

RUNNING HEAD: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO STUDY IN
KAZAKHSTAN

Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan

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Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan**Abstract**

Key words: Higher education, International student, International student mobility, Push and pull factors, Kazakhstan

This research studies the motivation of international students to study in Kazakhstan in order to identify the factors influencing their choice of Kazakhstan as a study destination. It seeks to explain why international students decide to come to Kazakhstan to pursue higher education, to identify the factors that influenced their choice and to present possible suggestions to the government and higher education institutions for the development of international student mobility in Kazakhstan.

The Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) is used as a theoretical framework to examine international students' decision-making process and to explore the factors that affect their choice to study in Kazakhstan. A mixed method research design is conducted by using an online survey tool and face to face interviews. The research sample is composed of 98 full-time degree international students who are currently enrolled at universities in Kazakhstan; 98 participants for the online survey and 7 participants for the interview.

This research reveals that both push and pull factors with a slight difference play a significant role in international students' decision to study in Kazakhstan. However, the overall decision to study abroad is influenced by the push factors while the choice of studying in Kazakhstan is influenced particularly by the pull factors.

This study provides significant implications for the government of Kazakhstan and its higher education institutions by means of which they should focus more on Kazakhstan's strong points and to apply marketing approaches or internationalization of education for recruiting international students.

Шетелдік студенттердің Қазақстанда оқу мотивациясына әсер ететін факторлар**Андатпа**

Түйінді сөздер: Жоғары білім, Шетелдік студент, Шетелдік студенттің ұтқырлығы, Итермелеуші және қозғаушы факторлар, Қазақстан

Осы зерттеу шетелдік студенттердің жоғары білім алу мақсатында Қазақстанды неге таңдайтынын түсіндіруге, сондай-ақ олардың таңдауына әсер ететін факторларды анықтауға және Қазақстанда шетелдік студенттердің ұтқырлығын дамыту үшін Қазақстанның Үкіметіне және жоғары оқу орындарына ықтимал ұсыныстар беруге ұмтылады.

Жалпыланған модель шетелдік студенттің шешім қабылдау процесін түсіндіру және білім беретін ел ретінде Қазақстанды таңдау факторларын зерттеу үшін теориялық негіз ретінде қолданылды. Зерттеу онлайн сауалнамамен және жеке сұхбатпен ұсынылған аралас зерттеу әдісімен жүргізілді. Зерттеу үлгісі Қазақстандық университеттерде күндізгі оқу түріне қабылданған 98 шетелдік студенттен тұрды; оның 98-і онлайн сауалнама толтырды және 7 студентпен жеке сұхбат өткізілді.

Бұл зерттеу Қазақстанда білім алу үшін шетелдік студенттердің шешімдерін қабылдауда әртүрлі факторлар маңызды рөл атқаратынын көрсетеді. Алайда, шетелде білім алудың жалпы шешіміне итермелеуші факторлар әсер етсе, Қазақстанда білім алуды таңдау шешіміне қозғаушы факторлар әсер етеді.

Бұл талдау Қазақстан Үкіметі мен оның жоғары оқу орындарын Қазақстанның күшті жақтарына шоғырландыру және шетелдік студенттерді тарту мақсатында маркетингтік тәсілді қолдану немесе білім беруді интернационалдандыру үшін елеулі алғышарттарды анықтайды.

**Факторы, влияющие на мотивацию иностранных студентов учиться в
Казахстане**

Аннотация

Ключевые слова: Высшее образование, Иностранный студент, Мобильность иностранного студента, Побуждающие и движущие факторы, Казахстан

Это исследование стремится объяснить, почему иностранные студенты выбирают Казахстан в целях получения высшего образования, а также определить факторы, влияющие на их выбор, и представить возможные предложения правительству и высшим учебным заведениям Казахстана для развития мобильности иностранных студентов в Казахстане.

Обобщенная модель использована как теоретическая основа для объяснения процесса принятия решения иностранным студентом и изучения факторов выбора Казахстана как страны, предоставляющей образование. Исследование было проведено смешанным методом исследования, представленным онлайн опросом и личными собеседованиями. Образец исследования состоит из 98 иностранных студентов, зачисленных на очную форму обучения в Казахстанских университетах; 98 из них прошли онлайн опрос и 7 - личное собеседование.

Это исследование показывает, что разновекторные факторы играют важную роль в принятии решений иностранных студентов обучаться в Казахстане. Однако, на общее решение обучаться за границей влияют побуждающие факторы, тогда как на выбор обучаться именно в Казахстане влияют движущие факторы.

Этот анализ выявляет значительные предпосылки для фокусирования правительства Казахстана и его вузов на сильных сторонах Казахстана и применения маркетингового подхода или интернационализации образования с целью привлечения иностранных студентов.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“We live in an era of globalization – there can be no going back on it” (Sorondo, Malinvaud & Lena, 2007, p. 24). Globalization became a phenomenon which brought both positive and negative aspects for the society. That is to say, globalization became the reason for accelerated changes in politics, economy and it has had a huge influence on education (Castells, 2001; Van der Merwe, 2005) including Kazakhstan.

Aside from changes that globalization brought to the country, it also brought the notion of “internationalization” and according to Gao (2015), higher education has especially become progressively internationalized around the world. Without a doubt, internationalization brings with it enormous potential benefits for higher education, such as helping universities to enlarge their academic staff, to make partnerships with different institutions and to integrate modern learning outcomes into the student experience (Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012). Moreover, higher education institutions plan and construct different marketing strategies to attract both their local and international students since it is essential for university’s sustainable development (Oliveira & Soares, 2016).

Improving the international student mobility has become a substantial part in developing educational reforms and policies, and Kazakhstan is not an exception. International student mobility is beneficial to both international students and higher education institutions. With regard to international students, academic mobility gives an opportunity for their further employment by helping them to grow professionally and personally (Souto-Otero et al., 2012). As for higher education institutions, international student mobility provides an opportunity to improve the teaching experience of the faculty as well as improving the research quality to become recognized internationally (De Wit, 2015). In terms of a country, according to Wei, international student mobility gives “an opportunity to become more competitive worldwide and support multiculturalism, and as a

way to replace the shrinking labor market capacity by skilled migrants among former international students” (as cited in Mukhamejanova, 2019, p. 1).

Kazakhstan admits the advantages of the international student mobility and there were taken actions to internationalize its higher education. Namely, the adoption of the Bologna Process which introduced the three-cycle system of higher education (Bachelor, Master's and PhD), alignment of national grading according to the European Credit Transfer Scheme (OECD, 2017). Moreover, the establishment of the universities with English language of instruction (KIMEP, Kazakh-British Technical university and Nazarbayev University) and the provision of scholarships for international students (Bekbauova et al., 2017) have been done. In addition to these actions, the motivations of international students to study abroad have been studied as a way of improving the international student mobility (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Price, Mazdors, Smith, & Agahi, 2003).

In investigating the motivations of international students' motivation to study abroad, number of researchers (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Mazzarol et al., 2001) have based their studies on the factors that influence their choice. Particularly, most researches (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Price, Mazdors, Smith, & Agahi, 2003) studied the factors in terms of the push and pull factors first introduced by Ravenstein (1976). According to him (Ravenstein, 1976), adverse conditions in one place push people out and propitious conditions in another place pull people in. Other studies claim that while the push factors are mostly related to political or economic issues in the country of origin, the pull factors refer to the attractions of the host country (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) as the quality and the recognition of education.

Moreover, quite a few research studies suggest that factors influencing students' decision to study abroad can be in terms of cost, international experience, availability of

information, the location, existing social reference and personal recommendation (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Another study was based on college choice model (Hossler & Gallapher, 1987) where it described the influencing factors in three stages of decision-making process of international students' choice to study abroad. Based on these studies, Chen (2007) introduced the Synthesis Model where he combined above-mentioned theories to explain the factors that affect international students' choice to study abroad.

Research Problem

The importance of international student mobility has gained a greater importance in the last two decades. The enrollment of international students worldwide have changed from 0.8 million in 1975 (Facts and figures: Mobility in higher education, 2015) to 4.89 million in 2016 with a fivefold increase ("International students", 2019).

With regard to Kazakhstan, various policy documents such as such as the Strategy for Academic Mobility in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2012-2020 and the State Program on Educational Development reflect the specific goals that Kazakhstan set for internationalization (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2012). Despite the fact that the balanced mobility is stated in the Strategy for Academic Mobility in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2012-2020, according to the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 9 077 international students studied in Kazakhstan in 2014, whereas about 48 875 Kazakhstani students were studying abroad (as cited in Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). As reported by the Ministry of Education and Science, currently there are about 20 000 international students who study in Kazakhstan, whereas about 120 000 Kazakhstani students are enrolled in the universities abroad (Astakhov, 2018).

In addition, The 2050 Strategy and The Plan of the Nation highlight the goal to be ranked among “top 30 countries” according to the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), and besides to have two higher education institutions in the top list of international university rankings (OECD, 2017). For instance, in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking, nine Kazakhstani universities appeared in their list of top 800 universities in 2016 (OECD, 2017). As a matter of fact, the QS World University Rankings use six performance indexes to evaluate the universities, among which involvement of international students in this university. Moreover, OECD (2017) reported that “Kazakhstan lacks strategic vision” (p. 173) in international co-operation which is also one of the issues to be resolved for the achievement of the goals in internationalization.

By addressing the above-mentioned issues, the international student mobility in Kazakhstan can improve for better since international student mobility can result in the development of intercultural communication and global reputation. Therefore, understanding the motivations of international students and identifying the factors that influenced them in choosing Kazakhstan as a destination for their studies can help to develop a strategy for the recruitment of international students. Moreover, it is useful to explore how the push and pull factors described in the research on international students in other countries can be observed in among international students in Kazakhstan.

Purpose of the Study

This research study is focused on understanding the motivations of international students to study in Kazakhstan. The Synthesis Model introduced by Chen (2007) will be used as a theoretical framework to determine the factors that influenced their motivation. Its main idea is to explain the factors that influence the choice of international students to study abroad by combining the theories of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and College Choice Model introduced by Hossler & Gallapher (1987). It focuses on the factors such as

personal characteristics of an international student, external push and pull factors and significant others. This paper is aimed at finding out the reasons that influenced the choice of full-time international students studying in Kazakhstan, what attracted them to study in Kazakhstani universities. Moreover, to find out why they did not choose to stay in their home country. The study will be conducted using mixed methods approach.

Research Question/Hypothesis

1. What are the push and pull factors that influence full-time international students' choice to study at universities in Kazakhstan?
2. What international student background characteristics are associated with the decision to study at a university in Kazakhstan?

Operational Definitions

Push and pull factors - “push” factors operate within the source country and initiate a student’s decision to undertake international study while “pull” factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 2). In the present study the push factors are the factors that made international students leave their country, and the pull factors are the factors that attracted them to study in Kazakhstan.

Full-time international students – an international student is a student who has crossed the border of his home country for the purpose of studying or undertaking other academic activities for a certain amount of time (Kelo, Teichler and Wachter, 2006). In the present study full-time international student is a student who come from another country to Kazakhstan for academic purposes. They study full-time to get a degree on campus.

Student background characteristics - in the present study these are the two domain factors presented in Chen’s Synthesis Model (2007), namely, student characteristics and significant others.

Significance of the Study

If previous researches connected with the internationalization in Kazakhstan were in relation to motivations of international faculty working in Kazakhstan (Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2017), experience of international students' in Kazakhstan (Mukhamejanova, 2019), the purpose of this research is to identify the factors that affect the motivations of international students to choose Kazakhstan as a study destination country. Its essence is to help higher education institutions to develop a strategy to attract international students to Kazakhstan, moreover, it is vital for institutional sustainability of the universities. Therefore, higher education institutions need to understand the motivations and factors that influence the choice of international students to develop their international student mobility.

Understanding motivations of international students to study in Kazakhstan can help not only to design the marketing strategies, but also direct the university administration to adjust the university curriculum to meet the needs of students who are studying in Kazakhstan. Moreover, some countries expect international students to solve the problem of decrease in number of their local students who apply for higher education institutions (OECD, 2008). Similarly, the findings of this research can help to balance the number of Kazakhstani students leaving to study abroad and the number of international students who come to study to Kazakhstan.

This study is significant since it gives evidence-based information on the flow of international students to Kazakhstan and discusses factors behind this movement. The revelation of factors that affect international students' choice to study in Kazakhstan can contribute to the development of marketing strategies to attract international students to choose Kazakhstan for their studies.

This paper includes six main chapters, namely, Introduction, Literature Review,

Methodology, Findings, Discussion and Conclusion. The first chapter of this paper describes the background of the study, the research problem, research questions and the significance of the study. The second chapter reviews literature on the effects of internationalization and marketing in higher education, student mobility, international student mobility in Kazakhstan, the factors that influence international students' choice and theoretical framework for this study. In this chapter, the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) is described and three main domain factors are clarified. The third chapter focuses on the methodology of this research and describes the research design, sampling, data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter provides the findings of this research with table illustrations. It is a mixed methods research design and thus there is a separate section describing quantitative and qualitative methods approach. The fifth chapter discusses and interprets the research findings about the factors that influenced the choice of international students in Kazakhstan. The concluding chapter six provides summary answers to the research questions guiding this study. It also discusses the limitations of this study and provides recommendations.

Chapter 2. Literature review

This chapter provides information about previous research studies concerning the factors that influence the choice of international students to study abroad. It starts with defining the terms “internationalization” and “marketing in higher education”. Furthermore, it describes the types of “student mobility” and the features of this phenomenon. This chapter is concluded with a description of the Synthesis model (Chen, 2007) which serves as the theoretical framework in this thesis. This model defines the factors that influenced motivations of international students to study abroad according to other research studies.

The Effects of Internationalization and Marketing on Higher Education

Over the last years, the purpose of higher education has shifted from the provision of public goods to a marketing service industry (Harman, 2004; Smart & Ang, 1993). For instance, when many Western countries reduced the government funding in the 1980s and in 1990s, the higher education institutions started recruiting activities to attract international students charging them full tuition fees (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As a consequence, the enrollment of international students positively affected the economic situation of the universities. For instance, Australian international students contributed AUD\$5 billion to its universities and similarly £7 billion was contributed to UK by international students (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2002; Barlett & Kane, 2002). Similarly, due to internationalization, universities have had different motivations to recruit students. For instance, according to Magnusson (as cited in Zhang & Zhou, 2018), because of Canada’s government funding decline for higher education institutions, there was given more autonomy for universities which resulted in universities “increasing the cost of education” (p. 7).

The concepts and practices of higher education institutions have been changed with the rapid growth of internationalization of higher education. Thus, higher education institutions have been adapting new policies and procedures to attract more international students (Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2015). In defining the term internationalization, it was proposed that “internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003). According to Bekbauova et al. (2017), internationalization is not only about the student mobility, “but also increasing the accessibility of higher education, the universalization of knowledge, the formation of international quality standards and the development of innovative higher education, expansion and strengthening international cooperation, enhancing academic mobility” (p. 166). Moreover, Knight and De Wit (1999) introduced four rationales for internationalization: academic rationales of improving educational partnerships and quality, the economic rationales of raising income from tuition and recruiting academics, the social/cultural rationales of encouraging cross-cultural understanding and awareness, or the political rationales of promoting public diplomacy and foreign policy. Correspondingly, the combination of these rationales has enabled greater international student mobility worldwide.

As a result of internationalization of higher education, the global education market is maintaining to grow and so does the contest amidst countries and educational institutions to engage more and more international students. For this purpose, the higher educational organizations are constantly developing their programs by the needs of international students to attract them more (Abello, 2015; Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2015). According to migration data portal, there is an increase in the number of international students who enrolled in universities abroad (International students, 2019). In addition, the data on

international student mobility suggests that the countries which have traditionally sent out most of international students, are now slowly becoming the destination countries for international students (OECD, 2013). For instance, long-established countries such as USA, Germany, Australia and France are now facing intense competition from New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore, China and the Russian Federation (De Wit et al., 2013).

Defining International Student Mobility

The oldest and the most general internationalization of higher education is known to be mobility of students (Codina, Nicolas, Lopez & Hernan, 2013). Moreover, international student mobility became a tool for the development of individuals for the use of a country's economy. In other words, student mobility is supposed to make a contribution to the development of personal skills in languages, intercultural understanding and by all means to the future employability considering the competitive labor market (Rodrigues, 2012).

According to Kelo, Teichler and Wachter (2006), most policies do not provide a thorough definition of student mobility as it may be presumed that there is a commonly held opinion on this phrase. However, for the purpose of this paper it is important to define what student mobility is since it is the focus of the study. The authors Kelo, Teichler and Wachter (2006) suggest that student mobility refers to an international student who has crossed the border of his home country for the purpose of studying or undertaking other academic activities for a certain amount of time.

As stated by Teichler (2017), there two types of student mobility that an international student may undertake, degree or diploma mobility and credit or short-term mobility, where the first means the entire academic program is done abroad, and the latter means only a part of the academic program is done abroad. Teichler (2017) claimed that international students study in a host country for the whole program to complete their

degree, but some study for a relatively short period of time, for instance, for an academic year or a semester. According to this, different terms can be applied, for example, those students who come for a full time study might be called “degree-mobile” or “diploma-mobile” students, and those who come for a shorter period can be called “credit-mobile” or “temporarily mobile” students (Teichler, 2017). Concisely, degree-mobile students go to another country to be enrolled in a totally in another educational system and get their diploma, while temporarily mobile students just want to experience another educational program for a while, but to study mostly in their own country (Teichler, 2017).

Besides, Teichler (2004) defined two other terms applied in understanding international student mobility. They are “vertical mobility” and “horizontal mobility” of student. He (Teichler, 2004) interpreted the “vertical mobility” as the movement of one person to another country which has better or superior education than the country where this person comes from. The reason why international students choose one particular country is not always connected with the academic rationale, but the move from a less economically developed country to an economically more advanced country is also a key issue. On the contrary, “horizontal mobility” suggests the move from one country to another in more or less equal terms when getting an opportunity to widen one’s horizons through experiencing academic environments and enhancing one’s intercultural understanding (Teichler, 2004; Rivza & Teichler, 2007).

International Student Mobility in Kazakhstan

As for Kazakhstan, student mobility has become one of its international education efforts (OECD, 2017). Nevertheless, OECD (2017) data shows that Kazakhstan is most popular among international students from Georgia and Uzbekistan, and it is less popular in Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan (Table 1). Moreover, there are also

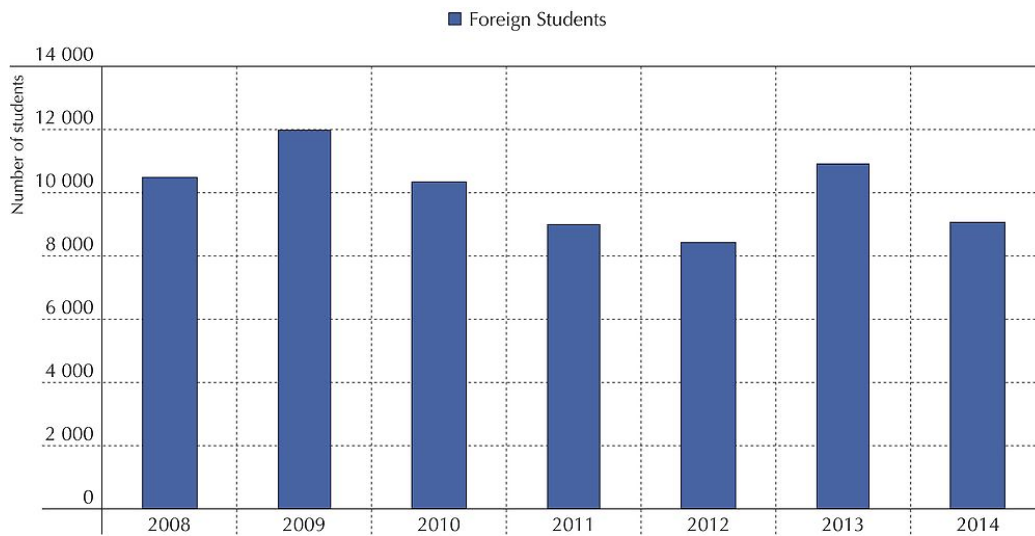
students from Mongolia, Tajikistan, India, Afghanistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan who are enrolled in Kazakhstani universities.

Table 1. International student mobility in Kazakhstan

Origin country	
Georgia	6 639
Uzbekistan	5 588
Russian Federation	1 644
Turkmenistan	1 090
Kyrgyzstan	963
People's Republic of China	897
Mongolia	656
Tajikistan	476
India	393
Afghanistan	334
Turkey	262
Azerbaijan	147
Korea	48
Ukraine	32
Pakistan	28
Armenia	24
Germany	23
Syrian Arab Republic	14
Belarus	12
Iran	6

Source: Compiled by the author from OECD (2017)

According to OECD (2017), international students who want to undertake academic programs in Kazakhstan as a rule do not need to pass Unified National Testing (UNT). The UNT is a national test which serves both as a final examination document and higher education entrance examination for local students in Kazakhstan. Instead of this entrance exam, international students can be admitted by meeting institution's own admission criteria.

Figure 1. International students in higher education in Kazakhstan

Source: Committee on Statistics of the MNERK (2014-2015).

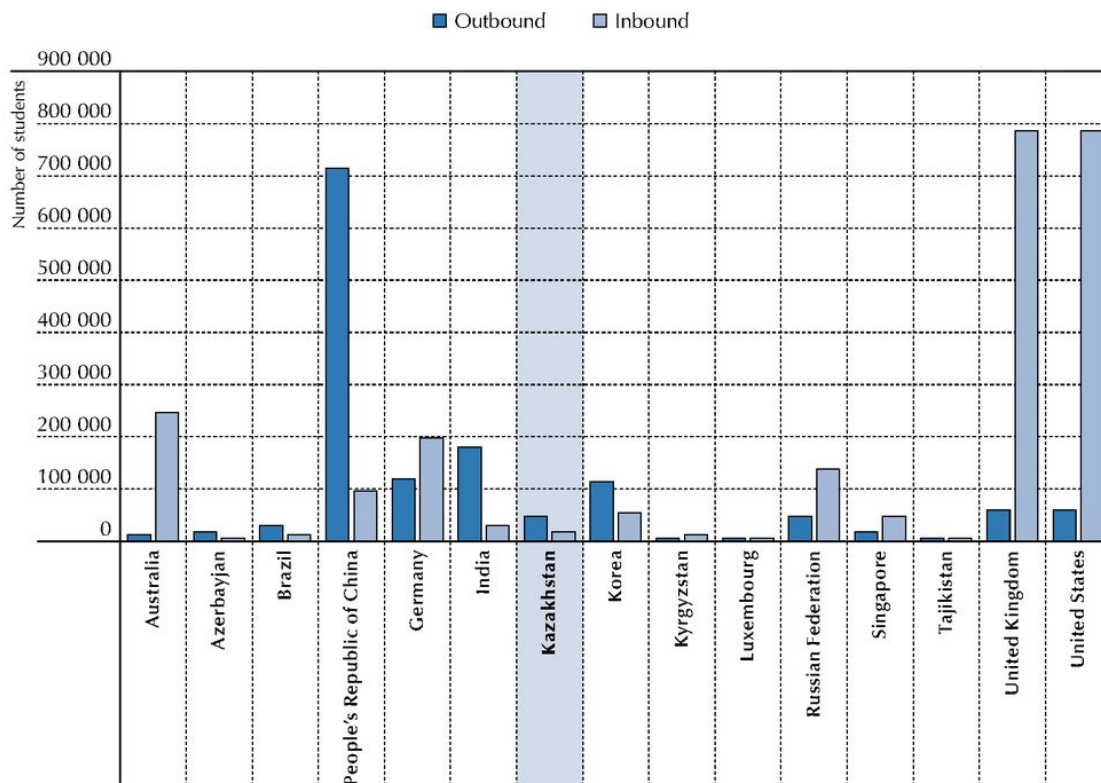
The figure (Figure 1) above shows the number of international students enrolled in Kazakhstan institutions and it varied from 10 458 students in 2008 to 9 077 in 2014 (Committee on Statistics of the MNERK, 2014-2015). As for 2018, there were 21 727 international students which was 4% of all students enrolled in academic programs in Kazakhstan that year (Committee on Statistics of the MNERK, 2017-2018).

Despite the fact that there are improvements in the internationalization of Kazakhstani higher education, the number of international students who come to study in Kazakhstan is still low (Mukhamejanova, 2019).

In comparison with developed countries Kazakhstan is relatively low in international student mobility (inbound student mobility), however, it is comparatively high in outbound mobility among developing countries (Figure 2). In other words, the probability is that Kazakhstan pays much attention to outbound student mobility which results in high rates of Kazakhstani student leaving abroad for academic purposes. According to OECD (2017), “low standard facilities, services and infrastructure in Kazakhstani higher education institutions, their limited capacity to provide instruction in

English language, and restrictive visa conditions all contribute to lack of competitiveness” (p. 166). While OECD (2017) understands the reason why outbound student mobility is more important to maintain for Kazakhstan, it states the advantages of developing international student mobility. If the outbound mobility ensures the investment in human capital which will result in the workforce of Kazakhstan, international students can “bring new perspectives, and they can contribute to improved cultural competence while enabling longer term relationship building and networking” (p. 167).

Figure 2. Outbound and International Mobility (rates) in 2015



Source: UNESCO International Statistics database (2016)

Overall, student mobility is a part of internationalization of higher education which countries pay attention to. As for Kazakhstan, the international student mobility can help to enhance its popularity, and it is important to know what attracts international students to Kazakhstan and why they prefer to study abroad. Therefore, the next section of literature review will present studies that have been conducted on the factors influencing

international students' choice to study abroad.

Factors Influencing International Student Mobility

Considerable research has been done on the factors that motivate international students to study abroad (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; McMahon, 1992; Mazzoral, 1998). Many of them explained motivations of traditional flow, such as migration of international students from the developing countries to the developed countries such as US, the UK and Australia.

Agarwal and Winkler (1985) used "human capital theory" as a conceptual framework to study the factors influencing motivations of international students who chose to study in US. Per capita income in the home country, the cost of education in the host country, the education opportunities provided in the home country and the expected benefits of studying abroad resulted in the "push and pull" factors in their research. The study explains the factors based on more economic external factors, however, not acknowledging the factors such as political and academic ones.

McMahon (1992) however, presumed that the flow of international students referred to unequal economic, educational and political relationships between home and host countries. He concluded that the "push" factors are those that encourage students to study abroad, and the "pull" factors attract students to their study destination. The factors which were attributed as "push" factors were: (1) level of economy in the home country; (2) the priority of education in a developing country; (3) the degree of involvement of the developing country on the world economy; (4) the educational opportunities in the home country. "Pull" factors were: (1) relative sizes of the home country within the world system; (2) the economic relationship between the host and home county; (3) political interest of the host country in the home country; (4) scholarships or any other assistance provided by the host country to international students; (McMahon, 1992, p. 468-469).

Regarding this study, it considers the political and academic factors, including with the economic ones, however, it does not include the individual factors.

Similar to the previous authors, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also used the “push and pull” model to analyze the motivations of international students' choice to study overseas. Inconsistent with the studies mentioned above, this study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) acknowledged the cultural and social features as the “push” factors, and the institutional factors as the “pull” factors such as the reputation of the institution, number of enrolled students and recognition of student's qualification at the host country. In addition, the study identified three stages in the decision-making process of the international student. Firstly, the international student decides whether to study abroad or study locally, then he/she decides on a host country, afterwards he/she chooses a host university. However, it is not always neglecting the host country selection.

In addition, another factor that affect international students to study abroad is travelling. According to Holloway, Humphreys and Davidson (2009), travelling with the aim of getting education is not a new occurrence and the offer of new opportunities for international students has been contributed by the development of the tourism and education industries over the past 20 years (Courtenay, 2016). In addition, Courtenay (2016) suggested another factor that could influence international students' choice of destination – developing their [international students] personal aptitude and acquiring new skills. In accordance with Jarvis and Peel as cited in Nyaupane & Teye (2011), despite the fact that educational institutions provide academic and career opportunities, many international students are driven by non-academic aspiration to study abroad. Correspondingly, Kitsantas and Weirs-Jensen (as cited in Lam, et al., 2011) draw our attention to four categories of motivations to study abroad: cross-cultural experience (1); academics (2); future careers (3); family heritage (4).

The revision of the works studying the factors that affect the choice of international students can help better understand the Synthesis Model introduced by Chen (2007). The next section of the literature review is focused on reviewing the development of the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) and how it is applied in the context of this paper.

Chen's Synthesis Model

To identify the factors influencing motivations of international students' to study in Kazakhstan, the Synthesis Model developed by Chen (2007) is used. This theoretical framework combines the theories of the "push and pull" model presented by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Hossler and Gallapher's college choice model (1987). Hereafter each theory will be explained to give a better understanding of the Synthesis Model.

The push and pull model was first introduced by Lee in 1966 to explain laws of migration (Lee, 2017). Push factors are related to economic or political issues of the country of origin; the pull factors are the factors of interest to the host country (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) for instance, the location of the country, quality of education and its reputation. According to Chen (2007), push factors can be both positive and negative forasmuch as repulsive characteristics of the country of origin and attraction factors of the host country. In addition, the pull factors are mostly positive since they are the attraction factors towards the chosen country (Chen, 2007).

Mazzarol et al. (1997), Hyams-Ssekas et al. (2014), Maringe and Carter (2007) agree that the push factors come first and then followed by the pull factors when it comes to deciding to study abroad. Side by side with the mentioned two factors, the unfavorable conditions that push people from their own country, and the favorable conditions that pull people to study abroad, Macready and Tucker (2011) designated a third factor "positioning", in accordance with which the international student moves abroad with the

purpose of being positioned for future education or job opportunities. While in the work of Lam et al. (2011) the push factors are described as being influenced by factors such as economic status, the country's role in a world economy and the role of education on that country, the pull factors were influenced by factors such as the knowledge about the country where students want to study, the spoken language, educational programs and its post benefits, family, friends and prestige (Lam et al., 2011; Mazzarol, Kemp, & Savery, 1997).

Another author, Yang as cited in Lee (2014) examined the push and pull factors of Chinese students studying in Australia. The push factors included foreign education being superior to their home country offered, and the problem of entering the higher education in their own country. The pull factors included the tuition fee and cost of living, but mostly they were attracted by the Australian migration policy which highlights the skilled workers.

Moreover, Li and Bray (2007) broaden the one-way push and pull model into a two-way model. What they wanted to explain is that there can be both push and pull factors in the home country and host country which can motivate/demotivate students to study abroad or study locally. For instance, the pull factors in the home country include "desire to stay with family, awareness of the relevance of domestic education, and increasing internationalization of domestic institutions"; on the other hand, the push factors from host countries include "increasing fees and other costs, restrictive policies on foreign students, uncertainties in visa approvals, tightening of immigration policies, and discrimination against students" (Li & Bray, 2007, p. 795). In addition, Li and Bray recommend that the above mentioned push and pull factors are all external and there are also internal factors in particular "family background, academic characteristics, perceptions and motivations, which shape the affordability, accessibility and desirability of

external higher education” (p. 813).

The availability of information about the host country and institution is also a related factor in student' decision making process (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). It is not enough to have loads of information available, but how easily students can access it. The availability of information also includes the reputation and recognition of the education in the host country including the physical condition of the university and the country (Lam et al., 2011). Llewlyn and McCabe (2008) have also added touristic and cultural attractions of the host country.

The closeness of the country of stay is one of the factors influencing international students' motivations. For the reason that a closer distance can promote mobility of students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). All things considered, in the decision-making process, motivations of an international student can be explained by the “push and pull” factors.

As mentioned before, the decision-making process of an international student can take several steps before he/she will be enrolled to a university abroad. Hossler and Gallapher (1987) defined “three-stage” model, namely, predisposition phase, application process and institutional factors. Predisposition phase implies factors such as socioeconomic status, parental involvement and peers' influence, whereas, the second phase suggests again socioeconomic status of the student, education level of the parents and financial support. For the last phase, institutional factors such as parental encouragement, a student's academic performance, and financial support should be considered (Hossler and Gallapher, 1987, p. 6).

In spite of the fact that the “push and pull” theory has been commonly used to describe motivations of international students to study abroad, it has some limitations. Above all, the push and pull model cannot fully explain the decision-making process of individual students (Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado & Rhoades, 2006) since it does not

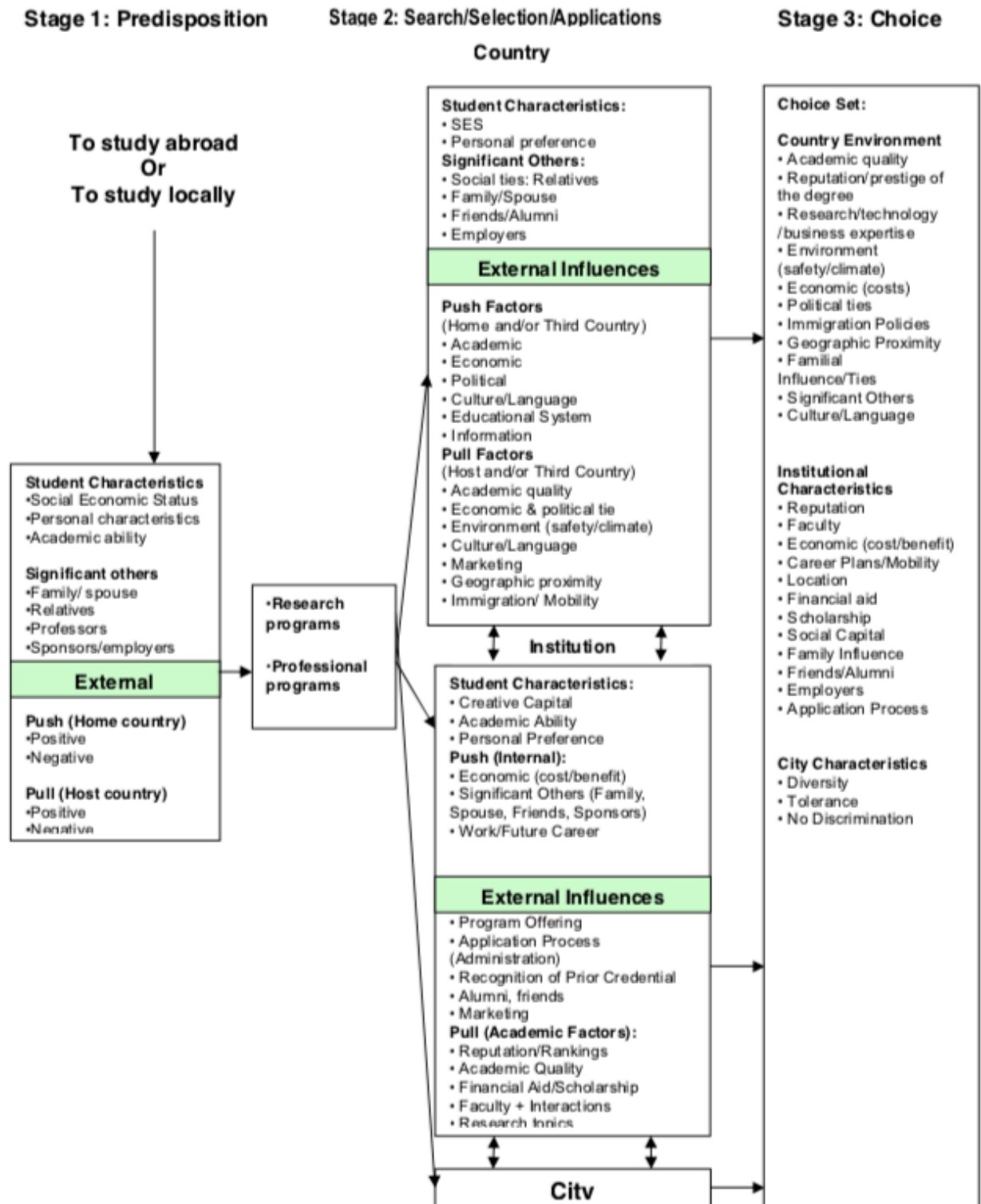
consider personal characteristics of students and recommendations from others (Li and Bray, 2007).

Chen (2007) tried to integrate the three-stage college model into the “push and pull” model. This model contains three stages, that is, predisposition, search/selection/application, and choice in decision-making of international study. Moreover, it accommodates three domains of factors, namely, student characteristics, significant others and the external push and pull factors.

“Student characteristics” relate to personal socioeconomic background, personal preferences and characteristics. “Significant others” refer to human sources such as parents, relatives, friends or professors that influence the decisions and “external influences” mean push and pull factors from home and host countries (Chen, 2007, p. 273).

The Figure 2 clearly illustrates the Synthesis Model developed by Chen (2007), and each domain factors in every stage of decision-making process. However, in order to adapt it to the purpose of this study, it will refer to three domain factors and taking into account all the stages into one since the main purpose of the study is to identify the factors that influence international students' choice to study in Kazakhstan. The Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) is used as a guide throughout the paper and only international degree-mobile students are considered. Moreover, the purpose of international students is described in terms of “vertical and horizontal mobility” with the collected data from interviews.

Figure 3. The Synthesis Model



Source: Chen's Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007, p. 288)

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter gives the information about the methodology applied in this research to answer the research questions “What are the push and pull factors that influence full-time international students' choice to study at universities in Kazakhstan?” and “What student background characteristics are associated with the decision to study at a university in Kazakhstan?”. Thus, this chapter describes the research methodology along with the types of research methods, research design, the sampling procedure, research setting, data collection instruments and ethical issues.

Research Design Description

The purpose of the research design is the provision of a framework so that the collected data can answer the research questions in a logical way (De Vaus, 2006). The research design includes the research methods (Babbie, 2007), which in turn has two approaches – qualitative and quantitative methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In analyzing the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs from some samples of the whole population, the quantitative method is appropriate (Marshall and Rossman, 2007, p. 125). The qualitative approach is useful when examining the phenomenon in-depth (Marshall and Rossman, 2007, p. 53).

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine the motivations of international students to study in Kazakhstan by applying the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007). The main premise of the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) is to identify the factors that influence international students' choice to study abroad and for the purpose of this paper this model is applied in the data collection of this study and guides the findings and the discussion chapter to determine the factors that influence the motivation of international students' choice to study in Kazakhstan.

Concerning the theme of the research, many studies before have based their analysis on quantitative research design (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Lam et al., 2011; Llewelyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Price et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the decision process of an international student is more complex (Oliveira & Soares, 2016) and qualitative study allows us to understand and analyze the perceptions and motivations of international students thoroughly. Therefore, to answer the research questions to the best possible detail this study focuses on both the qualitative and quantitative approach.

The explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2014) was used for this mixed methods study. The two phases of the explanatory sequential research design starts with the collection of the quantitative data and latter with the collection of the qualitative data. The quantitative data is prioritized in answering the research questions, and the qualitative findings are interpreted to explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano, 2007). Regarding Creswell and Plano's (2007) reference, for the purpose of this study quantitative results are collected first and followed by conducting face to face interviews.

Sampling Procedure

The research population in this study are full time international students including foundation, undergraduate and graduate students who are currently enrolled in universities in Kazakhstan. According to UNESCO (n.d.), international students are "students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin". The international students in this research are defined as those who are citizens of a country other than the Kazakhstan.

This study is focused on only full-time degree students since exchange students may have different personal, social, cultural and academic motivations than full-time international students.

The universities which have taken part in this study are the universities which have been active in recruiting international students and have rather large number of students from the other countries compared to other higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

According to the Statistics Committee of Ministry of National Economy of Republic of Kazakhstan (n.d.), there are 127 higher education institutions in Kazakhstan (stat.gov) and about 20 000 international students who are enrolled in Kazakhstani universities (Astakhov, 2018). Sampling relates to the process of electing units of observation from a population. The key of sampling is how to generalize the results from the selected samples. According to Babbie (2007), probability sampling based on the probability theory includes the idea of random sample, whereas, non-probability sampling is used when probability sampling is not applicable or impossible to use. Generating a random sampling requires a lot of resources which were not available in the scope of this current study. Therefore, nonprobability sampling technique was used.

In this study, as one of the non-probability sampling techniques – purposive sampling method is used. In as much as the focus is on international students enrolled in Kazakhstan, it is difficult to get empirical data without the gatekeeper or the permission of each university in Kazakhstan. Thus, the sampling procedure was conducted on a convenience basis, usually with the help of the gatekeepers at top universities in Kazakhstan. From 20 000 international students who are currently studying in Kazakhstan according Statistics Committee of Ministry of National Economy of RK (n.d.), 98 international students participated in the study.

For the quantitative part, 98 participants answered the survey questions and from them 7 international students were interviewed for the qualitative part. The interview participants were recruited from the online survey where at the end of the survey they were asked if they were interested in taking part in an interview. There were 15 international

students who agreed to participate in an interview, and 7 of them were chosen since they were from different countries.

An online link to the survey was sent to 120 international students who are currently enrolled in 11 Kazakhstani universities. Of these students, 81.6% of agreed to proceed with the survey (Table 2). From them 98 participants, 74 were male (75,5 %) and 24 female (25%). The vast majority of the participants (n=85, 85.98%) were studying at a Bachelor degree (BA) programs. Out of all respondents, five (5%) of them were enrolled in the Master's program (MA) and 8 (0.08%) of the international students surveyed in this study, were studying at Foundation (a one year program for preparing students for more advanced study or learning a foreign language). There were no Doctoral (PhD) students though it was included in the survey as an option.

The students from India (n=51, 51,%) outnumbered other countries, and in the second place were students from Tajikistan (n=16, 16%). Other participants come from the countries such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Somali and South Korea. From all the participants 47 (46%) of the international students were aged from 19 to 21, 41 (42%) of them were between 22-24 and 10 (10%) of them were older than 24 years old. Overall, more than half of the participants were 22 years old and older.

Popular international students' degree programs included Medicine and Health Care (n = 60, 61%), Economics and Business (n = 9, 9%), International Relations (n = 7, 7%), Construction Engineering (n = 6, 6%) and Information Technology (n = 4, 4%). About 80% of students' language of instruction (n = 84) at university was English. As for the start of their studies in Kazakhstan it ranged from 2004 to 2019, but 37 students (38%) started in 2015 and 20 students (21%) in 2018. According to the data, 80 students (82%) were receiving financial support from their parents and relatives, whereas 19 students

(19%) got loan from the bank to pay for their studies. Fewer of students were funded by Kazakhstan's government (n=7, 7%), whereas 9 students (9%) got a scholarship form their home country.

Table 2. Background Information on Participants

Country of residence	Gender		Level of study			
	Male	Female	BA	MA	PhD	Foundation
Afghanistan	5	0	5	0	0	0
Azerbaijan	0	1	0	1	0	0
China	1	2	0	1	0	2
India	36	15	51	0	0	0
Jordan	4	0	4	0	0	0
Malaysia	1	1	2	0	0	0
Mexico	0	1	0	1	0	0
Saudi Arabia	1	0	1	0	0	0
Somalia	5	0	4	0	0	1
South Korea	1	0	1	0	0	0
Tajikistan	14	2	12	1	0	3
The Netherlands	1	0	0	1	0	0
Turkey	3	2	3	0	0	2
Turkmenistan	1	0	1	0	0	0
USA	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total	74	24	85	5	0	8

Source: Compiled by the author from survey results in this study.

Survey of International Students in Kazakhstan

For the quantitative part of the study, there was conducted an online survey of international students who are currently enrolled in universities in Kazakhstan. Qualtrics was used as an online tool for survey. There was ready made email provided by the researcher to be forwarded to the participants by the university administration. After gaining official permission by the university administration, the online survey link was sent to international offices of the universities then to be distributed among international students.

The survey was developed based on the previous studies' survey questions and mainly focusing on Chen's (2007) Synthesis Model. In the beginning of the online survey,

the participants were explicitly asked if they wanted to participate in this study. It was in two languages, English and Russian, and was mainly distributed among higher educational institutions in Almaty and Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

The survey started with the consent form and included four blocks of questions. The blocks from 2 to 4 reflect the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) to answer the research questions. Each of these blocks represent the domain factors identified by Chen (2007) in his Synthesis Model. The first block was about the participants' general background information in 11 questions, 7 of which were multiple choice (gender, age, level and mode of study, major, language of instruction and financing studies), 4 of them were open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were interested in international students' ethnicity, their home country, main language spoken at home and when did they start their studies. The other blocks of the survey was based on 5 point Likert scale questions (Brill, 2008). The Likert scale questions were scored as follows: no influence = 1 point, slightly influenced = 2 points, somewhat influenced = 3 points, moderately influenced = 4 points, strongly influenced = 5 points. The second block was about personal factors that might have influenced their choice to study in Kazakhstan including 7 statements such as financial considerations, previous travel experience to Kazakhstan or to other countries, similarity to language or a culture that student is familiar with and family heritage. The third block was people who might have influenced their choice to study in Kazakhstan with 8 statements (parents, family, family friends, friends who have studies before the participant, study abroad advisors, vendors at the study abroad fair or professors at the university in a host country). The fourth block was about the push factors including 10 statements (cost of education, lack of scholarships, availability of classes at universities in a home country, future plans, the underdeveloped field that a participant has chosen, concern about the entrance exam, unemployment in their home country, the status of the university and the

availability of seats at universities in a home country), and the final block was about pull factors in 13 statements (political conditions, safety, quality of academic institutions in Kazakhstan, availability of majors, economic conditions in Kazakhstan, cultural environment, geographic proximity of Kazakhstan, financial aid, technological advancement of Kazakhstan, employment opportunities in Kazakhstan, research development and learning facilities in Kazakhstan). At the end of the online survey there was an additional open-ended question about what participants would like to do after they complete their studies and a final question about if they would like to participate in an interview for the qualitative part of the study.

Interview with International Students in Kazakhstan

The qualitative research approach was employed to gain more insight into the factors that influenced the choice of international students to study in Kazakhstan. The method used for the present study was conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews, which Fontana and Frey (2000) described as “one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 645).

The sampling for the qualitative part of the study was purposeful to interview international students who are from different countries. The online survey was used to recruit participants for the interview. At the end of the survey they were asked if they wanted to participate in an interview and to provide their email address, skype address or phone number to be reached for an interview if they agreed. Each interview was conducted by the researcher. The 7 single-participant interviews consisted of broad, open-ended questions to investigate the international students' perspectives on their choice and their experience in Kazakhstan.

As it was mentioned before, the interview participants were recruited from the online survey where they left their contact information. There were 13 international

students who volunteered to be interviewed and from them 7 international students who are from different countries were given interview protocol and consent form that they agreed the interview to be recorded. The participants were from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, India, Jordan, Sakha Republic in Russian Federation, China and Tajikistan. All participants are degree students who willingly shared their experience in choosing Kazakhstan as the host country to complete their studies.

Face to face interviews with international students were conducted and ranged in length from 30-40 minutes. There were 10 main questions which were focused on the process of the choice to study abroad and factors that might have influenced the participants' choice, and there were asked additional questions to gain more insight, and clarification of responses during the interviews. The questions were developed based on the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) described in the literature review and it reflected the structure of the survey. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate subsequent data analysis.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

To identify the factors influencing motivations of international students to study in Kazakhstan the survey results were analyzed. The data collected from the survey was downloaded to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to make a proper analysis. Descriptive and frequency analysis was conducted to see the general information about the participants, and there were compared means to identify the influence of given factors in the survey on the decision of international students to study in Kazakhstan. After completing the survey, scores were generated for each variable in each of the user experience categories. The part of acquired data were added into tables for the visual representation.

Regarding the interviews, they were transcribed and coded appropriately. Where applicable, comments falling into a number of categories were coded multiple times. There was used open coding (Merriam, 2002) for the recognition of data to answer research questions. Then the codes and the data were reviewed and some codes were refined or combined where overlap was identified. For the analysis of the interviews, the coded data was interpreted according to the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) to explain the data acquired from quantitative part of the data collection. The interviews which were conducted in Russian were translated into English.

Ethical Issues

It is important to inform the participants about the consent form since it specifies their role in the study (Cropley, 2015). In this study, the ethical principles of NUGSE were complied with the requirements. For that reason, the informed consent form was presented at the first page of the online survey and the interview participants were provided with the printed consent forms. Both participants were informed about the nature and the purpose of the study and that they could withdraw at any time.

Considering the fact that this research involves human subjects, the main ethical issue to be considered was providing anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the acquired data. The online survey was conducted without asking respondents' name so as not to expose to recognition and to make them more comfortable in answering questions. The respondents could understand the purpose of this research through a brief explanation in a guideline section before the questions items in the questionnaire. In addition, the information about the university was also not included in the survey questions to ensure the anonymity of the participants. As for interviews, they were conducted face to face in a closed room minimizing the possibility of being overheard. The collected data from both online survey and the interviews were stored in a personal computer of the

researcher in a password protected file. In this way, consent forms and the safe storage of the data ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of all research participants.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the online survey and face to face interviews which were conducted among international students to identify the factors that influenced their choice to study in Kazakhstan. To determine the push and pull factors that affected the choice of participants to study in Kazakhstan and to find out what background student characteristics are associated with their choice the acquired data are organized according to the Synthesis Model (2007). In this chapter, firstly, the quantitative findings are presented according to the Synthesis Model by three domain variables. The three domain variables include personal characteristics, significant others and external push and pull factors. Secondly, the interview findings are presented in line with the domain factors that are described in the quantitative findings.

Factors that Influence International Students' Choice to Study in Kazakhstan

Online survey findings.

The main questions presented in the survey after the background information were directly connected to the factors that might have influenced the participants' choice to study in Kazakhstan. There were main four parts of the survey which were categorized as personal factors (student characteristics), relationship factors (significant others), the push factors and pull factors (external push and pull factors) in correspondence with the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007).

Student characteristics.

According to international survey data in this study (Table 3), the personal factors that influenced the choice of studying in Kazakhstan were financial considerations of the participants ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.37$). Other factors such as their previous experience to Kazakhstan ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.471$), or other countries ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.436$), similarity of the language ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.520$), and the culture that student is familiar with ($M = 2.56$,

$SD = 1.405$), slightly influenced their choice. Moreover, the family heritage did not influence their choice much ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.468$).

Table 3. Quantitative Findings from the Online Survey

Student Characteristics	M	SD
Financial considerations	3.40	1.371
Previous travel experience to a host country	2.17	1.471
Previous travel experience to other countries	2.18	1.436
Similarity to a language that student is familiar with	2.57	1.520
Similarity to a culture that a student is familiar with	2.56	1.405
Family heritage	2.39	1.468
Significant others		
Parents	3.45	1.515
Family	3.29	1.580
Family friends	2.67	1.604
Significant others	2.45	1.522
Friends who studied abroad before you	2.72	1.514
Study abroad advisors	3.26	1.390
Vendors at the study abroad fair	2.30	1.420
Professors at the university in a host country	2.29	1.537
Push factors		
Major classes not available at universities in my home country	2.24	1.543
Cost of the education in a home country	3.58	1.484
Lack of educational resources in my home country	2.18	1.526
Future plans	3.47	1.441
The field that I have chosen is underdeveloped in my home country	2.28	1.585
Concern about entrance exam to a university	2.67	1.563
Unemployment in my home country	2.25	1.516
The status of universities in my home country in a world market	2.50	1.508
Lack of scholarships in my home country	2.30	1.495
Limited seats available at universities in my home country (lack of universities)	3.10	1.604
Pull factors		
Quality of academic institutions in Kazakhstan	2.97	1.313
Classes for major available in Kazakhstan	2.86	1.379
Economic conditions in Kazakhstan	3.13	1.377
Political conditions in Kazakhstan	2.68	1.526
Cultural environment in Kazakhstan	2.99	1.464
Safety in Kazakhstan	3.26	1.444
Geographic proximity of Kazakhstan	3.22	1.474
Financial aid / Scholarships in Kazakhstan	2.52	1.551
Prestige of studying in Kazakhstan	2.77	1.438
Technological advancement of Kazakhstan	2.70	1.404
Employment opportunities in Kazakhstan	2.57	1.401
Research development in Kazakhstan	2.62	1.436
Learning facilities and infrastructure in Kazakhstan	2.99	1.441

Source: Compiled by the author from the results of international students survey in this study.

Significant others.

The statements given in this part of the survey were directly connected to the people that did or did not influence the choice of participants to study in Kazakhstan. The average results indicate that parents ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.515$) played a crucial role in deciding to study abroad. Other relationship factors such as family ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.580$), study abroad advisors ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.390$) and other significant people also affected their choice (Table 3). Family friends ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.604$), friends ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.514$) who studied abroad before the participant and vendors ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.420$) at the study affair influenced their choice less than other people.

Push factors.

In this part of the survey the push factors were the referred to conditions that motivated the students to choose to study abroad. From the results (Table 3) it is clear that the most influential factors were cost of the education ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.484$) in their home country and their future plans ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.441$). The influence of availability of the seats at their home universities was also another important highlight of the results, the average results demonstrate that there are limited seats at their universities ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.604$). The results also show that there was a concern about the entrance exam ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.563$) and the status of the university ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.508$) in their home country in a world market. Moreover, the lack of scholarships ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.495$), non-availability of the major classes ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.543$), unemployment ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.516$) and the concern that the field they have chosen is underdeveloped ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.585$) in their home country have slightly influenced their decision.

Pull factors.

This section indicates the pull factors, the enticing conditions in Kazakhstan that attracted them to study there. Surprisingly, the mean for each statement is above 2.50 which

means every factor was influential in one or another way (Table 3). The most significant factors were the safety ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.444$) and geographical proximity ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.474$) of Kazakhstan as well as economic conditions ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.377$) in Kazakhstan. Not less important are the factors that relate to cultural environment ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.604$), quality of academic institutions ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.313$), availability of major classes ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.379$) and learning facilities ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.441$) in Kazakhstan. The pull factors that had a slight effect on their choice to study in Kazakhstan were prestige of studying in Kazakhstan ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.438$), political conditions ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.526$), the technological advancement ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.404$), employment opportunities ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.401$), research development ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.436$) and financial support ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.551$) that is provided by Kazakhstan.

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked an open ended question about their plans after they complete their studies. Not all the participants gave their answers, but from the received answers it can be claimed that 22 international students would like to go to their home country for educational and professional purposes. Whereas, 16 international students would like to further continue their studies and 8 of the participants would like to start working and growing professionally. From the common answers given, 3 participants hope to grow personally and one of them wanted to run his own business.

Interview findings.

The findings from the interviews were collected on the basis of the interview transcripts. The interview answers were based on the same domain factors as in the online survey in accordance with the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007). The interview participants were from Turkey, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Sakha Republic. All of them are full-time students who are currently enrolled in Kazakhstani universities. From all the participants, there were 3 male international students and 4 female. The major

of international students from Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Sakha Republic is Two Foreign Languages, whereas an international student from India is enrolled in Medicine and a student from Tajikistan is studying Economics and Business.

Student characteristics.

Regarding the survey, the average amount of students claimed that financial consideration was a significant factor that was influential in choosing Kazakhstan as a country to study in. Similarly, three participants of the interview also stated that “the cost of the education in their home country is much more expensive” and “high school graduates tend to look for other options in other countries”. For the support of the statement the participants commented that they chose to study abroad firstly, because of economic reason. Moreover, some pointed out that getting to universities in their country is very difficult and studying in private institutions is very expensive:

Well, one of the reasons I have chosen Kazakhstan is that the price of the education in my country is comparatively higher, I would say much higher. It is really difficult to enter university but we know that we need to study. My parents are really concerned about the price of university and decided to send me to another country. There are many of my friends and people that I know in general leaving our country because they cannot simply afford it. And nowadays more people from my country choose Kazakhstan, because again the cost of education is cheaper. [International student from Jordan]

The cost of the education in Kazakhstan was “attractive” compared to the universities in their own country, and because the universities in Kazakhstan are “low-priced, though offering good education”, participants found it “affordable.”

Another factor that was mentioned by the interview participants was travelling to Kazakhstan and other countries. Three have mentioned that because they have traveled to Kazakhstan before it was less stressful for them to choose this country:

My brother after considering many universities wanted to study in Kazakhstan, particularly in this university. Afterwards, when we came as a family to Kazakhstan, we looked around the universities here and I liked it. Then I decided I wanted to stay here too. Because, why not? My brother is here and he already has an experience in Kazakhstan, so it was logical. [International student from China]

Another participant shared nice memories about her trip to Kazakhstan as a child:

I used to come to Kazakhstan as a child with my family and I have really nice memories about this place. Kazakhstan has a really nice nature, I really love mountains here. Compared to my home country, I really love the weather here, though winter season in my country is warmer, much warmer. Therefore, when we were considering the countries to study in, Kazakhstan was the first option. I think I did the right choice. [International student from Uzbekistan]

Other participants claimed that travelling is their hobby and they would like to know more about the world. Their goal is to study in Kazakhstan and if there is an opportunity to continue their studies in another country. One of the participants shared his willingness to go as an exchange student to another country if the university gives a chance.

The similarity of Kazakh language and the use of Russian language were also important factors in the participants' motivation to study in Kazakhstan. In the same way the Kazakh culture was not less important, for instance:

There are a lot of ethnicities in Kazakhstan and they live together peacefully and they mix their culture together. It's really nice. I really love the whole idea of different people living together without any discrimination. What is more, people in

Kazakhstan are really nice. Since today and hopefully in future too, I never had an experience of arguing with someone, alternatively, they always help. [International student from Sakha Republic]

Another international student claimed that she chose Kazakhstan because of the family heritage, she commented:

Firstly, I chose Kazakhstan because of my dad. He is a citizen of Kazakhstan but he was born and raised in China completely. However, he was always back and forth between China and Kazakhstan. He always wanted to move to Kazakhstan in future. So I guess when I was growing up, my dad kept telling me that this country exists and it is a beautiful country. He explained that this is the country where our ancestors are from, and that I should know about it. All in all I think that is why I chose Kazakhstan. My dad had a big influence on me. Another thing is that people in Kazakhstan look like me and I look like them. [International student from China]

Significant others.

As an evidence for the results of the survey, according to each participant of the interview, there was one or more people who have influenced their choice to study abroad. In accordance with the survey, the most influential people were parents and family. Because of the experience of these people in Kazakhstan and relatives who live here, the participants' choice fell on Kazakhstan. One of the participants shared his experience when deciding where to study:

When we [family] decided that I will study abroad for sure, we started to look for the options. Initially, I really wanted to go to one of the European countries. However, my parents insisted that I would go to Kazakhstan because some of my relatives live there. [International student from Tajikistan]

Apart from parents and family, recommendation from the friends of some participants were also important. For instance, one of the international students took his friends' advice who have studied in Kazakhstan before, he claims:

My parents were very concerned about the people, about the tolerance to Hindu of local communities. Because of our religion, culture and customs, we differ from people from other countries. But I let my parents to speak to my Hindu friends who study in here. And they assured my parents that the culture of peace, human right and tolerance are promoted within Kazakhstan. And probably this was one of the main reasons why I chose Kazakhstan for my studies. [International student from India]

Vendors also played a crucial part in choosing Kazakhstan as a host country. Alina, who is a second year student, excitingly commented:

When we were about to graduate from school, me and my parents were in search of a university to apply for. Once in one of the educational fairs, there was a man who was representing the university that I am studying now, and he was so enthusiastic about this university that I was immediately intrigued. He shared everything about studying in Kazakhstan, how to apply, even survive [laughing] and shared every small detail that the international student should know. My parents were satisfied. [International student from Uzbekistan]

Based on interviews, it is certain that there are specific people that can influence students' motivation to study in one or another country, however, nobody mentioned about professors at the university in Kazakhstan.

Push factors.

It was interesting to gain more insight from the participants about why they chose to ever study abroad and what were the reasons that demotivated them to study in their home

country. Likewise most of the participants confronted their country “having extremely difficult university entrance exams” and “lack of scholarships”. Even though the classes and the fields that they wanted to study were available at their local universities, there were no available seats. For example:

In my home country the [entrance] exam is difficult. Because the seats at universities are few. The government universities are free. All free. But seats are few. In private universities the price is high. More than a million students appear there. [International student from India]

Another international student commented that it is easier to enter Kazakhstani universities, because in her country it is really challenging.

I guess you know the SAT of American High School? You take SAT and then you go to college, so the test like SAT in China is so hard. It's so hard that so many people fail that they couldn't even get into college. So, I thought, this is a good opportunity. I can study here [in Kazakhstan] because I did not have confidence that I will get in college and university in China. [International student from China]

Some participants' choice fell on Kazakhstan because of their future plans. Considering their future profession, some interviewees were certain that they need “foreign experience to be able to do their job” and “acquire skills that will help them to help their own country”.

In addition, apart from the statements that were mentioned in the survey, the interview analysis gave interesting findings which were not expected as a part of the theoretical model used in this thesis. One of the participants shared his concern about the political situation and safety in his home country. Ahmet, who came to Kazakhstan to learn English, appearing nervous:

Maybe because of the terrorism. Everything is about the economy, politics.

Everybody is talking about what are they going to do with Turkey. I don't like these kind of things, and I decided that I don't want to live or study there [in Turkey].

Then I talked to my parents and came here [to Kazakhstan]. [International student from Turkey]

Although the factors such as political conditions and safety appear in the pull factors in this thesis, this example clearly shows that these factors are the push factors. Similarly, Li and Bray (2007) have mentioned that the push and pull factors can be two way, in other words, the results show that the push and pull factors can be both positive and negative.

Another point that was not mentioned in the survey, but appeared in the interview was the pressure that students experience in their own country. The concern of one of the participants was the competitiveness in her country. She made a highlight on the pressure that are on students of her country:

We were always told that we need to study hard because [of high competition]. It's so difficult to live and actually be successful at your job. Start with good education to find a job and have I, don't know, financially good income. It is always so hard for us, especially for the new generation because competitiveness is already too harsh. So, I think maybe that was the reason, I mean the pressure. Yeah, but I like that in Kazakhstan people live freely, there is no competition. The population in here is not even like the quarter of Chinese population. What I want to say is that there is no pressure and it is just my people - Kazakh people. [International student from China]

All things considered, there are certain factors that have influenced the participants' motivation to leave their country and to come to study to Kazakhstan. The push factors such as the difficulty of the university entrance exams and the tuition fee in their home

country became the external factors for them to choose to study in Kazakhstan. Moreover, the lack of seats at university and education opportunities are other push factors that discouraged the participants to stay in their home country.

However, not only the push factors made an influence in their choice to study in Kazakhstan, but also the pull factors, the factors that attracted them to study in Kazakhstan such as economic condition in Kazakhstan, its geographical proximity and safety. The participants highlighted the low cost of universities compared to the universities in their home country and the influence of people who have had some kind of experience in Kazakhstan. In addition, political conditions of one country made one of the participant to leave for higher education studies in Kazakhstan. In contrast, good political conditions of Kazakhstan with certain countries attracted the international students to choose Kazakhstan as a destination country.

Pull factors.

According to survey findings, the data from the interviews also suggests that the safety and tolerance of people appear to be among important pull factors for international students in Kazakhstan. Almost all participants agreed on Kazakhstan's "friendly environment" and about "welcoming citizens" who mostly do not pay attention to gender, nationality and religion. Some participants explained that their parents were concerned about their child being in a foreign country where there is a different culture and different people. As they say, parents' concern was resulted in their own bad experience in a foreign country where they were treated poorly because of their nationality. An international student from India commented:

After I contacted study abroad advisors they told me that the place is very nice: there is no discrimination based on gender, country or religion. It is the country where every religion is respected. For me and my family it was important. We were

concerned about the difference in our countries everyday life. [International student from India]

Moreover, the cultural environment in Kazakhstan was relatively one of the key factors. If most of the participants of the interview heard the social and cultural environment from their parents or friends, or experienced it when they came to Kazakhstan, an international student from Sakha Republic in Russian Federation came to Kazakhstan to explicitly get to know its culture and people. She shared her first impression on Kazakhstan:

Two years ago, we had a kind of a social event in my town. There were many local celebrities and there were special guests from Kazakhstan. These guests were the representatives of the youth community in Kazakhstan, you know the ones who are popular now in social networks, like bloggers. They were so active, positive and energetic that I was charmed. This was the first time I knew about Kazakhstan. Second time I saw children from Kazakhstan who were participating in a sport competition. When I was sitting on a bench I saw a waffle from an ice-cream that was lying on the ground and everyone was walking pass it. However, those children stopped and picked the waffle up and put it on the tree and when I asked them why did they do it, they just simply said – it is bread and we must respect it. This was the second time I fell in love with this country and I wanted to see this country myself. [International student from Sakha Republic]

All participants were pleased with their choice of the field of studies because they could enroll in the major they wanted to. However, most of them were not quite sure if that studying in Kazakhstani universities was prestigious in their home country. Moreover, only a few of them are considering staying in Kazakhstan after completing their studies. In addition, most of them are planning to return back home after they complete their degree.

Political and economic factors were mentioned by a few participants; they were supportive of the fact that Kazakhstan and their country were in good relationship as countries in terms of politics. They say “Kazakhstan is the most politically related to my country...”, “we have never faced political problems for twenty years of successful cooperation between our countries”. One participant commented:

As far as I know Kazakhstan is one of the gas suppliers to my country. And there is an economic relationship between Kazakhstan and India. To my knowledge, these countries never had issues between each other and hopefully will not. [International student from India]

Another pull factor was the quality of education in Kazakhstan. The interviewees did not claim that it was better than in their own country, but they have mentioned some good points for the educational system in Kazakhstan. An international student from Tajikistan claimed:

I did a small research for myself to know about Kazakhstan more. Another aspect that I really like about Kazakhstan is that this country is a quickly developing country which has been adopting western countries' educational experience. In comparison with Russia where they still work with the Soviet educational system. [International student from Kyrgyzstan]

An international student from China added:

Kazakhstan is a really nice country. It's becoming recognizable by the international organizations, by a lot of foreigners right now. Because the economy is developing really fast and the policy of Kazakhstan about three languages: English, Russian, Kazakh. And the people are trying to speak English more, like the goal of the country is to put their level up to international recognition level. So, I think that is a really nice key factor right there and the people are friendly. Everything is nice. We

have students from Africa, too. I think they love this country. [International student from China]

Speaking of the quality of education in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, an international student from Turkey highlighted the language instructors in his university. He claims that he started learning English better here in Kazakhstan since in his home country English is taught without any practicing the language itself. However, he shared his concern about the difficulty and the quantity of the subjects that he has taken in the first year of his studies. It appears that there was no adapted curriculum according to the needs of international students and they had to catch up on their studies similarly with local students.

As for funding and scholarships, less than half of the participants are funded by the government or receive partial scholarship. One of the participants, gets funding from his own country but receives a monthly stipend from the government of Kazakhstan. Another participant got a grant from the local university in Kazakhstan but without the stipend, while another international students got a discount for the tuition fee. In relation to other participants, they fund their studies by the financial support from their parents. Therefore, the financial assistance to international students was not a strong pull factor because scholarships were not broadly available.

The findings from the online survey and the interviews show that the domain factors presented in the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007) have differently influenced the international students. It revealed that some factors are superior in international students' decision-making process while other factors were not that influential. To sum up, according to findings, financial considerations of students were the major push factor to leave their country which was also supported by the findings from the interview. The cost of education and limited seats at universities made their home country less attractive to

study as well as the difficulty of entrance exams. In the choice of studying in Kazakhstan, parents and family had the major effect on international students' choice, in addition, the safety and geographical proximity of Kazakhstan are revealed to be major pull factors.

However, the financial support from Kazakhstan to international students was not the pull factor. Given that, the next chapter further discusses the findings in relevance with the literature and shows the interesting findings which are not framed by the Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007).

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter aims at exploring the factors that influenced international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan, through their survey answers, and their experience and decision making process that they explained in the interview. The chapter discusses the findings applying the insights from the theoretical Synthesis Model and other literature on the international student mobility.

The Synthesis Model

This study used Chen's (2007) Synthesis Model as a framework to identify the factors that influence international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan. This framework was found applicable to the current research since it helps to define not only the push and pull factors but other important determinants such as personal characteristics of an international student and significant others which affected the choice of international students in Kazakhstan.

Push and pull factors.

The study showed that external push and pull factors play a significant part in international students' decision to study in Kazakhstan. Specifically, according to the mean values of the online survey, the pulling factors had slightly more influence ($M = 2.87$) on the decision to study in Kazakhstan rather than the pushing factors ($M = 2.66$). However, true to the statement that Mazzarol (1997), Hyams-Ssekas et al. (2014), Maringe and Carter (2007) claimed, based on the interview results, the push factors came first when deciding to study abroad in general and the pull factors affected their choice to choose Kazakhstan as a study destination. By any means, major push factors such as "cost of education in a home country" and "limited seats at universities in a home country" were the turning points for the decision to study in Kazakhstan. However, the factors such as the economic condition and safety in Kazakhstan were not less influential. It should be also

pointed out that the pull factors are not about the host country only, but about the home country too. Few interview participants are happy with the quality of the higher education in their country, which refers to a pull factor. However, the difficulty of enrolling in those universities and the limitation of seats in there make them choose Kazakhstan as a country for their studies.

With reference to the type of student mobility, there are both “vertical” and “horizontal” mobility in participants’ movement to Kazakhstan. Similarly to “vertical mobility” (Rivza & Teichler, 2007; Teichler, 2004) which is the movement of an international student to a country which has superior education or economically more developed, some participants of the interview claim to move to study in Kazakhstan because of the economic factors saying that it is more advanced in Kazakhstan. As for “horizontal mobility” which is the movement of an international student to another country (more or less equal to terms of their home country) to widen their horizons, the half of the participants decided to study in Kazakhstan due to the wish to enhance their view and widen their horizons through academic and cultural experience.

The discussed findings show that when deciding to study abroad the push and pull factors have an influence on international students’ choice. However, it is important to highlight the certain factors that affect international students more than the other factors. From the research findings, it emerged that the international students tend to leave their home country because of the financial considerations. Taking into consideration their own financial concerns, the cost of education is also not affordable for them. Furthermore, the difficulty in passing the entrance exam is also one of the push factors. In terms of the pull factors, safety and the geographical proximity of Kazakhstan are the major factors why participants have chosen Kazakhstan. Besides, the economic relationship of Kazakhstan with the home countries which international student are from was another pull factor.

Hence, it follows that Kazakhstani higher education institutions when developing the information about their university or at an education fair, can highlight the safe environment and situation in Kazakhstan. Additionally, giving consideration to geographical proximity, the advertisement of Kazakhstani universities can be targeted at the neighbor countries to attract more international students. Overall, given findings can provide some insights for the higher education institutions in Kazakhstan to develop their marketing strategy to attract more international students.

Personal characteristics of international students.

In the report of OECD for higher education (2017), the 2014 statistics shows the top countries from which international students come from to study in Kazakhstan. According to it, the highest number of students come from Georgia, Uzbekistan and Russian Federation. Whereas in this study, survey results show that most international students come from India outnumbering other countries. However, it is important to note that the sampling size was limited with 11 universities which means the diversity of countries where international students are from can vary. Next countries where Kazakhstan is quite popular is Tajikistan, and less popular in Afghanistan and Somalia. Comparatively, the top countries shown in the statistics are different from the findings of this study. The reasons for these results can be due to the location of the survey and the survey sampling since it cannot give the whole picture for Kazakhstan. An interesting result is that there are countries which are not mentioned by the 2014 statistics, such as Somalia, The Netherlands, Mexico and USA which conversely are present in this research.

Consistent with the reporting of OECD (2017), the participants of the study confirmed that there is no need to pass UNT and the university do admissions by different criteria compared to local students. In relation to the admission criteria, both participants of the survey and the interviews claim that it is extremely difficult to pass entrance exam to

universities in their home country. In other words, Kazakhstan might have been a destination country because of the easiness of the admission to the higher education.

In accordance with Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), where they state that the cost factor is not only the tuition fee but the students' travel and living expenses, the interview results showed that the international students consider the geographical proximity and the everyday expenses when they choose the host country. They reckon that their expenses in Kazakhstan can be funded by their families, while few participants say that their families struggle in providing financial support to their children though it is better than in their home countries.

A number of participants claim that studying in Kazakhstan can help them to become self-dependent and the experience to help them in their future job as Eder et al. (2010) and Lam et al. (2011) have stated. However, learning a foreign language is not their priority. The reason could be the unpopularity of Kazakh language in other countries and that most of them focused on learning English.

It appears that some participants in this research are motivated not only by academic opportunities in Kazakhstan but by non-academic purposes as well. The non-academic aspects include travelling as a hobby, gaining cultural experience, and meeting new people as Jarvis and Peel (as cited in Nyaupane & Teye, 2011) state.

Recommendations of significant others.

The results of the study show that the recommendations of others, such as parents, relatives, friends and vendors exerted considerable influence in the decision-making process of the international students. Not only did it contribute to their decision to study abroad, but to choose Kazakhstan and select a higher education institution in Kazakhstan as well. An argument by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) highlights the "importance and effectiveness of word-mouth", confirming the importance of recommendations of

significant others which were found in this study. Findings in this research comply with the previous research results where the role of the significant others in affecting the choice of international students was highlighted.

The experience of the international students' parents in Kazakhstan, friends who studied in Kazakhstan before, family heritage and study abroad advisors have influenced international students' motivation to choose Kazakhstan as a destination for their studies. It is important for the international students that their friends have had a positive experience in Kazakhstan since they can assure parents of the student not to worry about their child's study. Similarly, according to interviews, some parents assure their children that Kazakhstan is a good place to study considering their own experience. In addition, study abroad advisors and the vendors advertised Kazakhstan to some international students who participated in the interview.

Another important finding is that more than 80% ($n = 84$) of the international students who participated in the survey study in English. This contradicts to the OECD (2017) report where it stated that Kazakhstan could be not attractive to international students because of lack of English as a language of instruction at higher education institutions. This could be the difference in the year the report was written and the time this study was conducted, nevertheless, the popularity of English is one of the pull factors that attract the international students to Kazakhstani higher education institutions. In addition, the participants of the research find the "learning facilities and infrastructure in Kazakhstan" ($M = 2.99, SD = 1.441$) and the "quality of education" ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.313$) attractive, whereas OECD (2017) highlighted that these were the possible reasons why international student mobility is not developed in Kazakhstan.

It is important to note that to attract more international students to Kazakhstan, the government should pay more attention to the characteristics of Kazakhstan itself since the

pull factors play a crucial in deciding where to study. In other words, Kazakhstan should focus on its strengths such as safety, political conditions, availability of seats and the geographical proximity to increase and sustain the number of international students.

The next chapter provides the conclusion of the research and presents the recommendations for the stakeholders of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan based on the findings of the study, in addition, suggestions for the future studies are presented.

Furthermore, it includes the limitations of the current study.

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to identify the factors that influence the motivation of international students' to study in Kazakhstan. By using the Synthesis Model developed by Chen (2007), this study focused on the factors only in regards to the decision of international students to study in Kazakhstan.

The study identified key factors influencing international students' decision to study in Kazakhstan. The research findings show that certain push factors encouraged international students to decide to study abroad, however, positive pull factors influenced their choice to study in Kazakhstan.

The general perception and image of Kazakhstan as a safe country played a crucial role in pulling students to choose Kazakhstan. In other words, the awareness of a host country, as findings in this research suggest, seems essential when choosing a destination country. The research reveals that the international students' from India outnumber other countries similar to the data OECD (2017) provides. Additionally to the list of the countries (Table 1) international students in Kazakhstan come from (OECD, 2017), this study revealed the research participants from such countries as Somalia, the USA, the Netherlands and Mexico study in Kazakhstan.

As for universities in Kazakhstan, the international students seem to be attracted not by the quality of education but rather the availability of seats at Kazakhstani universities and the cost of higher education. Moreover, in the decision to study in Kazakhstan, most of the international students were impacted by the significant others who are parents, family, friends and vendors. They all played one of the key roles in the decisions of international students to study in Kazakhstan.

This study suggests that recruitment strategies of universities to attract more international students should be focused on the strengths of Kazakhstan as a country. The

internationalization approach is a key in student mobility, and marketing efforts, such as educational fairs and educational agents can help to develop the international student mobility in Kazakhstan. It is hoped that this study will generate further discussion and study in this area for the development of international student mobility in Kazakhstan.

Recommendations

The study proposes that the Kazakhstani government and higher education institutions should consider the importance of influential factors, such as the external push and pull factors and significant others in international students' decision-making process. The recommendations presented below are aimed at assisting the marketing of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

The first recommendation is to carry out market segmentation when recruiting international students. By using the pulling factors such as the geographical proximity and the similarity of culture, the international students from close countries or which have similar culture to Kazakhstan can be attracted. For the international students whose countries are further, there should be applied different strategies to attract them.

The second recommendation is to organize more educational fairs in different countries. However, they should consider the characteristics of the country and use appropriate marketing approaches. The vendors at the educational fair should be highly professional and familiar with the culture of Kazakhstan and its higher education system.

The third recommendation is to organize a social group in each university in Kazakhstan to make the adaptation period of the international students manageable. Having an international student representative for each country in the university could attract more students from this particular country. The influence of significant others such as parents and friends is important and following this recommendation universities could rely on both the effectiveness of "word-of-mouth" and spreading the advantages of

studying in Kazakhstan focusing on its strengths.

The fourth recommendation is to provide accessible information to international students in the university's website focusing on strengths of Kazakhstan. The information can contain information about the international students who have studied in this particular university before and share their experience. In addition, they can make sure that for the adaptation period of international students, the International office at the university can assist them in this period.

To sum up, the recommendations mentioned above may provide useful insights for Kazakhstani higher education institutions to consider when recruiting international students.

Limitations of this Research and Suggestions for Future Studies

While this study provides relevant information and useful insights, it has several limitations. The study focused on identifying the factors that influenced the motivation of international students' choice in the context of Kazakhstan by selecting samples from the top universities in Kazakhstan. Even though the sample size is large enough to gain some insights about the motivations of international students, this study does not show the whole picture of Kazakhstan. Future studies could select samples from each part of Kazakhstan or each city to see the bigger picture of international students' experience in choosing Kazakhstan as a host country.

This study focused on international students who study full-time in Kazakhstani universities, however, it would be interesting to know the exchange students' experience regarding the topic of the research. In future studies the experience of full-time and exchange students could be compared and analyzed to identify how different or similar they are.

In terms of this research, the focus was mainly on factors, and in future studies it

can include the stages of the decision-making process and identify what exact factors influence the international students' choice in each stage. Moreover, it would be interesting to know what the experiences of international students in Kazakhstan are like. Knowing their experiences during their studies and after graduation can help to measure their satisfaction with their experiences in Kazakhstan. Overall, these would bring new insight for marketing strategies to recruit international students to Kazakhstan.

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Appendix A: Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a **research study** on factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study is to identify the push and pull factors that influence international students' choice to study in Kazakhstani higher education institutions. You will be asked to participate in the interview on a voluntary basis. Upon your approval, your name will be substituted with a pseudonym to keep the anonymity. The interview data will be recorded via audio device, if you agree.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in the interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study is the possibility that students' voice will be heard. However, there is no guarantee that participants will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your student status.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, **[information is in the original consent form]**

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).

Appendix B: Interview protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan**Date of the interview:** _____**Start time of the interview:** _____**End time of the interview:** _____**Place of the interview:** _____**Participant:** _____**Interviewer:** _____**Introduction to a participant**

You are invited to participate in a study on identifying factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstani universities conducted by the student of NUGSE (Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education). The purpose of this interview is to learn about your perspective and experience in relation to how you chose a university and why did you decide to study in Kazakhstan. If you agree to participate in this interview, please know that your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to answer questions or withdraw from the interview at any time with no repercussions to you or to your organization. If you agree to participate in this interview would you kindly read and sign the consent form.

Starting the interview

Do you agree that the interview is digitally recorded?

Interview questions to all participants*Background information*

1. Could you please briefly introduce to yourself?

The decision to study in Kazakhstan

2. Why did you choose to study in Kazakhstan?

Possible factors that influenced their choice

3. Did you make decision yourself?
4. Are there any relatives of yours who live here or anyone who has an experience in Kazakhstan?
5. Are there any friends studying in Kazakhstan?

Additional questions

6. What do you think about education in Kazakhstan?
7. What are your plans after graduation?
8. Why didn't you choose to study in your own country?
9. What influenced your decision the most?
10. I have asked all my questions. Would you like to add something to what you already said or there was some question that I did not ask?

Appendix C: Introduction for an online survey**Survey for international students on Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan**

Dear participant,

This study is carried out by a Master student of Nazarbayev University. It is aimed at identifying the factors that influenced your choice to study in Kazakhstan. We are interested in knowing what (factors) you considered while you were choosing a university and country to study in.

Your answers are strictly confidential and will only be analyzed in aggregate form. If you are interrupted while filling out this questionnaire (for instance, if you need to take care of an important task), you can start it again later when it is more convenient for you.

Please, state if you agree to participate in this survey.

Yes, I agree to participate in this survey.

No, I don't agree to participate in this survey.

If a participant agrees, he or she will proceed with the survey.

If a participant disagrees, he or she will be thanked for spending their time.

Appendix D: Email for the university administration**To whom it may concern:**

I am a Master student of Nazarbayev University who is currently doing a research on **Factors influencing international students' motivation to study in Kazakhstan**. It is aimed at identifying the factors that influenced international students' choice to study in Kazakhstan. I am asking if you could distribute the online survey link among your university's international students (all degree students considered). I am interested in knowing what did international students consider while they chose a university and country to study in. All the information will be confidential and the name of university will not be mentioned in the study. I would highly appreciate your participation and cooperation.

Thank you in advance.

P.S. I will send the link as soon as I receive your consent.

Best Regards,

Botagoz Ibragimova

Appendix E: The content of the online survey

Gender

- Male
- Female

How old are you?

- <18
- 19-21
- 22-24
- >24

What is your ethnicity?

What is your home country (country of residence)?

What is the main language spoken at your home?

What is the level of your study?

- Bachelor
- Master's
- PhD
- other

What is your mode of study?

- Full-time (degree program)
- I am an exchange student

What is your major?

- Medicine
- Economics and Business
- International Relations
- Journalism
- Information Technology
- Accounting
- Geography and Environmental Sciences
- Biology and Biotechnology
- Physics and Technology
- Philology and World Languages
- Law
- Philosophy and Political Science
- Mathematics
- History, Archeology and Ethnology
- Chemistry and Chemistry Technology
- Foundation
- Other

What year did you start your studies in Kazakhstan?

What is the language of instruction (studies) at your university in Kazakhstan?

- English
- Kazakh
- Russian
- other

How do you finance your studies? (more than one option possible)

- Scholarship provided by Kazakhstan's government
- Scholarship provided by my home country
- Family and relatives
- Personal savings
- A loan from the bank

To what extent did the following relationship factors influence your choice to study in Kazakhstan? (1=No influence, 5=Strongly influenced)

	1	2	3	4	5
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Significant others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends who studied abroad before you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study abroad advisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vendors at the study abroad fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professors at the university in a host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent did the following push factors (conditions motivating you to leave) influence your choice to study in Kazakhstan? (1=No influence, 5=Strongly influenced)

	1	2	3	4	5
Major classes not available at universities in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of the education in a home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of educational resources in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Future plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The field that I have chosen is underdeveloped in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern about entrance exam to a university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unemployment in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The status of universities in my home country in a world market	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of scholarships in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Limited seats available at universities in my home country (lack of universities)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent did the following personal factors influence your choice to study in Kazakhstan? (1=No influence, 5=Strongly influenced)

	1	2	3	4	5
Financial considerations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Previous travel experience to a host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Previous travel experience to other countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Similarity to a language that student is familiar with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Similarity to a culture that a student is familiar with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intuition (It seemed as an interesting (unusual) place to study or I could benefit from studying here)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent did the following pull factors (enticing conditions in Kazakhstan) influence your choice to study in Kazakhstan? (1=No influence, 5=Strongly influenced)

	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of academic institutions in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classes for major available in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic conditions in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political conditions in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural environment in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safety in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geographic proximity of Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial aid / Scholarships in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prestige of studying in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technological advancement of Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment opportunities in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research development in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning facilities and infrastructure in Kazakhstan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What do you want to do after your studies?

Would you like to participate in an interview related to this research?

- Yes
- No

If you agreed to participate in an interview, please leave your contacts (e-mail address or mobile number)