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Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay: Features of Internationally Mobile vs. Domestic Students

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigated how internationally mobile students from Norway diverge from students in Norway regarding social background, grades obtained at upper secondary school, and motivation to study. Data from two comparable surveys were used, one relating to students abroad and one relating to domestic students. Results showed that, on average, mobile students were of higher social origin than domestic students, but this did not apply across all fields. In some subject fields, mobile students had higher grades than domestic students, while they were lower in others. Mobile students clearly demonstrated higher motivation than domestic students, even when controlling for subject field and background variables. In sum, we found that mobile students constitute a select group in several ways, most prominently regarding study motivation. This suggests that mobile students potentially represent a positive contribution to the learning environment in more ways than bringing diversity in cultural background.

Keywords: international students, motivation, student characteristics, student mobility, study abroad

INTRODUCTION

In fiction novels, people who move from one setting to another to achieve their goals are often considered to be different from those who stay behind. Many stories have been told about young people leaving the place they grew up, in search of opportunities in a different town or a different country. For this paper, we borrowed the title from one such story: Elena Ferrante's novel *Those who leave and those who stay* (Ferrante, 2013). This is one of a series of novels that tell the story about a young girl, Lenu, who leaves her hometown to go to university, and her best friend, Lila, who stays behind. The story describes how the careers and life courses of the two close friends develop very differently, and how mobility provides the one who leaves with opportunities not available to the one staying behind. At the same time, it opens up the question of whether the one who left had a different set of capabilities from the one who stayed behind in the first place.

In the scholarly literature on international student mobility, it has been suggested that students studying in a country other than their country of origin have or develop certain capabilities that are less pronounced among nonmobile students. Examples of this include adaptability and tolerance (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), independence and strong motivation (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003), high ambitions (Brooks & Waters, 2011), and open-mindedness and intercultural awareness (Malicki & Potts, 2013).

However, few studies have *compared* characteristics of internationally mobile and domestic students. Some studies have addressed differences in social background, finding that internationally mobile students more often are of higher social origin (e.g., Findlay et al., 2012; Gerhards & Hans, 2013), and a few comparisons of motivation and personal features exist. Research investigating motivation among internationally mobile vs. nonmobile students indicates a higher level of motivation among those with mobility experience (Chue & Nie, 2016; Sakurai et al., 2017).

Given the limited amount of research comparing internationally mobile students to domestic students, such a comparison is the main purpose of this paper. We analyzed empirically sound survey data on Norwegian students abroad to shed light on how those who study abroad diverge from students studying in Norway in the same fields of study. The focus was on analysis of three selected dimensions: social background, grades obtained at upper secondary school, and motivation to study. The internationally mobile students in our sample were all taking a full degree abroad. Such students are sometimes referred to as free movers or (full) degree students, but here we have referred to them simply as "mobile students." We compared this group to students in the same type of study program in Norway—here labeled "domestic students."

Student Mobility From Norway

Norway has a strong tradition of outbound student mobility and has a higher proportion of its students enrolled abroad than most other countries. According to OECD statistics, 7% of Norwegian students enrolled abroad in 2016, while this

proportion was only 2% in OECD countries overall, and 4% in EU countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018: table B6.3). From the 1970s, around 6–7% of all Norwegian higher education students have been enrolled in institutions abroad. In the 1950s and 1960s, the proportion was up to 30% (Bie, 1974), and in those times, students went abroad due the lack of capacity in domestic universities and colleges, a type of “push” motivation. Today, the capacity in Norwegian higher education is generally good, and fierce competition for domestic admission applies only to a limited number of study programs. Hence, most students who go abroad do so due to “pull” factors (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). A generous public funding scheme, the State Educational Loan Fund, is the main prerequisite for many Norwegian students choosing to study abroad. Mobile students are entitled to universal loans and grants to cover living expenses, on the same conditions as domestic students. In addition, they are eligible for support covering tuition fees and travel costs.¹ This funding scheme implies that the economic barriers to mobility are not necessarily very high in Norway, and that students are less dependent on their parents for financial support.

Research Questions

The decision to undertake a full degree abroad may involve overcoming a range of barriers. These obstacles can be economic (tuition fees, higher level of costs in the host country), cultural (language, different patterns of behavior), different teaching and learning styles, practical (housing, opportunities for part-time work) as well as social and psychological (new setting, lack of social networks). With this as a point of departure, we assume that mobile students may constitute a select group along several dimensions, particularly regarding motivation. Hence, one can question if higher levels of study motivation is an effect of being more able or being from a more privileged background, or if a stronger display of study motivation may be linked to other personality characteristics, or to engagement.

To investigate the question raised above, we will address three research questions in this paper:

1. Are mobile students different from domestic students in the same type of program with regard to social background and upper secondary grades?
2. Do mobile students show higher levels of study motivation, compared to domestic students?
3. To what extent are the potential differences between mobile students and domestic students related to subject field?

¹ Information available online: <https://www.lanekassen.no/nb-NO/Languages/norwegian-students-abroad/>.

Earlier Research

As mentioned, comparisons between mobile and nonmobile students are quite rare. However, several studies have addressed social background, and found that mobile students on average are of higher social origin than students who do not go abroad. This is shown for students from e.g. Sweden (Blanck & Börjesson, 2008), Norway (Wiers-Jenssen & Try, 2005), the UK (Brooks & Waters, 2011), Germany (Gerhards & Hans, 2013), as well as in studies covering students in many European countries (Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung [DZHW], 2018). The tendency to be of high social background is more pronounced among students who enroll abroad (full degree students) than among students who undertake parts of their education abroad, as an ERASMUS or similar exchange student (DZHW, 2018). In most studies, social background is measured in terms of parents' educational level.

Previous research from Norway (Steenstrup, 2008; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003) has shown that the higher social background of mobile students is partly related to these students choosing different types of study programs, compared to domestic students. Mobile students are overrepresented in prestigious fields of study such as medicine, psychology, and dentistry, while there are fewer mobile students in fields of study that traditionally have a wider recruitment base, such as shorter professional programs, like teaching, nursing, and social work. This pattern is also true in our data (Table 1) and is partly linked to the competition for admission to different fields of study. For example, medicine and psychology are two prestigious fields with high job security and opportunities for high salaries. These fields of study have many more applicants than study places, and a high grade point average (GPA) is a requirement for admission. However, earlier studies of students in medicine in Norway have shown that the GPA from upper secondary school is only slightly lower for students who study medicine abroad (Wiers-Jenssen & Aasland, 2001). Hence, these students are well qualified but due to numerous clauses, they study abroad to reach their goal of going into a particular profession.

Because mobile students have made the conscious choice to study abroad, it is not surprising that they exhibit particular personal characteristics. Wiers-Jenssen (2003) found that mobile students express high levels of motivation, as they have chosen to pursue their preferred degree abroad, and that in many cases, they are driven by pull motives. A British interview study showed that mobile students exhibit high ambitions, which can be seen as one of the main drivers for studying abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2009, 2011). Students who are not accepted by their British university of preference search for prestigious institutions abroad rather than enrolling in a British institution of lower prestige.

Regarding motivation for studies, Chue and Nie (2016) found that international students in Singapore had higher levels of self-determined motivation, in comparison to domestic students. A study of doctoral students in Finland found that the international students were more motivated and satisfied than their Finnish counterparts (Sakurai et al., 2017). A comparison of international and domestic students in the United States shows that international

students score slightly higher on some aspects of engagement, while U.S. students rated their educational experience slightly higher (Korobova & Starobin, 2015).

A study comparing achievement motivation among international and domestic graduate students in the United States found that the U.S. students were slightly more motivated (Karaman & Watson, 2017). Another psychological study has shown that mobile students diverge from nonmobile students regarding personality characteristics. Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) found that mobile students scored higher on extraversion and openness compared to nonmobile students, and these traits are evident even before students go abroad.

In sum, there is some evidence that differences between mobile and domestic students exist along several dimensions. Still, there is a need for more research that compares mobile students to nonmobile students, rather than just focusing on the international students.

Theoretical Framework

There are several ways of understanding that motivation and approaches vary with the scholarly tradition one takes as a point of departure. Within the literature on student mobility and migration, push and pull are commonly used concepts, while psychological perspectives focus on self-determination or expectancy-value theory. In a sociological or pedagogical perspective, motivation for study can also be seen as engagement.

The concept of push and pull factors is commonly used in the literature as a framework for understanding international student mobility (see Altbach, 1998; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Push factors refer to conditions in the sending country, such as lack of study places, poor quality, or political situation, while pull factors include the attractiveness of study abroad, such as high quality, opportunities for acquiring language skills and intercultural competence, improving prospects for an international career, etc. While this framework is helpful for understanding and categorizing the drivers and motivation for studying abroad, it does not address the strength of the motivation.

International student mobility is a temporary form of migration (that sometimes becomes permanent), and international students are described by some scholars as “student migrants” (Raghuram, 2013). From this perspective, we can assume that the rationales for studying abroad may overlap with the rationales and driving forces of migration in general. Migration rationales have also been divided into push and pull factors (see e.g. Richmond, 1993). Further, migration theories also suggest that those who leave constitute a select group. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) claim that migrants are more ambitious, motivated, and risk-taking than their peers in the home country. Boneva and Frieze (2001) make the argument for a migrant personality syndrome, and that those who want to migrate tend to be more work-oriented and to have higher achievement and motivation as goals than their peers who stay. Hence, migration theory tends to indicate that those who choose to leave are different in various ways. If these arguments are transferrable to student mobility, we can assume a higher level of general motivation among mobile students, as they have chosen to migrate to study.

The aim of migration theory is to explain differences in motivation at the macrolevel, while various psychological perspectives instead view motivation at the microlevel, through the lens of the individual. Self-determination theory is a prominent theory within motivation research (Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan 2002), focusing on theories of self-regulation, particularly using the concepts of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In self-determination theory motivation is seen as a continuum, rather than just the dichotomy between intrinsic motivation, which comes from within, and extrinsic motivation, which is created by external factors. In the continuum, amotivation (a complete lack of motivation) is at one end, while intrinsic motivation is at the other end. Extrinsic motivation is somewhere in between, as it can be generated by external sources or an individual's need for compliance or rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The expectancy-value model is another psychological theory of motivation, which is centered on two components which promote motivation: expecting to be successful in a task, and valuing the engagement in that task (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). These two components tend to enhance each other, which could contribute to explaining the higher level of motivation among students studying abroad. As earlier mentioned, these students will have to have overcome a range of barriers when making the choice to study abroad, and this may result in a stronger engagement in the task, combined with expecting to be successful.

The concept of study motivation used in this article is focused on the motivation to study and to do well in that study. This is an over-arching way of understanding motivation, which can also be seen as pragmatic, as it can be investigated using the available data. The psychological perspectives described above are related to this type of motivation but cannot be directly examined without using extensive survey instruments, and will therefore function as a backdrop to understanding study motivation among students studying domestically and abroad.

Based on earlier research and the theoretical frameworks presented above, we have formulated hypotheses to match the research questions.

Hypotheses

- H₁: Mobile students more often than domestic students have a higher social background.
- H₂: Mobile students report stronger study motivation than domestic students.
- H₃: Social background and grades from upper secondary education (GPA) between mobile and domestic students vary by subject field; mobile students in programs that are highly selective in Norway are of lower social background and have lower GPA than domestic students.

DATA AND METHODS

We analyzed data from two surveys, both collected from Norwegian students in autumn 2016. Survey A was directed at Norwegian students taking a full degree abroad. The population for this survey was all students registered as taking a full degree abroad by October 2016, a total of 14,140 individuals. The overall response rate was 39%, and no biases were found regarding gender, age, host country, or type and level of degree when comparing the population with the respondent sample. Hence, as the respondents represented the population quite well, weighting the data was not necessary (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017).

Survey B, the Norwegian national student survey (the Study Barometer), was used to create a comparison group. The survey was directed at all students in the second year of their program at universities and university colleges in Norway. This survey is conducted annually, to monitor student satisfaction and the quality of education. In 2016 it was sent to around 64,000 students, and the overall response rate was 45% (Holm & Skåtun, 2017). The questionnaire covers a range of themes, among them questions about study motivation.

In order to ensure good comparability, we used items which are identically phrased in the two surveys, and we compared students who are studying in the same fields of study domestically and abroad. The reason for this is that simply comparing averages across the two data sets would be distorted because the distribution of students by subject field in the two surveys is different. Table A1 in the Appendix illustrates this, displaying the distribution of students across fields of study in the full survey, and the distribution analyzed, which is focused on eight fields of study: medicine, psychology, architecture, art, humanities, social science, science, and business. These fields of study are comparable across surveys, but for mobile students, these fields of study account for almost 75% of students studying abroad, while the same fields only cover a third of domestic students. As business is the largest field of study in both surveys, this has been used as the comparison group in the regression analysis.

Limitations in the Data

The respondents to the national survey were all in the second year of their program, while the survey to students abroad included students in all stages of a bachelor's or master's degree. However, we ran tests, and there were no differences in results if we included only students who have studied for a similar length of time. Hence, this difference in data collection does not threaten the comparability of the two data sets.

Among domestic students, there were quite high proportions of missing data on grades, as this information comes from register data which were only added for respondents who had given consent for such data to be added to their survey responses. However, the distribution of data on those with grade information does indicate that data are missing at random. However, to control for this difference between the two data sets, and not to lose too many cases, we introduced a "missing data" category in the regression analyses.

Variables

In all analyses, data were analyzed by field of study. Frequencies for independent variables are presented in Table 1. The difference in variations between domestic and mobile students is small in all the independent variables, apart from in grades from upper secondary school, about which there is a comment below.

Age was grouped into three categories: 19–21 years old, 22–26 years old, and students 27 years old or older. The middle category was the largest among both mobile and domestic students.

Parents' level of education was used as an indicator of social background, as this is the only information of socioeconomic status available in both surveys. It compares those who have no higher education degree with those who have a short (≤ 4 years) or a long higher education degree (> 4 years). The parent with the highest degree defines the parental level of education. Most students, either studying abroad and domestically, have parents who have completed higher education.

Grades from upper secondary school in Norway run from 2 to 6, with 6 as the best. We divided the variable into three groups, to make the data comparable and easy to visualize. As the required GPA differs a lot between the subjects used in the analyses, using fixed categories rather than averages was an appropriate adaptation. We distinguished between students who have excellent grades from upper secondary, 5.01 or better, students who have good grades, which are defined as 4.51–5.00, and students who have average and lower grades, which are 4.50 or lower. As there were many missing observations in the data on grades for domestic students (48%), we also included a control for missing observations in the regression. The challenge of missing data on grades was particularly prominent for domestic students in arts and business, in which grades were missing for two-thirds of the respondents, and these two groups of students were therefore not included in the bivariate analysis. Apart from the difference in missing grades, there was also variation in the grade distribution between domestic and mobile students. Mobile students were evenly distributed on the three groups of grades (excellent, good, and average or lower), while the proportion of students with average grades or lower was much higher among domestic students.

Motivation The indicator for motivation was created by combining two items: study motivation for the program students were taking, and motivation to be well-prepared for class. Both variables were measured on a 5-point scale, and were quite highly correlated, $r = 0.507$. However, both variables were skewed, with a much higher proportion agreeing than disagreeing. Therefore, the indicator used in the analysis was dichotomized, as those who answered “completely agree” (5) to both indicators, or who answered 5 to 1 and 4 to the other, were coded 1 for “highly motivated” and all other answers were coded 0. The regression analysis was also based on the dichotomized variable. The indicator does not differentiate between different types of motivation; rather, it is an indicator of students' wish to do well as a student, a form of engagement.

Table 1: Frequency for Independent Variables and Dependent Variable in Regression Analysis

Variable	Mobile students		Domestic students	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender				
Female	2,155	70	4,593	64
Male	930	30	2,636	36
Total	3,085	100	7,229	100
Age				
19–21 years old	1,073	35	2,176	30
22–26 years old	1,675	54	3,275	45
27 years old or older	337	11	1,778	25
Total	3,085	100	7,229	100
Parental education				
No Higher Ed	462	15	1,487	21
Short Higher Ed (-4y)	1,054	34	2,607	36
Long Higher Ed (+4y)	1,569	51	3,135	43
Total	3,085	100	7,229	100
Grades				
Average or below (-4.50)	963	31	1,783	25
Good (4.51–5.00)	977	32	932	13
Excellent (5.01+)	1,012	33	1,031	14
Missing	133	4	3,483	48
Total	3,085	100	7,229	100
Distribution for motivation indicator (dependent variable in regression analysis)				
Motivation				
Share highly motivated (%)	61		29	
Mean score	0.6		0.3	
St. Dev.	0.49		0.45	
Number of cases	3,085		7,229	

Methods

To analyze the data, means were compared across the eight fields of study for parents' level of education, grades, and motivation, and differences are tested using *t*-test. The findings for grades and motivation were summarized in Figures

2 and 3. We also use regression analysis to investigate if field of study differences in motivation can be explained by gender, age, parents' education, or grades. We used a linear probability model to analyze our binary dependent variable. This type of model works well for binary data when the probability falls between 0.20 and 0.80, as the relationship between the probability and the log odds is almost linear in this range (Long, 1997). Further, the model is also easy to interpret, as the constant shows the probability of a student expressing motivation and estimates indicate how the probability changes for different groups.

RESULTS

Bivariate Analysis

We started out by comparing mobile and domestic students along three dimensions: parents' educational level, grades, and motivation. We found statistically significant differences in parents' educational level between mobile and domestic students in medicine, humanities, social science, science, and business, but they were all small (6–10 percentage points, see Figure 1). However, the differences were not all in the same direction, as students in medicine abroad have slightly lower social origin than students studying medicine in Norway while the pattern was the opposite in humanities, social science, science, and business. In these four fields, mobile students had a slightly higher social background than domestic students in the same field of study. Hence, when fields of study are considered mobile students are of similar social background to their domestic counterparts. However, as differences between mobile and domestic students within the same field of study were small, it seems as if the social recruitment to a given field of study is similar for students whether studying domestically or abroad.

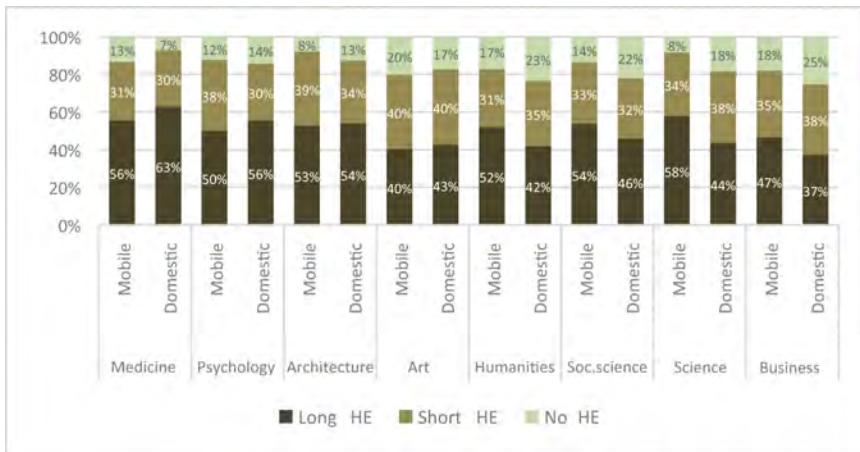


Figure 1: Proportion of Parents With HE by Subject Field, Comparing Domestic, and Mobile Students Within Fields

When comparing entry grades between mobile and domestic students, we found statistically significant differences within all the five programs displayed in Figure 2. In medicine and psychology, domestic students had considerably better grades, and this was particularly true for medicine. For humanities, social science, and science, the picture was the opposite. In these programs, mobile students had significantly better grades than domestic students. This pattern is shown to be linked to the main reasons why these students go abroad: students in medicine and psychology are committed to gaining entry to a profession and in order to reach that goal they choose study abroad as a “plan B” (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017).

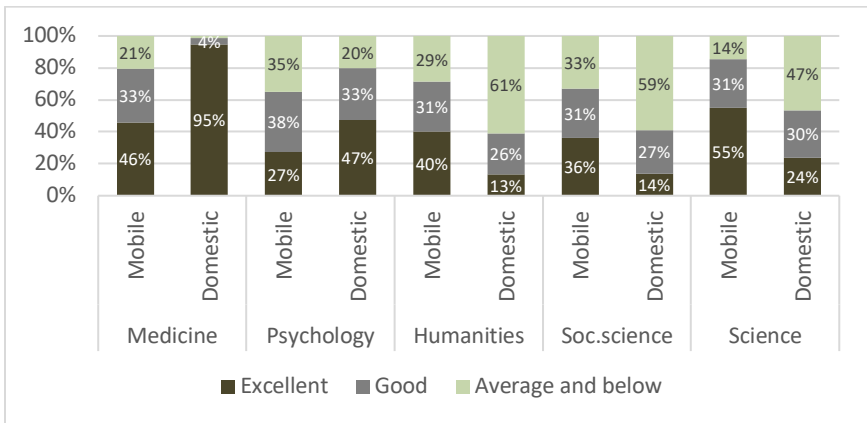


Figure 2: GPA From Upper Secondary School by Subject Field in HE, Comparing Domestic and Mobile Students Within Fields

As shown in Figure 3, we found a statistically significant difference in motivation between students studying abroad and domestically, and this difference runs across all eight programs. Students in art and architecture were the ones with the highest level of motivation, among both domestic students and students abroad, which could be linked to these groups of students attending highly selective programs abroad as well as in Norway.

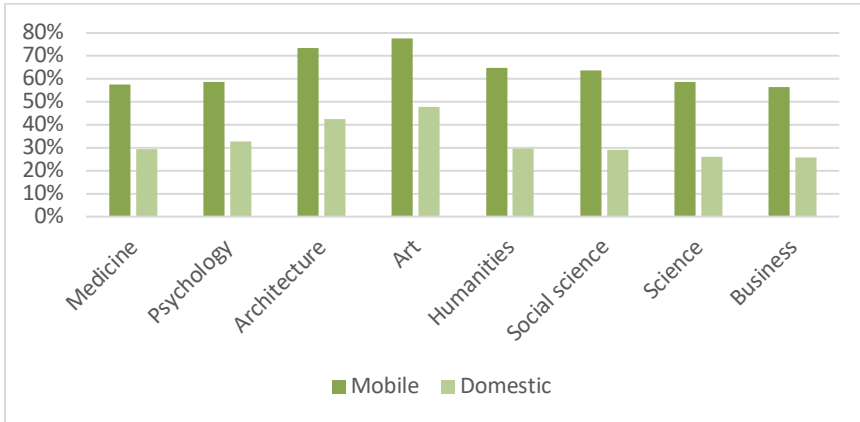


Figure 3: Motivation to Study Among Domestic and Mobile Students, by Subject Field. Percentage Highly Motivated

Multivariate Analysis

We used multiple regression analysis to investigate further what drives differences in motivation between domestic and mobile students. The first model in the regression only controlled for field of study and if the student was mobile or not, and business served as the comparison group. The results confirmed what we had observed in the bivariate analysis: being a mobile student implies higher levels of motivation, by about 30 percentage points. There are also differences between programs. Students in art, architecture, psychology, social science, and humanities were all significantly more motivated than business students. We also used an interaction term to control for differences between domestic and mobile students in the same field, but there were no significant effects (not displayed in model). The first model explained 10.5% of the variance in motivation among students. In model 2, background characteristics were introduced, and this only altered the other coefficients of programs slightly, as well as increasing the explained variance only a little, to 11.6%. Male students were generally slightly less motivated than female students, and students from families with a short higher education degree were also less motivated than their highly educated counterparts. However, older students (over 27 years of age) were somewhat more motivated, and so were students who had excellent grades (Table 2).

Table 2: Linear Regression (Linear Probability Model) on Motivation

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	95% CI				95% CI			
	B	SE	LL	UL	B	SE	LL	UL
Constant	0.258	0.008	0.243	0.272	0.220	0.015	0.190	0.250
Mobile student	0.309	0.010	0.289	0.330	0.329	0.011	0.307	0.351
Medicine	0.020	0.016	-0.012	0.051	-0.006	0.017	-0.039	0.027
Psychology	0.054	0.018	0.019	0.089	<u>0.041</u>	0.018	0.005	0.077
Art	0.216	0.017	0.182	0.250	0.212	0.017	0.179	0.246
Architecture	0.166	0.029	0.110	0.223	0.162	0.029	0.106	0.219
Science	0.005	0.015	-0.025	0.035	0.012	0.016	-0.019	0.042
Soc. Science	0.050	0.016	0.019	0.082	0.051	0.016	0.019	0.082
Humanities	0.050	0.017	0.018	0.083	<u>0.042</u>	0.017	0.009	0.075
Gender (female = 0)					-0.050	0.010	-0.069	-0.031
Age 22–26 years old					0.018	0.010	-0.002	0.039
Age 27 years or older					0.097	0.013	0.071	0.123
Parents no HE					-0.021	0.013	-0.046	0.003
Parents short HE					-0.033	0.010	-0.053	-0.013
GPA_good					0.023	0.014	-0.005	0.050
GPA_excellent					0.074	0.014	0.046	0.103
GPA_missing					0.060	0.012	0.036	0.085
Number of cases	10,314				10,314			
R ²	0.105				0.116			

Note: $p < 0.01$ = bold, $p < 0.05$ = underscore. Constant: Female business student, 21 years old or younger, who have parents with long HE and average grades. Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit.

The findings in the regression analysis support the bivariate analyses in establishing that mobile students are significantly more motivated than domestic students, and this also holds true when controlling for field of study, social background, grades, gender, and age. Introducing background variables does not increase the explained variance much, which also supports the interpretation that many of the differences are linked to program and particularly to students being mobile.

DISCUSSION

We found that those who leave are different from those who stay, but more so regarding motivation than grades and social origin. The analyses have revealed that when comparing mobile and domestic students in the same type of program, differences in social background are modest. Further, the direction of the difference varies by subject field; in some fields mobile students are of higher social origin, in others they are lower. This illustrates that it is important to take field of study into consideration when comparing the social origin of mobile and domestic students. The result provides limited support for hypothesis 1; that mobile students would generally be of higher social origin, but support for hypothesis 3 stating that this would vary by field of study. One explanation for the small differences is the subsidized public funding system for Norwegian students—home and abroad—contributing to lowering the economic threshold for studying abroad. Mobile students from Norway rely less on financial aid from the family than mobile students from other parts of Europe (DZHW, 2018).

Regarding grades from upper secondary school, we found variations in GPA according to field of study, in line with hypothesis 3. Among students in humanities, social science, and science, mobile students constituted a positively select group, for whom a higher GPA indicates that students choosing to study abroad are more talented or better prepared than those remaining in Norway. This may partly be because these students go abroad due to pull factors such as quality and international career (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). We also found that mobile students in professional programs that are highly selective in Norway, such as medicine and psychology, had a lower GPA than domestic students in the same field. This may not be surprising, because such students report more pragmatic rationales for studying abroad, such as a strong desire to enter a certain profession combined with challenges in getting admitted to a relevant study program in Norway (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017). However, this also illustrates that push type rationales for studying abroad can imply higher study motivation in the form of strong determination to reach a goal.

We found support for hypothesis 2, as students taking their degree abroad are clearly more motivated for study than students taking the same degree domestically. The differences were strikingly large, and well pronounced across all fields of study. This finding also holds when controlling for background variables in the regression analysis, including GPA.

In line with the motivation and migration theories outlined in the introduction (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014), students willing to overcome the challenges related to moving abroad to study are more dedicated and have a stronger study motivation than domestic students. The expectancy-value model also supports the interpretation that students taking their degree abroad place a high value on getting that degree and are also committed to succeeding in completing the degree they moved abroad to take. There is likely to be more at stake for mobile rather than domestic students—academically, economically as well personally. However, the difference in level of study motivation was more striking than we had expected, and it is interesting to note that it was very strong across all fields.

An alternative explanation of the higher levels of study motivation among mobile students could be that higher education abroad is of better quality, and therefore is more motivating than higher education in Norway. However, an argument against this is that international students *in* Norway assess Norwegian higher education more positively than their Norwegian peers (DIKU, 2019). This finding indicates that the difference in motivation is more closely linked to individual student characteristics, than the quality of the programs. Being a mobile student is likely to be related to exhibiting certain personal characteristics, and high level of motivation for studies for studies is one of these.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study contributes with a new perspective on how mobile students differ from domestic students along several dimensions, showing that mobile students are clearly more motivated, independent of their background characteristics and the type of education they undertake.

A limitation to the study is the relatively crude measures of motivation, which were based on the combination of two variables. However, these variables were highly correlated. Further, the data set does not contain measurements of personality types, which could have shed further light on differences between the mobile and domestic students.

Hence, future studies focusing on student's study motivation between mobile and nonmobile students should include more psychological measurements, in order to be able to distinguish better if and how students who choose to study abroad differ from those who do not. It would also be interesting to see international comparisons of this type of analysis, to see if the link between motivation and personality traits holds true across different country contexts.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study has demonstrated that students who take their degree abroad are significantly more motivated for their study than students who study the same degree domestically. We found smaller differences between mobile and domestic students according to social background and GPA, and this pattern is not consistent across fields of study. However, the finding on study motivation cuts

across all fields of study and holds when controlling for social background and GPA in the regression. A stronger motivation among mobile students is in line with migration theories indicating that those who leave are different from those who stay.

A central Norwegian policy rationale for encouraging student mobility is that it is assumed that international students bring cultural diversity and different perspectives and that they are contributing to “internationalisation at home” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). Our study showed that in addition to the skills and experiences they bring back, mobile students may contribute positively to the host institution they are at, by being highly motivated for study.

NOTE

Appendix for this article can be found on the JIS website at <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jis>

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