

## FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' CHOICES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF POLISH STUDENTS STUDYING IN A BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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### ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to investigate the factors which influence students when deciding to study abroad. The case study is based on Polish students studying in the British higher education system (UK HE) and the paper examines these students' choices and their decision-making process when selecting their university studies. The literature review suggests that there are two types of factors influencing students' decision-making process: push factors, which operate within the home country, and pull factors, meaning that students are attracted by the host country and encouraged to study there. Polish students constitute a significant group of EU students who study in the UK and yet there are very few studies on this particular group. The results from this qualitative research on Polish students studying in a selected British university indicate that, contrary to a number of other studies, pull factors could be more important in influencing Polish students' decision-making process regarding studying abroad.

**Key words:** international students, Polish students, UK HE, decision making process, push factors, pull factors, choice

**JEL codes:** I2, I23, M1, M10, M16, M3, M30, M31, M37

### INTRODUCTION

The last few years have witnessed a dramatic surge in international student mobility [King and Sondhi 2018, Javed et al. 2019, Nghia 2019]. Looking from the European perspective, membership in the European Union creates a number of opportunities, including staff and student mobility options for citizens of the member countries [Di Pietro 2020]. This gives young people not only a chance to study the entire selected programme in a chosen university in the EU, but also

to benefit from European exchange programmes that allow them to study in a host institution for one or two semesters in order to experience a different environment and gain international experience.

The United Kingdom is one of the most popular destinations for students from all over the world, and although it will no longer be an EU member at the end of 2020, the country is still open to welcome overseas students. Omoruyi and Rembielak [2019] state that the UK higher education institutions are recognised as the second largest destination for international students

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**Table.** Top EU sending countries (number of students)

Country	2018–2019	2017–2018	2016–2017	2015–2016	2014–2015
Italy	13 965	13 985	13 455	12 135	10 525
France	13 675	13 660	13 560	12 525	11 955
Germany	13 475	13 545	13 735	13 425	13 675
Spain	10 330	9 630	8 820	7 840	7 040
Greece	9 920	10 135	10 045	9 790	10 130
Romania	9 740	8 655	8 110	7 200	6 590
Republic of Ireland	9 625	9 600	10 070	10 245	10 905
Cyprus	8 865	9 360	9 145	9 330	9 745
Poland	8 380	7 545	6 585	5 655	5 245
Bulgaria	6 020	6 040	6 585	6 195	6 255

Source: HESA [2020b].

after the USA. It is also a top choice for EU students, and number one for Polish students. Every year the number of Poles beginning their studies in the UK is growing approximately by a thousand (the table). It is predicted that the number of EU students coming to the UK may decrease due to Brexit, but the biggest challenge currently is COVID-19.

### HIGHER EDUCATION AS A SERVICE AND PUSH-PULL FACTORS IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Higher education (HE) being a service, shares similar characteristics to many other services, such as intangibility, inseparability, perishability, and variability [Kotler and Armstrong 2015]. The globalisation of markets and internationalization of HE brings students more choice in terms of selecting HE providers. Demand for education, particularly higher education, has traditionally been driven by expectations of its ability to increase economic and social status of the graduate [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002], but the actual choice of country and institution in which to study can be influenced by many factors. One factor may be a country of origin effect (CoO) [Lee et al. 2016, Mc Leay et al. 2020]. Some researchers [McMahon 1992, Mazzarol

and Soutar 2002, Maringe and Carter 2007, Buchanan 2014, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020] attempt to explain the global pattern of international student flow by identifying a combination of push-pull factors that encourage students to study overseas [Nghia 2019].

When deciding on their HE provider, students face a number of alternatives which are available to them not only locally but also internationally. This makes their decision-making process even more complex. The traditional decision making process is conceptualised as a five stage process involving: identification of a problem needing to be solved, the search for information, an evaluation of alternatives, making the purchase decision, and finally evaluating it [Kotler and Fox 1995, Moogan et al. 2002, Cubillo et al. 2006, Germeijis and Verschueren 2007, Maringe and Carter 2007, Kotler and Armstrong 2015, McLeay et al. 2020]. However, Mazzarol and Soutar [2002] propose dividing international student's decision making process into three stages:

- Student's initial decision to study abroad rather than in their home country, usually influenced by a series of push factors within the home country which encourage them to leave and study overseas.

- Researching the international HE market and selecting a country to study in, usually influenced by a combination of pull factors which make a particular country an attractive place to study.
- Deciding which particular HE provider to select from, influenced by pull factors which make a particular institution more appealing than its competitors.

Push factors can be explained as those that exist within the home country of a student and influence a student's final decision to undertake study overseas. In terms of push factors, Mazzarol and Soutar [2002], Maringe and Carter [2007], Baloch et al. [2018], Nghia [2019] and McLeay et al. [2020], point at a lack of access to higher education among many developing countries, for example in Asia and Africa; historical or colonial links between the home and host countries, a commonality of language, availability of science or programmes based highly on technology, geographical proximity, and perceptions of the tertiary education system available in the home country. Also important are the levels of economic wealth in the home country, especially GNP growth rate [Lee and Tan 1984, Agarwal and Winkler 1985, McMahon 1992, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, McLeay et al. 2020], the education opportunities available in the home country and the expected benefits of studying abroad [Agarwal and Winkler 1985, McMahon 1992, Baloch et al. 2018, McLeay et al. 2020].

Pull factors instead operate within the host country and host institution to make them relatively appealing to international students. In terms of host country, McMahon [1992] distinguishes such factors as: relative size of home country economy compared to host country, host's national political interests in the home country through foreign assistance or cultural links, economic links between source and host, and host nation's support of international students via scholarships. Other authors stress the importance of such factors as: international recognition of the host country [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, McLeay et al. 2020], international education experience [Lin 1997, Maringe and Carter 2007, Baloch et al. 2018, McLeay et al. 2020], use of government promotion agencies [Mazzarol 1998, Maringe and Carter 2007, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], and

image [Paramerawan and Glowacka 1995, Yavas and Shemwell 1996, Landrum et al. 1998, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020]. In the case of non-EU students, significant factors could be legal stability regarding visas [Maringe and Carter 2007, McLeay et al. 2020] and ease of university entrance and immigration procedures, which encourage students to study abroad [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Maringe and Carter 2007, McLeay et al. 2020].

Pull factors can also operate at a host institution level. Such factors could include: institution's reputation for quality [Hooley and Lynch 1981, Lin 1997, Mazzarol et al. 1997, Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Soutar and Turner 2002, Cubillo et al. 2006, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], market profile [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Cubillo et al. 2006, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], range of courses, alliances or coalitions [Hooley and Lynch 1981, Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Soutar and Turner 2002, Cubillo et al. 2006, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017] including off-shore teaching programmes [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], staff expertise [Lin 1997, Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Soutar and Turner 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, McLeay et al. 2020], degree of innovation [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], use of information technology [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rashid and Raj 2006, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], resources, size of the alumni base and promotion and marketing efforts [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, McLeay et al. 2020], presence of students from students' home country [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Lin 1997, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], customer focused organisational culture [Mazzarol 1998], use of government promotion agencies [Mazzarol 1998, Maringe and Carter 2007, Rem-

bielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], image [Paramerawan and Glowacka 1995, Yavas and Shemwell 1996, Landrum et al. 1998, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], inclusion of accommodation [Maringe and Carter 2007], library facilities [Quereshi 1995, Price et al. 2003, Cubillo et al. 2006], and availability of computers [Price et al. 2003, Cubillo et al. 2006].

Apart from push and pull factors, there are other factors which are found within the students themselves, such as: overall level of knowledge and awareness of host country [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], recognition of host's qualifications in the home country [Mazzarol 1996, Mazzarol et al. 1997, Cubillo et al. 2006, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], wanting to become a 'leader' in a field [Maringe and Carter, 2007], Referrals or recommendations from parents, relatives friends and other gatekeepers [Hoolley and Lynch 1981, Mazzarol et al. 1997, Maringe and Carter 2007, Cubillo et al. 2006, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], cost issues including social costs such as travel, crime, racial discrimination [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Cubillo et al. 2006, Maringe and Carter 2007, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020], presence of students and others from students' home country [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Maringe and Carter 2007, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018, Buchanan 2019, McLeay et al. 2020, Di Pietro 2020], availability of part time work [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017] and work after the course [Lin 1997, Turner 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017], perception of physical and study climate and lifestyle [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Lin 1997, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017,

Baloch et al. 2018, McLeay et al. 2020], geographical proximity [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017, Baloch et al. 2018], ethnocentrism and cultural proximity as well as socio-economic level [Cubillo 2006].

In order to recruit and retain students in what is an increasingly competitive environment many HEIs are increasingly adopting a more consumer-oriented approach [DeShields et al. 2005, Rashid 2007] especially bearing in mind that the era of 'universal free higher education' is long over. Studies have shown that many factors influence students' decision-making process but satisfied students may communicate with their peers and return to the alma mater for further study [Gruber et al. 2010].

## NUMBER OF POLISH STUDENTS IN UK HE INSTITUTIONS

The addition of 10 new members to the European Union on 1 May 2004 (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia) brought considerable changes for UK universities, as students from the new member states gained easier access to EU education in countries other than their own. This was particularly significant in the case of Polish students. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data in 2003 (just before Poland entered the EU), only 85 students from Poland were studying in the UK. One year later the situation had changed completely – in 2004, British universities admitted 499 students from Poland, and in 2005 they admitted 1,034 students. The overall number of Polish students in the UK was 8,380 as of 2018/2019 [HESA 2020a].

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted prior to finalization of Brexit and involved five focus groups, with eight participants in each, totalling 40 Polish students studying in one of the northern UK universities. In terms of the demographic nature of the participants, 32 were enrolled in undergraduate programmes and eight were postgraduates. The majority of the programmes were business or language-related. Twenty eight partici-

pants were female and 12 were male. The age range was between 20 and 35. The majority of students had family networks that had already been established in the UK, and only some of them were studying and living in the UK on their own.

## FINDINGS

According to the participants of the focus groups there are many reasons why they chose the UK as their study destination.

### Push factors

#### *Polish economy versus British economy*

At the starting point of the discussion, participants of the focus groups explained the reasons why they had decided not to study in Poland. Surprisingly, only a minority pointed at the economic situation in Poland, which had prompted their parents to leave the country and consequently move the whole family permanently to the UK. When faced with making a decision where to study, students decided to stay close to their mother, father, and siblings.

One student stated: “After my dad was made redundant when his company closed down, for many months he couldn't find a job in Poland. The only breadwinner for our family was my mum, and it was really hard for us to live. After a number of family discussions the decision was made to move to the UK. First my dad moved, and once he settled in my mum decided we should all go there to live together. We have always been very close. I went to secondary school there and when the time came to choose my university it was out of question that I would leave the UK as I wanted to stay close to my family and friends.”

Another student also supported it by saying: “So many people were leaving Poland in 2004, and my family saw better financial prospects in the UK so we packed and moved. Also my parents' sisters and brothers joined us, so now we are all here. I couldn't imagine studying away from my family so it was obvious I would choose a British university.”

However, some students made a decision to leave Poland and their families in order to earn money abroad and then to study: “After I finished high school

I was not sure what I wanted to study, as I had very many ideas. So I spoke to my friends, some of whom had already lived in the UK, and I decided to try various jobs before I knew what I want to do in the future. As I realised that I would earn peanuts in Poland if don't have an MSc, I thought the UK offered me more than my country. I packed and moved to live with my friends. I spent four years working in a factory making sandwiches and then I decided it was time for me to move further. By that time I had also improved my language skills so I felt confident I could study in the UK. Now I am a happy student of Finance and Accounting.”

#### *Lack of innovations in Polish institutions*

When we discussed the reasons why students chose British institutions, the main push factor that was pointed out by Polish students was that Polish universities were not very innovative in terms of programme offerings, whereas British universities gave them flexibility in combining various modules so that they could study what they were really interested in. This is in line with several studies [Mazzarol 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Rembielak et al. 2009, Rembielak 2015, Rembielak et al. 2017].

“I looked at the offer at Polish universities and I saw that the modules they offered students to study were really boring. I wanted something more exciting and I could only find it in the UK.”

“After I finished my secondary education, I went to study at the University of Poznań. I studied Economics there for one semester only. Unfortunately, I was not happy with this programme and I decided to move to the tourist industry, as this was my interest. So I continued my education at the University in Poznań and I successfully completed one year, but I was not content with the course of studies, with the way it was taught. I started to search for other opportunities and as one of my friends had already been studying here I found out a lot about the way of life here, the university, so I used her help. Then I applied via UCAS.”

“I finished a BA at the University in Kielce in English Studies, and after that I decided that I don't want to stay in my city any more, I want to go to some different place. I came to England just for the holidays to my cousin to Manchester, and after two months

I decided that it would be a great idea to study English in an English-speaking country, which would improve my English language skills. On the other hand when I started researching the offer from Polish universities I was not happy with the modules I would be studying, as it seemed to me that I would be studying about writing, etc. and that once I come to England this will come natural and I would be concentrating on studying how to teach. It would be theory and practise at the same time, which encouraged me.”

#### *Low level of customer service in Polish higher education institutions*

Some students who had already had experience with Polish universities were not very happy with the customer service the institutions offered to them. They did not like the fact that in Poland the contact between student and lecturer was very formal and they felt their needs were not fully understood. This is in line with research by Mazzarol [1998] and Mazzarol and Soutar [2002].

“I had experience with a Polish university and I think that in Poland the contact between student and lecturer is more like between a Master and a student, whereas here it is more like friends. He/she accepts that you can have a different point of view or that even maybe you know more than him/her in certain areas, which I think is great. Discussions with students are very helpful and make you feel more involved in the studies as you know that somebody listens to you and it is important what you say.”

“I agree with everything she said. I've had exactly the same experience. What is very important to me is that if I have a problem, I know that I can go to a lecturer and I can speak about it.”

#### *Favouring of British education by Polish businesses and expected benefits of studying abroad*

Many students also stressed the fact that the Polish job market favoured graduates with British education qualifications at the expense of those with Polish qualifications. The image of the British education system is very positive in Poland, and is considered to deliver very high quality instruction. So UK graduates are very competitive in the Polish market due to the fact that their knowledge and expertise are expected

to be really outstanding. This is in line with studies by Mazzarol [1996], Mazzarol et al. [1997], Cubillo et al. [2006], Rembielak et al. [2009], Rembielak [2015], Rembielak et al. [2017], Baloch et al. [2018], Buchanan [2019], McLeay et al. [2020]. Moreover, it is assumed that the English language proficiency of those graduates will be high, which definitely is an asset in collaborating internationally.

“If you graduate from a British university it is definitely better for you to find a prestigious job in Poland. Employers value you higher as they know you speak fluent English and you have more practical experience. You see, it is very hard in Poland to get practical experience when you are a student as you have so many hours of lectures and tutorials that it is physically impossible. You study a lot of useless stuff. In the UK you study what is needed for your job and usually you have at least one day free per week, which allows you to work.”

#### *Willingness to leave parents and become independent*

Some students also stressed the fact that they wanted to leave their parents and ‘learn to be an adult’, which can be considered both as a push factor and a student factor. They also stressed the importance of being able to work part-time when studying at the same time. This is in line with studies by Mazzarol et al. [1997], Binsardi and Ekwulugo [2003], Rembielak et al. [2009], Rembielak [2015], Rembielak et al. [2017].

“I have always been close to my family and they had a lot of influence on my life and decisions. I started to feel a bit scared that as a single child I would never grow up so I thought the further away from my parents I move the better lesson of life I would get. My parents were really concerned at the beginning but they always supported me and understood my choice. I learned a lot in the UK both as a student and as a person. What was also important to me was I could work part time and earn my money.”

### **Pull factors**

#### *Multicultural aspect*

When discussing what prompted students to study in the UK, the majority of them stated that the main reason was that they wanted to experience multicultural

studies, and they believed they could only get that in the UK or the USA. However, since the UK is closer to Poland and the opportunities to study there as a citizen from another EU country are much easier, the choice was obvious. This is in line with Mazzarol et al. [1997] and Lin [1997].

“This diversity was one of the things which attracted me to come to study here because I found our Polish society as kind of homogenous. There are not many foreign people in Poland. I was missing this element in Poland. I was missing this kind of diversity and openness, other people, other cultures, religions, and so on. And hence I was excited to come here to experience it. I love to have people from all over the world in my class as it enriches me a lot. I believe it is amazing to share my opinions with some other people from other countries, culture or background, it opens your mind. You can learn a lot of things from these diversities and I do find it positive.”

#### *Geographical proximity*

The majority of students pointed to the fact of a relatively short distance for travel between Poland and the UK. They claimed that the changes within the EU encouraged more people to migrate for work, which influenced travel companies to extend their offerings of cheap transport. This made the UK a very attractive place to study in, as it was very convenient for students to travel between Poland and the UK at a relatively small financial cost. This is in line with research by Mazzarol and Soutar [2002].

“For me this was the only country I considered. It was because of the changes in the European Union, which made it easy for me to come here, and study without problems, as we had an equal chance with all the other EU citizens, and also because it's the closest English-speaking country.”

#### *Language proximity*

Although Poland is not an English-speaking country, it is spoken as a second language by the majority of young people, as it is mandatory to study English at primary and secondary school. It is also encouraged to raise children as bilingual, so from a very early age they get acquainted with the Polish and English language, and both of them become like a mother tongue

to them. This makes the UK a very attractive place to study as students do not find it difficult to communicate and study in English.

#### *Image*

The image of the UK as a reliable and friendly country and British HE institutions as providing a high-level quality of service is a very important pull factor for Polish students. It was stressed by all of the participants in the focus groups. This is in line with studies by Paramerawan and Glowacka [1995], Yavas and Shemwell [1996], Landrum et al. [1998], Baloch et al. [2018], Buchanan [2019], and McLeay et al. [2020]. The UK is perceived as a very interesting country, with a multicultural society, interesting culture, traditions, and customs.

The high quality of British universities was stressed by many students not only in relation to its perception through the eyes of Polish people, but also worldwide. Obtaining solid British qualifications was perceived as a ‘passport’ to a global career. This is in line with research by Hooley and Lynch [1981], Lin [1997], Mazzarol et al. [1997], Mazzarol [1998], Soutar and Tourner [2002], Mazzarol and Soutar [2002], Cubillo et al. [2006], Rembielak et al. [2009], Rembielak [2015], Rembielak et al. [2017], and McLeay et al. [2020].

“I know of people who studied in British universities and then went back to Poland. They got very good jobs in teaching because the employer sees that that person studied in England and that he/she must have lived there and dealt with culture, and it looks really nice on the CV. Also if I want to stay here I heard that it is better to have a British degree. And also in different countries, if I want to go to Japan and teach they will accept me because I studied in England, so it gives you an international recognition.”

“It's like a passport for a good work. If I want to get a good job in Germany in my field, I think it would be seen better, and I feel that I am starting from a good position.”

The availability of internships, sandwich courses, which are on offer at British universities, are valued by students and prospective employers. This provides students with another distinctive feature which makes them competitive in the market.

“British universities offer internships so you really get practical experience and when you start a job you don't feel scared, as you are familiar with the system. This is something that is hard to get in Poland.”

The majority of students also stressed the importance of appropriate teaching methods applied by staff. They really appreciated the practical approach and teaching by examples.

“I have always wanted to study in the UK as I heard a lot about the British education and I liked the way they teach here – the practical approach. That was my image of the British education.”

#### *Student loans*

The majority of respondents were encouraged to study in the UK by student loans and bursaries. They felt that as EU members they could get the same financial support as British students and this encouraged them to prove they were worth the investment from the government. They also appreciated the universities' activities, such as loyalty bursaries, which was one of the factors contributing to their decision to choose a particular HE institution. This is in line with McMahon [1992] and Rembielak et al. [2009], Rembielak [2015], Rembielak et al. [2017], McLeay et al. [2020].

“The other very important factor was the European Union student loans, which really helped me financially. I also work, in a hotel, but the loan was extremely helpful. The fact that I can study and work at the same time also encouraged me to come here, and the employers here are very helpful to students, my contract is very flexible and if I have exams I just don't have to come to work.”

“What also encouraged me was the excellence scholarship which I was given, it was 1,000 pounds less to pay, so I only paid 2,000. This was a great incentive.”

“I got the loyalty bursary after one year and it was a great opportunity.”

#### *University programmes, the educational system and university facilities*

The majority of Polish students pointed at the fact that they really appreciated the flexibility the programmes gave them, the choice of elective modules,

and the fact that the master's degree programme runs for one year only, whereas in Poland it takes two years.

Most of the respondents appreciated the high level of university facilities, such as classrooms, the choice of books in the library, its opening hours and facilities, computers and all the IT equipment, and university accommodations. This is in line with research by Quereshi [1995], Price et al. [2003], Cubillo et al. [2006] and Maringe and Carter [2007].

“I am very satisfied. I like the library. I spend a lot of time there. I think it is good to have a lot of useful books there so I don't have to worry and I can access them.”

“I agree, and the service is great, also the online access to the library. I can renew my books without even leaving my room. Staff in the library are very friendly, professional and helpful.”

Many of the respondents stressed also the importance of the actual programmes being offered by the university and also the importance of league tables, which is in line with research by Hooley and Lynch [1981], Mazzarol [1998], Soutar and Turner [2002], Cubillo et al. [2006], Rembielak et al. [2009], Rembielak [2015], Rembielak et al. [2017], McLeay et al. [2020].

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Globalisation has had a significant influence on the development of competition within the higher education sector. Enlargement of the European Union in 2004 brought many changes to member countries – old and new. The opening of borders and free movement between nations helped a lot of young people move to other EU countries to obtain a solid education. Polish students very quickly adapted to the new environment. When making decisions about what and where to study they were influenced by many factors, which either existed in their home country (push factors) or operated within the host country and host institution (pull factors). Results obtained from focus groups of Polish students studying at a British university showed a rather small significance of push factors in their decision making process – instead, a lot of pull factors played a very important role.



The respondents found the multicultural aspects of the UK very attractive. They wanted to have a broader perspective and felt that exposure to people representing various countries and cultures could help them open their minds. Although Poland and England do not closely border each other, the airline connections are so good that it makes the physical distance insignificant. And though there is no commonality of language between the two countries, the Polish educational system supports learning foreign languages and studying English is mandatory for all Polish pupils, so the English language is not a significant barrier.

One of the most important factors is the desire to obtain better knowledge in their area of study. Polish students feel that this can be obtained in the UK. They have a very positive perception of the UK as a country and of British HE institutions as providers of a high quality service which is valued worldwide.

Polish students have a free education system in Poland, but as they are aware that they are entitled to a number of scholarships and bursaries, they quite often choose the UK to study. Students feel that even if they still have to make some financial sacrifices, this makes a good investment for the future. They feel that obtaining an education in the UK will open their possibilities of making a career anywhere in the world. They are also convinced that once they go back to Poland, having graduated from a British university will make them more competitive in comparison to their colleagues who studied home.

The results of the research show that the reputation of a particular programme, university, and its staff, was a very important factor for students when selecting a HE provider. The responses indicate clearly that the university facilities, such as accommodations, library, and IT are very important factors for the prospective students.

Findings from this research indicated that pull factors are more important in recruiting Polish students to British universities than push factors.

### Limitations

The research was conducted before the implementation of Brexit and before the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to see how these two factors affect Polish students' decisions to study abroad or

just in the UK. As there is also a high probability that British universities will deliver all their programmes online in the 2020–2021 academic year, it would also be interesting to explore how this will affect students' recruitment to these countries.

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## **CZYNNIKI WPŁYWAJĄCE NA WYBORY STUDENTÓW I PODEJMOWANE PRZEZ NICH DECYZJE: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU POLSKICH STUDENTÓW STUDIUJĄCYCH W BRYTYJSKIEJ INSTYTUCJI SZKOLNICTWA WYŻSZEGO**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest zbadanie, które czynniki mają wpływ na podejmowanie decyzji studentów o studiach za granicą. Studium przypadku stanowią Polacy studiujący w brytyjskich uczelniach wyższych. Dokument analizuje proces podejmowania decyzji przez tych studentów w zakresie wyboru studiów uniwersyteckich. Przegląd literatury sugeruje, że istnieją dwa rodzaje czynników, które wpływają na ten proces: wypychające (ang. *push*), które działają w kraju pochodzenia, oraz przyciągające (ang. *pull*), co oznacza, że studenci są „przyciągani” przez kraj przyjmujący i zachęceni do studiowania tam. Polacy stanowią dość znaczną część studentów z UE uczących się w Wielkiej Brytanii, ale jest bardzo mało badań na tej konkretnej grupie. Wyniki badań jakościowych na Polakach studiujących na wybranym uniwersytecie brytyjskim wskazują, że w przeciwieństwie do wielu innych badań czynniki przyciągające mogą mieć większy wpływ na podejmowane decyzje polskich studentów w zakresie uczenia się za granicą.

**Słowa kluczowe:** studenci zagraniczni, polscy studenci, brytyjskie instytucje szkolnictwa wyższego, proces podejmowania decyzji, czynniki wypychające, czynniki przyciągające, wybór

