

Evolving Global Student Mobility: An Investigation into the Higher Education Experiences and Motivations of Students and Alumni from P12 International Schools

Natalie Cruz^{a,*}

^a*Old Dominion University, United States*

*Corresponding author: Email: Ncruz004@odu.edu

Address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, United States

Introduction

There are 5.1 million students in P12 international schools, up 6.7 percent in the past five years. (ISC Research 2018). Graduates from these schools often go on to study in another country other than where they graduated, and universities around the world are taking notice and beginning to recruit these bright, culturally competent individuals (Findlay et al. 2012; Schulman and Le 2018). Although researchers have extensively examined the mobility of international undergraduate and graduate students attending universities worldwide, less is known about the mobility patterns of the large and expanding international high school student population of globally mobile students. This study will fill a needed gap in the literature by examining the experiences of international students from P12 international schools related to their university choice.

The primary purpose of this project is to understand this fast growing subset of globally mobile students by analyzing their mobility patterns and “push-pull” factors in their selection of universities. Current research on international students’ experiences tends to focus on Anglophone countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Ammigan and Jones 2018). Therefore, a secondary goal of this study is to add to the small but growing body of research that examines international student experiences outside major receiving countries (Chiang 2015; Perez-Encinas and Ammigan 2016; Zhang and Brunton 2007). The expectation is that because students at international schools come from a plethora of countries worldwide, they will likely choose to attend a diversity of schools around the world (ISC

Research 2018; Jamaludin, Sam, and Sandal 2018). For the purposes of this study, an international school is defined as such if they offer “ a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in English outside an English-speaking country, or, if a school is in a country where English is one of the official languages, it offers an English-medium curriculum other than the country’s national curriculum and the school is international in its orientation.” (ISC Research 2018, under “What does ISC consider to be an international school?”)

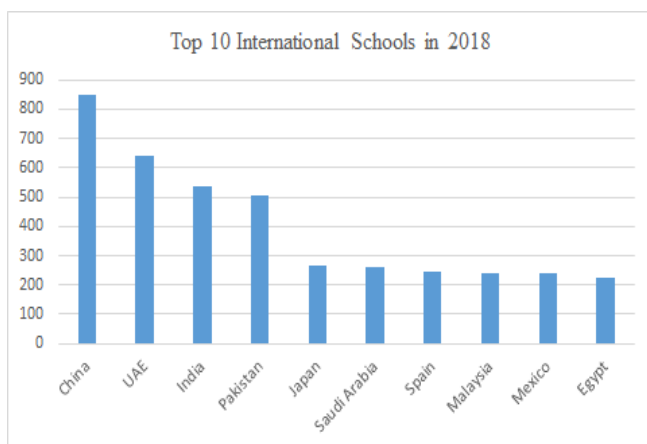
The Importance of Students at International Schools for International Higher Education

Over 250 million people now live outside of their home country (United Nations 2017), so it is not surprising that the number of international schools have continued to grow. P12 international schools have grown by 5.6 percent in the last five years, bringing the total to 9,605 English-speaking schools (ISC Research 2018). With the increase in the number of international schools and students and a changing international higher education landscape, there is an opportunity for higher education institutions (HEIs) to better understand the “push-pull” factors that drive the mobility patterns of these students. Countries like China and Malaysia that have traditionally sent students abroad for tertiary degrees are now building their HEI capacity to receive the next generation of international students (Sa and Sabzalieva 2018). This will impact the market in a large way. The impetus to understand the changing patterns

of mobility should be preeminent for HEIs worldwide if they hope to attract more international students.

Understanding the motivations of students from international schools will continue to grow in importance. To this end, there appears to be a connection between the preponderance of international schools and global student mobility. India and China represent two of the top three countries with the most P12 international schools, and students from these countries also comprise the largest percentages of globally mobile students studying at HEIs (UNESCO 2018). See Figure 1 for the top 10 countries with P12 international school and Figure 2 for the top 10 countries that send globally mobile students for higher education. There is no known publicized aggregate data to analyze the higher education mobility patterns of students from P12 international schools. However, this study will provide great insights into reasons why these students choose a particular HEI. Additionally, consulting research, having personal conversations with knowledgeable individuals, and triangulating global student mobility and international school location data can provide a good estimate of where these students may study. It is more important now than ever to understand and anticipate the new directions and motivations of the growing international student market.

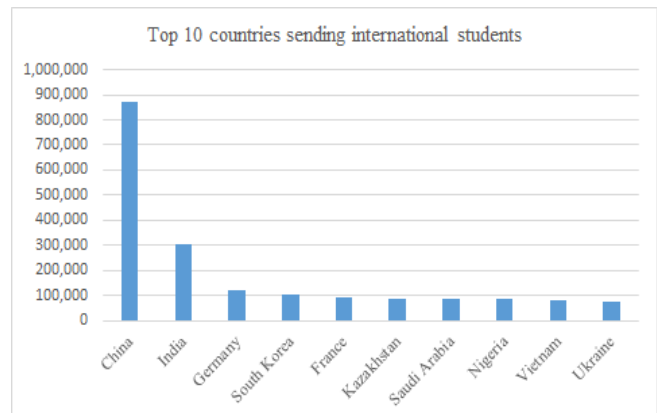
FIGURE 1 TOP 10 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN 2018



ISC Research. "Global report."

<https://www.iscresearch.com/services/global-report>

FIGURE 2 TOP 10 COUNTRIES SENDING INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN 2017



United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. "Outbound internationally mobile students by host region."

http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS&populcustomise=true&lang=en#

Students studying in P12 international schools typically show higher levels of intercultural sensitivity and understanding, and many students graduate with an International Baccalaureate degree which means they have obtained a high level of academic achievement (Straffon 2003). From personal experiences interacting with students from international schools, they typically can choose any location and type of HEI they want. Many students may choose to go back to their country of citizenship, while many others will decide to study in a new country (Findlay et al. 2012; ISC Research 2018). International schools were originally created for expat families sojourning abroad for professional purposes, but the student population at P12 international schools has diversified quite dramatically (ISC Research, 2018). International schools used to enroll 80 percent expat and 20 percent local students, but the situation has completely reversed and now 80 percent of students at international schools are local (ISC Research 2018). International schools are viewed as stepping stones for families that want to offer a global education and future transnational professional experience for their children (Keeling, Anne 2018 Personal conversation with author, September 19). Particularly for local families, these schools give their children a window into the outside

world and access to a collection of world knowledge and connections with the global elite without leaving their home country (Bunnel 2007).

As an overall group, students that attend these international schools are members of a transcendent classification of high schools, where the country they are located in is less important than the students they serve and the values they espouse (Findlay et al. 2012; ISC Research 2018). Students that attend these types of elite schools typically go on to study at prestigious or strong HEIs, and then have international or transnational careers (Findlay et al. 2012). When a local family chooses an international school experience, they also offer their son or daughter a chance to catapult into this transnational group that is difficult to access without significant international experience. As a result, not only do the expat children experience an early form of intercultural competence and global citizenship, but the local students that study in international schools are also primed to achieve these competencies, and then in turn study abroad (Bunnel 2007; ISC Research 2018). However, local students at international schools are not as often seen as viable enrollees by many HEIs, but this narrative needs to change. There seems to be great opportunity for more communication between HEIs and international school students. This will likely benefit the international student enrollment of HEIs, and students themselves will also benefit from learning more about a diversity of institutions to meet their personal and professional goals.

Research Methods and Takeaways

Globally mobile student numbers have rapidly increased in the last 25 years, tripling from 1.3 million in 1990 to over 5 million in 2017 (UNESCO 2018). Among this population, students at P12 international schools represent a growing subset. However, more research is needed to understand the “push-pull” factors that impact their university choice, as well as their university experience. This study will be a mixed-method design to examine the experiences of students and alumni from P12 international schools. The

following research questions will be examined in this study:

- 1) What are the university “push/pull” factors and other motivations in choosing a higher education institution for students in P12 international schools?
- 2) What are the acculturative processes, university “push-pull” factors, and intercultural learning of international school alumni that study at a higher education institution?

This research study is guided by the international students’ decision-making process model (Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cerviño 2006). This model views international students’ university choice through purchase intention with five guiding aspects: personal reasons, country image effect, institution image, city effect, and programme evaluation. There are 19 other sub-factors that comprise the five major factors (Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cerviño 2006). Students from international schools likely will place emphasis on different factors when they consider which university to attend than a traditional international student coming from their home country. As an example, international school counselors seem to play a heightened role in the university decision-making process of students from international schools (ISC Research 2018). This model should provide a strong basis to explore the motivations of students from international schools.

To examine research question one, approximately 3,500-5,000 current students will be surveyed from a variety of international schools throughout different world regions, including China, the United Arab Emirates, India, and the Netherlands. These countries were chosen because substantial number of students’ study at international schools in these countries, and because they are all culturally different from one another. To investigate research question two, the researcher will use an exploratory phenomenological framework to examine 30-40 students’ acculturative processes, university “push-pull” factors, and intercultural learning through semi-structured interviews. This study will contribute to the well-established research about international students’ experiences but will provide a unique aspect by

examining students who graduated from international secondary schools.

The survey of current international school students and interview questions for international school alumni will incorporate the five major factors of the international students' decision-making process model (Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cerviño 2006). The results from this study will provide insight into students' "push-pull" factors and the shifting trends of global student mobility. It will allow international schools to better advise and prepare their current students for higher education. It will also provide tertiary institutions with insights on unique successes and challenges that students from international schools may experience. With a better understanding of these students' experiences and needs, both students and higher education professionals should be able to ensure a better match and opportunity for a successful university experience and professional career.

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