

## Exploring Zambia Undergraduate's Motivations to Study Abroad in a Malaysian Private Higher Education Institution

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### Abstract:

*Higher education institution is like any other business institutions where the management need to understand its customer needs and wants in order to remain competitive. Past literature has highlighted the importance of understanding motivational factors among undergraduates at the higher education institution as this will affect their future. Even though there were studies undertaken to explore these undergraduate's motivational factors, less is known about the minority group of Zambia undergraduates in Malaysia. This paper aims to explore how Zambia undergraduate's make the decision to study abroad and what influence their decision in the selection of a Malaysian Private University. Six Zambia undergraduates in Kuala Lumpur were invited to participate in this study. Data were collected from open-ended questions and interviews which were carried out over two months. Findings indicated that these undergraduates considered two motivating factors for study abroad; achieving personal development and to attain a good job. The findings as mentioned by Zambia undergraduates might be unique because they believe confidence, group work, respect, influence and interpersonal skills are needed for them to adapt to the foreign university environment. This*

*current study contributes to better understanding of Zambia undergraduates and will help universities to have a greater knowledge about the motivating factors of Zambia undergraduates for furthering study in private higher education. Finally, the limitations and future directions are discussed.*

**Key words:** Motivational factors, Undergraduates, Higher Education, Zambia, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

With the emergence of globalisation, nowadays it is becoming a phenomenon for Zambia undergraduates to consider studying abroad using the Zambia government scholarship. Prem and Massimiliano (2009) projected that globalisation will further intensify the movement of undergraduates across cultures and geographic boundaries in the pursuits of international education, credential and exposure. There is hardly any one country that is unaffected by the presence of international undergraduates in its institutions of higher learning, or the pressure to send some of its own undergraduates to study abroad (Paige, 1990). The provision of scholarships from governments or individual corporate bodies has made this possible even for those who would have never considered it due to financial problems. For most Zambia young ones, this is a life time opportunity to be seized. They decided to further their studies abroad for many reasons, some of them to gain exposure to the outside world, better standards of education as well as realising their ambitions and dreams. In the recent years, Malaysia has become a popular education hub for foreign undergraduates with numerous universities for undergraduates to choose from private to public institutions.

Two factors contributing to the movement of international undergraduates to study abroad: the push and pull factors. Push factors are factors such as the economic and

political situation in the student's country of origin. While pull factors are factors such as the host country or university's reputation or image. Seth (2000) as quoted by Mpinganjira (2011) carried out a study and found that almost half of those who leave Africa do so to study abroad, 30 percent seek professional development and less than 7 percent leave for political reasons. Further studies carried out found that, in many cases, undergraduates from developing countries believe that studying abroad can help enhance their future employment prospects as there is often a high status associated with overseas studies in developed countries (Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman, 2011; Binsardi and Ekwulogo, 2003; Bourke, 2000). The international undergraduates market has, however, become highly competitive over the years (Maringe, 2006; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2005). Hence the success in recruiting and retaining international undergraduates will thus depend on the ability of the country and its institutions to understand and provide for the needs and wants of these markets.

Many undergraduates choose to study abroad for many reasons, the primary reason being that they believe the levels of standards of education in countries abroad are higher than those in their native countries. Binsardi and Ekwulogo (2003) found that undergraduates choose to study in the UK because of its high educational standards and its recognised qualifications worldwide and study abroad given them the opportunity to hold leadership positions in their home countries upon graduation (Zeeshan, Sabbar, Bashir and Hussain, 2013). Considering the needs to resolve perceived education standard by encouraging the undergraduates to continue to study in their countries of origin, this may take several years to accomplish in most African countries especially Zambia. Because the quality of education and as well as employability in African countries are perceived as much lower than most developed countries by global standards, many Zambia

undergraduates are motivated to study abroad in pursuit of better quality education as well as more job accessibility.

In recent years, Malaysia has established itself to become Asia's education hub. There have been policies passed by the Malaysian government encouraging foreign undergraduates from all over the world to pursue their studies in line with the Malaysian Private Higher Education Plan (MAMPU, 2009). This has encouraged millions of undergraduates have come to study in Malaysia. However, there is no in depth understanding of why and how they choose Malaysia in particular. Therefore, there is need to investigate more on the reasons behind these undergraduates' decision to study in Malaysia.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Motivation to Study Abroad**

Maringe and Carter (2007) as well as Mazzarol (1998) noted that the decision to study abroad is one of the most significant and expensive initiatives that undergraduates may ever undertake as a result requiring a lot of deliberation on their part. Many factors may thus influence the decision to study abroad. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), access-related difficulties are the primary drivers influencing the decision to study abroad on the part of most African and Asian undergraduates.

Bourke (2000) found that in many other cases, the course of interest may not even be offered by home country institutions. Other studies have found that in many cases, undergraduates believe that studying abroad, especially in developed countries on the part of developing country undergraduates, can help enhance their future employment prospects as there is often a high status associated with overseas study in developed countries (Binsardi and Ekwulogo, 2003; Bourke, 2000).

Apart from access-related problems, many other studies have found that the quality of education on offer relative to that offered abroad is one of the most important factors influencing the decision to study abroad (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, 2008; Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006). During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a significant shift in the purpose of study abroad. Higher education institutions recognized that participation in study abroad programs benefited undergraduates through the understanding of other cultures, increase in personal development, and interest in making a change (Goodwin and Nacht, 1988). In addition, Hartz, Watson and Noyes (2005) has highlighted that an individual's well-being is strongly influenced by close associates such as friends.

Tim and Geoffrey (2002) and Gursharan (2009) carried out numerous studies to investigate the possible push and pull factors important for international movement of undergraduates. Gursharan (2009) believed that push factors are related to the home country specifically those that motivate a person to leave and go to some other place. Low productivity, unemployment, underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of facilities, exhaustion of natural resources could be some possible push factors. Gursharan (2009) explained that pull factors are factors related to the host country that make it more appealing than one's home country. Better employment, higher wages, better facilities, working conditions and amenities are some possible pull factors.

### **Outcome or expectation of studying abroad**

The outcomes of study abroad for undergraduates vary from internal to external, as evidenced in the literature. Internal outcomes identified are personal, development, personal autonomy, identity development, flexibility, and cross cultural competency. Some of the external outcomes identified are language competence, increased international knowledge, increased motivation in academics, and academic and career

development (Akande and Slawson, 2002; Carlson, Burn, Useem and Yachimowicz, 1990; Goodwin and Nacht, 1988; Kauffman, Martin and Waever, 1992; Opper, Teichler and Carlson, 1990; Paige and Fry, 2005).

Davey (2005) found that overseas undergraduates differ in their motivations for studying abroad. For example, the Taiwanese undergraduates choose to study abroad because they consider the international acceptability and recognition of overseas as a tremendous benefit for their long-term investment. On the other hand, the European Union (EU) undergraduates choose to go to other countries, mainly because it provides them an opportunity to learn the English language and the cultural traditions.

A research carried out by Opper et al., (1990) found that respondents from the entire sample stated that their study abroad experience has affected their academic, cultural, and professional aspirations on several levels. On the academic level, respondents stated that they had increased their language competence, improved awareness of their learning styles, developmental comparative perspectives, and had performed better in their academics while overseas. On the cultural level, respondents experienced increased knowledge of politics, society, and culture of the host country. Lastly, the long-term effects of the experience on the professional level where study abroad allowed for increased mobility to international positions allowed use of another language on the job, and made undergraduates more marketable to employers.

David McClelland had developed the McClelland's Three Needs Theory in 1961. This theory is based on individual needs. In his theory he found that workplace motivation of an individual usually results from three dominant needs. These three dominant needs are as follows: the need for achievement where individuals have the desire to accomplish something difficult such as undergraduates will have to work hard to overcome challenging modules to attain good results in the

university. Next, the need for power where individuals will try to exercise their influence on others (Greenberg and Baron, 2003) such as undergraduates will find ways to demonstrate their leadership skills in leading group work, discussions or to encourage others to achieve their goals. Finally, the need for affiliation where the undergraduates will build social acceptance by others in their social community. Hence, there are three key areas to motivate individuals to pursue higher education.

## **Methodology**

This study was to explore the motivating factors for study abroad among selected individuals from Zambia that currently pursuing their degree in Malaysia. Hence, open ended questions was used to gather data for this study. Purposive sampling is a sampling method that researcher used in order to determine the elements which are chosen in line with the purpose of study. In the sampling group, Zambia undergraduates in one of the Malaysian Private University have been selected as the participants in the research. The sample group consists of six Zambia undergraduates consisted of both male and female in various levels of degree study. These questions were derived from past studies and based on McClland's theory. In-depth interviews with the respondents was recorded using a voice recorder at the respondent's convenient.

## **Findings**

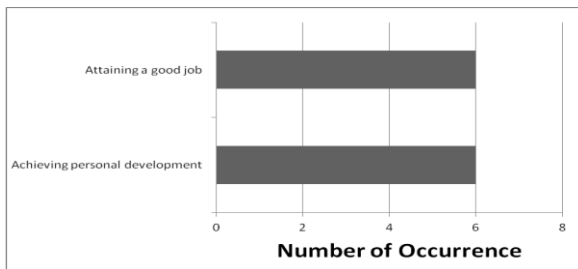
The findings of motivational factors are categorised into three types, these being (a) reasons, (b) stimulants and (c) skills. The findings as below:

**Table: 1 Respondent's Profile**

Name	Gender	Age	Degree (Year)
Esther	Female	20	1
Jay	Male	20	2
Suad	Male	21	3
Jasmin	Female	-	3
Sonny	Male	22	2
Adam	Male	23	3

*Why would you choose to study abroad?*

The most influential reasons for Zambia undergraduates who chose to study abroad are to achieve personal development and to attain a good job. Figure 1 illustrates that from the 12 comments, all respondents were motivated to study abroad in pursue of a better job and brighter future.

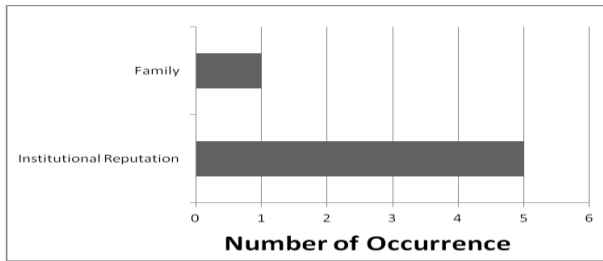


**Figure: 1 Reasons for Studying Abroad**

*How to know your study abroad destination?*

Two sources of stimulants in their decision where to study were initiated by their family and the institutional reputation. In total, 6 statements from the open-ended questions showed that these undergraduates were not independently making their decision, but with the involvement of their parents and almost all influenced by the institution's reputation.

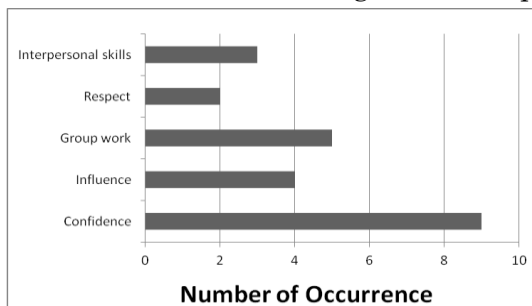




**Figure: 2 Stimulants**

*What is needed for the success of study abroad?*

Five areas emerged that were deemed to be what is needed for the success of studying abroad; confidence, influence, group work, respect and interpersonal skills. The most prominent area for success was confidence, receiving 9 of the 23 statements in this area. Most undergraduates feel confident that they will be able to achieve their goals and aspirations.



**Figure: 3 Skills**

**Discussion**

Motivational factors to study abroad can be a complex decision. The search for good jobs and better future have motivated this group of undergraduates to leave their home and came to study in Malaysia. To further reveal the particulars of how they know where they are going, this group of Zambia undergraduates was asked for their perceptions as to what motivate them to further study in a foreign country like Malaysia.

The majority of these Zambia undergraduates was motivated by their own personal reason, all 12 statements from 6 respondents have quoted study abroad will promote personal development and to attain better job upon graduation. One of them explained that *"I chose to study abroad for my personal growth - to globalise myself. This opportunity will help to expose me to the world, branch out myself and learn about different places, different cultures and different people. It will also broaden my experience by learning how my home country fits into humanity and through the eyes of different cultures as a Zambian."* The present of self awareness was thought provoking as they are just early twenties.

These respondents are motivated by their own, but not without the stimulants from their parent and institutional reputation which have influenced their decision to study in Malaysia. In this study, the reputation of the institution really matters. Undergraduates will not attend a university that has a bad reputation for not caring about the well being of their undergraduates. Undergraduates will gauge an institution by the quality of education that they offer. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002; 2008) and Cubillo et al., (2006) found that the quality of education on offer relative to that offered abroad is one of the most important factors influencing the decision to study abroad. As quoted from one of the interview responses, *"education abroad is more efficient and practical in terms of acquisition of knowledge and transparency."* Some respondent said that, *'a qualification obtained from abroad has more worth than that acquired in my country, despite them being the same.'* Secondly, family plays an important role in decision making especially when it comes to making educational and career choices. Hartz et al., (2005) found that a person's well-being is strongly influenced by the attributes of close associates such as family or close friends. The success one has in education and career-wise is usually emulated by their younger siblings or children. One of the respondents had this to say, *"my influence came from my*

*sister and her job in the UN so I wanted to become like her and when I started my University degree I ventured off to learn more."*

What needed to be successful to study abroad was thought-provoking. The importance of confidence was strongly presented, having 9 of the 23 statements recorded. During the interviews, all respondents were observed as confident individuals in the way they expressed themselves. Two of the respondents believed that they will have the potential to be leaders in the near future. As quoted by the respondents, *'Yes, I do as I believe I have leadership qualities.'* Another respondent went on to say, *'yes I do as I have the potential to lead.'* This finding is consistent with Zeeshan et al., 2013 that students perceived the opportunity to study abroad is to equip them with leadership elements so they could hold leadership positions upon returning to their home country. Socially, most of the respondents expressed that they didn't feel the need to be liked when in a social setting. It can be concluded that they were comfortable with who they were and saw no need to impress others so that they were *"liked"*. When asked how friendly relationships with others made them feel, the respondents had this to say, *'comfortable enough to be myself,' 'they make me feel confident and relaxed.'*

Nevertheless, group work is also an advocate to the adaptation of study at foreign country. The findings demonstrate these respondents acknowledged that teamwork plays a big role in their lives especially as undergraduates. When asked what role teamwork plays in their lives, they had this to say, *'A very important role because I feel that when facing challenges, everyone has something to present.'* Another respondent said that, *'Team work is vital in life as one can't do everything alone.'* It can be observed that the respondents, despite their social orientation are ready to work in teams in order to obtain good results.

On the other hand, the ability to influence, to respect others and interpersonal skills are important factors to these undergraduates. To them, ability to influence will mean one has the power and people will respect and accept you into their community. Four of the respondents believed that having influence gave one power. They had this to say:

*'Influence is power because it keeps you in control of every situation. For me, being in control of a situation is good.'and 'it is important to some degree. In most cases, it is easier to get things done once you have influence and power.'*

Finally, acceptance within a group is needed to avoid being isolated in Malaysia.

This study has revealed the dynamics of motivational factors through the voices of six Zambia undergraduates in Malaysia. For further study, broader evidence collection and larger sample size would assist in explaining undergraduate's motivations. It is recommended to have a larger sample size of undergraduates from different African countries and to extend number of private and public universities in Malaysia. The impact of understanding the needs and wants of these undergraduates are necessitating for promoting Malaysia as an educational hub for other African countries including Zambia.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the Zambia undergraduate's decision to study abroad, which the motivation is expressed in three themes: reasons, stimulants and skills. To do so, we have tried to clarify using the personal description of their journey to study abroad, by interviewing selected Zambia undergraduates in Malaysia. In this way, this work has the merit and the originality of deriving themes from this minority group of Zambia undergraduates which were missed out in the literature. Through this study, we managed to show that decision to study

abroad is pretty complex, which involves interactions between family members, personal goals and skills. McClland's (1961) theory which helped to identify the dominant motivators of people in organisation, was extended and relevant in today's educational institution.

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