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Why Study Abroad: Differences in Motivation Between US and International Students

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Abstract

Globally, collegiate students possess distinct drives, opportunities, and constraints that influence their choices regarding if, when, and where to study abroad. This research explored the study abroad motivations of US students who were studying in other countries as well as international students who were studying in the US. Data was collected using a cross-sectional survey constructed from pre-existing study abroad motivation instruments. Human capital theory and the push-pull model of international education flow were used as the theoretical frameworks grounding this study's survey. A principal components analysis helped determine the most parsimonious number of latent motivation constructs in the survey. Using independent samples t-tests, significant differences were found in motivations related to language learning, academic enrichment, avoiding social limitations, and aspiration to work in host country; these factors were significantly higher among international students as compared to US students. An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis found that when holding all other independent variables constant, international student status significantly predicted language learning as a study abroad motivation. This study's results offer insight on how colleges and universities can craft global experiences suited to students' desires to study outside their home country. It also brings awareness to the role of country of origin in motivational factors when studying abroad and encourages stakeholders to consider the importance of cultural and national background when engaging students in these opportunities.

Keywords: higher education, international education, language education, survey research

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, collegiate students, and higher education institutions (HEIs) have much to gain from study abroad programs. While colleges and universities encourage students to participate in these experiences, students possess distinct drives, opportunities, and constraints that influence their choices regarding if, when, and where to study abroad. Studies have reported the most common reason students study abroad is to improve their career prospects (Crossman & Clark, 2010; Franklin, 2010; Potts, 2015; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008); others have found students are interested in enhancing their worldview, global perspective, and cross-cultural

effectiveness (Kitsantas, 2004; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Thus, the decision-making processes related to participation in study abroad opportunities are complex, suggesting that further analysis is warranted. This study employed a cross-sectional survey (Fowler, 2013) constructed from pre-existing instruments to investigate the study abroad motivations of US students and international students. Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and the push-pull model of international education flow (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) were used as the theoretical frameworks, grounding this study's survey.

Institutions differ in their definitions of *international student* and *study abroad student*, but the terms may apply to the same student depending upon the perspective and context from which that student is being examined. US international education office practitioners typically use the term *international student* to refer to an incoming student, with the term *study abroad student* used to refer to an outgoing student; however, these designations are reliant upon the perspective of a particular institution. An international student is often defined as an individual who attends an HEI on a non-immigrant or temporary visa; a study abroad student is one who participates in institution-sponsored international education travel, such as a US student traveling outside the US. This research explores students traveling from and to many different countries. In this study, international student refers to a student traveling to the US from another country, and study abroad student refers to a student traveling outside their home country for any period of time and at any degree or non-degree level.

Literature Review

Collegiate study abroad experiences provide students with the opportunity to engage in experiential learning and grow in their intercultural competence through immersion in other cultures. HEIs promote these transformative programs as a vehicle for increasing personal and global awareness, as well as for producing an internationally conscious and concerned citizenry (Doyle, 2009; Fischer, 2009; Franklin, 2010; Hamza, 2010; Kitsantas, 2004; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; McLaughlin & Johnson, 2006; Slotkin et al., 2012; Warner, 2009; Zamastil-Vondrova, 2005). These experiences offer the opportunity to gain human, social, and cultural capital needed to participate in a global workforce (Kitsantas, 2004; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Marc, 2019; Slotkin et al., 2012; Wasley, 2006). Within HEIs, these programs serve students seeking to expand their personal and academic horizons, and institutions can boast a student population matriculating with skills critical to a 21st century society. Accordingly, multi-national companies deem study abroad experiences as an asset to the workplace (Crossman & Clark, 2010; Kratz & Netz, 2016; Petzold, 2017; Potts, 2015; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008) due in part to the positive effects on learning abilities and linguistic competence (Hadis, 2005; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015), as well as on intercultural openness and character development (Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). In addition, study abroad programming encompasses a multitude of career-related opportunities, including but not limited to internships, volunteering, field work, and service learning (Hernandez et al., 2014), all of which can potentially expand student motivations to engage with a global world (de Wit, 2002). Both within and beyond academia, studying abroad offers experiences to individuals, businesses, and societies that can translate into sound personal and professional competencies.

While the literature demonstrates individual motivations for studying abroad, cross-cultural motivations that explicitly compare US and international student motivations remain sparse. The

Council on International Education Exchange (2006) noted, "There is a good deal of folk wisdom about what motivates students to go abroad, there is very little hard data . . . student decision-making is clearly a rich area for research" (p. 3). Researchers have worked to fill this gap by examining the decisions and motivations of students from a wide range of countries. Sanchez et al. (2006) found students from the US, France, and China display significant differences in intent to study abroad. US students are motivated by the possibility of learning a new language, while Chinese students are more likely to be influenced by the opportunity for new experiences or for *liberty/pleasure*. Apart from this research, few studies have directly compared the differences between those hailing from various world regions.

Previous inquiries into motivations for study abroad have indicated a wide range of possibilities. Some have framed decisions about study abroad as analogous to travel and tourism (He & Chen, 2010) or equivalent to choosing one's first university (Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). Other researchers have demonstrated demographic variables often influence one's intent to study abroad. Stroud (2010) found gender, major, and living status (with parents or on campus) significantly predicted these decisions. Similarly, Salisbury et al. (2009) found gender and academic major influenced intent, as well as parental education level and income, as measured by Pell Grant eligibility. Other research reported the most common reason students chose to participate in study abroad programs was to improve their career prospects through language learning and cultural experiences (Crossman, & Clark, 2010; Franklin, 2010; Potts, 2015; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008).

Researchers have also examined motivations within specific populations. Nyaupane et al. (2011) explored student populations at US universities and identified four key motivators that influenced study abroad intent: international travel, escape, academic, and social. Salyers et al. (2015) interviewed Canadian students who had returned from a study abroad experience and identified four themes in their motivations: social, professional, educational, and cultural. In a consideration of non-Western perspectives, Weger (2013) investigated international students studying in US intensive English programs and identified five motivating factors: developing self-confidence, attitudes toward English language learning/community, personal English use, value of English learning, and international posture. Weger (2013) also included language learning as a distinct motivation, while Nyaupane et al. (2011) and Salyers et al. (2015) included it as part of a larger construct. Although this body of research is promising in its identification of core motivations for students' study abroad decisions, additional empirical research is needed to fully understand this concept on a global scale.

Theoretical Framework

Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and the push-pull model of international education flows (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) were utilized as the theoretical frameworks for this study. These theories can explain the study abroad motivations of both US and international students. Economists and higher education researchers have employed human capital theory to explain the reasons individuals choose to invest in higher education (Becker, 1964). Broadly, human capital involves the knowledge and skills possessed by an individual that add value to their economic capacity; thus, an individual may choose to invest more in higher education when the expected cost is less than the expected benefit (Acemoglu et al., 2014; Becker, 1964). A student's decision to study abroad includes the consideration of costs and expenses, both monetary and non-monetary, that will be incurred during the travel experience (Tuckman et al., 1990). The expected

benefits are both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. In this context, intrinsic benefits include the opportunity to learn a language, cultural exploration, tourism, and personal escape. Conversely, extrinsic benefits involve the expected future earnings when applying the education for economic activity (Becker, 1964). Thus, extrinsic benefits include possible higher earnings upon graduation, the opportunity to work in the host country, and academic enrichment; all of which can serve as a signal of quality to the labor market.

The theory of international education flows described by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) encompasses students' decision-making processes for studying abroad. This theory includes three distinct stages that characterize the process of choosing a study destination. In the first stage, students decide to study abroad rather than in their home country, which is influenced by *push* factors. Push factors refer to aspects within their home country such as the level of economic wealth, the country's degree of involvement in the world economy, priority placed on education by the government, and the availability of educational opportunities in their home country. These work together to *push* students to seek education internationally. Individuals from impoverished countries are more likely to be pushed out by harsh economic conditions that motivate them to search for greater opportunity. In stage two, pull factors become crucial in determining the reason one country is preferred over another. Pull factors include opportunities for employment during and after graduation, the host country's relative prosperity compared to their home country, knowledge and awareness level of the host country, and the recommendations of family and friends on the study destination. In stage three, the student has settled on an institution to attend for their studies. Additional pull factors that make a particular institution preferable include the institution's reputation; range of academic programs offered; and related costs (tuition and fees, living expenses, and travel expenses).

In order to capture the effect of language learning on decision making, Kachru's (1992) model of world Englishes was employed as a covariate in the research. Kachru's (1992) model of world Englishes divides countries into *circles* based on the status of English use within that country. If a student travels from the US to another country where English is the dominant language, their motivation for language learning is likely less than a student studying in a country where English use is limited.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design (Fowler, 2013) was utilized to examine motivations of US and international students who participated in a study abroad program during their collegiate experience. An electronic survey, anchored by human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and the push-pull model of international education flows (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), was created based on the constructs identified in former research (Nyaupane et al., 2011; Weger, 2013). The original seven constructs utilized to develop the survey included: (a) language learning interest, (b) attitudes toward language learning/community, (c) personal language use, (d) developing international social ties, (e) escape motivations, (f) academic motivations, and (g) tourism motivations. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors distinguish study abroad motivations among college students?
2. Do US and international students differ significantly in their reported motivations for studying abroad?

3. Does student country of origin (US vs. international) predict study abroad motivations?

Survey Instrument

The seven survey constructs were explored through 36 Likert-scale response items. The survey was adapted from pre-existing instruments by Nyaupane et al. (2011) and Weger (2013). Nyaupane et al. tested their 23-item survey on a sample of 136 US students. Using a principal component analysis, they identified four motivational factors underlying these items (international travel, escape, academic, and social). Nyaupane et al. (2011) reported Cronbach's alpha levels for each factor, and the scores were acceptable to strong ranging from .74 to .87. Weger (2013) surveyed 131 international students studying in the US using a 32-item survey and identified five underlying factors: learning self-confidence, attitudes toward English language learning/community, personal English use, value of English learning, and international posture. However, a much lower cutoff was employed for loading items (.20); as suspected, the Cronbach's alpha levels for several of the factors were quite low. Three factors had Cronbach's alpha levels of .70 or higher: learning self-confidence, attitudes toward English language learning/community, and personal English use. Two had lower scores of .50 and .48: value of English learning and international posture, respectively. Although Weger's (2013) final two factors showed low internal consistency, these items were included in the current study survey because they produced eigenvalues above 1.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) and were consistent with theories of study abroad motivation among international students (Yashima et al., 2004).

Sample survey items for this study included the following: I often feel encouraged when I am learning a new language; It is important to me to get a broader understanding of the world; It is important to me to meet people from different countries; and I chose to study abroad to strengthen my resume. A 6-point Likert scale was utilized with response options from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = mostly disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = mostly agree, to 6 = strongly agree. The survey also included demographic questions related to college major, age, gender, race/ethnicity, country of citizenship, and location of the study abroad experience (Nyaupane et al., 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006; Stroud, 2010; Weger, 2013). This study's survey design allowed for a descriptive and inferential examination of study abroad motivations across various demographic variables, including student country of origin (US versus international), which was the variable of interest in this study.

Data Collection

Upon this study's Institutional Review Board approval, study abroad directors at three HEIs in the US Southwest shared the electronic survey link with their US students who had studied abroad, as well as with international students studying at their institution. Each university has a similar profile—public, four-year research institution with less than 15,000 students enrolled. Two of the three had large English language programs; therefore, these institutions were likely particularly desirable to international students interested in improving their English language skills before they began degree-level coursework. Email was utilized to distribute the electronic survey to students, with a completion window of three months. The purpose, instructions, and consent form were provided at the beginning of the survey, which required approximately 20 minutes to complete; varied English proficiency was considered when determining the timeframe for completion.

Additionally, students were given the option to enter a randomized drawing to receive one of five $20 Amazon gift cards for completing the survey.

Participants

In total, 59 individuals submitted usable responses to the survey: 26 US students who studied abroad and 33 international students studying in the US (see Table 1). Gender distribution followed global trends, with more US students reporting as female compared to a higher number of male international students. The participant ages ranged widely not only in current age, but also in age when they studied abroad. Due to a few extreme outliers, US students were older and studied abroad primarily later in their undergraduate careers. In contrast, international students were younger and studied abroad during both their undergraduate and graduate work.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents

Demographic	Total	US	International
Gender	59	26	33
Female	32	18	14
Male	27	8	19
Average Age	28	32	24
Average Age When Study Abroad Began	22	25	20

Both populations represented a wide range of majors, as noted in Table 2. US students were more likely to have majors involving a social aspect such as criminal justice, political science, sociology, and student affairs; international students were more likely to study technical majors such as engineering and computer science, followed by business. US students limited their study abroad travel to Asia, Europe, North America, and South America while international students studying in the US hailed mostly from Asia and Europe.

Table 2. Destination/Origin and Majors for US and International Students

US Students						International Students					
Destination	*n*	*%*	**Majors**	*n*	*%*	**Origin**	*n*	*%*	**Major**	*n*	*%*
Asia	5	19%	Business	8	31%	Africa	1	3%	Business	8	24%
Europe	16	62%	Env. Science	1	4%	Asia	20	61%	Comp. Science	9	27%
N. America	1	4%	Exercise Science	1	4%	Europe	9	27%	Engineering	9	27%
S. America	4	15%	Social Science	16	61%	N. America	1	3%	Env. Science	1	3%
						S. America	2	6%	Social Science	4	12%
									Studio Art	1	3%
									Taekwondo	1	3%

Data Analysis

After initial screening for missing data, a factor analysis was preformed though a principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation to determine the most parsimonious number of latent motivation constructs in the study abroad survey (Mertler & Reinhardt, 2017). PCA is a variable-reduction technique that shares many similarities to exploratory factor analysis but does not assume an underlying construct; it is commonly used for identifying relationships between items in a survey (Mertler & Reinhardt, 2017). Within educational research, PCA has been helpful when measuring multiple observable variables (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2008). It reduces a larger set of variables into a smaller set of *artificial* variables, called principal components, which account for most of the variance in the original variables (Johnson & Wichern, 2018). PCA extracts uncorrelated linear combinations of the variables and produces the maximum amount of explained

variance (Chua, 2009). This method was appropriate for this study and the research questions because it provided a unique solution with which the original data could be reconstructed from the results. PCA considers the total variance among the variables; therefore, the solution includes as many factors as there are variables. Before running the analysis, the data were checked to ensure all assumptions were met to conduct the PCA: (a) a linear relationship existed between the variables, (b) the data were suitable for data reduction, and (c) sufficient sampling occurred to produce reliable results.

A PCA produces several values that can be used to assess the strength of a factor, or the amount of variance that is shared by the survey items included in the factor. Among the most used are the eigenvalue and the factor loading. The eigenvalue for a factor measures the total variance in the survey explained by that factor. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) recommend keeping any factors with an eigenvalue above 1. The factor loading for an item measures the correlation between the item and the average score for the factor, i.e., the factor loading suggests the extent to which an item *fits* into that factor. Factor loadings range from -1 to +1. The higher the factor loading, the stronger the correlation between the item and factor. While the interpretation of factor loadings is not as direct, Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) recommend a cut-off score of .32 items are then traditionally placed into the factor with which they have the highest factor loading (Mertler & Reinhardt, 2017). Follow-up analysis on factors also can be conducted using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the correlation between all items in the factor.

A varimax rotation was used during the PCA to improve the interpretability of the solution. Varimax is the most used rotation method and simplifies the analysis and interpretation of the factors by maximizing the spread in loadings; items with high loadings for a particular factor tend to increase, while items with a low factor loading tend to decrease (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). This rotation method was chosen because relatively high levels of shared variance were expected among the items and it was anticipated that several items would load to more than one factor. The use of varimax rotation aided in assigning items to individual factors by more clearly emphasizing the factors with which each item had extremely high or low loadings.

Based on the results of the factor analysis, an unweighted mean for each student was calculated for each factor by averaging the scores from the individual questions associated with that factor. After initial data screening, the factor means were analyzed for significant differences between US and international students using independent samples *t*-tests with a significance level of .05 (Mertler & Reinhart, 2017). The mean scores on each factor served as the dependent variable, and the independent variable was student country of origin: US or international.

In addition to the independent samples *t*-tests, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was employed to understand the relationship between the variable of interest, student country of origin, and the mean score on each of the motivation factors when accounting for covariates. Covariates in the model included gender, age, age at time of study abroad, and status within Kachru's (1992) model of world Englishes. Using the Kachru (1992) model allowed for the establishment of two groups to distinguish the role of English in the study abroad experience. The first group involved students traveling within the *inner circle* or countries where English is the dominant or official language versus *outer circle* where English is widely used or one of many official languages (Group A). The second group involved students moving from the *expanding circle* where English is primarily taught as a foreign language, to the inner circle or vice versa

(Group B). Three countries, Netherlands, India, and Botswana were identified in the sample as part of the expanding circle where English is widely used; students traveling from or to these countries were assigned to Group A, while all others were placed in Group B for comparison purposes.

Several of the demographic factors included in this study's (OLS) regression model have been found in previous research to influence study abroad decisions, such as a significant relationship between gender and study abroad motivation (He & Chen, 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). While age has not been directly correlated to study abroad decisions, He and Chen (2010) noted academic standing (freshman, sophomore, etc.) is significantly related to study abroad motivations, and age and academic standing are generally correlated.

All analyses were conducted in SPSS software. Normality was accessed for all variables. Although a few univariate outliers were detected for the variable of age, upon inspection these values were within a reasonable range for the sample population and not likely to be due to data entry error. Therefore, they were maintained in the data set (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). All regression variables were assessed for multicollinearity and found to be within the traditionally accepted range on both Tolerance, values greater than .10, and Variance Inflation Factor, with a cutoff of less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Findings

The following section reports the results of the factor analysis, independent samples t-tests comparing US and international populations, and the OLS regression on each of the eight motivation factors.

Factor Analysis

The PCA was conducted using the enter method. The analysis produced eight factors with eigenvalues above the traditional cut-off value of 1.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Table 3 presents the eigenvalue, the percentage of variance added by each factor, and the overall Cronbach's alpha for the items in the factor based on an 8-factor solution. When an item loaded on more than one factor, it was assigned to the factor with the highest loading. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients fell between .70 and .94, which were deemed acceptable to high ratings of internal consistency (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Table 3. Factors Identified by a Principal Component Analysis With Varimax Rotation

Factor	Eigenvalue	Change in Variance Explained	Cumulative Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Language Learning	9.366	25.933	25.933	.94
Cultural Exploration	4.984	13.846	39.779	.87
Travel and Tourism	3.153	8.758	48.537	.87
Academic Enrichment	2.400	6.667	55.204	.73
Personal Escape	1.954	5.428	60.632	.70
Avoid Social Limitations	1.720	4.770	65.402	.73
Work in Another Country	1.467	4.076	69.478	.73
Attitude Toward Host Country	1.219	3.385	72.863	.71

The factors combined to explain 72.8% of the variance in item responses. Although a sample of 59 was not ideal for a robust PCA, the decision was made to continue with the independent samples

t-tests based on the relatively high Cronbach's alpha values (Tabachnkick & Fidell, 2001), the face validity of the factors identified, and the alignment between the factors in this analysis and those identified in previous research. Appendix A includes the individual items associated with each factor and their factor loadings.

Independent Samples T-Tests

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between US and international students in their motivations to study abroad. Based on the results of the PCA, an unweighted mean score was calculated for each factor and compared using a *t*-test. Table 4 displays the results of the independent samples *t*-tests on the eight factors identified in the survey. International and US students did not differ significantly in their desire for cultural exploration, desire for travel and tourism, motivation to escape their daily life, or attitude toward their host country. However, international students were significantly more motivated by their confidence and interest in learning a language $t(55) = 3.572$, $p < .001$; desire to enrich their academic experience $t(58) = 2.427$, $p = .018$; desire to avoid social limitations in home country $t(57) = 2.618$, $p = .011$; and aspiration to work outside home country $t(57) = 2.408$, $p = .021$.

Table 4. Independent Samples *T*-Tests

Factor	US		International		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Language Learning*	3.86	1.15	4.81	0.95	55	3.572	.000
Cultural Exploration	5.55	0.50	5.24	0.87	58	0.932	.360
Travel and Tourism	4.17	1.24	3.59	1.17	57	1.496	.140
Academic Enrichment*	3.85	1.21	4.41	0.99	58	2.427	.018
Personal Escape	2.84	1.15	2.94	1.19	57	0.632	.530
Avoid Social Limitations*	2.78	1.73	3.89	1.31	57	2.618	.011
Aspiration to Work in Host Country*	3.72	1.52	4.40	0.99	57	2.408	.021
Attitude toward Host Country	4.54	0.66	4.45	1.13	57	0.254	.814

*Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 5 presents the 95% confidence intervals and effect sizes for the significant differences found through the independent samples *t*-tests. Based on Cohen's (1988) suggested interpretations, the effect size for the motivations of academic enrichment, avoiding social limitations, and aspiration to work in another country were medium; while the effect size for language learning was large. The 95% confidence intervals suggested a reliable effect from both language learning and avoiding social limitations, with a lower confidence interval of .40 difference in response to the questions for language learning and .32 for the questions related to avoiding social limitations. However, due to the smaller effect and the size of the standard deviations, the lower confidence intervals for questions about academic enrichment and aspiration to work in host country suggest differences between US and international students may not be reliably reproduced in other samples.

Table 5. Confidence Intervals and Effect Sizes of Significant Independent Samples *T*-Tests

Factor	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size	
	Lower	Upper	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Language Learning	.40	1.50	.90	Large
Academic Enrichment	-.01	1.13	.50	Medium
Avoid Social Limitations	.32	1.91	.72	Medium
Aspiration to Work in Host Country	-.01	1.37	.53	Medium

OLS Regression Analysis

OLS regression using the enter method was employed to understand the covariates that predicted each of the eight study abroad motivations. The independent variables of the regression model included student country of origin (US versus international), as well as the following demographic variables found to be significant in previous research: gender, age, Kachru's model of world Englishes, and age at study abroad (He & Chen, 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). Regression models were calculated with the eight factors identified by the factor analysis serving as the dependent variable: language learning, cultural exploration, travel and tourism, academic enrichment, personal escape, avoid social limitations, aspiration to work in host country, and attitude toward host country.

The only regression equation that yielded a statistically significant model was that of language learning as the dependent variable. Specifically, when accounting for the influence of covariates, student country of origin significantly predicted language learning ($B = -.962$, $SE = .339$, $p = .007$). This suggests that when accounting for other factors, international students answered nearly a full point higher (.96 points) than US students on questions related to language learning. No other predictors were significant in the model. The Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 of the OLS regression model indicated a reasonable goodness of fit, as the model accounted for nearly 30% of the variance in language learning study abroad motivation. Table 6 presents the full OLS regression model for the one of significance, language learning. The 95% confidence interval for language learning ranged from -1.164 on the lower end to -.282 on the upper end, suggesting international students are likely to answer somewhat higher than US students on questions about language learning in similar studies.

Table 6. OLS Regression on Language Learning

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Country of Origin (US or International)*	-.962	.339	-.398	-.839	.007
Gender	-.085	.329	-.035	-.026	.797
Age	.020	.023	.165	.884	.381
Kachru's Model of World Englishes	-.326	.335	-.121	-.971	.336
Age at Study Abroad	-.047	.027	-.331	-1.736	.089

*Significant at $p < .05$; $R^2 = .28$, $F(5,49) = 3.801$, $p = .005$.

Discussion

Given the recent trends of increasing numbers of US students studying abroad and the growing international student populations at US colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2019), this study contributed to the research on collegiate students' motivations to study abroad. A cross-sectional survey, grounded by human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and the push-pull model of international education flows (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), was employed to determine whether motivations differ among US students studying abroad and their international counterparts. A factor analysis was conducted to determine the most parsimonious number of latent study abroad motivation constructs in the survey. A PCA using varimax rotation resulted in eight factors: (a) language learning, (b) cultural exploration, (c) travel and tourism, (d) academic enrichment, (e) personal escape, (f) avoid social limitations, (g) aspiration to work in host country, and (h) attitude toward host country.

The results of the PCA deepened our understanding of study abroad motivations. One of the most compelling results offered by the factor analysis was the separate loading of the desire for personal escape and the avoidance of social limitations. This division breaks with previous survey research that combined these types of constructs into a single factor (Nyaupane et al, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006). This finding indicates these two concepts may be better understood individually as distinct motivations for studying abroad. This result also speaks to the push-pull model of international education flows (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), as students expressed a more nuanced *push* to study abroad than prior research indicated. Another significant finding of the factor analysis was that language learning is a distinct motivation, separate from other aspects of cultural experiences. Salyers et al. (2015) found students are motivated to study abroad along social, professional, educational, and cultural lines, including language learning as one aspect of cultural motivation. However, the results of the factor analysis suggest language learning can cut across these categories and may be a single independent construct. Considering it as independent from the four-part model presented by Salyers et al. (2015) is supported by this study's results, in that US students and international students do not differ significantly in their desire for cultural exploration. However, students are distinct in their desire to learn a language, which indicates a greater interest for human capital development (Becker, 1964) with international students.

Through independent samples *t*-tests, the results revealed other similarities and differences between the motivations for studying abroad among US and international students. The two groups do not differ in study abroad motivations regarding their desire to culturally explore a different country, to participate in travel and tourism opportunities, to escape personal restrictions in their home country, or in attitudes toward their host country. Cultural exploration had the highest mean average for both groups, indicating that leisure and sightseeing activities, as well as engaging in new experiences were important factors in the decision to study abroad for the participants in this study, supporting ethnographic research arguing for the importance of intercultural experiences to students (Marc, 2019). However, significant differences were found in motivation to learn a language, enrich their academic experience, avoid social limitations, and work in the host country. International students rated each of these factors significantly higher than their US peers, confirming traditional hypotheses about these groups (Council on International Education Exchange, 2006; Weger, 2013). Furthermore, the OLS regression results indicate student country of origin, specifically for international students, is a significant predictor of language learning as a motivation for studying outside one's home country.

Theoretical Implications

These results build on, and complicate work, by previous researchers. Weger (2013) specifically studied motivation for language learning among international students studying in the US. His survey identified a general construct of *international posture*, which included a desire to learn new languages, to meet Americans, and to work in an English-speaking country. However, the PCA of the sample in this study identified these constructs as separate, and the independent samples *t*-test found that US and international students differ significantly in two of these factors: language learning and aspiration to work in the host country. This suggests that combining distinct factors into a singular general construct may thwart the opportunity to examine such factors in a more nuanced way.

This study's results support the key factors identified by Nyaupane et al. (2011), while also building upon their research in important ways. Their research found that US students are motivated to study abroad for international travel, escape, academic, and social reasons; however, this study's results suggest these may be further subdivided in meaningful ways. For example, escape motivation can differ between escape from social constraints and from academic restrictions. This study's results also suggest key differences between US and international students in the degree of importance of the motivations identified by Nyaupane et al. (2011). While US and international students are equally influenced by cultural exploration, travel and tourism, and attitude toward host country, international students reported being motivated to study abroad to escape social limitations, suggesting this *pull* for international education (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) is crucial for international students.

The strongest statistical result of this study was that language learning is a greater motivator to study abroad for international students than for US students. This result is supported by the large effect size of .90 in the independent samples *t*-tests and is further maintained by the results of the OLS regression. The OLS regression illustrated that international students reported significantly higher motivations for language learning, even when accounting for the influence of students moving between English-speaking countries by using Kachru's (1992) world Englishes model as a covariate. These results confirm the importance of language learning for international students, as indicated by the *folk wisdom* mentioned by the Council on International Education Exchange (2006). However, the results conflict with the limited available research in this area as Sanchez et al. (2006) reported that US students were highly motivated to study abroad by a desire to learn other languages, while those from France and China were not. However, the broader sample of international students in this study found a higher motivation level for language learning when compared to US students.

Practical Implications

HEIs are well positioned to offer global experiences to students who can benefit from fostering intercultural knowledge, skills, and dispositions; thus, this study's results suggest a series of important implications for study abroad directors and faculty implementing study abroad programming. Despite limitations in sample size, the study has high practical value for institutions. With a greater understanding of student motivations for studying abroad, HEIs can more effectively plan, promote, and improve the quality of global educational experiences. By comparing motivations of individuals from different countries, colleges and universities can more proficiently promote international education across countries and identify ways to stimulate study abroad programming where students are less likely to leave their home country. Gaining insights into these motivations may allow stakeholders to better advocate for study abroad opportunities and more broadly increase intercultural awareness by re-mapping existing study abroad patterns.

This study's results offer three strategies for improving study abroad experiences. First, programs seeking to draw international students should emphasize opportunities for internships and other workplace-focused programming to offer career experiences in the destination country. In highly competitive markets for study abroad programming, HEIs may gain a competitive advantage and improve student satisfaction by offering opportunities in the labor market. While paid work is limited in the US by legal restrictions for visa holders, on-campus positions and unpaid internships may offer viable alternatives. To further appeal to career-minded international students, US

institutions may consider investing in industry-specific English courses, such as English for Engineers.

Second, international education programs could attract both US and international students by offering local and domestic tourism activities to expand opportunities for native speaker interaction. Marketing materials could emphasize excursion and leisure opportunities locally and nationally. Learning opportunities outside the classroom could attract new students and raise study abroad participants' satisfaction levels. Many US institutions likely de-emphasize these elements based on *folk wisdom*, that international students are motivated primarily by academic interests. Although those are important, international students are equally motivated by opportunities for tourism and cultural exchange as their US counterparts. HEIs may benefit from emphasizing regional cultural and tourism opportunities and developing programming to connect students with locals.

Finally, HEIs preparing study abroad programs for US students can improve academic experience, quality, and advertising effectiveness by emphasizing cultural exploration, travel, and tourism. Given US students' lower interest in studying abroad to enrich their academic experience or learn a language, they may approach study abroad coursework with decreased motivation compared to international students. Planners of these experiences may benefit from offering curriculum that is heavily scaffolded and which can be tailored to differently skilled language proficiency. Institutions also may benefit from replacing classroom-based instruction with out-of-classroom activities to combine tourism and cultural exchange with language learning and other academic goals. Thus, programs in locations seeking to entice US students should carefully consider academic and language programming design and marketing to align with factors that are generally important to US students, such as sightseeing and cultural exchange.

Limitations and Further Research

The greatest limitation to this analysis is the small, non-randomized sample. The sample size ($n =$ 59) was less than ideal for a factor analysis, and the results should be interpreted with caution. However, strong similarities between the factors found in this study and those found in previous research (Nyaupane et al., 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006) somewhat mitigate the small sample size. The greatest area of departure between the factor analysis conducted in this study and previous analyses is in *escape*, which has been presented as a unitary factor. The current analysis suggests escaping from social pressures may be quite different than avoiding societal or governmental limitations. While the sample size was small for the PCA, it met suggested criteria in both the independent samples *t*-tests and OLS regression models.

Another limitation was the sampling procedures, as this study utilized a convenience sample. Suggesting the participants' demographic profiles likely did not align with characteristics of the greater population of US students studying abroad or international students studying in the US (Wynants et al., 2015). Yet, this study's sample diversity may somewhat abate the convenience sampling limitation. Most previous research has only included data from one institution and explored only students traveling from, or to, a particular destination. Although the sample analyzed in this study was not random, several traits distinguished and bolstered it, like drawing from multiple institutions and including students studying abroad at diverse academic career points and those studying in and from a wide range of countries. Additionally, a selection bias likely occurred

within the sample, as students who were motivated to complete the survey may have possessed different characteristics than those unmotivated to do so.

Finally, this study's reliance on participant self-reporting is another limitation. Due to the anonymity of the survey, the fidelity of the answers provided cannot be verified. Participants' cultural or linguistic backgrounds may have also influenced the way in which they read and understood the survey questions. For those with limited English proficiency, some questions may have been unclear or misunderstood; especially those measuring cultural concepts such as *escape*, *friendly*, or *stressful*.

When reviewing the findings from this study, the desires from international students to transition into the US labor market warrants further attention. Students from low- and middle-income countries may be more motivated by this factor than their counterparts from high-income countries. International students from high-income countries and US students can engage in study abroad experiences to build general human capital, but some international students may signal an interest in transnational human capital development, aligning with Becker's (1964) human capital theory. Thus, study abroad experiences may pose different motivational dimensions depending upon a student's country of origin, as described by the Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) push-pull model of international education flows. A student's financial status and their country's economic standing may provide additional insight into a range of study abroad decision-making processes. Future research could also explore the finding that US and international students are equally motivated by cultural exploration, travel, and tourism opportunities. Additionally, the factor analysis combined language learning interest into a single factor and divided personal escape and avoiding social limitations as separate factors. Both require further investigation, as they reveal substantive differences from prior studies. Relatedly, testing for replicability with much larger sample sizes and across more specific student populations, such as racially and ethnically diverse, female, and first-generation students would be beneficial to the research and higher education communities.

Conclusions

This study addressed multiple calls to improve empirical understanding of study abroad motivations for US students studying abroad and international students studying in the US (Council on International Education Exchange, 2006; Nyaupane et al., 2011). Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and the push-pull model of international education flows (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) were useful theoretical frameworks to employ in the cross-sectional survey design (Fowler, 2013), as they provided the theoretical context by which to identity student motivations for studying abroad. Thus, this study offers insight into the ways in which colleges and universities can craft global experiences suited to students' desires to study outside their home countries. It also brings awareness to the role of country of origin in motivational factors to study abroad and encourages stakeholders to bear in mind the importance of cultural and national background when engaging students in these opportunities. Greater consideration and broader implementation of study abroad programming could give rise to students exchanging information around the world in ways that meet the needs of both students and an evolving global landscape.

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Appendix A: Study Abroad Motivation Survey Factor Loading

Statement	Loading
Factor One. Language Learning.	
Eigenvalue = 9.366. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 25.933	
I enjoy learning new language(s).	.87
I am very good at learning language(s).	.83
Learning a new language is important to me so that I can read books, magazines, or newspapers in the target language.	.82
Learning a new language is important to me because it will help me to better understand movies, TV shows, and popular culture.	.75
Learning a new language is important to me in order to be able to get to better know the life of people who speak the target language.	.75
I feel confident when I am speaking in my second language class.	.74
I often feel encouraged when I am learning a new language.	.72
Learning a new language is important to me because I would like to travel to countries where that language is spoken.	.72
Learning a new language is important to me because it will help understand the culture and art of its speakers.	.72
I would like to learn as many new languages as possible.	.70
Factor Two. Cultural Exploration.	
Eigenvalue = 4.984. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 13.846	
I love learning about other cultures.	.85
It is important to me to have an authentic experience with other cultures.	.85
It is important to me to meet people from different countries.	.76
It is important to me to get a broader understanding of the world.	.74
It is important to me to develop close relationships with locals in my host country.	.74
Factor Three. Travel and Tourism.	
Eigenvalue = 3.153. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 8.758	
I chose to study abroad to go to famous geographical sites.	.89
I chose to study abroad to go to famous cultural sites.	.88
I chose to study abroad to go to famous historical sites.	.85
I chose to study abroad to buy goods and gifts from host country.	.63
I chose to study abroad to travel with friends.	.58
I chose to study abroad to travel independently without family.	.51
Factor Four. Academic Enrichment.	
Eigenvalue = 2.400. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 6.667	
I chose to study abroad to learn at a prestigious/famous school.	.77
I chose to study abroad to strengthen my resume.	.73
I chose to study abroad primarily to earn academic credits.	.66
I chose to study abroad to learn from experts.	.56
I chose to study abroad to learn more about my major	.48
Factor Five. Personal Escape.	
Eigenvalue = 1.954. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 5.428	
I chose to study abroad to escape day-to-day life.	.79
I chose to study abroad to get away from stressful situation in my home country.	.69
I chose to study abroad to escape legal restrictions.	.45
I chose to study abroad to show friends/family that I have been to the host country.	.45
Factor Six. Social Limitations.	
Eigenvalue = 1.720. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 4.77	
I chose to study abroad to escape social boundaries.	.84
I chose to study abroad to escape limitations on my education in my home country.	.74
Factor Seven. Aspiration to Work in Host Country.	
Eigenvalue = 1.467. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 4.076	
I want to learn another language so that I can work in another country.	.74
Learning a new language is important to me because I would like to work in a country where that language is spoken.	.65
Factor Eight. Attitude toward Host Country.	
Eigenvalue = 1.219. Percent Increase in Variance Explained = 3.385	
Before I left my home country, I believed that most people in my host country are honest.	.85
Before I left, I believed most people in my host country are friendly.	.64