
Students as New Settlers: the policy implementation gap

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Abstract

Given that New Zealand is experiencing a lack of skilled labour in Information Technology (IT), and that this lack is increasing in direct proportion to ongoing technological development, the government is looking to immigrants to meet this shortfall. The purpose of this paper is to explore the issues surrounding the New Zealand Government's stated preference for meeting this shortfall in skilled labour by having highly qualified international students as new settlers/new immigrants. What actually happens to these international IT students once they are here in New Zealand and how does the New Zealand IT job market match their needs with the needs of these potential new settlers?

Keywords

International IT students, immigration, pastoral care

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Introduction

Many countries currently experience labour shortages in some fields as well as the excess of labour in other fields. To resolve these issues, these countries are trying to attract skilled people to come and fulfill the lack of labour in various particular fields by changing their immigration policies. Thus, the international exchange of labour has become an important global issue – especially to those people looking to better their lives.

One such immigration policy change arises out of the realization that international students are a potential source of qualified migrants. They have already experienced the local culture and lifestyle while studying and they have gained the required skills by graduation. According to Beerkens (as cited in Teshnar, 2009), the international exchange of students is used as a political instrument in European integration to link economic and cultural collaboration between countries. Swain (2004) claimed that international students, who had studied in New Zealand, are potential quality migrants as they have qualifications that are recognised by New Zealand employers and are already partly settled here.

A variety of skills, but especially IT skills, are required in many countries – for example, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and

New Zealand. *"Highly qualified IT professionals, a microbiologist, a psychiatrist, other scientists, doctors, nurses, secondary school teachers, and trades people such as mechanics and electricians are among those being invited to apply for residence,"* according to Swain (2004, para. 14). New Zealand is offering a job search visa for graduates who completed NZQA level 5 or higher level courses. Until three years ago, the job search visa was valid for six months. But it was changed in 2006 to a longer term of one year. The New Zealand Government appreciated the difficulties international graduates had in gaining employment in NZ. It did not want them to leave as soon as they became qualified as they were considered skilled potential labour.

Methodology

International students face certain difficulties when they graduate and are looking for employment in New Zealand. This also applies in other countries. Maasen & Uppstrøm (as cited in Teshnar, 2009), explain the difficulty of recruiting international students as a result of the "language issue". This language issue relates to gaining employment, but also for non-English speaking background (NESB) students studying. There can also be issues such as discrimination on the grounds of race, creed, language and other reasons.

A literature review explored the current global responses to international students, their motivation, any discrimination that may be experienced, and the New Zealand Government policies to support international students. As the scope of this topic is IT students and graduates as new settlers, this review is mostly limited to recent international students' immigration literature/research.

Then, on the basis of the literature review findings, a survey was conducted with international students in IT programmes of study using a range of closed and open questions. The survey addressed some of the issues raised by Malhotra and Clear (2010) and seeks to provide research into the perceptions and experiences of the students themselves.

Literature Review

Prior to the recent 2009 recession, international students were offered more and more favourable opportunities to seek employment after upskilling through post graduate study. Coleman (2009, para. 4) said *"Immigration is a major contributor to New Zealand's economy ... as is export education. Export education is one of New Zealand's top five export industries, generating over \$2 billion annually in foreign exchange for New Zealand's economy. In addition, there are an estimated 32,000 jobs associated with the export education industry. Export education is big business for New Zealand, but of course, it could be much, much bigger."*

From an economic point of view, *"High-skilled immigrants are... a self-selected pool of individuals, who move to countries where there is demand for their skills and ... they raise global productivity"* (Kaushal & Fix, 2006, p.14). While some countries are unable to provide enough jobs to employ skilled people, other countries have insufficient skilled labour to fulfill the needs of their market. From a global point of view, immigration increases global productivity by fulfilling the supply and demand for skilled labour around the world (Teshnar, 2009).

The fundamental rationale underpinning immigration rules in many countries is to attract high-skilled workers. This policy created positive sentiment and attracted international students and graduates who then wanted to stay to find a job in their new countries. As the next step from the job search visa, New Zealand offers the opportunity for the graduates to apply for residency under SMC (Skilled Migrant Category). Although this applies to certain skills shortages, students recognised that New Zealand considered students and graduates as potential qualified migrants. Students who have studied in New Zealand were seen as potential quality migrants as they have qualifications that are recognised by New Zealand employers and they are already partly settled here (Swain, 2004).

The practice of securing qualified labour force through the recruitment of international students has become common in various developed countries (Kapur & McHale, 2005; Green, 2007; Hawthorne, 2002; & Chellaraj, Maskus & Mattoo, 2005 as cited in Teshnar, 2009). Countries consider their foreign students as potential qualified migrants as they were highly educated, experienced, and proficient English speakers. Chellaraj, Maskus and Mattoo (2005, p.12) emphasized the benefits of an *"open-door immigration policy"* to boost the rates of economic growth of the country (the United States). For example, besides attracting highly skilled workers, US Immigration Policy has changed to enable international students to stay on to work after graduation and contribute to the economy with their various backgrounds and skills (Anderson, n.d.).

Similarly, Australia's immigration policies have changed in recent years. From September, 1, 2007, changes were made to the Skilled Migration Requirements to

ease the process of gaining employment for graduates with higher levels of English and relevant work experience. These changes ensured that international graduates who desired to work in Australia after completing their studies had a better chance of competing for jobs in their chosen vocations (Teshnar, 2009).

In addition, UK changed its immigration policies to broadly recognize international students as potential migrants. All international students and graduates were accepted for the international graduates scheme, rather than restricting it to science and engineering graduates. Thus, all international students who graduated from UK universities had the possibility of employment for a year after graduation – similar to the job search visa in NZ. Former British Higher Education Minister, Bill Rammell (as cited in Teshnar, 2009, p.17) said the measures were taken to *"allow UK employers to benefit from skilled people who have gained UK qualifications and have experience of living in the UK."*

What motivates international students and graduates to consider applying for residency? Migration is influenced by push and pull factors. Push factors force a person to move. These include drought, famine, lack of jobs, over population and civil war. Pull factors encourage a person to move – such as a chance for a better job, better education, a better standard of living. (Teshnar, 2009) Being an international student is expensive and takes considerable time and effort, so it is unlikely to be an easy decision for most students to make. Therefore, it is important to explore the ways countries appeal to international students to motivate them to study abroad.

Teshnar's 2009 study of International Students in Norway examined the concept of "Migration Motivation". According to the interviews in the study, the main pull was the absence of tuition fees, and in some cases, the availability of a scholarship (Teshnar, 2009). Commonly, financial problems could be a barrier for international students as it is expensive to live and study in Europe. The study found that another motivation for international students was their investment in their future career. This finding applies to almost all international students around the world. The study program content is highly rated by students. They seek programs that are relevant to their previous education or job experience, and consider a degree taken in Norway to be highly valuable for their future career plans (Teshnar, 2009, p.85). In conclusion, it appears that while the strongest reason to go abroad to study is their investment in their professional development for better future, they still need to carefully consider financial issues when choosing a country in which to study.

Another recent study from the United States examined perceived obstacles for international students. The *Study of International Students and U.S. Policy Choices* discussed recent obstacles for increasing international student enrolments. International student enrolments at U.S. universities have recently declined. Firstly, the U.S. Visa Policy was an obstacle. Many applications are declined because the applicants did not prove that they did not intend to stay permanently in the United States, under section 214(b). Thus, at a time when the nation's success was based on its laws and institutions and the skills of its workforce, U.S. policy specifically blocked the entry of bright foreign nationals who planned to

study and later work in the United States. (Anderson, n.d.).

Another obstacle was being in competition with other countries to attract international students. The study said when other countries changed their policies to attract more international students, recent U.S. policies lagged behind. Another disincentive was the unattractive exchange rate for the US dollar and the high cost of living and education. Finally, their low potential ability to work in the United States while studying was an obstacle. The less realistic that opportunity becomes, the less likely it is for students to choose a U.S. university. They are more likely to choose postgraduate education in another nation state, including in their own country (Anderson, n.d.).

Other disincentives from choosing the United States have been identified by the *Discrimination and Harassment Among International Students: a Focus Group Study* (Sutton, 2002) at North Carolina State University. Discrimination has been described as something that involves different treatment based on a characteristic such as colour or gender or being "foreign". This study examined international students' experiences through several themes including discrimination, harassment, national origin, race, religion, disability, sexual harassment, gender roles in American society and other societies, Post-September 11th experiences, student and American faculty perceptions of international students, and forms of harassment or discrimination an international student may face (Sutton, 2002).

Having a 'foreign-sounding name' can cause disadvantage by receiving different treatment from a

roommate. The study found that international students could benefit from education that gave a clear definition of discrimination and how American laws and policies manage discrimination. Participants referred to race as their "ethnic origin" or "ethnic background" whereas others referred to race as "colour." Some of the participants also noted that race was a much bigger problem in America than it was in their own country (Sutton, 2002). Some Americans also have strong stereotypes and prejudices about different religions which they associate with different countries or national origins; especially as an effect of post September 11 experiences (Sutton, 2002).

In summary, it was clear that harassment and discrimination are handled in different ways in other countries; therefore, more education for international students is needed to inform them of their rights and responsibilities as outlined by federal and state laws and university policies. In addition, international students may not have a clear understanding of "race" as defined by law or of what constitutes harassment (Sutton, 2002).

Some New Zealand based research has been conducted among Pacific Island students at Auckland University, sponsored by the Ministry of Education. The Pacific Island Students Academic Achievement Collective (1993) explained why Pacific Island students achieved low marks in their study and suggested ways in which lecturers could understand their background to improve achievement. Language is one of biggest issues for international students. It could cause discrimination and also be an obstacle to fully understanding their studies.

In New Zealand, there is a Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. All educational institutions must honour this to enable them to have international students in their institutions. The Code provides a framework for service delivery by educational providers and their agents to international students. It sets out the minimum standards of advice and care that is expected from educational providers for international students. The Code applies to pastoral care and provision of information only, and not to academic standards (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003). Thus, international students are legally protected by schools and they have a right to ask for help from their schools.

In summary, developed countries vary in their policies and practices towards international students depending on skills shortages, and the degree of competition for their fees within the global tertiary education systems. In buoyant economic times of with high skills shortage, international students are exposed to a variety of incentives, including nil or relatively low tuition fees, and a variety of incentives to stay on as job seekers for a period of time after their post graduate qualifications are completed. The effect of these pull factors on international students in ITPs in New Zealand is further explored in research conducted in 2010.

The Survey

The survey questions were designed based on findings from the literature review. There were four parts. Part A dealt with New Zealand's Immigration Law, Part B looked at current students, Part C examined the motivation of the students to come abroad to study and live, and Part D looked at those who had graduated and were now successful immigrants.

In Part A of the Survey (New Zealand Immigration Laws) six questions defined how the respondents thought of themselves fitting into New Zealand society and their attitudes and knowledge of the current immigration laws. In Part B, they were asked, as a student now, nine questions to find out whether they had experienced any discrimination and also how hard they believed it was going to be for IT international students to find employment. Seven questions in Part B also related to more detail on the question about discrimination. As already mentioned, Part C dealt with the Students' motivation to come to New Zealand to study and live, and two questions looked specifically at why they actually chose New Zealand. Part D asked about life after a successful immigration, and this included two specific questions to investigate how many participants would stay in NZ forever after successful immigration.

The survey was carried out amongst the international students who study Bachelor and Graduate IT programmes of study at one of the South Island metropolitan tertiary institutions in New Zealand. While it was mostly completed through face to face interaction, some of questionnaires were completed by emails. (Acknowledgement is given to several staff for allowing the survey to be carried out at the beginning of their respective courses.) Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and in all 32 completed questionnaires were used to analyse the results. This represented approximately 80% of all international students in these programmes of study.

Results

Most participants (about 84%) classified themselves as students and also as potential immigrants (see Table

1). A similar number of participants said they would fit into the NZ immigration scheme in the near future.

Q1. How do you see yourself fitting in to NZ society?				
As a student	As a potential immigrant	As someone who will return home	Other	
15	12	2	2	
Q2. How soon do you see yourself being fully familiar with the NZ immigration laws_{xxx}				
Now	Soon	Later	Much Later	Other
2	14	11	3	1
Q3. What more do you see yourself having to do to fit into NZ society?				
Complete your Study	Apply residency	Apply citizenship	I feel I already fit in	Other
15	14	3	0	0
Q4. Do you see the process of fitting in_{xxx}				
Easy	Too Easy	Hard	Too Hard	Other
5	1	18	4	2
Q5. How long do you see that it will take you to fit into NZ society?				
1 year	2 years	3 years	More	Other
7	12	6	6	0
Q6. Do you think that the current NZ immigration laws encourage international students to consider immigration?				
Yes	No	Don't know	Others	
17	4	10	0	

Table 1: Results of Part A: Fitting in and the New Zealand Immigration Laws

However, 90% said that completing their study and then applying for residency was the most important thing to do to fit into New Zealand society. About 69% of the participants said that the process of fitting into New Zealand society is hard or too hard and a similar number of participants believed that it would take them from 1 to 2 years to achieve this; 19% believed it could take as much as 3 years or more. Only 53% of them said that the New Zealand immigration laws encourage

international students to consider immigration and another 31% of them said that they did not know.

About 72% of participants responded that they had never experienced any discrimination in NZ. But 25% of the participants said they had experienced some form of discrimination (see Table 2). In the questions

Q7As an international student in NZ, have you ever experienced any discrimination?				
Yes	No	Other		
8	23	0		
Q7.1. If yes, do you mind saying what the discrimination was				
6 answers				
Q7.2. If yes, how many times have you been discriminated against?				
1 time	2 times	3 times	More	
2	2	2	2	
Q7.3. If yes, do you think you were discriminated against because of your..				
Race	Creed	Colour	Language	Other
4	0	3	3	2
Q7.4. If yes, how did you resolve the discrimination?				
1 Ignored it	Asked for help	Others		
8	0	1		
Q7.5. If yes, did you need to go to hospital?				
Yes	No	Other		
1	7	0		
Q7.6. If yes, did you report it to the police?				
Yes	No	Other		
1	5	1		
Q7.7. If yes and you reported it to the police, what was their reaction?				
None	Not interested	Helpful	Other	
2	0	1	0	
Q8. How easy do you think it will be to get a job in ICT here in NZ?				
Easy	Too Easy	Hard	Too Hard	Other
1	0	19	9	1

Table 2: Results of Part B: As a student now- Discrimination and getting work in New Zealand

relating to the details of the discrimination, 50% of those who said they had experienced some form of discrimination, admitted it had been two or more times. They said it was mostly relating to race (50%), colour (38%) or language issues (38%). Being given the opportunity to choose more than one form of discrimination, gives rise to the overlap of percentage responses.

Almost all of those who responded that they had experienced some form of discrimination admitted that they ignored the discrimination rather than trying to resolve it. Most of the participants did not need to go to hospital because of the discrimination but one participant did answer that he/she reported the discrimination to the police. Responses to the question as to whether the Police were helpful have to be taken as null and void due to the inaccurate answers. Finally, in this section, most participants (about 88%) believe that it will be hard or too hard to get employment the IT sector in New Zealand upon graduation.

Q9. What is your main reason to come to study in NZ?				
Investment for future career	Better value for money than other countries	For living permanently in NZ	Other	
18	7	3	2	
Q10. What would be your main reason to stay in NZ after graduation?				
NZ nature	NZ culture	NZ economy	NZ immigration laws	Other
17	8	2	6	1

Table 3: Results for Part C: Motivation of Students to come abroad to study/live

About 78% of participants (see Table 3) answered that they came to New Zealand to study for either an investment in their future career or because of better value for money than other countries, but not for living permanently in NZ. Now that they are here, 50% of participants responded that the reason to stay after graduation would be New Zealand's natural environment and only 25% said they would stay because of the New Zealand culture.

About 6% of participants answered that they would only stay in New Zealand for a few years after having processed their immigration (see Table 4). Only 9% said they would stay in New Zealand forever. When asked what they planned to do back home, if they went there, 47% were not sure what they would do. 16% said they only wanted residency and another 10% said they wanted to go back home to their family.

Q11. How long do you think you will live in NZ?				
Forever	Few years	Few Months	Other	
3	21	2	4	
Q11.1. If you didn't choose 'Forever', why do you plan to go back home or go to other countries?				
For Business	For living with other family	Did not plan it from the starting point - just wanted residency	Not sure	Other
2	5	5	15	1

Table 4: Results for Part D: After Successful Immigration

Analysis of Results

As previously mentioned, the New Zealand Government recognises the lack of highly skilled labours, especially in the IT sector. Therefore they launched the skilled migrant scheme for immigration and they extended the term of the job search visa from six months to one

year. According to the result of part A, most participants have answered that they are fitting into the NZ society as a student or as a potential immigrant. They answered that the process was hard but they would be qualified to apply for residency in the near future. They mostly acknowledge that the immigration laws encourage international students to consider permanent immigration.

This shows that the New Zealand Government's policy for international students has been implemented mostly in a positive way but still it is recognised that the students are finding it hard to fit in. Also, it appears the government needs to constantly keep informing potential new immigrants of their policies to attract more potential qualified immigrants as many participants answered that they did not know these policies.

The literature review identified that discrimination occurred to international students all over the world. According to the results of part B of the local survey, most participants responded that they had never experienced any discrimination in New Zealand. However, some did experience a degree of discrimination. Their experiences are varied but the common points were that they ignored it rather than trying hard to resolve it. The types of discrimination were mostly on the grounds of race, then colour, and then language. This highlights that the protection of international students is not properly working. Certainly there are government systems and policies in place to protect international students and one of the policies has been introduced in the literature review, namely the code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. So once again, the Government

needs to inform the international students more effectively and, perhaps ensure that ITPs are more stringently following these guidelines.

Despite the fact that the New Zealand Government is aware of the lack of skilled IT professionals, and is heavily promoting internationally in that sector, the survey shows that students do still believe that it will be hard or too hard to get a job here New Zealand in IT. Again this is an indicator of the gap between what the Government see the situation to be and what international students experience or believe it to be.

There are a variety of different motivations for students to go abroad from their homeland to study or live. According to the survey results, most participants came to New Zealand to study because of the better value of the currency than other countries or for investment in their future career. As mentioned in the literature review, the quality of education would be one of the major reasons for international students to choose a country to go to. Results in this part of the survey differ from that found in the literature review and are not as expected.

Another concern of this survey was whether people would stay for some time or forever after successful immigration. Most participants responded that they would stay in New Zealand, after immigration, for only a few years. And most of them answered that they were not sure at that stage whether to stay for a longer or a short term. This possibly highlights the need for the New Zealand Government to encourage them, to provide incentives for them to stay on longer and provide their newly-acquired qualified skills to the job market.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that immigration is an important issue to New Zealand to improve the local economy and the government has tried to encourage international students especially those who are majoring in IT. But according to the results of the survey, there is a gap between what the Government has assumed and what actually happens to the international students. This, in turn, could result in a decreasing level of skilled labour in New Zealand unless the Government resolves these issues effectively.

Finally, it is important that the significance of these findings are enhanced by further study and research, perhaps extending the research into the qualitative detail of personal case studies and a broader spectrum of quantitative results.

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