

**Understanding the International Students' Innovation
Decision Process with Particular Reference to
International Higher Education Service
in Australia and in Thailand**

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

The work presented in this thesis contains no material which has been previously published or written except where references are given, and to the best of my knowledge, none of the material has been accepted for the award of any other degree at any university or other institution.

Puangchompoo (Sapjaroen) Jones

LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS

AECs	Australian Education Centres
AEI	Australian Education International
AIEF	Australian International Education Foundation
AIT	The Asian Institute of Technology
ASEAN	The Association of South East Asian Nations
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AUN	ASEAN University Network
AusAid	The Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program
BIE	The Bureau Industry Economics
BOI	The Board of Investment of Thailand
BUIC	Bangkok University International College
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEP	Department of Export Promotion of Thailand
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
EIP	The Evaluation International Programme
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
EMSS	The Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme
GATS	The General Agreement on Trade and Services
GMS	The Greater Mekong Sub-region
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IDP	IDP Education Australia
IMMI	Department of Immigration and Multiculture and Indigenous Affairs
MUA	The Ministry of University Affairs
NESDB	The National Economic and Social Development Board
ONEC	Office of the National Education Commission
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institution of Technology
TUAS	Thai University Administrators Shadowing (TUAS) Programme
UMAP	The University Mobility in Asian and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	The World Trade Organisation

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the international higher education service in i) Australia as one of the leaders in this service and ii) Thailand as an eastern developing country that has potential to offer this service. However, as a new country offering this service, Thailand lacks experience of operating it in the world market. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from a leading country, which has more experience, like Australia.

This study aims to i) identify the factors affecting international students in coming to study at HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) in Thailand and in Australia (Melbourne), ii) explore how these factors influence each stage in the model of “International Students’ Innovation Decision Process” in offering the international higher education service of Thailand and Australia (Melbourne), iii) present the implications of the results of this study with regard to marketing of the international higher education service by Thailand, iv) reveal how international higher education service is perceived by persons who are involved with this area in Thailand/Australia (Melbourne) and v) Propose practical directions for the international higher education service of Thailand by adapting the useful experiences of Australia (Melbourne).

When international students have studied in their home countries, the international higher education service offered by other countries is a “new” service to them. This view is therefore different to that taken by previous studies in similar areas. Therefore, the model in this study of “the International Students’ Innovation Decision Process” was developed in order to examine the factors affecting international students when making a decision to study abroad in Thailand and Australia. It was also developed to explore their experiences when they were studying at Higher Education Institutions: HEIs in both countries. The results of the study including the findings of Australia’s experiences in offering the international higher education service will be used to assist Thailand in offering a high quality international higher education service.

In this study both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The qualitative component included in-depth interviews with persons involved in the international higher education service in Thailand and Australia. The quantitative component involved a questionnaire survey which was designed to investigate factors affecting international students when making a decision to enrol, and when studying at HEIs in Thailand and Australia. The survey of international students in both countries was used to investigate “the International Students’ Innovation Decision Process”. It incorporated five groups of factors; sources of information, HEI characteristics, country characteristics, benefits and risks of study abroad. Seventeen (17) HEIs and one (1) government department in Thailand and four (4) HEIs in Australia (Melbourne) were used for this study.

Results of the in-depth interviews indicated that the demand by international students for study abroad in Thailand and Australia is still high. It was found in both countries that the international higher education service offers major benefits including cultural exchange as well as financial benefits. Strategies for offering this service that have been successful in Australia, for example use of reliable private agents, were identified and this could be utilised by HEIs in Thailand when offering the international higher education service to prospective international students.

Findings of the survey with international students in both countries of this study identified 4 stages in “the International Students’ Innovation Decision Process”:

- Knowledge Stage: building up the knowledge base
- Persuasion and Decision Stage: assessment and decision activities
- Implementation Stage: reassessment activities
- Confirmation/Disconfirmation Stage: confirmation/disconfirmation decision

The international students’ knowledge about study abroad in Thailand and Australia was found to be likely increased by word of mouth communication from acquaintances and also from the internet. Sponsors, parents and friends were likely to be influential

sources of information when international students were making a decision to enrol at HEIs in both countries. HEI characteristics such as standard of courses and recognition of qualification, country characteristics, for example reasonable cost of living, were factors that influenced international students when making a decision to enrol at HEIs in both countries. High benefits and perceived risks of study abroad influenced international students when making a decision to enrol at HEIs in both countries. The results indicated that expectations of international students in both countries expectations were not met for all HEI and country characteristics once they were studying at HEIs in the destination country. For international students in Thailand, perceptions of the benefits of study abroad did not change, whereas in Australia perceptions of the benefits of study abroad such as “learn English with native speakers” decreased. However, international students’ perceptions of risks of study abroad changed very little in both countries. Further, the majority of international students in both countries intended to complete their study (at the confirmation/disconfirmation stage) in the destination country. This was the final stage of “the International Students’ Innovation Decision Process”.

The international higher education service in this study is defined as a “new” service (an innovation) for international students, who have already made a decision to enrol at HEIs in other countries. In order to examine the international higher education service as a “new” service for international students who look for a place to study abroad, Rogers’ (1995) innovation decision process was an effective model to utilise and adapt to examine international student perceptions and their experiences of the international higher education service in Thailand/Australia in each stage of “the International Students’ Innovation Decision Process” model. Moreover this model is also expected that this model will be helpful for future researchers who are interested in conducting research in similar areas particularly for research in developing countries that wish to offer international higher education service.