

## **International Students' Motivation to Study Abroad: An Empirical Study**

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Push-pull theory, consumer decision-making models (CDM) and rational choice theory (RCT) are the theoretical frameworks commonly used in the literature to explain international students mobility (ISM). Despite their obvious merits, however, the individual's intrinsic motives to study abroad and the sociocultural factors attached to them are neglected. This study is developed based on two motivation theories—expectancy-value theory (EVT) and self-determination theory (SDT)—to examine whether students' intention to study abroad originates from the students themselves or compromises with society and how the external factors defined in push-pull theory work with these internal motivations to affect students' decision-making. A quantitative study was conducted with a sample size of 736 international students who were currently studying in China.

The study found that international students are most motivated by attainment value and intrinsic value defined in EVT when they decided to study abroad. How important it is to do a task and to what extent the task can bring pleasure to oneself are the two strongest driving forces. The influence of external factors alone on the intention to study abroad is limited, and it must be combined with other motivational factors to play a more significant impact. Utility value is essential, but it is placed behind the two values in this study. External factors themselves are value-neutral, and only after being placed value judgments can they affect decision-making.

Demographic characteristics also significantly affect international students' decision. Female participants have a greater intention and more autonomy in their decision-making to study abroad than males, while males seem to be more hesitant than females. Men tend to emphasize the utility value of study abroad more than women and are more likely to be impacted by the loss of valued alternative cost (LOVA) and emotional cost incurred by study abroad. Also, younger participants placed a higher value on interest than older participants, while older participants highly valued the utility of studying abroad and cared about LOVA more than young participants. Besides, those whose parents had higher education degrees had significantly lower expectancy and attainment value to study abroad than those whose parents did not have higher education degrees. The high expectancy and attainment value can be transformed into pressure on their children. Hence, participants with less-educated parents showed significantly higher controlled motivation than those with well-educated parents.