



**AN INVESTIGATION OF CZECH STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS UK HIGHER EDUCATION –
BENEFITS AND POST-BREXIT ISSUE**

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Abstract:

This paper covers an insight on how EU students specifically 'Czech students' would behave after Brexit, i.e. how Brexit would affect their selection of the UK higher education. Further, this study also examines why Czech students would choose UK over other EU and English speaking countries. In particular, this study examines three objectives: (i) to examine why Czech students would choose the UK over other European countries, (ii) to examine what are the value-added features that UK higher education would provide to students from the Czech Republic, and (iii) to examine how Brexit would affect Czech students' selection of the UK's higher education. A qualitative study was conducted with students based in universities in North-East. The findings suggest that Czech students choose UK because of its language, global recognition, job prospects, work-based learning, innovative teaching methods, quality of teaching, less distance between UK and Czech Republic, culture, and international environment are some of the reasons to choose UK as destination. Further, they have suggested that coming UK was their and their families' dream. They have also explained that after Brexit, UK would not

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be as attractive as the current time. They mentioned that limitations in students' loans, financial help, internships, NHS facilities, increase in prices, racial abuses, and fees would be few of the reasons to stop them to choose UK for higher educations. Implications and limitations are discussed in the study.

Keywords: Czech students; UK higher education; educational benefits; value-added features; Brexit, interviews

1. Introduction

According to Clanek (2020), the number of Czech students choosing education in foreign countries has been increasing. In 2015, the total number of Czech students in higher education abroad was almost 13,000 (iRozhlas, 2016). Brexit has been an important issue affecting the higher education sector in multiple ways (Adams, 2020). This includes the potential loss of EU market, as well as membership in Erasmus student mobility programme (Adams, 2020). UK higher education sector is in need for understanding what could potentially convince EU students to study in the UK after the loss of access to the student finance and increase in tuition fees.

To examine this topic in detail, a qualitative study has been employed to have an insight into what do EU students want and expect from the UK universities in the future and how they perceive the UK itself as a study abroad destination in comparison with other popular countries. This study will also inform and assist higher education marketers with decisions related to which target segment should UK Universities focus on in the future. This study identifies three main objectives: (i) to examine why Czech students would choose the UK over other European countries, (ii) to examine what are the value-added features that UK higher education would provide to students from the Czech Republic, and (iii) to examine how Brexit would affect Czech students' selection of the UK's higher education.

Brexit has presented many questions in past few years. Some universities are still waiting with the confirmation of the increase in tuition fees, but it has become clear that there will be significant changes from the academic year 2021-2022. EU students will no longer be eligible for home student fee status, their tuition is likely to increase up to the international amount and furthermore, they will most definitely lose access to the funding from the government (Speed, 2020). Literature argues that these factors will have a severe effect on the EU student recruitment (Kuper, 2020). According to O'Malley (2020), UK universities could lose 25% of international students due to the government decision to cease their home student status. Nevertheless, there are still international students from other countries, including but not limited to the USA, China, India, etc., who are interested in studying in the UK despite paying full international fees and not having access to the student finance. This study aims to help the university explore what is it that UK universities could offer to EU students that would be worth paying the extra

money for, compared to other countries where there are no tuition fees, such as Germany or Netherlands (Study.eu, 2020).

Furthermore, this study helps to reveal the main differences between education systems in the Czech Republic and the UK. The results from primary data collection have shown that these differences might have some impact on students' selection of study destination. According to Marginson (2018), the UK belongs among the top study destinations for its high-quality education as well as focus on employability among other things. Nevertheless, the UK has to face increasing competition from other European countries, where students do not have to pay fees at all. According to Conlon et al. (2017), the UK remains at the top mostly for English being an international language. However, this might no longer be enough. The aim of this study is to reveal what are the current value-added features of UK higher education and what could be improved to retain EU market.

The study starts with a literature review on each of the three objectives, further, methodology is explained, and finally, the study discusses the conclusion including the managerial and theoretical contributions.

2. Literature review

A critical literature review is an essential part of this study as it will inform the researcher and the organisation about what is already known about EU students' perception towards UK higher education and the implications of Brexit for the UK higher education sector. According to Universities UK (2020), Brexit will have a massive impact on the number of applications received from EU students in the future and the market will shrink inevitably. Moreover, the literature suggests that EU students now perceive the UK as a rather unwelcoming study destination (Bolton & Hubble, 2021). There is a limited knowledge about students' awareness of all the value-added benefits that higher education in foreign countries provide to students, which creates a potential area for research and supports the need for this study.

2.1 Students' perception towards higher education in foreign countries

Literature suggests that there is some understanding of perceived benefits of pursuing a degree in foreign countries among prospective university students. Nevertheless, significant barriers and challenges could potentially outweigh perceived benefits of studying abroad. According to Li et al. (2013), the main concerns for students who think about pursuing a degree abroad are financial issues including tuition fees, higher cost of living, having to work simultaneously with studies to afford their survival in a foreign country, as well as other issues related to being far away from their families and friends, mental health issues connected with living abroad and the fear of loneliness. Furthermore, some students stated they were not confident enough in their knowledge of a foreign language, which could lead to increased stress levels as well as poor academic performance (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018). These are all valid points; however, this

particular paper did not say, whether they have considered different personality types when interviewing students and most importantly, whether participants have financial resources to study in a foreign country, or any other indication of whether and how they would be able to fund their studies.

On the contrary, different source claims that study in a foreign country can massively improve one's self-confidence and eliminate most of these barriers and challenges stated above (Shannon, 2013). This indicates that it is therefore essential for the UK universities to focus on enhancing and promoting international student support prior the beginning of the consumer relationship. UK higher education institutions should include information about international student support in their first touchpoints of the customer journey and all their communications with international students (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

Soria & Troisi (2014) confirmed that most students are indeed interested in travelling and exploring foreign countries. Nevertheless, a recent survey revealed that only a few of these students are interested in studying in a foreign country. Research suggests that students tend to be more interested in short term internships abroad rather than pursuing a degree abroad (Soria & Troisi, 2014). The implications for the UK universities are to focus mainly on how study in a foreign country can enhance students' employability and thus, better access to their dream job or graduate schemes. It is worth mentioning that higher quality of education in a foreign country was one of the key determinants why students decided to pursue a degree abroad (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018).

2.2 EU students' perception towards UK higher education

In the academic year 2018-2019, there were 143,000 students from EU enrolled at UK universities (Bolton & Hubble, 2021). According to Marginson (2018), the UK, alongside with the USA, has been perceived as one of the most popular study destinations for EU students. Other popular countries and UK competitors are for instance Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, and New Zealand (Marginson, 2018; Universities UK, 2014). Survey revealed that EU students who made the decision to study in a foreign country tend to consider or even choose the UK as their study destination mainly for the quality of education, the broad range of courses offered, better job prospects after gaining a degree from a UK university or the fact that all courses are taught in English, the language they were already familiar with (Conlon et al., 2017; West, 2000).

Moreover, differences between how male and female students from EU countries perceive the UK as a study destination have been discovered (West, 2000). Significantly more male participants stated they considered highly important the job prospects and better job opportunities after obtaining a degree from a UK university, whereas female participants from EU countries decided to choose to study in the UK mostly because it is not far from their home country (West, 2000). Nevertheless, it is important to note that this information might be outdated. However, UK universities could leverage this knowledge when considering creative marketing strategies, especially the appeal on

emotions when promoting study at their institution or in the UK overall to prospective female students and their parents.

To conclude, it is important to mention that EU students' perception towards UK higher education has changed immensely due to the current political situation regarding Brexit (Marginson et al., 2018). According to Bolton & Hubble (2021), EU students now tend to think about UK as a country that is rather unwelcoming to international and EU students. This could be considered as a major issue for the UK universities, mainly because a recent survey has shown that when it comes to choosing a destination, EU students are very motivated by how welcome they feel in the said country (Bolton & Hubble, 2021). This indicates that UK universities must address this issue if they want to keep attracting students from EU countries. They must find a way how to reassure prospective EU students that no matter the fee status, their position towards EU students has not changed, but maybe even improved as they are willing to offer extra support to these students.

2.3 Value-added features, which higher education provides to students

Firstly, it is essential to define what does added value mean in terms of higher education. Literature argues that in practice, value-added is a term connected with either the benefits of having a degree, especially in terms of income, career prospects and overall life satisfaction, or with benefits gained from undertaking alternative programs and experiences at higher education institutions Benjamin & Hersh, 2002; Krueger, 2000). Some sources have come across a question 'what is the importance of higher education in this century'? and 'whether having a degree really makes a difference in people's lives these days'? (Cunha & Miller, 2014). The next sub-section is going to discuss what is the value added of higher education at the present time.

According to Simkovic (2017), completing a degree might lead to prosperous career and increased chance of financial security in the future. Ma et al. (2016) agree with this statement. However, choosing a higher education pathway can have much broader positive impact on people's lives, going far beyond better career prospects (Ma et al., 2016). Literature suggests that the overall student experience as well as the opportunity for personal development have had a massive impact on students. Research revealed that an average undergraduate student has had a chance to grow as a person and become more mature, with higher sense of responsibility upon finishing a bachelor's degree (Norton & Martini, 2017).

This proves that university is not only about gaining knowledge, but also about all the transferable skills it provides, such as teamwork, communication skills, awareness of different cultures, assertiveness, confidence, and better judgement when evaluating decisions using critical thinking (Norton & Martini, 2017). These findings seem to be valid, as they have been mentioned in multiple research papers, meaning it provides solid evidence of accuracy. They are also relevant for this study, and thus for UK higher education institutions as they provide slightly deeper understanding of what the university can communicate to prospective students as the value-added.

Although all these sources seem to be valid and provide solid information based on both primary and secondary research, they did not mention whether prospective students are aware of these benefits mentioned above. It is UK universities' task to address this issue.

2.4 Value-added benefits UK higher education provides to students

After the initial evaluation of wider value-added benefits of higher education in the previous chapter, it is essential for the purposes of this study to take a closer look at the UK higher education sector and its perceived benefits. It has been already mentioned earlier that the UK belongs among the most popular study destinations in the world. According to Mellors-Bourne et al. (2013), UK universities are undoubtedly one of the best in the world in terms of both quality of education and future career prospects, which students obtain upon graduation. Furthermore, the UK university degrees and other higher education qualifications are recognised among employers all over the world (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013). UCAS (2020) claimed that this is one of the main reasons why international students choose the UK as their study destination.

Other benefit of studying in the UK is the length of courses. While most undergraduate courses last typically three to four years, the vast majority of master's degrees are for one year only. This has been perceived as a major benefit and differentiator from the competition (Lomer et al., 2018). Furthermore, studying a master's degree for one year only can reduce accommodation fees, as well as other cost of living significantly (UCAS, 2020).

From the international student perspective, another value-added feature is the English language enhancement (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013). Students can develop their English language skills not only at university, but they also have the opportunity to take a part time job or to volunteer whilst studying, which would be much more difficult in a country where English is not a national language, considering some students might not know the national language of other countries (Wilkins & Juusola, 2018).

Finally, it is important to mention that UK universities offer the opportunity to undertake a year in the industry (placement year), which is not typical for other European countries. Although some universities from EU countries offer the opportunity of a short-term internship as a part of the learning experience, a full 12-month placement is a speciality of the UK (Brooks & Youngson, 2016).

2.5 Brexit and its effect on the UK higher education sector

Brexit has been a hot topic in past few years (FT, 2020). Fortunately, the UK has recently managed to get a trade deal eventually (FT, 2020). However, the implications for the higher education sector remain significant. Firstly, UK universities will most likely lose prospective students from EU (Mayhew, 2017). On top of that, the UK has decided not to extend their membership in Erasmus scheme, which has changed lives and broaden horizons of many students both from the UK and abroad (Adams, 2020). According to Adams (2020), Boris Johnson initially claimed that the UK would lose out financially if

they stopped the Erasmus scheme, as there were more students coming to study in the UK than the other way round. However, situation has changed, and Johnson has recently confirmed that a new scheme is about to be introduced instead of continued participation in Erasmus. The scheme will be named after Alan Turing, and it will serve the UK students exclusively (Adams, 2020). The limitation of this article is that it is uncertain if UK students will be interested in the newly proposed Turing scheme.

The implications for UK Universities are that EU students will not be able to study at this institution for a semester, but they will still be able to study full degrees on international students' terms. However, the literature did not mention whether this will change EU students' perception towards the UK as a study destination. This issue remain unclear and further discussion will be provided after the collection of primary data.

Although the UK has decided not to participate in Erasmus scheme from now on, they are aware of possible issues emerging from the potential loss of access to EU research funding after Brexit (Kelly, 2020). Fortunately, thanks to the trade deal being established, they negotiated continued participation in Horizon Europe research programme (Kelly, 2020). This is a very fortunate step for the UK higher education sector as they can continue having access to funds, participating in research projects under this scheme and using world-class facilities available through this programme (Kelly, 2020).

Another point of concern is universities' ability to hire academic employees from EU countries. New EU staff would require visa, and research suggests that UK might lose some of the best academic talent due to these and other complications related to Brexit (Marginson et al., 2020).

2.6 The impact of Brexit on EU students

According to Universities UK (2020), Brexit will have a severe impact on EU students who want to begin their studies in the UK and do not have guaranteed settled or pre-settled status by the end of the transition period, which was on 31st December 2020. This impact includes the loss of access to student finance loans, increased tuition fees to the international students' level and visa requirements (Marginson et al., 2020). Brexit will also affect incoming EU students, who are not covered by the EU Settlement scheme in terms of how they will be able to access NHS and other healthcare services (NHS, 2020). Current EU students with settled or pre-settled status will be able to continue using European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), whereas new students without the required residency status might have to pay Immigration Health Surcharge alongside a visa (BBC News, 2020; NHS, 2020). Jack (2020) claimed that these changes will result in a decreased number of applications from EU students in the future. The estimated decrease in EU students' applications is about 70% (Jack, 2020).

Literature suggests that it would be wise for universities to target wealthier applicants, who are able to fund their studies themselves, rather than lower-income applicants (Jack, 2020). However, this statement has not been supported by primary research and therefore, seems slightly biased and more of an assumption, rather than a

pure fact. Nevertheless, if this were indeed an accurate statement, it would be wise for UK universities to consider this during the STP process.

It is important to mention that it has been confirmed that current students will not be affected by Brexit for the full length of their course. Moreover, provided that they managed to apply for EU settlement scheme by the end of December 2020, they might be able to continue receive the same benefits as home students even after finishing their current course (GOV.UK, 2020).

3. Methodology

A qualitative research method was used for this study and twenty interviews with students from Czech Republic was conducted. Previous literature has suggested that these numbers are adequate, and usage of a small sample is acceptable for qualitative research (Hussain et al., 2020). According to the previous researchers, there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, although, the samples should be based on the ability to provide detail and important insight on the topic (Patton, 2002; Priporas et al., 2012). Interviews were conducted, until theoretical saturation was received (Saunders et al., 2018).

The involvement of students was the best choice for this study due to their relevancy and issues, which they have faced due to the ongoing issues of Brexit (Bryman & Cramer, 1996). The objective of qualitative analysis is to see things from the participants' point of views and understand the situation from their perspectives (Priporas et al., 2017). Participants were between the ages of 18 to 25. They all were based in North-East of England and were students at the universities within that area.

For the interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on the previous literature (Saunders et al., 2018). The purpose of the interview protocol was to ask questions on the following topics: Czech students' perception towards the UK as a study destination, Brexit and its impact on Czech students' selection of the UK higher education, and the benefits that UK higher education provides to Czech students. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide any recommendations and enhancements they would welcome at their university to make the UK higher education more appealing to Czech students after Brexit.

Participants were invited prior to the interviews and invitations were sent beforehand. Small incentives were paid for their time and participation. Participants were chosen based on purposive sampling technique (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Due to the ongoing pandemic and government restrictions on Covid19, interviews were conducted online. Timings for the interviews were decided based on the participants' willingness. Sample used in this study was a good representative of the population, because it included equal number of participants from different ages and genders (Roy & Sanyal, 2017). Further, details on the account of participants including their ages and genders are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviews

Participant no.	Age (in years)	Gender	Duration of the interview
1	23	Male	35 minutes
2	21	Female	34 minutes
3	23	Female	32 minutes
4	23	Female	36 minutes
5	22	Male	33 minutes
6	21	Female	30 minutes
7	22	Male	32 minutes
8	20	Female	27 minutes
9	21	Female	30 minutes
10	22	Female	35 minutes
11	23	Female	37 minutes
12	20	Female	33 minutes
13	22	Male	28 minutes
14	22	Female	34 minutes
15	23	Female	30 minutes
16	20	Male	27 minutes
17	23	Male	35 minutes
18	23	Male	32 minutes
19	23	Female	35 minutes
20	22	Female	31 minutes

Topics discussed:

- Why do Czech students study abroad?
- Why did they choose the UK specifically?
- What other countries did they consider and why?
- Perceived benefits of UK higher education
- Challenges associated with possessing a UK degree as a Czech student
- Quality of education both in their home country and in the UK
- Pricing of courses
- Suggestions and areas for improvement for UK higher education
- Brexit and its impact on Czech students
- Is money an issue for Czech students?

Before each interview, the participants were informed on the purpose of the study. It was informed that their participation in this study is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Further, information on ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity, the avoidance of personal details, and using other ethical measures in the study, were explained in detail.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed vis-a-vis. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and all the six steps were used: (i) get familiar with the data, (ii) generate initial codes, (iii) search for themes, (iv) review the themes, (v) define and name the themes, and (vi) produce the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hussain et al., 2020). Coding was done manually as well as through NVivo 12.0 to meet the criteria of reliability. Further, to ensure validity, a copy of the analysed data was disseminated to interviewees to confirm the authenticity (Hussain et al., 2020). To reduce the potential bias, all the interviews were conducted by a single interviewer, while the second and

third colleagues performed the coding and analysis of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Passavanti et al., 2020). More precisely, the analysis was carried out by means of interpretivist method, allowing the researchers to acquire a depth understanding of the data (Passavanti et al., 2020).

4. Findings

As per the objectives, the findings of this study are based on the three objectives as given below:

4.1 Why Czech Republic students would choose the UK over other countries

The participants gave quite a few reasons to select UK over other countries. Most of the participants suggested that they had chosen the UK due to English language. According to them, by doing a degree from the UK they would be able to improve their English. It is a world-class language and is recognised at the international level. Having a degree in English would be helpful in finding and securing the future opportunities throughout the world. Moreover, moving to a new country, where the language can be a barrier, had made participants to choose UK as their first choice.

Similarly, participants had also suggested that the quality of UK education is of high level. Compare to Czech Republic, where the institutions take more traditional approach and focus more on theoretical than practical side. The UK institutions comparatively use a hybrid approach, where focus is given on both the theoretical and practical approaches. They make students to critically think and evaluate the situation and make the decisions accordingly. The provided education uses innovative pedagogies, which are less stressful and more innovative in terms of analysis and research and provide a ground that can be of great use in future career. Similar to that Czech universities emphasise more on the traditional assessment and learning methods, which somehow make students to look for institutions outside the country and particularly show high interest in the UK for its innovative methods.

Another reason, which most of the participants had suggested is the limited number of universities, which really makes it hard for the students to get in the higher education. Outside Czech Republic, UK is the best option as explained earlier based on the language and as well as distance. Participants had less willingness to go to English-speaking countries, which are far from Czech Republic. UK is the suitable option due to the short journey timings compare to some of the other English-speaking countries. One of the other reasons to choose UK among other English-speaking countries is the ease and availability of the student loan, which cannot be available easily for non-EU countries.

Findings also revealed that mostly students had chosen the UK, because of their personal motivation or interest. Participants suggested that UK had always been their dream country to obtain higher education from. Not only the language, educational system, but also the culture had excited students to move to the UK for higher education.

The open-mindedness, developed, professional, diverse, and motivational culture are some of the outstanding attributes to attract Czech students towards the UK for higher education. Further, findings also suggested that including personal motivation, few were also influenced by their families, friends, and/or external sources such as Unilink, social media, etc. These influences later shaped individuals into own motivation and hence, became a source of choosing the UK for higher education.

“I wouldn’t have accepted the fact that I speak Czech, but I could also speak English, you know what I mean. They know that you would be speaking English, it would be a bit weird, so definitely, for example for me, it gives me an opportunity and I can work in other countries, not only just England, even the US, Iceland, even the Germany and some other countries.” (Participant 11)

“From my experience I think they are really of a good quality, because they don’t make you learn everything by heart so you can do research on your own more and you can be less stressed because you don’t have all those tests and mini test each week or three weeks. Yeah, it’s much better.” (Participant 6)

“I mean it’s like you know, the educational system because I think it’s much harder, especially for psychology we only have 3 unis that do psychology so I know I would never get in.” (Participant 2)

“UK is close for me than US. I could have gone to Norway or Denmark, but I don’t know the language and I didn’t like. I was already deciding it to come to the UK, so I wasn’t looking for other options. I know, Norway is very friendly to European students, same as Sweden, I think, Denmark is the same, but then I was scared, because I didn’t know the language, so the language barrier was definitely the issue. And US is too far away compared to UK, which only takes two hours from Czech.” (Participant 18)

“UK was definitely my dream, I’ve always wanted to live here or at least try to live here and work here, and when Unilink showed me the opportunity to study here, I knew that I wanna try it. So, it was the only option.” (Participant 9)

“I don’t know if it’s important, but I really like the atmosphere. It’s calm, professional, motivational, you’re not that much stressed, it seems like the professors are treating you like a grown-up and you feel it during those lectures and seminars.” (Participant 20)

“Let’s be honest, the idea came after visiting Gaudeamus, and when I met Unilink, because till that moment, I was thinking about finishing my grammar school that I will take one year off and that I will just go to the UK.” (Participant 17)

“Ok...so the idea came from my sister studying in the UK and also me trying to improve my English so that was probably the main reason for me and also it's good for employability.” (Participant 5)

4.2 To examine what are the value-added features that UK higher education would provide to students from Czech

Participants had given importance to the UK higher education due to the following value-added features: English language, quality, range of degrees, international outlook, culture, etc. Teaching quality is one of the main factors of the value-added feature that participants had given importance to. Participants suggested that the UK universities use combination of theories and practical skills, which make students to enhance their analytical tools applicable to future jobs. Similarly, various pedagogies are used by the UK universities, such as personal reflection, analytical learning, etc., are helpful in enhancing students' learning abilities. Further, students in the UK higher education are taught relevant and limited number of modules on the programmes, which provide with a wider and applicable learning to the specific field. Work-based learning or placement in other-words is also described as an important element of teaching quality. It provides a competitive advantage in the market and helps with the future employment. Employers these days do not only look for individuals with degree, but equally, they give importance to candidates with some related work experience, especially, if the candidate has a prior work-related experience in the degree. Another, quality feature of UK higher education is described based on continuous communication with students, where teachers reach on regular basis and at times, students even get one-to-one meetings with their tutors.

Participants had also suggested language as the value-added feature. Earning a degree in an international language would help students to improve their language skills. It would also enhance the chances of employability. UK degree is globally recognised by the employers and other higher educational institutions in other parts of the world. Hence, students based on UK degree can easily secure the jobs or admissions in extended programmes.

The international outlook is another value-added feature. UK has a larger number of students from all around the world, which helps with learning as well as exploring different cultures. Studying in an international atmosphere open new doors and help students to see the things from wider perspectives.

One of the value-added feature and reason to study in UK higher education is the wider range of courses. The UK universities provide various programmes and modules, which can help students in selecting the most appropriate to their working field and establish a beforehand knowledge on the topic.

Finally, participants had also pointed UK higher education culture as a significant value-added feature. According to the participants, learning in a calm, professional, motivational, and friendly atmosphere is helpful, personal, and gives a feeling of closeness. All these value-added features aren't provided by the Czech Republic

universities. For instance, education in Czech is stereotypical and stressful, education is extensively traditional and theoretical, students are taught unrelated modules to the chosen programme, range of programmes are limited, teaching pedagogies are weaker, less educational support is provided and placements or internships with the programmes are hardly available.

“I think so, yeah. And also in British universities, you are learning through research, which I think is more beneficial for you rather than just like learning theory and theory by heart because theory can be outdated.” (Participant 2)

“I really like and enjoy that here in the UK you’ve got less modules per semester, because we can really focus on one or three areas at the same time and then move on, so I feel like we have the knowledge in specific area.” (Participant 10)

“I think, in general the system here is much easier to handle, you have essays, and you get the exams, and there they are difficult. In Czech you have to study everything and things that you don’t really need or you don’t really have to focus on, so if I have to go and study in psychology in Czech, then I also have to do sociology and stuff like that.” (Participant 11)

“I think communication with students even though it is beyond my expectations, like the way tutors and lecturers and the whole department communicate with students is very engaging and is very informative, I think the individual contact is still very generic – even though you get personal meetings with your tutors, you feel its generic.” (Participant 20)

“Maybe employability? Because...even If I wanted to go back to Czech Republic and like work there and live there, I think I would have higher chance to be employed because I have a degree from abroad.” (Participant 9)

“I did...but I didn’t know what and because I knew that I maybe or would be interested in marketing and I think four years ago there was nothing related to marketing in Prague. I believe so. So, that’s the reason why I didn’t choose the Czech Republic and I finally chose England.” (Participant 16)

“Also, I think that there is lot of different people, a lot of people from different countries so, it is really a big diversity. I don’t know if I would meet so many people from other countries in Czech Republic, the way I met here. So, I think that’s really useful to meet other people and other cultures and learn from them.” (Participant 19)

4.3 To examine how Brexit would affect Czech Students' selection of the UK higher education

Participants had suggested that they would go to other EU countries after Brexit. There are various reasons to this including the most obvious reason is the tuition fees. Further, potential students from Czech Republic won't even get the student loans; their fees would increase from UK fees to international fees; they would have to apply for student visas; there will be issues with post-study visas; limitations on internships, job placements, or other types of jobs will also be major issues; restrictions on getting access to NHS; complications with travelling, and prices on airline tickets, phone bills, sending parcels, etc., would also increase, causing a major hurdle for Czech and EU students to come to the UK for higher education.

Mostly participants agreed that Brexit will also affect UK in the long-term. This affect would be based on socio-economical situations. Czech Republic, EU, and international students bring a lot to the UK economically. In the Brexit situation, where Czech and other EU students would resist to come to the UK, this situation would have a larger impact on the UK and its universities, economically. Similarly, the racial tolerance, which has hugely occurred due to the immigration especially the overseas students including EU and Czech students, would be affected due to the Brexit. Further, these socio-economical changes would take the students to other countries and as a result, these changes would weaken research and bringing talent to the UK universities. Brexit restrictions would mainly be faced by the students coming to the UK after the Brexit date and won't cause any issues for students already living in the UK Brexit as their status as per the UK and EU agreement would be of settlement.

In addition, there are also few misconceptions that UK degree won't be recognised in Czech Republic or any other EU country after the Brexit date. And if this is the reality, then not many students would come to the UK for higher education and would go to other EU or international countries.

In order to resolve some of the major issues, few participants in the interview had suggested that UK universities should come forward and take things in their control. UK universities should negotiate with the government and choose the strategy, which is most fruitful. Strategies such as reduction in their fees, introducing instalments, etc., would be the basis to attract potential Czech and other EU countries students.

"Let me rephrase, I would may extend my choice of universities in regard to countries, so I would may looked into Denmark, Netherlands and other countries, because £15,000 is a lot." (Participant 1)

"I know it'll affect newly coming people who want to study here. They will not get the loan, and they will not get the UK home fees, so that will affect the income of international students." (Participant 10)

"I wouldn't be sure how is it going to work with other things like insurance, because we're not part of the EU, so maybe like mobile phone bills, if I was sending a parcel from here to the Czech Republic, it could be more expensive, it could take longer, or maybe the flights could be more expensive or even the visa and other issues will be more complicated." (Participant 17)

"Definitely, it has made few things more difficult...so like travelling, I notice that, now the prices for the flight are not that high because of pandemic, but prices of the flight will go up, so that's an issue...we used to be of certain amount, now it will almost be double the amount of our suitcase, so that adds extra money and also I like calling my parents and grandparents, so now the fees for calling them has also gone up." (Participant 19)

"You can't travel on your ID, you have to have your passport, which for me, I am a very forgetful person, because if I forget my passport, I can keep my ID, but now it just does not work like that." (Participant 3)

"And I think, when I said it in the beginning of the interview, this is what I think is the strength of the UK education, that diversity...It doesn't only look good, it gives students the opportunity to get used to working in international environment, which gives us some racial tolerance, which you know it's very, very fundamental. Economy wise especially, I think maybe some unis go down because they will not survive on just the UK students." (Participant 7)

"They will lose this big international thing and cooperation, research, business.... They will lose business to other universities around the world. I feel like the UK will lose. Since they will not have many international students, international students won't work here. So, the UK will lose workforce as well." (Participant 8)

"Well, I don't know how much power universities have, so I don't know what I should recommend because I don't know how much they can do. It would be nice if it's possible to lower their fees or communicate instalments with students as the university itself." (Participant 5)

"Well with Brexit, of course, Because I've heard that with Brexit, you know like being in place, I think EU won't validate them anymore...so, I think that for our Bachelor's study we are fine. But I want to do my Masters study and it's after Brexit, so I think if I go home, it's not going to count." (Participant 15)

5. Conclusion

This section is divided into three parts based on the objectives. Starting from the first objective, participants have given importance to UK higher education because of the

English language, innovative teaching methods, distance between UK and Czech Republic, personal motivation, and open-minded culture, etc. Some of these findings are in line with the previous literature. For example, Arambewala & Hall (2009), West (2000), and Shannon (2013) confirmed in their studies that UK universities provide a quality in the education and give a better job perspective to the students in UK. However, findings such as personal motivation and open-minded culture of UK are some of the contributions based on the first objective. These findings are noticeable and aren't given by the previous researchers.

Findings on the second objective highlights the value-added features, which UK higher education provides. Attributes such as work-based learning, continuous communication with students, global recognition of the degree, and wide range of courses are few of the value-added features recognised by Czech students. Apart from these, other value-added features including the quality, innovative methods, job prospects, benefit of having degree in English language, and international environment are similar to the findings found from the previous objective. Some of these findings, such as job-related experience with the degree, job prospects, and language benefit are in line with previous literature (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013; Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Conlon et al., 2017; Norton & Martini, 2017). Other findings, such as innovative methods of teaching, continuous communication with students, and wide range of courses are some of the new outcomes, which this study has formed.

Finally, findings on last objective, i.e., how Brexit would affect Czech Republic students' selection of UK higher education, suggests that because of difficulties, such as student loans, limitations on internships and job placements, increase in tariff of various products, increase in racial abuse, and restrictions to get access to NHS would make students to resist to come to UK and go elsewhere. As a result, UK would face a reduce amount of Czech and EU students coming for higher education (Jack, 2020). These findings, such as UK would become unwelcoming study destination, increase in tuition fees, lack of financial help are in line with the previous literature (Marginson et al., 2020; O'Malley, 2020).

This research has also forwarded some suggestions from Czech students. Participants have suggested that UK universities should choose the strategies like lower fees, introducing instalments, etc., would be a good idea to attract Czech and EU students after the full transit (Bolton & Hubble, 2021; Mayhew, 2017).

5.1 Theoretical and managerial contributions

This study has both theoretical and managerial implications. Starting from the theoretical contributions, this study provides a few new insights. Firstly, this study would minimise the gap in literature based on examining the reason that why Czech Republic students aim to choose UK over other countries. Previous literature has examined the reasons of studying at higher education including studying at institutions in the UK (Conlon et al., 2017), but there is a limited research done on the reason that why Czech students give importance to get education in the UK. Similarly, this study has examined the value-

added features that UK higher education provides to students from Czech Republic. Although, as discussed in the first objective, there is a literature been found on examining the value-added features of higher education (Simkovic, 2017), but limited knowledge is found on understanding the value-added features of UK higher education. Consequently, this study has minimised the gap in the literature by examining how Brexit would affect Czech students; selection of the UK higher education. Although, limited previous studies have examined how Brexit would affect EU students' selection of the UK higher education (Marginson et al., 2020), but little is known on how Brexit would affect Czech Republic students' selection of choice.

Further, we also have explained the managerial implications. Managers based on the findings from this study would be able to understand that why Czech Republic students choose UK. The reasons, such as: personal motivation to study in UK, English is recognised as a world-class language, having a degree in English would open the doors for opportunities throughout the world, UK education quality is of high level, universities use different innovative pedagogies, professional culture, and wider number of programmes and universities exist in UK can help managers to come up with marketing strategies that can best suit the students' requirements in recruiting them from Czech Republic including other EU and international countries. These strategies would be helpful especially when the UK is coming out of EU and universities are struggling to get students from Czech Republic and other EU countries.

Similarly, this study will also help managers to understand the value-added features that attract Czech students to come to UK for higher education. Teaching quality, language, global recognition, international culture, wider range of courses and universities, and finally, teaching culture, are some of the attributes, which students look for to get a degree from UK. Managers can use these attributes and create marketing strategies, which can bring more students.

Finally, findings from this study will also help managers to understand the obstacles and issues, which Czech students would face after the Brexit. Issues such as international student fees, student visas, limitation on jobs, restrictions to public funds, travelling complications, increase in exchange prices, socio-economical issues, recognition of UK degrees in EU after Brexit, etc., can be taken in consideration by the managers to reduce the restrictions and limitations, so Czech and EU students can feel welcome and come to the UK for higher education.

5.2 Limitations and future studies

This study has few limitations. First and foremost, this study has gathered data from Czech students from universities based in North-East of England. It can be suggested that students studying at different locations in UK can have different experiences with UK higher education. Hence, a future study can minimise this gap by collecting the data from students from other locations.

Second, this study has collected the data based on non-probability purposive sampling method. A future study can collect the data based on probability sampling.

Third, this study has only conducted twenty interviews, a future study can collect more data by conducting more interviews. Fourth, as this study has collected data based on qualitative method, which limits the generalisability issue. Thus, a future study can collect data based on quantitative method and can collect larger data. Similarly, future studies can also be conducted based on mixed method to get more exploration on the topic.

Next, another limitation is based on the perceptions of students from different European Union countries. It can be said that each EU country has a different structure and socio-economic condition. It would be suggested that future study can also collect data from other European Union students based on the fact that students in each country can have a distinct attitude and perception towards the UK universities. Furthermore, future studies can use comparative studies and can compare UK with other EU or English-speaking countries and can study different factors, which attract students to pursue education in different countries. Next, a future study can also be done from the universities perspective and can illustrate that what factors in their own knowledge attract them to Czech and other EU students.

Finally, this study has covered each of the three objectives on a very basic level. Future studies can cover this topic in more detail and separately to get a clear idea on each of the three objectives.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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