table 5: Frequency analysis – discrimination experience of International students

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
2	9	7.4	7.4
3	36	29.5	36.9
4	59	48.4	85.2
5	18	14.8	100.0
Total	122	100.0	

1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Mildly disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Mildly agree, 5 – Strongly agree.

Figure 2: Experience Discrimination in New Zealand



Table 6: Mean value analysis – satisfaction with their life in New Zealand

	1.My life in New Zealand is close to my ideal	2.My life in New Zealand is excellent	3.I am satisfied with my life in New Zealand	4.I have got the important things I want from my life in New Zealand	5.I would change almost nothing about my life
N Valid	122	122	122	122	122
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	2.72	2.71	3.01	3.06	1.97

Chinese respondents generally disagree that their life is close to their ideal, and they do not agree their life in New Zealand is excellent. However, they generally disagree that they would change almost nothing about their life in New Zealand if they had a second chance (Table 6, above). The

findings show most Chinese international students (respondents) are dissatisfied with their current life in New Zealand.

About 44% of the respondents mildly disagree that their life in New Zealand is close to their ideal. This means almost half of the respondents feel their New Zealand life is under par. About a quarter of the respondents mildly agree that their life in New Zealand is close to their ideal. Thus, the number below expectation is almost twice the number of meeting expectation. Around 30% of the respondents have neutral attitudes towards the statement (Figure 3, below). The research finds that there is no one who strongly agrees that their New Zealand life meets their expectation.

Figure 3: My Life in New Zealand is close to my Ideal



1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Mildly disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Mildly agree, 5 – Strongly agree

9. Recommendations for Government and Tertiary Providers

9.1 New Zealand government to rectify shortcomings in service

The previous Government budgeted \$40 million on innovative international education initiatives between 2005 and 2008 to support a more strategic approach in international education (Mallard, 2004). They announced initiatives for improving the development and quality of New Zealand's export education industry, paying attention to smaller schools and tertiary institutions. These have capacity, but need more support to participate successfully in the export education market (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Government also emphasises effective business planning and financial viability in all institutions on better pastoral care and future recruitment for younger overseas students, including improving the current code and rules to have a better legal basis (International Division, 2008).

9.2 Improvement by Tertiary Providers in the following areas needed

- Accommodation
- Study
- Social Network

- Discrimination
- Service quality of elements in their day-to-day lives

10. Conclusions

Particular aspects which need to be worked on by the Government and education providers in order to meet the needs, and bridge the expectation gap, of international students were pointed out. This would require cooperation from education institutions and the New Zealand Government to do further research to monitor the satisfaction and changing experiences of international students in New Zealand.

The New Zealand education sector as a whole still needs to work hard to attract more international students. It needs to do more to make the New Zealand education industry internationally competitive. Both the living and study environments of international students are deeply impacted by culture differences. The New Zealand government may therefore wish to establish a special purpose fund for education institutions to help them to develop cultural awareness programmes, to foster increased interaction between international and local students. Living conditions is another important element which may significantly impact the competitiveness of the New Zealand export education industry.

In many aspects, New Zealand is a strange environment for Chinese international students. Prior to coming here, they formed their expectations based on what they imagined life would be like, but typically, have a limited awareness of the world as most have never travelled outside of China before. In this sense, expectation gaps are inevitable. However, minimising the expectation gaps would go a significant way to improve New Zealand's chances on a competitive export education market. Therefore, meeting the needs of overseas students must be an important target for education providers and the New Zealand government.

The number of enrolments is expected to climb again in 2010 according to reports, Stuart Boag the Communications Director of Education New Zealand has indicated that new enrolments by Chinese students would increase by 20% in 2010. Chinese students are still the largest source of long-term education fees payers, since Japanese and Korean students are more concentrated in short-term language courses (Gerritsen, 2008).

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