



Factors Contributing to Brain Drain in Thailand

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of this study is to find the main factors which affect the migration rate and may lead to brain drain. Brain drain is the migration of highly trained or skilled people to wealthier countries where they can gain more salary and better standard of living. Moreover, brain drain can result in losing professionals and cause deterring effects on the countries. This has become an important issue as in recent years, more people have been leaving their countries to more developed countries. Thus, it is clear that brain drain is a significant issue in various countries including Thailand. Nevertheless, some countries, for instance Taiwan, have developed policies in order to improve their citizens' life qualities. Finding the main causes of migration may help us understand more about the situation, which may lead to a solution for this issue. There are mainly three levels of brain drain, Geographical brain drain, Organizational brain drain and Industrial brain drain. In this paper, we mainly discuss Geographical brain drain since it has the most substantial impact on the country. Based on 250 respondents who are Thai inhabitants, the result shows that the most significant reason for migration is the standard of living, followed by social conditions.

KEYWORDS: Brain drain, Factor analysis, Migration, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Brain drain is a term used to indicate substantial migration of skilled human resources for various purposes such as gaining favorable professional opportunities, to earn higher salary or to seek a better standard of living. Brain drain can result in the loss of a core portion of valuable individuals, for instance healthcare professionals, scientists, engineers and financial professionals. The definition has become especially important in recent years as more and more people have been leaving their countries to seek better opportunities abroad (Julie Young, 2021). The brain drain is less pronounced in poorer countries, but becomes increasingly noticeable for wealthier countries where people seek work elsewhere when they start making enough money domestically (UNESCO, 2018). While this phenomenon is often seen as a problem for poorer countries, it can also be an opportunity for those who are lucky enough to move away with enough money saved up to live comfortably (Kattel and Sapkota, 2018). With a better standard of living, better quality of life, higher wages, access to advanced technology and stable political conditions (Adetayo, 2010), developed countries are seeking talent from less developed areas. Introducing brain drain is the brain drain of highly skilled human resources into commerce, education, etc. Highly skilled medical professionals are needed in all parts of the world (Sunita and Ronald, 2005). The migration of medical staff jeopardises the development of future medical staff. Possible benefits from the expansion of international networking could result from the brain drain. In a sense, it is about networking between the home country of the foreign country and its counterparts who remain in the country (Jessica Karpilo, 2020).

Career advancement or promotion, higher wages and better employment opportunities in developed countries is one of the expectations which can activate high-skilled workers to migrate when there is a lack of career advancement opportunities perceived by the employees (Abubakar Lawan Ngoma, 2013). Migration of highly skilled personnel does not only derive from educational and professional opportunities. There are many other possibilities for instant migration, which might suit its labor desire with an extra skilled workforce and positions requiring skilled workers are not available in their original worker markets (Simona Cavallini et al., 2018). The highly skilled laborers when obtained opportunities from the destination country tend to work in that country and the destination country, when it benefits from skilled labor from the country of origin, provides citizenship. This caused the brain drain problem (Phrasrirattanamunee et al., 2018).

There are several levels of brain drain, firstly, Geographical brain drain which is when professionals migrate from one country within a country in favor of another. Geographical brain drain can harm the original countries of those who migrated by losing expertise and supplies of professions with the emigrants (Julie Young, 2020). On the other hand, direct benefits accrue to the recipient countries since the intellectuals of any country are one of the most valuable resources (Sunita and Ronald, 2005). Secondly,



Organizational brain drain is the mass exodus of talented workers from a company due to varied career goals or lack of opportunities within the company. Finally, Industrial brain drain happens when skilled workers leave an entire industry.

In terms of the emigration rates of Thailand, even though it had declined steadily between 2016 and 2019, the number of Thai emigrants during the COVID-19 situation rocketed by 4 times from June to July in 2020, increasing from 585 to 2,394, and this trend appears to have continued: from December 2020 to April 2021 the number of yearly emigrants rose gradually from 104,377 to 109,252 (Overseas Employment Administration Division, 2021). The set up of a group “Let’s Leave the Country” on Facebook platform shows how Thai citizens are awakened to intellectual emigration. It immediately won over half a million members in 3 days, between 1st May and 3rd May, and grew to more than a million no later than one month, with various ages and careers sharing their advice and experience on leaving Thailand and living overseas (Srisitt, 2021).

Education plays an important role at many stages of an individuals’ migration. The migration decision, in some cases, is based on a comparison of the expectation in education and career between origin region and destination region (Dustmann and Glitz, 2011). Under specific circumstances, education becomes a factor for international migration at university level. Even though there are universities available in their home countries, the expectation of studying in the developed countries has become a strong parental desire for their children to escape from traditional cultures to have more opportunities of acquiring better jobs (Punch and Sugden, 2013). Many migrants combine educational determination with plans to seek opportunities working and settling down there.

This study is therefore conducted to evaluate the significant factors which may lead Thai citizens to migrate to other countries in order to raise awareness of brain drain among Thai people. Moreover, it seeks to find out ways to reduce the rate of migration.

METHODOLOGY

To empirically examine the hypothesis, the online survey was responded by 250 Thai residents which were classified into three groups by generations, Gen Z (11 - 26), Gen Y (27 -39) and Gen X (40 -56). The interrogation contains 14 questions divided into three sections. The first section is personal information which involves genders, ages, school programs, expectations in education and future career, familiarities to foreign cultures and desire to immigrate. The second part contains questions with a 5-likert scale about factors affecting the decision made for international migration. Besides, in this part, each factor was rated in five scales of influence ranging from highly affected to less affected. Finally, respondents were offered to choose one of the factors that is the most effective factor contemplating immigration in the last section. The process of data collection was voluntary and was conducted through Google Form. The lists of questions were presented in the appendix.

RESULTS

A total of 250 people were included in the study. Females accounted for 75.2 percent of the 188 respondents, followed by males (20.8 percent) and gender undetermined respondents (4.0 percent). There are 13, 29, and 208 respondents in the Gen X (40-56), Gen Y (27-39), and Gen Z (11-26) groups, respectively. The majority of respondents (188 respondents) are in the math science field, while more than one-third (113 respondents) are interested in (or work in) the medical field. Surprisingly, roughly three quarters of respondents (185 respondents) intend to immigrate to another country.

According to Table 1, respondents tended to strongly agree that they considered the standard of living was important for them so that standard of living was rated 4.78 out of 5. Likewise, their opinion towards social conditions and economics have a big influence on their decision as the mean scores were 4.65 and 4.66, respectively. Other two factors that show a comparable result were welfare state (4.59) and environment (4.49), meaning that the respondents realized the long-term effects towards their health and lifestyle. On the contrary, the mean score of occupation & employment where the decision to move to another country was 4.44 out of 5, indicating that a great disparity of opinion exists; however, they tend to be uncertain if this factor plays any significant part in their decision.

Finally, respondents were likely to disagree with the notion that there is no evident driving force behind emigration, as the mean score was as low as 4.29. To summarize, the respondents predominantly agreed on the importance of standard of living, which was followed by social conditions, economy, welfare state, and environment, in that order. While, they mainly disagreed with occupation & employment and were unsure about technology.



In addition, on the standard deviation score there was no deviation in Gen X because the mean score of all was 5. On the other hand, in Gen Y the standard deviation score of standards of living, social conditions, environment and occupation & employment were 0.37. On the contrary the standard deviation score of technology was 0.88. Interestingly, the standard deviations in Gen Z were very fluctuated. In terms of standard of living, social conditions and economy there were smaller deviations compared to environment, occupation & employment, technology and welfare state.

Table 1: Respondents’ view on the factors affecting the decision made for international migration based on a 5 Likert scale where 5 signifies strong agreement while 1 strong disagreement

Level	Mean				Standard Deviation Score			
	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	All	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	All
Standard of living	5	4.83	4.77	4.78	0	0.37	0.58	0.57
Social conditions	5	4.83	4.63	4.65	0	0.37	0.64	0.63
Environment	5	4.83	4.48	4.49	0	0.37	0.78	0.77
Economy	5	5	4.64	4.66	0	0	0.67	0.66
Occupation & Employment	5	4.83	4.41	4.44	0	0.37	0.79	0.78
Technology	5	4.17	4.29	4.29	0	0.88	0.81	0.81
Welfare state	5	5	4.57	4.59	0	0	0.82	0.81

We also sought to figure out what would happen if the respondents were asked to choose only one description out of the total of seven statements that represent the effective factor affecting the decision made for international migration. The purpose of this is to scrutinize a principal form of motivation.

According to Table 2, When respondents were asked to choose one preferred statement that most describe their effective factor affecting their decision for international migration, the most principal factor was standard of living chosen by 129 participants from Gen Z while it was chosen by only 7 participants from Gen X and Gen Y, which is all up to 73.5%. Following this was social conditions which was chosen by 11.9% of the respondents. Other two factors that show a comparable result were economic (4.9%) where the respondents find this affects their living, and occupation & employment (4.3%). Interestingly, a small group of respondents chose welfare state and environment as their forms of decision, conveyed by 3.2% and 2.2%, respectively. On the contrary, none of the respondents chose technology as their effective factor.

Table 2: Respondents’ selection of the most effective factor affects the decision made for international migration

Preferred level	Frequency				Percent			
	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	All	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	All
Standard of living	1	6	129	136	50	100	76	73.5
Social conditions	0	0	22	22	0	0	12	11.9
Environment	0	0	4	4	0	0	0.02	2.2
Economy	1	0	8	9	50	0	0.04	4.9
Occupation & Employment	0	0	8	8	0	0	0.04	4.3
Technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Welfare state	0	0	6	6	0	0	0.03	3.2



DISCUSSION

Brain drain has been going on for a long time and has become more severe. It is a serious issue that people have to be aware of and take action to avoid this problem. It is not limited to the countries of Europe, but also in other parts of the world. Thailand is one of them. It is a country where there are many high-performance workers and students who come from different backgrounds and want to seek a better life.

According to the results showing that living standard is the major motivating factor, this may happen in the view of the fact that Thailand's living conditions eventually have become a serious dilemma. This predicament significantly correlates with social disproportion, economic crisis and maladministration, leading to an unhealthy environment which prompts further life problems; e.g. poverty, physical and mental illness, and so forth. Although Thais' minimum wage had been increasing slightly from approximately 300 baht in 2012 (Thairath Online, 2017) to 330 baht in 2020 (Ministry of Labour, 2020), the household expenses had been on the dramatic rise. Many Thai labour workers are underpaid, compared to the same occupation in richer countries. Food costs are surprisingly as high as 49.18% of monthly wages in Thailand, not including the other costs of living such as monthly rental costs, transportation costs, or facility costs (Moneyhub, 2017). In addition, Thailand has faced inequality problems for a long time. In recent years, while Thailand has had difficulty dealing with COVID-19 pandemic, the economic issues have become severe and critically affect the underprivileged—the middle-classes and the poor—in the widespread job losses. Even though the poverty rate dropped to 6.2% in 2018 to 2019, it has grown to 8.2% in 2020 (The world bank, 2021). Moreover, Thailand eventually has certain structural issues regarding standard of living; for instance, failure of education system for universal basic education (Bangkok Post, 2017), the traffic congestion in Bangkok which was ranked as the world's worst in 2019 (TomTom, 2019), inaccessible of public transportation in provincial cities illustrating inequality (Tanpat, 2021), low quality of footpaths and the other public facilities, and etc. In addition, there is the continuous movement of protest against the government, encouraging Thai citizens to awake and aware about how underprivileged they are. As a result, civilians tend to seek better conditions for life.

Various factors can exist when one considers migrating to another country. Push and pull factors theory of migration, Ravenstein's laws, points out that there are 7 laws of migration; 1) Migrants move mainly over short distances; those travelling longer distances head for the great centres of industry and commerce. 2) Most migration is from agricultural to industrial areas. 3) Large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase. 4) Migration increases with the development of industry, commerce, and transport. 5) Each migration stream produces a counter-stream. 6) Females are more migratory than males, at least over shorter distances. Males are dominant in international migration. 7) The major causes of migration are economic (Ravenstein, 1885) based on Ravenstein's calculations from the British and other censuses of his time. First and foremost, considering all of these 7 laws, our study has shown the contradiction between the seventh law of Ravenstein's laws which said that economics, as the third effective factor in our study, is the major cause of migration. While our result revealed that the most crucial factor which influences migration is the standard of living. The reason for this is probably because the majority of respondents are in Gen Z (11-26 years old). This is due to the fact that adolescents are rarely faced with financial problems, they tend to focus on the standard of living rather than economics.

Due to the fact that Thailand is entering a "super-aged" society, permanent immigration should be taken seriously. Thailand may face lower labour demand as well as elderly abandonment soon. Heavy out-migration has a huge impact on elderly directly, especially on the health and health care system. The out-migration of adult children is associated with poor mental health and higher mobilization of health facilities by olders (Ramesh et al., 2011). However, the emigrate workers do not only affect the country of origin, but also the destination country. Immigration may affect the supply of labor, causing pressure on job issues as the "job loss" from the locals. The pressure of hardship can be formed as the public facilities (e.g. housing, education, health care) were used excessively by both origin citizens and incoming workers (eSchoolToday, n.d.). Nonetheless, although immigrants increase pressure on the labour force, they also spend their wages on their basic needs and other goods and supplies—this may increase domestic economic demand for the country of destination, in positive results (Penn Wharton Budget Model, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This quantitative research examines various factors that have an impact on decision-making to immigrate. The questionnaire was responded to by 250 Thais with 74 percent of them having a desire to emigrate from Thailand. Based on responses from those 185



respondents, the vast majority of factors is the standard of living (e.g. expected wages, living expenses, transportations and education), followed by social conditions. In addition, the most effective statement selected by them is, also, standard of life. Together, these results indicate that the determination of emigration from Thailand is mainly driven by living conditions. This study, therefore, points out that people with immigration desires are expecting to have higher living quality. Due to the fact that the generation preferring to immigrate abroad is teenagers with motivation in medical professions, the immigration should be taken seriously to prevent labor productivity loss. Thus, it is further recommended that the government could play an important role in preventing and reversing brain drain; for example, Taiwan's model, enhancing citizens' quality of life with education policy, wage and skill engagement, inequality reduction, and industrialization (Kevin, 2003). Taiwan, besides, subsidized scientists and entrepreneurs to access the international community after the revitalization of the country's image with multinational activities. The United Arab Emirates has done the same, with positive results.

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APPENDIX

List of questions used in the first part of the questionnaire: gender, age, study fields, educational expectations, career or future career, familiarity with foreign countries and temptation to relocate to other countries.

List of questions used in the second part of the questionnaire: quality of life, social condition, environment, economic, occupation, technology and welfare state.

Question used in the third part of the questionnaire: What factors impact the decision to migrate the most?

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