



ASSOCIAÇÃO DE POLITÉCNICOS DO NORTE (APNOR)
INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE BRAGANÇA

**The motivation and transformative learning experience of
international students in Portugal (IPB)**

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To obtain the Master Degree in Management, Specialisation in Business
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Supervisor:

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Bragança, December, 2023.



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Abstract

Understanding the motivations and transformative experiences of international students is essential in the context of global education. This study explores the motivations of international students in Portugal, specifically Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), as their study destination during the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. The study identifies Push Factors (negative aspects in home countries) and Pull Factors (positive aspects abroad) guiding students' choices, emphasizing the transformative journey involving personal, social, and cultural factors. Using a questionnaire, 62 valid responses were collected and analysed, focusing on motivations, transformative experiences, and long-term impacts.

Key findings indicate that personal growth, migration plans, and economic conditions were primary motivations. Affordable tuition fees, the desire to explore Portugal, and cultural experiences were decisive factors in choosing IPB. International students at IPB actively engaged with fellow students, participated in events, and significantly broadened their knowledge about Portugal. Positive feelings towards the country increased notably, with friendly locals, open-minded society, family values, and delightful cuisine being highly appreciated. The study showcased the positive impact of studying abroad, fostering enhanced confidence, self-esteem, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills among participants. Moreover, it challenged and changed stereotypes, nurturing a more inclusive mindset. While acknowledging individual differences, the collective evidence underscores the transformative power of international experiences, shaping well-rounded, culturally aware, and adaptable individuals prepared for the challenges of our globalized world.

Keywords: *International Students, Motivations, Transformative Learning, Push-Pull factors.*

Resumo

Compreender as motivações e as experiências transformadoras dos estudantes internacionais é essencial no contexto da educação global. Este estudo explora as motivações dos estudantes internacionais em Portugal, especificamente no Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), como destino de estudo durante os anos letivos 2021/2022 e 2022/2023. O estudo identifica Fatores de Impulso (aspectos negativos nos países de origem) e Fatores de Puxão (aspectos positivos no estrangeiro) que orientam as escolhas dos estudantes, enfatizando a jornada transformadora que envolve fatores pessoais, sociais e culturais. Recorrendo a um questionário, foram recolhidas e analisadas 62 respostas válidas, focando as motivações, as experiências transformadoras e os impactos a longo prazo. Os principais resultados indicam que o crescimento pessoal, os planos de migração e as condições económicas foram as principais motivações. O preço acessível das propinas, o desejo de explorar Portugal e as experiências culturais foram fatores decisivos na escolha do IPB. Os estudantes internacionais do IPB interagiram ativamente com os seus colegas, participaram em eventos e alargaram significativamente os seus conhecimentos sobre Portugal. Os sentimentos positivos em relação ao país aumentaram de forma notável, com os habitantes locais amigáveis, a sociedade de mente aberta, os valores familiares e a deliciosa gastronomia a serem altamente apreciados. O estudo demonstrou o impacto positivo de estudar no estrangeiro, promovendo uma maior confiança, autoestima, consciência cultural e capacidade de resolução de problemas entre os participantes. Além disso, desafiou e alterou estereótipos, fomentando uma mentalidade mais inclusiva. Embora reconhecendo as diferenças individuais, as provas coletivas sublinham o poder transformador das experiências internacionais, formando indivíduos completos, culturalmente conscientes e adaptáveis, preparados para os desafios do nosso mundo globalizado.

Palavras-chave: *Estudantes Internacionais, Motivações, Aprendizagem Transformativa, Fatores Push-Pull.*

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Introduction

Understanding why international students choose to study abroad is crucial. The study of motivation is guided by theories like Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), and Goal Orientation Theory (GOT). These theories highlight the importance of psychological needs, perceived value, and goal orientation in motivating students. Factors Influencing Students' Choices are two main categories: Push Factors and Pull Factors. The first include the negative aspects like political instability and limited opportunities in home countries whereas the second include the positive aspects such as quality education, employment prospects, and cultural experiences (Lee & Rice 2007). International students encounter unique challenges when studying abroad, navigating new cultures, languages, and academic pursuits. Studying abroad can lead to transformative experiences, fostering personal growth, self-awareness, and cultural competence. This transformative journey involves a complex interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors (Harrison & Peacock 2010).

The study explores the motivations and transformative learning experiences of international students choosing Portugal, specifically IPB, as their study destination during the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years. The study has four main objectives: to determine the factors motivating international students to select Portugal and IPB, explore transformative learning of international students at IPB and assess long-term impacts of the international student experience. We formulated a research question for the direction of our research: "What motivates international students to select Portugal (IPB) as a study destination and what are the benefits with respect to transformative learning during 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years?", Data collection involved a tailored questionnaire encompassing demographic information, motivations for studying in Portugal, and queries about transformative learning. The questionnaire was distributed via email outreach to IPB's official student email and through personal connections. Collected responses (62 valid ones) were organized and cleaned in an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics, including means, medians, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were computed using Excel. Advanced analyses were performed employing tools like PivotTables and PivotCharts. The study focused on the specified academic years and international student status, ensuring relevance and contextual accuracy. The research methods aimed to comprehensively capture the motivations and experiences of international students at IPB.

In Chapter 1 we have conducted a literature review. There we have explained main theories of motivation (Section 1.1) and examined the multifaceted impact of studying abroad, including career prospects and language proficiency (Section 1.2). This section forms the theoretical foundation, linking motivations to transformative experiences. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the transformative learning theories (Section 2.1.1) and factors contributing to transformative experiences, such as cross-cultural interactions and identity development (Sections 2.1.4 to 2.1.9). This section bridges theoretical frameworks with real-world

experiences. In Chapter 3 we have explained the Research methodology of the study, and outlined the research objectives (Section 2.1), methods of data collection (Section 2.2), and analysis techniques (Section 2.3). It serves as the methodological bridge, grounding theories in empirical research. Chapter 4 presents empirical findings, characterizing the sample (Section 3.1) and analysing motivations (Section 3.2) and transformative experiences (Section 3.3). This section translates theories and methods into actionable insights. In Chapter 5 we have synthesized the findings, acknowledged limitations, and proposed future research directions.

1. Literature Review

1.1. The motivation of international students to study abroad

1.1.1. Motivation theories

The study of motivation is central to understanding why individuals engage in certain behaviours or pursue specific goals. Several theories of motivation have been applied to the study of international students' motivation to study abroad. Self-determination theory (SDT), for instance, posits that individuals have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that the satisfaction of these needs is essential for well-being and optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT has been used to understand the motivation of international students to study abroad in terms of the extent to which studying abroad satisfies their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (e.g., DeWit & Altbach, 2021; Wunderlich & Schommer, 2014). DeWit (2011) used SDT to investigate the factors that influence international students' satisfaction with their study abroad experiences. She found that students who had higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness during their study abroad experiences were more likely to be satisfied with the experience overall. This suggests that satisfying the psychological needs identified by SDT is important for promoting motivation and well-being among international students studying abroad.

Expectancy-value theory (EVT) posits that individuals' motivation is influenced by their perceptions of the value of a particular activity and their expectations of success (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). EVT has

been used to understand the motivation of international students to study abroad in terms of the perceived value of studying abroad (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007). According to EVT, if international students perceive studying abroad as valuable, they are more likely to be motivated to pursue this opportunity. Lee and Rice (2007) used EVT to investigate the impact of perceived discrimination on international students' motivation to study abroad. They found that students who perceived higher levels of discrimination were less likely to perceive studying abroad as valuable and were therefore less motivated to pursue this opportunity. This suggests that perceived value is an important factor that can influence international students' motivation to study abroad.

Goal orientation theory (GOT) suggests that individuals' motivation is influenced by their orientation toward goals, including mastery goals (i.e., the desire to learn and improve) and performance goals (i.e., the desire to demonstrate competence; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). GOT has been used to understand the motivation of international students to study abroad in terms of their orientation toward language learning and intercultural competence (e.g., Van der Wende, 2014). Van der Wende (2014) used GOT to investigate the role of language learning and intercultural competence in international students' motivation to study abroad. She found that students who had a mastery orientation toward language learning and intercultural competence were more motivated to pursue these goals during their study abroad experiences. This suggests that the type of goals that international students have can influence their motivation to study abroad and their experiences while abroad.

1.1.2. Factors influencing international students' motivation to study abroad

"Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice.

In the literature, the factors influencing student destination choice are mainly "push factors" and "pull factors". Push factors are the negative factors that influence students to leave their home country. These factors include political instability, economic hardships, lack of educational opportunities, and limited employment opportunities. According to a study by Lee and Rice (2007), the most important push factor for international students was the lack of educational opportunities in their home country. They found that students who came from countries with limited educational opportunities were more likely to choose a destination with better educational prospects. Other studies have also found that political instability, economic hardships, and limited employment opportunities in home countries were significant push factors for international students (Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2005). For instance, Altbach (2004) found that political instability and economic hardships were key push factors for students from sub-Saharan Africa.

Pull factors are the positive factors that attract students to a particular destination. These factors include the reputation and quality of education, employment opportunities, multiculturalism, and the social and

cultural environment of the destination country. According to Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012), the quality of education is the most important pull factor for international students. They found that students were attracted to countries with a reputation for high-quality education and research. Other studies have also found that the reputation and quality of education, employment opportunities, multiculturalism, and the social and cultural environment of the destination country were significant pull factors for international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). For example, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that international students were attracted to countries that offered employment opportunities and a multicultural environment.

The decision to study abroad is often influenced by a number of factors, including personal factors, educational factors, financial factors, social factors and cultural orientation. Personal factors such as age, gender, personality, and cultural background can influence international students' motivation to study abroad (Mazzarol Soutar, Seng, 2003; Wang, Li, Cui, 2018). For example, younger students and those with more extroverted personalities may be more motivated to study abroad than older students or those with introverted personalities (Wang et al., 2018). Similarly, students from collectivist cultures may be less motivated to study abroad than those from individualist cultures, due to factors such as family obligations and a preference for staying close to home (Mazzarol et al., 2003).

Educational factors such as academic goals, language proficiency, and previous study abroad experiences can influence international students' motivation to study abroad (Yu & Kim, 2018; Brunsting, Zachry, & Takeuchi, 2018). Students who have higher academic goals or who have previously studied abroad may be more motivated to pursue this opportunity (Brunsting, Zachry, & Takeuchi, 2018). Similarly, students who have higher levels of language proficiency may be more motivated to study abroad in order to further improve their language skills (Yu & Kim, 2018).

Financial factors such as the cost of studying abroad, scholarship availability, and living expenses can also influence international students' motivation to study abroad (Lee & Rice, 2007; Qin & Qin, 2016). Students who perceive studying abroad as too expensive or who are not able to secure sufficient funding may be less motivated to pursue this opportunity (Qin & Qin, 2016) and students who have concerns about the cost of living in the host country may be less motivated to study abroad (Lee & Rice, 2007). Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) conducted a survey of enrolment managers and found that cost was the most commonly cited reason for students not studying abroad. This highlights the importance of financial aid and scholarship opportunities to support students who may otherwise be unable to afford study abroad. Some institutions and organizations have implemented alternative programs, such as short-term or virtual study abroad, to increase access to international education opportunities (Wong, 2017). Olsen (2020) suggests that while the direct costs of study abroad can be high, the potential long-term financial benefits, such as improved employability and earnings, may outweigh the costs. Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2011) explored differences in the factors that influence white and minority students' intent to

study abroad, finding that financial considerations were more influential for minority students than for white students. Lutterman-Aguilar (2019) similarly identifies financial barriers as a significant factor in low-income students' decisions to participate in study abroad programs. This suggests that addressing financial barriers may be particularly important for promoting greater diversity and equity in study abroad participation. Additionally, some studies have explored the financial benefits of study abroad for students' future career prospects. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) found that students who studied abroad had greater success in finding employment after graduation, particularly in jobs that required intercultural skills. However, these benefits may not be realized immediately and may depend on the field of study and type of study abroad program.

The cost of study abroad can vary widely depending on the type of program, the destination, and the duration of the program. Engle and Engle (2003) propose a classification of study abroad programs based on cost, ranging from low-cost or embedded programs to high-cost independent programs. Wong (2017) argues that to increase access to study abroad opportunities, institutions must address the financial barriers that students face, including high program costs, limited financial aid and scholarship options, and hidden costs such as passport and visa fees.

Social factors such as social support, cultural adaptation, and perceived discrimination can also influence international students' motivation to study abroad (Lee & Rice, 2007; Brunsting, Zachry, & Takeuchi, 2018). Students who perceive higher levels of discrimination may be less motivated to study abroad (Lee & Rice, 2007). Similarly, students who feel socially isolated or who have difficulty adapting to the host culture may be less motivated to study abroad (Brunsting, Zachry, & Takeuchi, 2018).

Cultural orientation refers to an individual's level of familiarity and comfort with a particular culture, as well as their attitudes and beliefs about that culture (Wunderlich & Schommer, 2014). Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that international students' cultural orientations influence their adaptation to new environments. Students with a high level of cultural orientation may be more likely to study abroad to deepen their understanding of the host country's culture and gain intercultural competence. Conversely, students with a low level of cultural orientation may be less likely to study abroad or may face difficulties adjusting to the new cultural environment (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Several studies have investigated the influence of cultural orientation on students' motivations to study abroad. In a study of US undergraduates, Lee and Rice (2007) found that students who reported high levels of cultural openness were more likely to express an interest in studying abroad. Similarly, Weng (2018) found that Taiwanese students with a high level of cultural sensitivity were more likely to express a desire to study abroad. Other researchers have explored the role of cultural values in shaping students' motivations to study abroad. In a study of Chinese students, Huang, Turner and Cheng (2014) found that students who placed a high value on international experience were more likely to consider studying abroad. Additionally, in a study of Indian students, Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) found that students with a strong collectivist

cultural orientation were more likely to view study abroad as a means of enhancing their social networks and professional connections. It is worth noting that cultural orientation can be influenced by a range of factors, including age, gender, and previous international experience. For example, Jamaludin, Sam and Sandal (2018) found that older students and those with prior international experience were more likely to have a high level of cultural orientation. Similarly, in a study of Australian students, Kruzich and Singelis (2009) found that women were more likely to have a high level of cultural orientation.

Fakunle (2021) identified six primary rationales for studying abroad: academic, career, personal development, cultural, social, and political. The academic rationale refers to the desire to access high-quality education, while the career rationale is about improving one's job prospects. Personal development refers to the desire for self-improvement and growth, while the cultural rationale is about experiencing different cultures and expanding one's worldview. The social rationale is about building connections and networks, while the political rationale is about pursuing social justice causes. He argues that understanding these non-economic factors can help universities better support international students and design programs and services that meet their diverse needs. By acknowledging and addressing these rationales, universities can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for international students.

Inam, Ullah, Singh, and Arumungam (2020) found that the pandemic had a significant impact on international students' intention and motivation to study in Malaysia. The study revealed that almost half of the respondents were considering dropping out of their studies due to the pandemic's effects on their personal and financial situations. Furthermore, the authors found that the pandemic had negatively affected international students' perceptions of Malaysia as a study destination, particularly in terms of safety and health concerns. The study also revealed that the quality of education, multicultural environment, and the availability of scholarships continued to be important factors in motivating international students to study in Malaysia despite the pandemic. Moreover, the quality of education, the reputation and the support services provided by Higher Education Institution (HEI) were the primary factors influencing international students' loyalty towards Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. Additionally, cultural diversity and the availability of extracurricular activities were also important factors that contributed to international students' loyalty.

According to Curtis and Ledgerwood (2018) personal and academic development, cultural immersion, and career development were the most significant motivations for students to pursue international education opportunities. Understanding these factors and their interrelationships can help educators and policymakers develop strategies to support and promote international students' motivation to study abroad. Strategies to increase international students' loyalty include improving the quality of education, enhancing the reputation of HEIs through marketing and branding efforts, providing comprehensive and

accessible support services, promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity, and offering a wide range of extracurricular activities (Thoo, Lim, Huam & Sulaiman 2022).

Perceived benefits, such as language acquisition, intercultural communication skills, and increased employability, influenced students' decisions to pursue international education opportunities. Constraints that hindered students' decisions to pursue international education opportunities included financial concerns, academic scheduling conflicts, lack of knowledge or information, and personal factors such as family obligations and fear of the unknown (Curtis, & Ledgerwood 2018). The authors also identified some challenges faced by international students, including language barriers, cultural differences, and difficulties in navigating administrative processes (Nada, & Araújo 2019).

DeWit (2011) notes that student motivations to study abroad can vary widely, depending on factors such as the individual student's background, academic interests, personal goals, and cultural orientation. However, there are several common motivations that are frequently cited by students who choose to study abroad. One of the main motivations that de Wit identifies is a desire to gain intercultural competence and to experience new cultures and perspectives. He notes that many students see study abroad as a way to broaden their horizons and to develop their understanding of different societies, languages, and ways of life. In addition, de Wit suggests that students may be motivated by a desire to improve their language skills and to gain a better understanding of their own cultural identity. Another key motivation for studying abroad that de Wit identifies is the potential for academic and career advancement. He notes that studying abroad can provide students with access to new and unique academic programs, research opportunities, and professional networks, which can enhance their knowledge, skills, and career prospects.

1.2. The impact of studying abroad on students

Olsen (2020) found that studying abroad leads to long-term personal, academic, and career benefits. Deardorff (2006) emphasized that intercultural competence is a valuable student outcome of internationalization. Kuh (2008) argued that high-impact educational practices, such as study abroad, can improve students' overall learning outcomes. Byram (2008) similarly emphasized the value of education for intercultural citizenship. Chen (2012) suggested that intercultural communication skills are essential for students to make the most of their study abroad experiences.

1.2.1. The impact of study abroad on students' career prospects

As global markets become more integrated, it is increasingly important for students to gain international experience to increase their employability and competitiveness in the global workforce. Study abroad programs have been identified as a valuable means of gaining such international experience. Research

has consistently shown that study abroad programs have a positive impact on students' career prospects. Baldwin and King (2014) found that study abroad experience was positively correlated with job placement and higher starting salaries. Similarly, a study by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2019) found that study abroad programs had a positive impact on students' employability, particularly in terms of their ability to work effectively in intercultural teams. Additionally, research has identified specific skills and competencies that students can gain through study abroad programs that are particularly valued by employers. Ferdinand and De Wit (2014) noted that studying abroad can have a positive impact on students' career prospects. They found that employers often value the skills that students acquire while studying abroad, such as intercultural competence, adaptability, and communication skills. Additionally, students who study abroad may have a competitive edge in the job market due to their ability to speak a foreign language, which is becoming increasingly important in a globalized economy.

A study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) found that study abroad experiences had a positive impact on the development of key skills, including communication, adaptability, self-awareness, and intercultural competence. Many participants reported that these skills contributed to their career success and gave them a competitive edge in the job market. Sisavath (2021) found that international experience significantly contributed to the development of interpersonal and communication skills, multidisciplinary knowledge, and international competencies among participants. Moreover, these experiences were seen as valuable assets in the job market, leading to increased job opportunities and improved educational credentials.

Furthermore, research has identified specific study abroad program components that are particularly beneficial for students' career prospects. Tiessen (2014) found that internships and other forms of experiential learning during study abroad programs were particularly beneficial for students' career prospects. Berg, Paige and Lou (2023) suggested that longer study abroad programs (e.g., a full academic year) are more likely to result in positive career outcomes for students. Finally, research has also identified certain demographic factors that may influence the impact of study abroad on students' career prospects. For example, a study by Dwyer, Peters, and Xu (2010) found that students from underrepresented groups (e.g., low-income students, first-generation college students) benefited more from study abroad programs in terms of their career prospects than did students from more privileged backgrounds.

1.2.2. The impact of study abroad programs on language proficiency, intercultural competence, and academic/professional development

Research suggests that study abroad programs can have significant positive impacts on students' language proficiency, intercultural competence, and academic and professional development. The impact of study abroad programs on students' language proficiency has been extensively studied. For

instance, a study by Hwang and Chun (2021) found that study abroad experience can enhance Korean learners' speaking skills in English. Similarly, in a study by Zhao and Kong (2019), Chinese students who participated in study abroad programs showed significant improvement in their oral English proficiency. Kitiabi (2018) found that students who studied abroad significantly improved their language proficiency compared to those who did not. Pinar (2016) examined the relationship between study abroad and second language acquisition, finding that study abroad had a positive impact on language acquisition in both the short and long term.

In addition to language proficiency, the impact of study abroad on students' intercultural competence has been explored. As noted by Juffermans and Veugelers (2019), study abroad programs offer opportunities for students to gain intercultural experience, which can enhance their ability to interact with people from different cultures. In a study by Zhang, Liu, and Wang (2021), Chinese international students who studied abroad showed significant improvement in their intercultural competence, including in their attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors towards different cultures. As Furnham and Bochner (1986) noted, study abroad experiences can help students develop intercultural competence and empathy for people from different backgrounds. Similarly, Berg (2009) found that study abroad programs can significantly enhance intercultural competence, with students demonstrating greater sensitivity and awareness towards cultural differences.

Furthermore, study abroad programs have been found to have a positive impact on students' academic and professional development. A study conducted by Lasanowski and Ossege (2021) with German students who participated in study abroad programs were found to have significantly higher grades and a higher probability of graduating within the regular study period. Additionally, a study by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2013) found that study abroad experiences were positively correlated with cross-cultural adaptability, which is a valuable skill for individuals in the global workforce. Stroud (2010) found that students who participated in study abroad programs were found to have greater confidence in their academic abilities and a stronger desire to continue their education. Additionally, Chwialkowska (2020) found that study abroad experiences were positively correlated with job satisfaction and income in the long term.

1.2.3. The relationship between language learning and study abroad motivation

Language learning and study abroad experiences have been found to be interrelated and can have a positive impact on individuals' personal and professional development. The relationship between these two factors has been a topic of interest for many researchers in the field of second language acquisition. One study conducted by Jackson and Ogilvie (2007) explored the motivations of university students who chose to study abroad. They found that language learning was a primary motivation for many students. The desire to learn or improve their language skills was related to students' interest in the culture and

history of the target language. Additionally, language learning was seen as an important tool for future career prospects. Another study by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) examined the relationship between language learning motivation and study abroad experience. The researchers found that students who studied abroad had higher levels of motivation to learn the target language than those who did not study abroad. The study also found that students who had higher levels of motivation to learn the target language were more likely to study abroad in the future. Similarly, Kim and Lee (2010) conducted a study on Korean students' motivation for studying abroad. The results showed that students' motivation for language learning was the most significant factor in their decision to study abroad. Additionally, the study found that students who studied abroad had higher levels of motivation for language learning and were more likely to continue studying the language after returning to their home country. In a more recent study, Lee and Jung (2018) investigated the relationship between language learning motivation and study abroad experience in a Korean university context. The study found that students who studied abroad had higher levels of motivation for language learning and were more likely to have a positive attitude towards the target language and culture.

Apart from motivation, other factors influence language learning and study abroad experiences. One such factor is cultural immersion. By exposing themselves to a new culture, students gain a better understanding of the target language, which can enhance their language learning skills. A study by Kinginger (2011) found that the most significant factor that influenced students' language learning during a study abroad experience was cultural immersion. Students who had higher levels of cultural immersion had higher levels of language proficiency and were more likely to engage with native speakers of the target language. Moreover, the duration of the study abroad experience has also been found to have an impact on language learning. In a study by Dewey and Duff (2009), the researchers found that students who studied abroad for an extended period had higher levels of language proficiency than those who studied abroad for a shorter period. Additionally, students who stayed for a more extended period were more likely to engage with native speakers of the target language and use the language in everyday communication.

1.2.4. The relationship between country of origin and motivation

Özyer and Yildiz (2020) examine the relationship between the country-of-origin of international students and their motivation to study in Turkey. They found that students from Asian countries were more likely to be motivated by academic reasons, such as access to high-quality education, while students from African countries were more likely to be motivated by personal reasons, such as the desire for self-improvement and personal growth. Students from European countries were more likely to be motivated by career reasons, such as improving their job prospects, and students from Middle Eastern countries were more likely to be motivated by cultural reasons, such as experiencing different cultures. The study suggests that the country-of-origin of international students is an important factor to consider when

designing programs and services to support their motivation and success in studying abroad. By understanding the diverse motivations of international students from different countries, universities can better tailor their offerings to meet their unique needs and goals.

1.2.5. The importance of pre-departure orientation and support for study abroad motivation

Students' perceptions of the benefits of study abroad are positively related to their likelihood of participating. Students who believe that studying abroad will help them gain new perspectives, develop language skills, and improve their job prospects are more likely to consider studying abroad. Students who have prior international experience or who were studying a foreign language are more likely to study abroad. Other factors that are related to study abroad participation included students' financial resources, academic preparedness, and concerns about safety and security. Universities can increase study abroad participation by addressing these factors and by providing students with more information about the benefits of study abroad (Wilhite, 2007).

International students are a vulnerable population who may face challenges such as culture shock, language barriers, and social isolation. Pre-departure orientation and support programs can help students develop coping strategies and enhance their study abroad experience. Such programs can also help international students prepare for the cultural differences and social norms of the host country and reduce the likelihood of culture shock Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2010). Berg (2009) argue that effective pre-departure orientation and support programs are crucial for enhancing the educational outcomes of study abroad programs. They propose a model of intervention that focuses on four main areas: student preparation, on-site support, re-entry support, and evaluation. According to them, effective pre-departure orientation and support programs can significantly influence the success and motivation of students who participate in study abroad programs. Berg, Paige and Lou (2023) suggest that pre-departure orientation and support programs can influence study abroad motivation and success by helping students develop a positive attitude toward international understanding and language skills. They argue that such programs can help students overcome cultural barriers and facilitate cross-cultural communication, which are critical for successful study abroad experiences. Olsen (2020) provide an overview of the benefits of study abroad and argue that pre-departure orientation and support programs can help students realize these benefits. They highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence for successful study abroad experiences. According to them, pre-departure orientation and support programs can help students develop these essential skills and prepare them for the challenges they may face while studying abroad.

Pre-departure orientation and support programs can help students overcome factors such as fear, cultural differences, and homesickness, and enhance their motivation to study abroad. Effective pre-departure orientation and support programs can increase students' confidence, reduce anxiety, and

enhance their study abroad experience Lewin (2009). Such programs can enhance students' understanding of cultural differences, prepare them for challenges they may face while studying abroad, and increase their confidence and motivation. Effective pre-departure orientation and support programs can help students develop cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence, which are critical for successful study abroad experiences Everett (2013). Similarly, Altbach and Knight (2007) argue that pre-departure orientation and support programs are crucial for ensuring the success of such programs and enhancing their educational outcomes. Effective pre-departure orientation and support programs can increase students' awareness and appreciation of other cultures.

Jones (2016) notes that students may have a variety of motivations for studying abroad, such as a desire to improve their language skills, gain new perspectives, learn about different cultures, or enhance their career prospects. Universities should work to understand and address the various factors that may influence students' decisions to study abroad. Financial concerns may be a major barrier for some students, and that universities can help to address this issue by providing financial support, such as scholarships or grants, or by offering more affordable study abroad programs. Jones also discusses the importance of promoting awareness and understanding of the benefits of study abroad among students, faculty, and staff. Universities can help to promote the value of study abroad by providing information and resources on the benefits of intercultural competence and by highlighting the experiences and achievements of students who have studied abroad. It is important understanding and addressing students' motivations and concerns in order to promote study abroad participation and to enhance the overall internationalization of higher education. By providing support, resources, and opportunities for students to engage with different cultures and perspectives, universities can help prepare their students for success in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world.

Students' motivations to study abroad are shaped by a range of individual, academic, and institutional factors, and that universities and other stakeholders have an important role to play in promoting study abroad and supporting students in achieving their goals. Government policies and funding mechanisms can influence the availability and affordability of study abroad programs, and that universities can play a key role in promoting study abroad by providing support and resources for students, and by fostering a culture of internationalization De Wit (2011). Brustein (2012) suggests that participants in study abroad programs may be motivated by a desire to gain new insights and perspectives on education, as well as on other social and cultural issues. Brustein also highlights the potential benefits of study abroad programs for participants, such as the development of intercultural competence and the ability to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. He notes that participants in study abroad programs often report that their experiences have helped them to better understand the needs and perspectives of their students and have enhanced their ability to work effectively with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

1.3. Transformative learning

International students face a unique set of challenges when they come to study in a foreign country. They have to adapt to a new culture, a new language, and a new way of life, while also pursuing their academic goals. Studies have shown that the experience of studying abroad can be transformative, leading to personal growth and development, increased self-awareness, and enhanced cultural competence. The transformative learning experience of international students is a complex process that involves a range of personal, social, and cultural factors. One important aspect of this process is the development of intercultural competencies, which can include skills such as communication, empathy, and adaptability. Host country policies and attitudes can have a significant impact on the development of these competencies.

Transformative learning is a process of personal and social change that results from critical reflection on one's experiences, beliefs, and assumptions. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning involves a shift in perspective or frame of reference, which leads to new insights, perspectives, and meanings. This shift is often triggered by a disorienting dilemma, a situation that challenges one's assumptions and beliefs, and prompts reflection and re-evaluation. Transformative learning can occur in a variety of settings, including formal education, work, and personal life. Transformative learning can be defined in various ways, but some of the most important definitions are:

Mezirow's Definition: Mezirow (1991) defines transformative learning as the "process of becoming critically aware of one's own assumptions and biases and learning to recognize their limitations and to revise them as necessary" (p. 167). Mezirow emphasizes that transformative learning involves a shift in perspective that enables individuals to view the world in a new way.

Taylor's Definition: Taylor (2014) describes transformative learning as a "profound and persistent change in the way we think, feel, and act" (p. 7). According to Taylor, transformative learning is a process of personal growth that involves a deepening of self-awareness, increased insight into one's own values and beliefs, and the ability to think critically about complex issues.

The authors found that the international students experienced significant personal and academic transformations during their study abroad programs. These transformations included increased self-awareness, improved intercultural communication skills, enhanced critical thinking abilities, and expanded worldviews. Chwialkowska (2020) found that international students who participated in programs that facilitated cross-cultural interaction, such as language exchange programs or cultural events, reported higher levels of intercultural competence than those who did not participate in these

programs. Positive interactions with domestic students, as well as exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, can contribute to the development of intercultural competence and personal growth Kim (2020). However, negative experiences related to host country policies and attitudes can also inhibit the development of intercultural competencies. International students who experienced discrimination or prejudice within the host country reported lower levels of intercultural competence and a less positive transformative learning experience (Kuo, Hussein, Makhzou, Sabhnani and Zvric, 2023).

Transformative learning experiences are influenced by various factors, including the learning environment, social interactions with local and international students, exposure to new cultures and perspectives, and academic challenges (Nada, Montgomery & Araújo, 2018).

Teoh, Wang and Kwek (2023) explore the concept of transformative learning among educational travelers, including international students. They found that the participants' experiences were characterized by a range of transformative processes, including personal growth, expanded worldviews, and changes in identity and values. The authors also identified several factors that facilitated or hindered transformative learning, including intercultural contact, pre-trip preparation, and reflective practices. They suggest that educational programs can be designed to promote transformative learning by creating opportunities for intercultural engagement, providing resources and support for pre- and post-trip reflection, and fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. They identify several critiques of existing approaches to assessing transformative learning, including a focus on individual experiences and a lack of attention to power dynamics and structural inequalities.

Pang, Cox and Acheson (2023) describe transformative learning as a process of "perspective transformation," in which learners critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, challenge dominant narratives and power structures, and develop new ways of thinking and acting in the world. They highlight the importance of taking a critical and intersectional approach to understanding and assessing transformative learning in the context of international education. The authors argue that this requires a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of the social, cultural, and political dimensions of transformative learning, and that future research in this area should aim to develop more culturally responsive and context-specific measures of transformative learning.

Anand, Anand, Welch, Marsick, and Langer (2020) provide an overview of real-world applications of transformative learning. The authors describe transformative learning as a process that involves critical reflection, self-examination, and a willingness to explore and challenge one's own assumptions and beliefs in order to generate new perspectives and ways of being in the world. They argue that transformative learning can be applied in a wide range of contexts, from education and training to organizational development and social change.

Pritt (2022) found that international study has the potential to be a transformative experience for Omani students, providing them with opportunities for personal and professional growth and development. It has broadened their perspectives and exposed them to new cultures, ideas, and ways of thinking as well as it has enhanced their personal growth and development, including their independence, confidence, and communication skills. Lastly, it has improved their employability and career prospects by providing them with valuable skills and experiences that are highly valued in the job market. He also highlights the importance of providing support and resources to students during and after their international study experiences to ensure that they are able to fully realize the transformative potential of their experiences. O'Donnell (2021) aimed to explore the longer-term effects of participation in New Zealand high school students' overseas study tours, and she found that participation in these study tours can be a valuable and transformative learning experience for students. It had a positive impact on the personal and social development of the students, such as increased self-confidence, independence, and intercultural understanding and had an impact on the students' academic and career development, such as increased motivation to learn and pursue further education.

Choi, Slaubaugh, and Kim (2012) suggest that international exchange programs can provide significant transformative learning experiences for students. The exchange students reported enhanced self-awareness, increased cultural understanding, improved language proficiency, and academic growth. They also faced a range of challenges during their exchange program, including language barriers, homesickness, and cultural differences, which allowed them to develop resilience and adaptability.

Syahrudin, Mutiani, Handy, Abbas, and Jumriani (2022) argue that transformative learning can be enhanced by connecting students to diverse networks and resources, which they refer to as linking capital. The students reported that their interactions with diverse individuals and groups, including peers, mentors, and professionals, helped them to develop new perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Several factors can facilitate or hinder the development of linking capital in higher education, such as institutional support, social norms, and cultural differences. Higher education institutions can promote transformative learning by creating opportunities for students to engage with diverse individuals and groups, both within and outside of the institution. Global learning can provide significant benefits for students, including enhanced intercultural competence, critical thinking skills, and personal growth. Promoting global learning can help higher education institutions to better prepare students for a rapidly changing globalized world and to address global challenges and opportunities (Kahn & Agnew, 2017).

Transformative learning can have significant educational implications for adult learners, enabling them to develop critical thinking skills, gain new insights and perspectives, and develop a greater sense of self-awareness and personal growth. It is important to create educational programs that promote transformative learning and provide opportunities for learners to engage in critical reflection, experiential learning, emotional engagement, and social interaction. Aguiar and Silva (2011) suggest that

transformative learning can have significant educational implications for adult learners. They identified four main themes related to the transformative learning processes experienced by the participants: critical reflection, experiential learning, emotional engagement, and social interaction. The study found that critical reflection was a crucial aspect of the transformative learning process, as it enabled participants to examine their beliefs and assumptions critically. Experiential learning was also identified as a key element, as participants were able to apply their learning to real-life situations and gain new insights through direct experience. Emotional engagement was also important, as participants were able to connect with their learning on a deeper level and develop a greater sense of self-awareness. Social interaction was also highlighted as a crucial aspect of transformative learning, as participants were able to learn from and with others and develop a sense of community. Nada and Araújo (2018) found that the students' narratives reflected the complex and multifaceted nature of migration and education. The students' experiences were shaped by a range of factors, including their individual backgrounds and circumstances, their interactions with other people, and the institutional and societal context in which they were situated.

1.3.1. Transformative Learning Theories

Transformative learning theory is a popular framework for understanding how learning can lead to personal growth, critical reflection, and transformation. Some key transformative learning theories are::

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory is one of the most well-known and widely cited theories in the field of adult education. According to Mezirow, transformative learning occurs when individuals critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, leading to a fundamental shift in their perspective (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow's theory has been used to understand how study abroad experiences can lead to transformative learning and personal growth (Kinging, 2009).

Freire's Critical Pedagogy is another transformative learning theory that emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and social justice. According to Freire, education should be a tool for empowerment and social change, rather than a means of perpetuating the status quo (Freire, 1970). Freire's theory has been used to understand how study abroad experiences can lead to transformative learning around issues of social justice and equity (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Magolda's Self-Authorship Theory is a transformative learning theory that emphasizes the importance of personal identity development. According to Magolda (2023), self-authorship involves developing a sense of inner purpose, voice, and self-awareness. Magolda's theory has been used to understand how study abroad experiences can lead to transformative learning around issues of personal identity and self-awareness (Harrison & Peacock, 2010).

Taylor's Transformative Learning Framework is a recent addition to the field of transformative learning theory. According to Taylor, transformative learning involves a process of "disruptive experience, critical reflection, and intentional action" that leads to personal growth and transformation (Taylor, 2014). Taylor's theory has been used to understand how study abroad experiences can lead to transformative learning around issues of cultural identity and global citizenship (Byram, 2008).

1.3.2. Transformative Learning and International Students

Studies have shown that international students experience transformative learning during their study abroad experiences. For example, Fink and Barrett (2011) found that study abroad experiences led to increased self-awareness, enhanced cultural competence, and personal growth and development. Similarly, Chwialkowska (2020) found that international students experienced transformative learning when they were able to immerse themselves in the host culture, engage in critical reflection, and encounter diverse perspectives. Nada and Legutko (2022) highlight the transformative learning potential of the Erasmus mobility program and underscores the importance of experiential learning, intercultural interactions, and reflection for personal and academic growth. Erasmus program can enhance transformative learning experiences by providing opportunities for intercultural interactions, facilitating reflection and critical thinking, and promoting experiential learning through activities such as internships and volunteer work. Additionally, the authors recommend that universities should provide support and guidance to students during the mobility period to ensure a successful and meaningful experience.

Immersion in new experiences: Studying abroad provides a unique opportunity for international students to immerse themselves in a new culture and language. This can be a challenging and disorienting experience, as students have to navigate unfamiliar social norms, communication styles, and ways of life. However, this immersion can also be a catalyst for transformative learning. For example, Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students experienced a shift in their frame of reference as a result of their study abroad experience, which led to increased self-awareness and cultural competence. Similarly, Kim and Ruben (2012) found that international students who were able to fully immerse themselves in the host culture experienced transformative learning, which led to enhanced intercultural communication skills and personal growth and development.

Exposure to diverse perspectives: International students are exposed to a variety of perspectives during their study abroad experiences. They encounter people, ideas, and ways of life that are different from their own, which can challenge their assumptions and beliefs. This exposure to diversity can be a catalyst for transformative learning. For example, Kristiana, Karyanta, Simanjuntak, Prihatsanti, Ingarianti, and Shohib (2022) found that international students who were able to engage with people from diverse backgrounds experienced transformative learning, which led to enhanced intercultural communication skills and personal growth and development.

Engagement in critical reflection: Engaging in critical reflection is an important aspect of transformative learning for international students. This involves actively questioning one's assumptions and beliefs and considering alternative perspectives. Reflection can take many forms, such as journaling, group discussions, and debriefing sessions. For example, Berg (2009) found that structured reflection activities, such as guided journaling and debriefing sessions, facilitated transformative learning for international students.

1.3.3. Factors that Contribute to Transformative Learning

Several factors contribute to transformative learning, including immersion in new experiences, exposure to diverse perspectives, and engagement in critical reflection. Immersion in new experiences involves actively engaging with the unfamiliar and experiencing the world in a new way. This can be facilitated by studying abroad, which provides a unique opportunity for students to immerse themselves in a new culture and language. Exposure to diverse perspectives involves encountering people, ideas, and ways of life that are different from one's own. This can challenge one's assumptions and beliefs and promote critical reflection. Engagement in critical reflection involves actively questioning one's assumptions and beliefs and considering alternative perspectives. This can be facilitated by structured reflection activities, such as journaling, group discussions, and debriefing sessions.

1.3.4. The impact of cross-cultural contact on the transformative learning experience of international students

Cross-cultural contact is a key aspect of the study abroad experience and is often cited as a key factor in facilitating transformative learning for international students. Cross-cultural contact can take many forms, such as interactions with host country nationals, participation in cultural events, and engagement with local communities. Numerous studies have shown that cross-cultural contact can have a transformative impact on international students. For example, several studies have found that interactions with host country nationals can promote intercultural competence, increase cultural awareness, and enhance self-confidence (Lee & Rice, 2007; Chwialkowska, 2020). Participation in cultural events and engagement with local communities have been found to facilitate personal growth and development, increase cultural awareness, and foster a sense of belonging (Komatsu & Roberge, 2014a; Berg, 2009).

One way that cross-cultural contact can facilitate transformative learning is by exposing international students to diverse perspectives and challenging their assumptions and beliefs. Kim and Ruben (2012) found that intercultural contact in the classroom led to increased openness to diverse perspectives and greater cultural empathy among international students. Lee and Rice (2007) found that interactions with host country nationals challenged international students' assumptions about race and ethnicity and led

to increased cultural awareness and sensitivity. Another way that cross-cultural contact can facilitate transformative learning is by providing international students with opportunities to develop new skills and competencies. Komatsu and Roberge (2014b) found that participation in a cultural immersion program in Japan led to improved communication skills, intercultural competence, and personal growth among international students. Berg (2009) found that engagement in community service projects facilitated the development of leadership skills and enhanced students' sense of social responsibility.

Cultural similarity between the home culture and host culture is another factor that can influence the impact of cross-cultural contact. Students who come from cultures that are more similar to the host culture may have an easier time adapting to the new environment and may be less likely to experience culture shock (Mezirow, 1991). However, research has also shown that students who come from more culturally diverse backgrounds may be more open to cross-cultural interaction and may be more likely to experience transformative learning (Berg, 2009).

While cross-cultural contact can be a valuable tool for facilitating transformative learning for international students, it can also present challenges and barriers. One major challenge is the potential for culture shock and feelings of isolation or disorientation (Kristiana, Karyanta, Simanjuntak, Prihatsanti, Ingarianti, & Shohib (2022). Culture shock can occur when international students experience significant differences in language, culture, and social norms, which can lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and homesickness. Another challenge is the potential for discrimination or prejudice from host country nationals (Lee & Rice, 2007). International students may experience discrimination or bias based on their race, ethnicity, or nationality, which can negatively impact their sense of belonging and overall well-being. The quality and quantity of cross-cultural contact can vary depending on the study abroad program and individual student experiences. Some students may have limited opportunities for cross-cultural contact, either due to program design or personal factors such as social anxiety or language barriers. As a result, not all international students may have the same transformative learning experiences as a result of cross-cultural contact.

1.3.5. The challenges and barriers to transformative learning for international students.

Transformative learning theory suggests that individuals who undergo significant personal, intellectual, and emotional transformations can achieve long-term and profound changes in their beliefs, values, and attitudes. For international students, who face multiple challenges related to language proficiency, cultural differences, and academic expectations, transformative learning can be an essential tool for their academic success. International students often face cultural dissonance, language barriers, and adjustment difficulties, which can hamper their academic success. However, transformative learning can provide a framework for overcoming these challenges and promoting critical reflection, perspective-taking, and openness to new experiences. According to Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory,

individuals who experience disorienting dilemmas, engage in critical reflection, and develop new habits of mind can transform their beliefs, values, and behaviour.

One of the essential aspects of transformative learning is critical reflection, which enables individuals to question their assumptions, beliefs, and values and develop a more nuanced understanding of themselves and the world around them. International students who engage in critical reflection can benefit from increased self-awareness, cross-cultural competence, and intellectual flexibility, which can contribute to their academic success. Leaver and Campbell (2023) discuss the evolving landscape of education, highlighting shifts in teaching philosophy, advancements in digital technology, and the need to adapt due to external challenges like pandemics and war. It emphasizes the development of cross-country skills and resilience in learners, leading to personal transformation through diverse learning experiences, ultimately fostering multilingualism and multiculturalism.

1.3.6. The relationship between transformative learning and academic achievement for international students.

The role of transformative learning in promoting academic achievement has been an area of increasing interest in the field of international education. International students, in particular, face unique challenges in adapting to new academic cultures, and transformative learning experiences can help them to develop new perspectives, attitudes, and skills that can positively impact their academic performance.

Transformative learning is a process of critical reflection that leads to a change in the learner's perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning involves a shift from a habitual way of thinking to a more reflective and critical approach. This type of learning is particularly important for international students who may need to adapt to new academic cultures and approaches to learning. Asikainen, Gorbunova, Postnikov and Ryzhkova. (2017) found that transformative learning is positively related to cross-cultural competence, which is the ability to understand and navigate diverse cultural contexts. This cross-cultural competence can help international students to perform better academically by facilitating their understanding of different academic cultures and expectations.

Several studies have shown that transformative learning experiences can positively impact academic achievement. King and Magolda (2005) developed a developmental model of intercultural maturity, which suggests that transformative learning experiences can lead to increased intercultural understanding and the ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts. Jin (2013) conducted a narrative inquiry of Chinese international students and found that study abroad experiences led to transformative learning and positive academic outcomes, such as improved critical thinking skills and academic performance.

The use of technology in facilitating transformative learning has also been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement. Henderson and Tannock (2018) argue that technology-enabled learning can promote transformative learning by providing opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning experiences. This type of learning can help international students to develop digital literacies and skills that are essential for academic success in the 21st century. In addition, the use of technology can help to overcome barriers related to language and communication, which can also impact academic achievement. The authors suggest that identity development is a key factor in facilitating the transformative learning experience for international students, as it helps them to navigate the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment and to develop a stronger sense of self. In addition, technology has played an increasingly important role in facilitating identity development for international students. A study by Çömlekçi (2020) investigated the use of social media by international students in Turkey and found that social media helped them to develop a sense of community and belonging, as well as to express and explore their cultural identity. The author suggest that social media can be a valuable tool for international students to connect with others and develop a sense of identity in a new and unfamiliar environment.

1.3.7. The impact of home country culture on the transformative learning experience of international students.

International students' transformative learning experiences have become a topic of interest for researchers, educators, and policymakers in higher education. Transformative learning has been described as a process in which an individual becomes more critically aware of their beliefs and assumptions, which then leads to a change in perspective and behavior. This process is often facilitated by cross-cultural experiences, such as studying abroad. However, the impact of home country culture on transformative learning experiences is an area that has received less attention in the literature.

International students come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have unique experiences and beliefs that shape their identity and worldview. Studies have shown that students' home country culture can impact their transformative learning experience in a number of ways. First, students' prior cultural and educational experiences can influence their ability to adapt and participate in their new academic and social environments. For example, students from collectivist cultures, where group harmony is valued over individualism, may struggle with the more individualistic and competitive academic culture in Western countries (Yi, 2018). Similarly, students from countries with different education systems and teaching methodologies may find it challenging to adjust to a new learning environment that emphasizes critical thinking and independent learning (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Second, students' cultural background can impact their social interactions and relationships in the host country. Brown and Holloway (2008) found that students' cultural background played a significant role in shaping their experiences of social support while studying abroad. For example, students from countries where

building strong relationships and social networks is valued, such as China and South Korea, may struggle with the more individualistic and less relationship-oriented culture in the United States. Third, students' home country culture can impact their perception of their host country and their ability to engage in critical reflection and perspective-taking. Li and Bray (2007) found that students' cultural background played a significant role in shaping their perceptions of their host country and their ability to engage in intercultural dialogue. For example, students from countries with a strong national identity, such as Japan and South Korea, may struggle with engaging in critical reflection and dialogue about their host country, as it can be perceived as a challenge to their national identity. Finally, students' home country culture can impact their sense of identity and their ability to navigate the multiple cultural contexts they encounter while studying abroad. Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that students' cultural background played a significant role in shaping their sense of identity and their ability to integrate their various cultural identities. For example, students from countries with a strong cultural identity may struggle with reconciling their home country culture with the host country culture and may experience a sense of cultural dissonance or identity conflict.

1.3.8. The influence of host country policies and attitudes towards international students on the transformative learning experience

The number of international students has increased significantly over the last few decades, with many countries now seeing international education as an important source of revenue and a means of promoting cross-cultural exchange. However, while the transformative learning experience of international students has been widely studied, less attention has been paid to the influence of host country policies and attitudes on this process.

One key factor that can influence the transformative learning experience of international students is the policies and attitudes of the host country towards international students. Studies have found that policies that promote inclusivity, such as programs that provide support for international students or facilitate cross-cultural interaction, can have a positive impact on the transformative learning experience of international students. Glass and Westmont (2014) found that international students who participated in a support program that provided information and assistance with adjusting to the host country reported a greater sense of belonging and a more positive overall experience. On the other hand, policies that are restrictive or discriminatory can have a negative impact on the transformative learning experience. Li and Bray (2007) found that policies that limit the ability of international students to work or participate in extracurricular activities can lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion, which can in turn inhibit the development of intercultural competencies and personal growth.

Attitudes towards international students within the host country can also be a significant factor. Huang and Ren (2023) found that negative attitudes towards international students among domestic students

can lead to social exclusion and feelings of alienation, which can in turn negatively impact the transformative learning experience. However, studies have also found that positive attitudes towards international students can enhance the transformative learning experience. Ward, Bochner, Furnham (2001) found that positive interactions with domestic students can facilitate the development of intercultural competencies and contribute to personal growth.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Objective of the study

Starting from the research question: “What motivates international students to select Portugal (IPB) as a study destination and what are the benefits with respect to transformative learning during 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years?”, the aim of this study was to identify students’ motivations and perceived benefits of international experience, respectively, transformative learning. In another words, the research aim is to assess the motivation and transformative learning experience of international students in Portugal, using as case study the IPB. We aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive international students to choose Portugal, specifically IPB for their education and how their academic and cultural experiences contribute to transformative learning.

The following research objectives facilitated the achievement of this aim:

1. Identifying the motivations of international students’ in selecting Portugal as a study destination.
2. Identifying the motivations of international students’ in selecting IPB as a study institution.
3. Determining the transformative learning experience of international students in Portugal (IPB)
4. Investigating the potential long-term impacts of the international student experience on their personal and professional development.

2.2. Description of Data Collection

To identify students' motivations and transformative learning experience primary data was used. For this purpose, a comprehensive questionnaire that included both closed-ended and open-ended questions was designed using Google Forms. The questionnaire covered the key research objectives and it consisted of three parts. Questions of the first part were devoted to identifying the demographic profile of the international students, the questions of the second part were focused on the motivation of international students whereas the questions of the third part were focused primarily on transformative learning. We ensured that the questionnaire is user-friendly and accessible on various devices. The questionnaire was open for responses from 31 July 2023 until 22 of September 2023. ANNEX I provides a copy of the questionnaire that was used to collect the data.

The data was collected in two ways: i) sending periodical emails to IPB Official Student Email; ii) personal connections.

Sending periodical emails to IPB Official Student Email (geral@alunos.ipb.pt): The email explained the purpose and importance of the study and emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of responses. The link was provided to Google Forms where students could access and complete it.

Personal Connections: We have reached out to international students at IPB whom we personally know or have connections with (e.g., through friends or colleagues). The study's objectives were explained briefly and their participation was requested in completing the questionnaire. Further, they were encouraged to forward the questionnaire to their friends and acquaintances who were also international students at IPB during the academic years in the research period.

2.3. Description of Data Analysis

After data collection, the responses were imported into an Excel spreadsheet. The data was organised with each row representing a participant and each column representing a specific question.

The data was reviewed for any errors, missing values, and inconsistencies and it was cleaned by removing any discrepancies to ensure accurate analysis. After ensuring we have a reliable sample, we conducted descriptive statistics to get an overview of the dataset. The statistical indicators were calculated with the help of Microsoft Excel. We have calculated means, medians, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. For more advanced analysis, we have used Excel's data analysis tools, such as PivotTables and PivotCharts.

2.4. Population vs. Sample

The target population of this study consisted of all international students studying at IPB during the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years. We collected a representative sample of 62 valid responses (from a total of 67 responses) of various country backgrounds which contributed enough data to generate relevant conclusions.

The criteria for inclusion in this study were two: academic year (specifically 2021/2022 and 2022/2023) and international student status in IPB. The respondents who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis. Approximately 7% of the initial responses were excluded based on the specified criteria. In this study, we chose to focus our research on the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years due to specific factors and contextual changes during these periods that were directly pertinent to our research objectives. For international student status exclusion, this study was centred on international students' experiences, and respondents who were not international students were not relevant to the research questions. This exclusion was done to ensure the rigor and accuracy of the research.

3. Presentation and Analysis of Results

3.1. Sample Characterisation

The description of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents starts with the gender of the respondents. In the sample, there was a higher proportion of female participants compared to male participants, as shown in Figure 1.

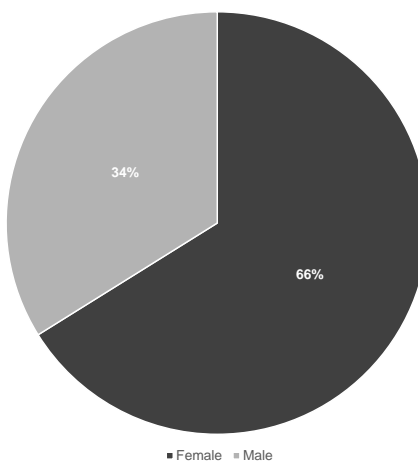


Figure 1 - Distribution of respondents by gender

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Of the 62 valid responses from the international students, 66% of the students were females and 34% of them were males. Another variable that is important to characterise the students is their age. In Figure 2 we have presented the distribution of respondents by age interval.

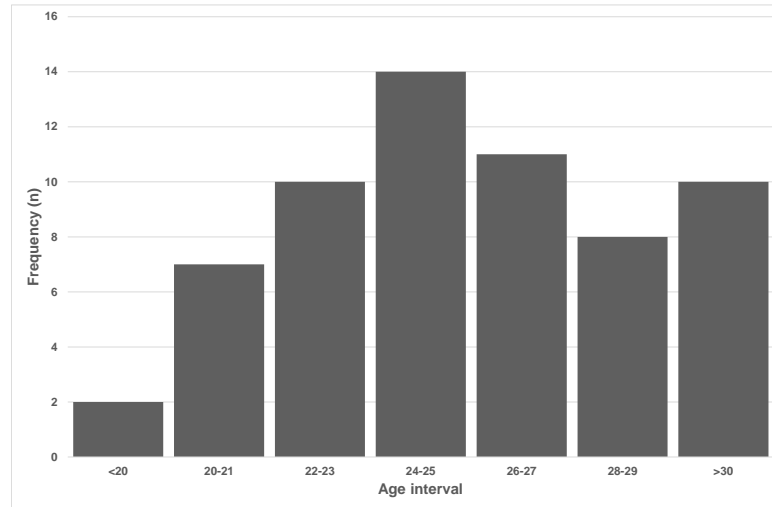


Figure 2 - Distribution of respondents by age interval

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The age structure of respondents is the following: 3.23% of international students were less than 20 years old, 11.29% of international students were 20-21 years old, 16.13% were 22-23 years old, 22.58% were 24-25 years old, 17.74 were 26-27 years old, 12.90% and 16.13% of the respondents were aged more than 30 years old. The oldest participant in our sample was 36 years old. The mean age of our sample was found to be 25.64 years old and a median of 25 years old. The average age of the females was 25.15 and the average age of males was 26.67.

There were 19 countries represented among the 62 responses obtained, with 17.74% of them from Algeria and 14.52% of them from Brazil. 80.6% of the respondents were from non-European Union countries (Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Georgia, Iran, Kosovo, Mauritania, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey) and 19.4% were from European Union countries (Italy, Poland, France, Spain).

The academic degree of our respondents is presented in Figure 3.

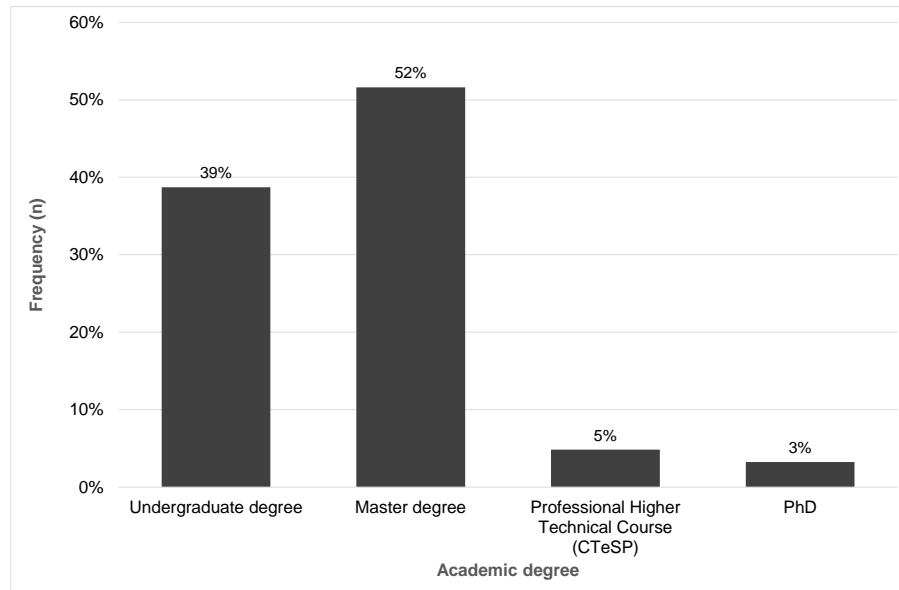


Figure 3 - Distribution of respondents by their academic degree

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The majority of the respondents pursued a master's degree (52%); 39% of them an undergraduate degree; 3% of students a PhD and 5% a Professional Higher Technical Course (CTeSP).

The average age of the respondents who were pursuing a bachelor's degree was 22.88. The average age of the respondents who were pursuing a Professional Higher Technical Course (CTeSP) was 27.67; for the ones who were pursuing a master's degree was 27.18 and for PhD studies was 31.0.

From the 62 respondents, 69% were self-supported students of the institution (in the same conditions as domestic students) and 31% were attending IPB under International Programmes. The self-supported students were from Brazil (12.90%), Algeria (11.29%), Tunisia (11.29%), Bangladesh (8.06%), Nepal (4.84%), Italy, Iran, Poland, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mauritania. A more detailed distribution of international programmes is presented in Figure 4.

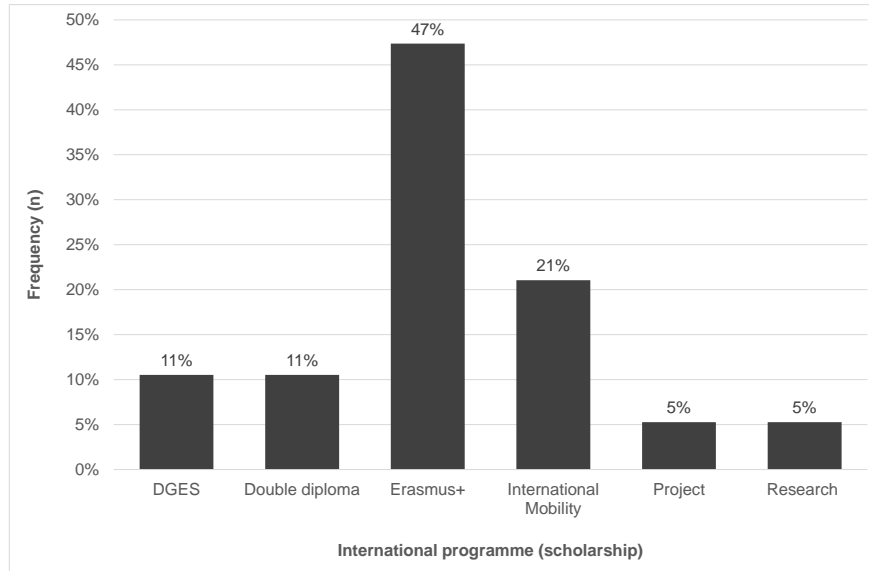


Figure 4 - Distribution of respondents by an international programme

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The majority of students in our sample (69%) attended IPB as self-supported students. 31% of the students attended IPB with some scholarship support. From them, 47% were under the Erasmus+ programme. 21% of students studied in IPB as part of International Mobility, 11% were Double Diploma students and 11% DGES students, 5% of them were engaged in research and 5% in projects.

The students who were under the International Mobility program were from Brazil, Russia, Algeria. Erasmus students were from Poland, Italy, Algeria, Morocco, Spain. Finally, the Double Diploma students were from Algeria and Georgia. Figure 5 presents the distribution of the respondents by the academic year they have attended.

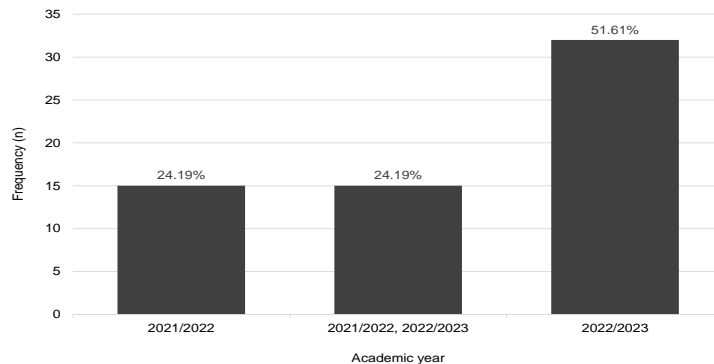


Figure 5 - Distribution of respondents by the academic year they were attending IPB

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

51.61% of our respondents attended IPB only in the 2022/2023 academic year, 24.19% of them attended IPB in 2021/2022 and 24% of the respondents attended IPB in both academic years. The 2021/2022 academic year was selected a total of 30 times whereas the 2022/2023 academic year was selected 47 times.

3.2. The motivation of International Students

In this part, the research is centred around exploring the reasons behind the students' decision to study abroad in general, their choice of Portugal as their study destination, and furthermore, their selection of Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB) as their educational institution. We have presented the frequency of travel abroad prior to international experience in IPB in the Figure 6.

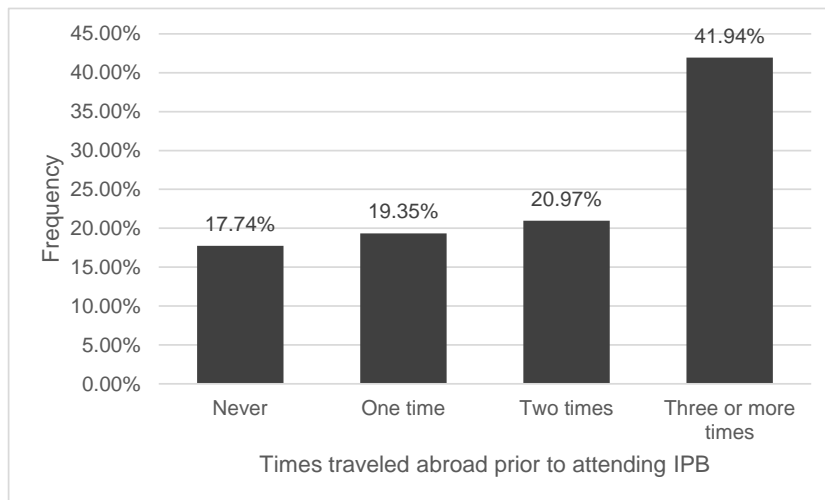


Figure 6 - The distribution of frequency of times travelled abroad prior to attending IPB

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As shown in the Figure 6, a significant portion of our respondents (42%) had travelled three or more times outside their home country prior to enrolling at IPB. Additionally, 21% of the respondents had travelled at least twice, while 20% had travelled once. Interestingly, 18% of the respondents had never travelled beyond their home country before attending IPB. A majority of students from Tunisia (57.14%) had substantial international exposure, having travelled three or more times before attending IPB. Most Polish students (71.43%) also had extensive international experience, traveling abroad three or more times. A significant portion of Brazilian students (55.56%) had travelled abroad once before attending IPB, with 22.22% having more extensive travel experiences (three or more times). Algerian students had diverse experiences, with 36.36% traveling three or more times and 27.27% traveling twice before attending IPB. The majority of students from Bangladesh (80.00%) travelled abroad twice before joining IPB. Nepali students had varied experiences, with 25.00% in each category of travel frequency. All Italian

students had extensive international experience, having travelled abroad three or more times. Figure 7 presents the main motivations of the students to study outside their home country.

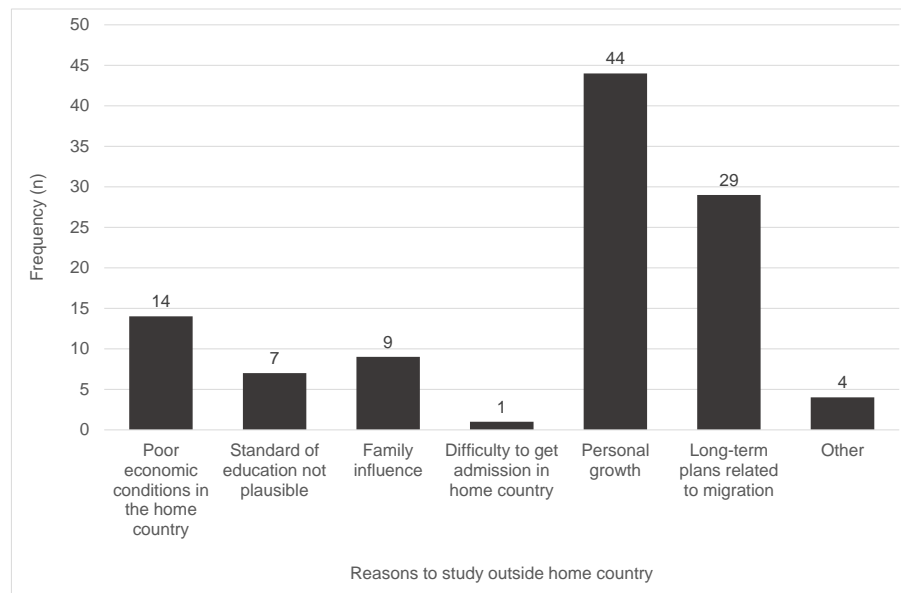


Figure 7 - The distribution of the motivation of international students to study outside their home countries.

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As shown in the Figure 7, there were a diverse set of motivations for students to study abroad. Personal growth and long-term migration plans were the most common reasons, indicating a focus on individual development and future opportunities. Economic factors also played a significant role, reflecting the impact of financial considerations on educational decisions. Family influence, the pursuit of specific educational standards, and other reasons (such as concerns about political situations in home countries) were additional factors contributing to the decision to study abroad. The data underscores the multifaceted nature of students' motivations, reflecting a blend of personal aspirations, economic realities, and external influences.

Poor economic conditions in the home country: 67% of Pakistani students, 50% of Iranian students, 33% of Russian students, 20% of Syrian student, 17% of Bangladeshi and Nepalese students, 10% of Algerian, Tunisian and Brazilian students as well as 7% of Polish students cited poor economic conditions in their home country as a motivating reason to study abroad. Standard of education not plausible: 50% of Iranian students, 33% of Nigerian students, 25% of Bangladeshi students and 5% of Algerian and Brazilian students indicated that the standard of education in their home country is not satisfactory motivating them to seek education opportunities in other countries. Family influence: 33%(each) of students from Italy, Mauritania and Nigeria indicated that family influence plays a crucial role in their decision to study abroad. 18% of Polish students, 17% of Nepali students, 8% of Bangladeshi students, 5% of Algerian students and 5%of Brazilian students indicated that family influence impacts

their decision to study abroad suggesting that this factor is not decisive. Personal growth: Students from Georgia, Kosovo, and Turkey unanimously consider personal growth as a vital factor in their decision to study abroad. For them, the opportunity to grow personally and develop as individuals is a primary motivator. Italian students (67%) prioritize personal growth significantly, while Polish students (64%) and Tunisians students (60%) also attach great importance to it. Students from Algeria (45%), Brazil (35%), Mauritania (33%), Nepal (33%), Nigeria (33%), and Russia (33%) see personal growth as moderately important. While not the sole motivator, it significantly influences their decision-making process. Students from Bangladesh (25%) and Syria (20%) acknowledge personal growth, but it is not the primary motivator. Other factors play a more substantial role in their decision. Long-term plans related to migration: Students from Mauritania (50%), Iran (40%), Georgia (35%), Turkey (35%), Brazil (33%), Nepal (33%), Russia (33%), and Syria (33%) see long-term migration plans as moderately to highly important. These students likely consider their education as a stepping stone towards future migration opportunities. Students from Pakistan (20%) and Bangladesh (9%) consider long-term migration plans as relatively less important compared to other factors. While it influences their decision, it might not be a dominant factor in their choice to study abroad.

Figure 8 presents the main motivations of the international students to select Portugal as their study destination.

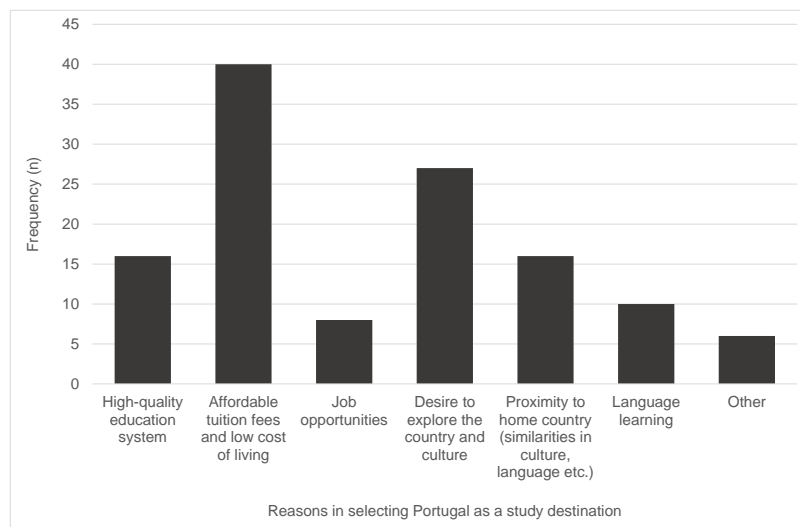


Figure 8 - The distribution of the main motivation of international students to select Portugal as a study destination.

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The top reason to select Portugal as a study destination was the fact that the country offers affordable tuition fees and low cost of living (40 times selected), followed by the desire to explore the country and culture of Portugal (27 times). High quality education system and proximity to home country (similarities

in culture, language etc.) were each selected 16 times. Other motivations were language learning (10 times), job opportunities (6 times) and other reasons (collaboration between universities, no other option available to them etc.).

High-quality education system: Students from Morocco (100%) consider Portugal's high-quality education system as a significant motivator for studying in the country, indicating a strong preference for educational excellence. Syrian students (50%) and students from Bangladesh (43%) view Portugal's high-quality education system as moderately important, suggesting that educational quality is a key factor but not the sole motivator for their choice. Students from Nigeria (25%) and Pakistan (25%) Algeria (12%), Nepal (9%), Poland (6%), and Brazil (5%) see Portugal's high-quality education system as important but other factors weigh more heavily in their decision-making process.

Affordable tuition fees and low cost of living: Students from Iran (100%) and Turkey (100%) consider affordable tuition fees and a low cost of living as significant motivators for studying in Portugal, indicating that financial affordability is a primary consideration for these students. Students from Georgia (50%), Kosovo (50%), Mauritania (50%), Nigeria (50%), Pakistan (50%), and Bangladesh (43%) view affordable tuition fees and a low cost of living as moderately to highly important factors in their decision-making process. Brazilian students (33%) and Russian students (33%) also place considerable importance on these factors. Students from Spain (33%) and Tunisia (30%) consider affordable tuition fees and low cost of living with moderate importance, suggesting that while these factors influence their choice, other considerations might also play a role. Students from Poland (29%), Algeria (28%), Nepal (27%), and Italy (25%) see affordable tuition fees and a low cost of living as moderately important factors, but they might prioritize other aspects slightly more in their decision-making.

Job opportunities: Students from Nigeria (25%) and Pakistan (25%) consider job opportunities as a moderately important factor when choosing to study in Portugal. This suggests that career prospects and the potential to find employment after graduation are considerations for students from these countries. Students from Tunisia (10%) and Nepal (9%) see job opportunities with relatively lower importance, indicating that while employment prospects are a factor, they might not be the primary motivator for these students. Students from Algeria (8%), Poland (6%), and Brazil (5%) also consider job opportunities, but it is a factor of lower significance in their decision-making process. Other factors play a more substantial role for students from these countries.

Desire to explore the country and culture: Students from Russia (67%) consider the desire to explore the country and culture as a significant motivator for studying in Portugal. This suggests a keen interest in experiencing the cultural and historical aspects of the country. Students from Georgia (50%) and Mauritania (50%) also view the desire to explore the country and culture as important, indicating a strong interest in immersing themselves in Portugal's cultural diversity. Students from Nepal (36%), Spain (33%), and Tunisia (30%) consider the desire to explore the country and culture with moderate importance, indicating a willingness to engage with Portugal's cultural heritage and traditions. Students from Italy (25%), Syria (25%), and Poland (24%) see the desire to explore the country and culture as a

factor of relatively lower to moderate importance, suggesting some interest but not a primary motivator. Students from Algeria (16%), Bangladesh (14%), and Brazil (14%) consider exploring the country and culture, but it is a factor of lower significance in their decision-making process. Proximity to home country (similarities in culture, language, etc.): Students from Brazil (33%) and Spain (33%) consider the proximity to their home country, including similarities in culture and language, as a moderately important factor when choosing to study in Portugal. This suggests a preference for a familiar cultural and linguistic environment. Students from Italy (25%) also view the proximity to their home country with moderate importance, indicating a consideration for cultural and linguistic similarities, but not a primary motivator. Students from Poland (6%) see the proximity to their home country as a factor of relatively lower to moderate importance. While cultural and language similarities are considered, they might prioritize other aspects more significantly in their decision-making process. Language learning: Students from Italy (25%) and Syria (25%), Poland (24%) and Algeria (12%) and from Nepal (9%) consider the opportunity for language learning as a moderately important factor when choosing to study in Portugal. This suggests a desire to enhance their language skills while pursuing their education.

The international students decided to study in IPB for a set of reasons. Figure 9 highlights the reasons why respondents choose IPB.

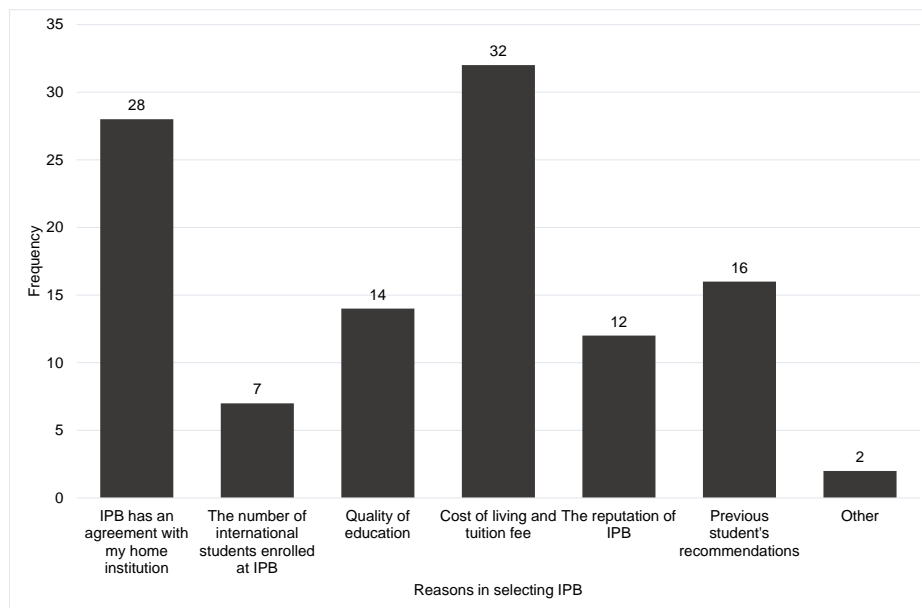


Figure 9 - The motivation of the international students to select IPB as their educational institution.

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

It's interesting to note that a significant portion of students, 53%, chose IPB as their first choice when deciding to study abroad, indicating a strong preference for the institution. The remaining 47% didn't

initially consider IPB as their first choice, suggesting that these students might have been influenced by specific factors that led them to choose IPB later in their decision-making process. As, we can see from the figure above, a common motivator for the international students to select IPB as their educational institution is the cost of living and tuition fee. This aligns with the trend observed in selecting Portugal as a study destination, indicating that affordability is a significant consideration for students choosing both the country and the specific institution (Figure 8). Other reasons include the inter-institutional agreements between universities, recommendations from previous students of IPB, the quality of education which IPB offers, the reputation of IPB, the high number of international students in the institution and others. These factors collectively contribute to IPB's appeal among international students, showcasing the institution's diverse strengths and attracting students from various backgrounds and preferences. The combination of these factors likely creates a positive and supportive environment for international students, fostering a rich educational experience at IPB.

Agreement with Home Institution: This factor is considered mostly from Italian (67%), Georgian (50%), Brazilian (44%), Polish (33%) Algerian (25%), and Russian (25%). Number of International Students: Moroccan (33%), Russian (25%), Bangladeshi (11%) students considered this factor the most. Quality of Education: This factor was decisive for Iranian students (50%), Syrian students (40%), Moroccan students (33%), Algerian students (15%), Nepalese students (14%), Polish and Tunisian students (each 13%) and Bangladeshi students (11%). Cost of Living and Tuition Fee: For students from Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey affordability is a significant concern (100%), and they heavily consider the financial aspects of studying abroad. Iranian and Mauritanian students assign a moderate weight of 50% to the cost of living and tuition fee, indicating that affordability is a significant consideration. Affordability is a consideration too for Brazilian students (38%), Bangladeshi students (33%), Italian students (33%) Nepalese students (29%), Polish students (27%), Algerian students (25%), Russian students (25%) and Tunisian students (13%). Reputation of IPB: French students consider the reputation of IPB as the most crucial factor, assigning it the highest weight of 100%. Students from Mauritania assign a weight of 50% to the reputation of IPB, indicating that the institution's standing is an important factor. Bangladeshi students consider the reputation of IPB with a weight of 33%. Tunisian and Syrian students assign a weight of 20% to the reputation of IPB. This suggests that while the institution's reputation matters, it is not the most influential factor in their decision-making process. Algerian (10%) and Polish (7%) students assign a relatively lower weight of 10% to the reputation of IPB. Other factors have a more substantial influence on their decision to study abroad. Previous Students' Recommendations: Spanish students consider previous student's recommendations as the most crucial factor, assigning it the highest weight of 100%. This suggests that for Spanish students, the experiences and feedback of former students are highly influential in their decision to study at IPB. Students from Georgia assign a weight of 50% to previous student's recommendations, indicating that the opinions of former students are an important consideration. Nepali students consider previous student's recommendations with a weight of 29%. While important, other factors also play a significant role in their decision to study at IPB. Russian

students assign a weight of 25% to previous student's recommendations. This suggests that while the experiences of former students are considered, they are not the most influential factor in their decision-making process. Algerian and Syrian students consider previous student's recommendations with a weight of 20%. Recommendations from previous students are a factor but they are not the primary determinant in their decision. Polish students and Brazilian students also assign a weight of 13%, Bangladeshi students 11% and Tunisian students 7% to previous student's recommendations. Suggesting that while recommendations matter, they are not the most influential factor in their decision-making process.

3.3. The transformative learning experience of IPB students

We found that 93.5% of the respondents have socialised with other international students while attending IPB. We also found that the majority of the respondents (81%) have participated in international events at IPB, and 13% have not participated, with 6% not having participated due to no information of any such event being held. The majority of the students stated that they had many opportunities to share their culture with only 10% stating that they didn't have any opportunity to do so.

The host country is an important factor in motivation and transformative learning of the international students. For this reason, we have investigated the international students' knowledge before and after their arrival in the country. Figure 10 shows the distribution of our findings.

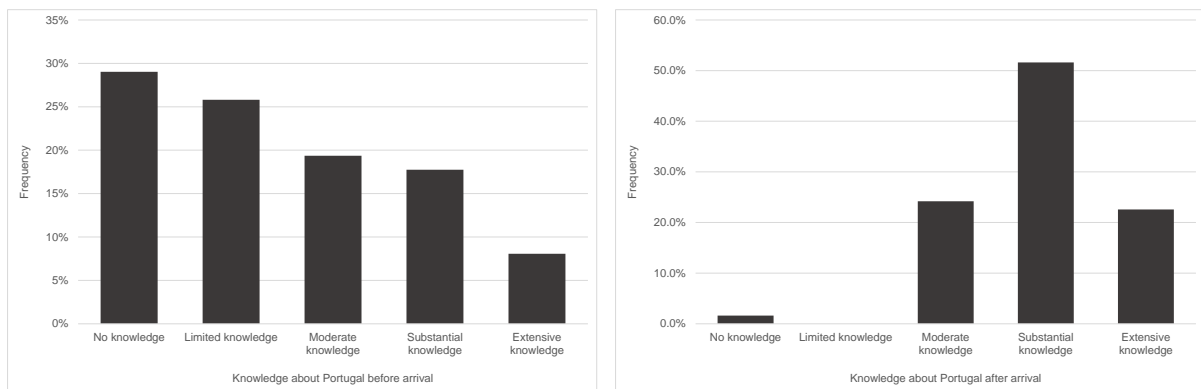


Figure 10 - Comparison of the distributions of respondents' knowledge before and after arrival in Portugal

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

In the Figure 10 above, we can observe that the knowledge about the host country after the international experience improves significantly. Before arrival, the majority of the respondents have no knowledge (29%), limited knowledge (25.8%), moderate knowledge (19.4%), substantial knowledge (17.7%) and only a few (8.1%) have an extensive knowledge of Portugal. After arrival, respectively after their international experience, we notice that the students' knowledge of the country broadens. The majority

of them consider their knowledge to be substantial knowledge (51.6%), moderate knowledge (24.2%), and extensive knowledge 22.6%. The average knowledge of the international students about Portugal before their arrival was 2.5 (limited to moderate knowledge) and after their international experience their knowledge about Portugal increases to the average of 3.9 (substantial knowledge).

We also wanted to understand if there is any change on the feelings of the international students toward Portugal after attending IPB. Figure 11 presents a comparison of their feelings before and after attending IPB.

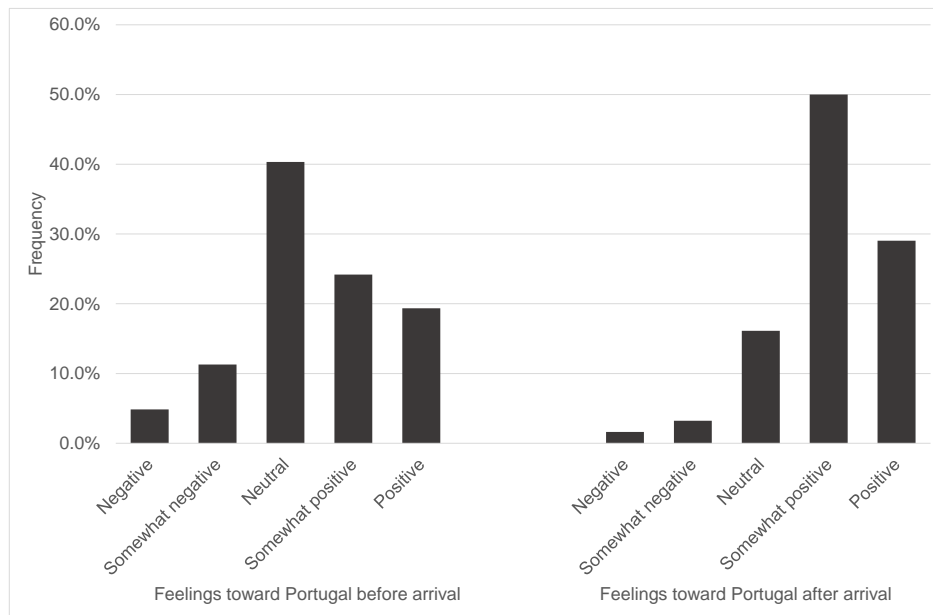


Figure 11 - A comparison of the distribution of the feelings of respondents before and after arrival

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As we can observe from the Figure 11 above the positive feelings increased after attending IPB. Feelings of the international students before their arrival in Portugal were on average 3.4 (neutral to somewhat positive feelings), suggesting a mix of emotions and uncertainties, whereas after arrival the average is 4.0, indicating a more positive outlook. This makes us understand that there was a positive transformation. The majority of the students before arriving have neutral feelings (40.3%) and somewhat positive feelings (24.2%) toward Portugal. After, we see that the majority of the students have somewhat positive feelings (50%) and positive feelings (29%).

Table 1 summarises the frequency of the most appreciated Portuguese aspects by the international students.

Table 1- The most appreciated host country aspects from the international students

Host culture aspects	Frequency (n)
Cultural Values and Interpersonal Relationships	46
Kindness	12
Helpful	7
Friendly	7
Hospitality	7
Open-minded (Tolerant)	6
Preserving family ties	3
Respectful	3
Generosity	1
Lifestyle and Environment	16
Food	8
Places to visit	4
Weather	2
Easy access to healthy lifestyles	2
Attitudes and Outlook	2
Optimism	1
Professionalism	1

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Based on the responses provided by the international students, three key aspects (see Table 1) of the Portuguese culture were appreciated: Cultural values and interpersonal relationships (72%), lifestyle and environment (25%) and the attitudes and outlook (3%) of the Portuguese people.

The helpful and friendly nature of the Portuguese people, coupled with their hospitality, played a crucial role in creating a welcoming environment for the international students. The respondents highly valued the kindness exhibited by the Portuguese people by referring to acts of friendliness, empathy, and consideration experienced in their various social interactions. As a respondent expressed: "Everyone I have met has been incredibly welcoming and eager to help, whether I am asking for directions or just trying to understand the culture." Another respondent highlights the helpful nature of the Portuguese people by explaining: "They are ready to help at university, governmental institutions, and even at shops." Similarly, another respondent stated: "They are all willing to help you, to accompany you in administrative work and to translate for you."

The openness and tolerance of the Portuguese society were acknowledged, suggesting a culture that embraces diversity and different perspectives. As a respondent affirms: "They have curiosity to learn about different cultures." The importance placed on family ties and the overall respectful attitude of the Portuguese people were aspects that international students found noteworthy too. They "care about old people" and "keep family ties".

Portuguese cuisine was another aspect that was widely appreciated, indicating that the culinary traditions and flavours of the country made a significant positive impression on the international students. The

international students specifically highlighted three popular dishes from Portuguese cuisine: Pastel de Nata, Bacalhau (salted codfish), and Francesinha. The appreciation for these specific dishes further highlights the students' love for Portuguese culinary traditions, emphasizing the role of food as a central aspect of their cultural experience in the host country. These culinary delights likely provided the students with a connection to Portuguese culture, enhancing their overall stay in the country.

The variety of places to visit in Portugal, such as cultural landmarks, natural attractions, and historical sites, contributed to the students' positive experiences. The favourable weather conditions and the ease of adopting a healthy lifestyle were mentioned, indicating the positive impact of the environment on the students' well-being. A respondent explained: "I like the easiness of being healthy in Portugal. I had options to do exercises, go to gym and access to healthy food."

While mentioned by fewer respondents, qualities such as optimism, professionalism, and generosity were still recognized as admirable traits within the Portuguese host culture. We analysed the impact of the international experience of our respondents in 5 main points. Figure 12 shows the impact on confidence and self-esteem.

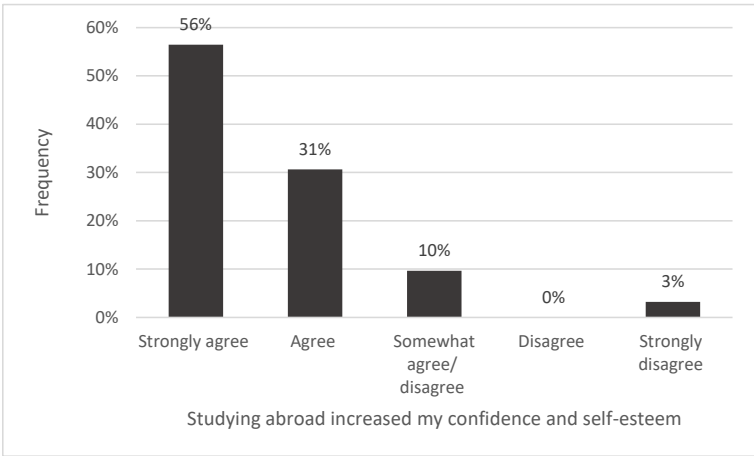


Figure 12 - The distribution of the influence of the international experience on confidence and self-esteem

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Based on the responses provided, the ratings for the statement "Studying abroad increased my confidence and self-esteem" on a 5-point scale are as follows: Strongly Agree: 56%, Agree: 31%, Somewhat Agree/Disagree: 10%, Disagree: 0%, Strongly Disagree: 3%. The majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, indicating that studying abroad had a significant positive impact on their confidence and self-esteem. These results suggest that for the majority of respondents, studying abroad was a highly positive and transformative experience that significantly enhanced their confidence

and self-esteem. However, it's essential to recognize the individual differences and experiences that might lead to a small number of respondents having a different perspective. Figure 13 shows the distribution for the measurement on cultural awareness impact.

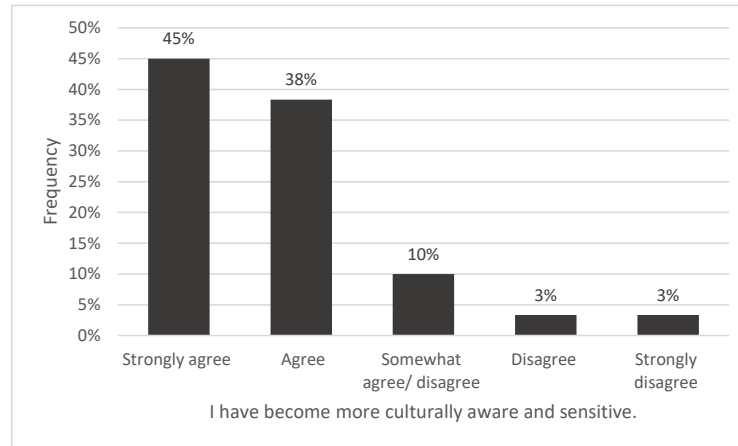


Figure 13 – The distribution of the impact of international experience on culture awareness and sensitiveness

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As we can see from the Figure 13 above, the results indicate the following ratings for the statement "I have become more culturally aware and sensitive" on a 5-point scale: Strongly Agree: 45%, Agree: 38%, Somewhat Agree/Disagree: 10%, Disagree: 3% and Strongly Disagree: 3%. The combined percentage of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed ($45\% + 38\% = 83\%$) indicates a substantial majority of participants felt that studying abroad contributed positively to their cultural awareness and sensitivity. This suggests that the experience significantly broadened their understanding of different cultures and made them more sensitive to cultural differences. While a small portion of participants had mixed feelings or did not feel the same level of growth, the overall positive response indicates that studying abroad had a beneficial impact on their cultural awareness. We have presented the distribution of the impact on personal and professional growth in the Figure 14.

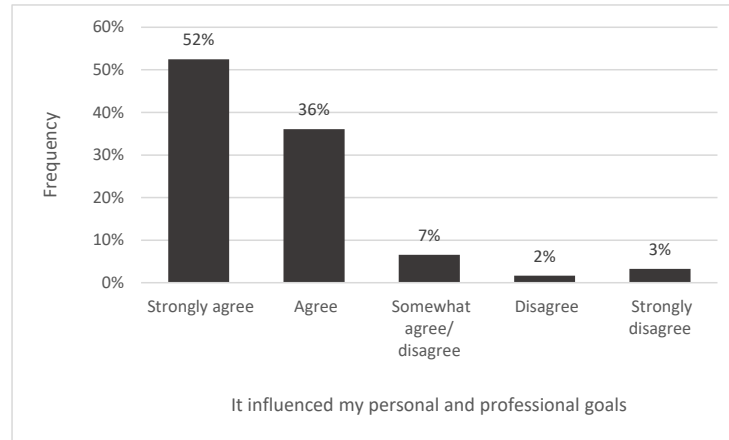


Figure 14 - The distribution of the international experience impact on personal and professional growth

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As shown in the Figure 14 above, the ratings for the statement "It influenced my personal and professional goals" on a 5-point scale are: Strongly Agree: 52%, Agree: 36%, Somewhat Agree/Disagree: 7%, Disagree: 2% and Strongly Disagree: 3%. The combined percentage of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed (52% + 36% = 88%) suggests that a significant majority felt that studying abroad had a positive influence on their personal and professional goals. This indicates that the experience played a substantial role in shaping their aspirations and ambitions.

Figure 15 shows the distribution of the international experiences' impact on development of new ways of thinking or problem-solving skills.

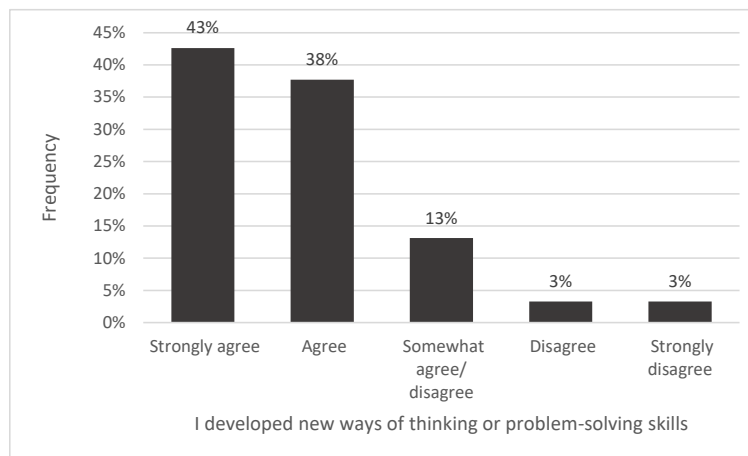


Figure 15 - The distribution of the international experiences' impact on development of new ways of thinking or problem-solving skills

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The figure above shows the ratings for the statement "I developed new ways of thinking or problem-solving skills" on a 5-point scale as follows: Strongly Agree: 43%, Agree: 38%, Somewhat Agree/Disagree: 13%, Disagree: 3% and Strongly Disagree: 3%. Our results indicate a positive development of these skills. The combined percentage of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed (81%) indicates that a significant majority felt that studying abroad led to the development of new ways of thinking or problem-solving skills. This suggests that the experience was intellectually enriching, encouraging participants to approach problems from different angles and think critically.

In Figure 16, the impact of the international experience on understanding other cultures and clearing misconceptions/stereotypes is presented.

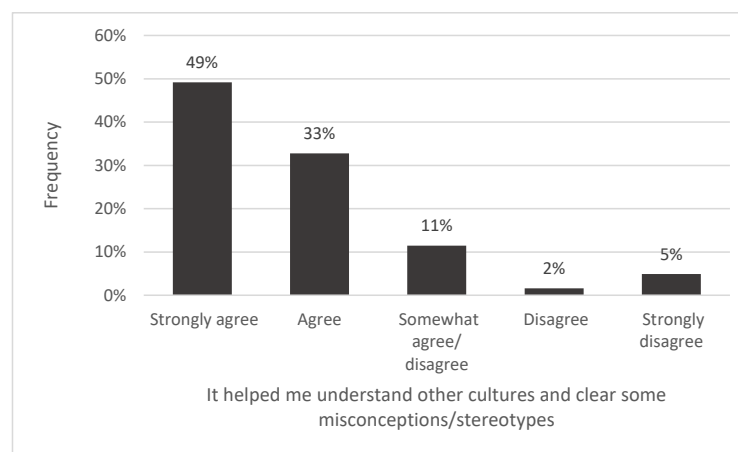


Figure 16 – The distribution of the impact of the international experience on understanding other cultures and clearing misconceptions/stereotypes

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

As shown in the figure above, the ratings for the statement "It helped me understand other cultures and clear some misconceptions/stereotypes" on a 5-point scale was: Strongly Agree: 49%, Agree: 33%, Somewhat Agree/Disagree: 11%, Disagree: 2% and Strongly Disagree: 5%. The combined percentage of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed (82%) suggests that a significant majority felt that studying abroad helped them understand other cultures and clear misconceptions/stereotypes. This indicates that the experience was effective in broadening their cultural awareness and dispelling preconceived notions.

Based on the responses provided by the respondents, their international experience led to several changes in misconceptions and stereotypes. We have noticed three main groups of stereotypes and misconceptions: National/ Racial Superiority, Religious and language stereotypes, National and cultural characteristics of Portugal. Some of the national or racial superiority misconceptions and stereotypes challenged during the international experience were:

- “My country is the most hospitable one” The experience of hospitality in other countries challenged the beliefs in their home country's unparalleled hospitality.
- “Europeans are different from us”: Interactions with Europeans highlighted the similarities and the belief that we are not the same.
- “White people are superior”: Interactions with people of different racial backgrounds likely challenged this notion, promoting an understanding that everyone is equal, and no race is superior.

Some of the religious and language stereotypes that changed due to this international experience were:

- “Muslims are terrorists”: A stereotype dispelled by personal interactions.
- “People from certain countries have limited English skills”: Personal experiences likely showed that language proficiency varies widely within nationalities, challenging assumptions about English skills.
- “Arabian/North African people are what media portrays”: Interactions likely dispelled negative media portrayals, promoting a more accurate understanding of Arabian and North African cultures.

National and Cultural Characteristics of Portugal:

- “Portuguese are racist”: This stereotype was challenged based on personal experiences.
- “Portugal has not much to offer (opportunities)”: Positive experiences challenged this misconception, showcasing the country's opportunities and offerings.
- “Portuguese people are lazy”: Interactions with locals challenged this stereotype.
- “Portuguese language of Portugal and Brazil are the same”: Interactions with people from both places highlighted the linguistic differences between Portuguese of both countries, dispelling this misconception.

In the following Table 2, we have presented the most common changes our respondents reported after the international experience.

Table 2 - The changes observed in the respondents after their international experience by themselves or others

Changes observed	Frequency
Open minded	10
Confident	7
Adaptivity and resilience	6
Responsible/Mature	5
Social skills	5
Independent	4
Language	3
Decision making	2
Broad thinking	2

Source: Own elaboration using the data obtained from the questionnaire.

After their international experience, students reported positive changes in various aspects of their personal development. Exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives broadened their minds, developing a more accepting and open attitude towards different ideas and beliefs. Navigating a new environment and overcoming challenges boosted their self-assurance, making them more confident in their abilities and decisions. Living independently in a foreign country enhanced their self-reliance, encouraging them to take initiative and manage their responsibilities effectively. The experience of being accountable for their own well-being and academics led to increased maturity and a sense of responsibility towards their actions. Faced with various situations, they improved their decision-making skills, learning to make thoughtful and informed choices independently. Dealing with cultural differences and unexpected challenges strengthened their adaptability and resilience, enabling them to thrive in diverse environments. Exposure to different cultures and perspectives broadened their thinking, encouraging a more inclusive and global mindset. Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds improved their social skills, making them more adept at connecting with others and understanding different social contexts and being in a foreign language environment enhanced their language skills, improving their ability to communicate effectively in different languages.

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research Lines

The research focused on understanding students' motivations to study abroad, specifically in Portugal and at Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB). We found that about 42% of respondents had travelled abroad multiple times before attending IPB. The primary motivations for studying abroad included personal growth, migration plans, and economic conditions. Regarding their choice of Portugal, affordable tuition fees and a desire to explore the country and culture were key factors. IPB was chosen by 53% as their first choice due to factors like the cost of living, inter-institutional agreements, and quality education. We found that 93.5% of students socialized with other international students, and 81% participated in international events at IPB, enhancing their transformative experience. Students' knowledge about Portugal significantly improved after their international experience. Positive feelings towards Portugal increased, with friendly Portuguese people, open-minded society, family values, and delicious cuisine being highly appreciated. The variety of places to visit and the ease of adopting a healthy lifestyle further contributed to their positive experiences. The study demonstrated the positive and transformative impact of studying abroad on students. Through international experiences, participants experienced significant enhancements in confidence, self-esteem, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills. The exposure to diverse cultures and environments not only shaped their personal and professional goals but also fostered valuable life skills such as open-mindedness, independence, and adaptability. While acknowledging individual differences, the collective evidence shows the growth the students undergo during their time abroad. The international experience at IPB significantly enhanced students' knowledge about Portugal, transformed their feelings towards the country, and positively impacted their personal, cultural, and professional growth. The experience also challenged and changed stereotypes, fostering a more accepting and inclusive mindset among international students. This research emphasizes the crucial role of international experience in shaping culturally aware, and adaptable individuals prepared for the challenges of our globalized world. The findings, while valuable for understanding the experiences of students at IPB, might not be generalizable to all international students. Focusing exclusively on international students in Portugal may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader global contexts. The study's scope is limited by a relatively small sample size, potentially restricting the application of advanced statistical analyses. Additionally, the study's temporal frame might not account for evolving sociocultural dynamics, potentially impacting the relevance of the conclusions in the face of changing circumstances. Future research could delve deeper into the role of institutional support structures (such as mentorship programs, counselling services, or cultural integration initiatives) and how these support systems influence motivation and transformative learning experiences among international students. It would be very interesting to make a detailed study of the long-term impact of international experiences on students and understand how their experiences continue to influence their personal, academic, and professional lives.

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ANNEX I

The motivation and transformative learning experience of international students in Portugal (IPB)

This questionnaire is part of a study that intends to determine the motivation and transformative learning experience of international students in Portugal (IPB) in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years. The study is part of the Dissertation to obtain a Master's Degree in Business Management.

In this context, we kindly request your collaboration to complete the questionnaire. The data collected from this questionnaire is anonymous and confidential which will be used inline with the objective as mentioned above.

In case you have any doubt, please contact at the following email address: abetare.demiri2@gmail.com

Demography

1. 1. Gender:

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

2. 2. Age:

3. 3. Where are you from?

4. 4. Which academic degree you attended at IPB?

Mark only one oval.

Professional Higher Technical Course (CTeSP)

Undergraduate degree

Master degree

PhD

5. 5. In which academic year you have studied at IPB?

Tick all that apply.

2021/2022

2022/2023

Other: _____

6. 6. Type of student?

Mark only one oval.

- Scholarship
 Self-supported
 Other: _____

7. 7. If you were benefiting from a scholarship, please specify:

Mark only one oval.

- Erasmus+
 International Mobility
 Double diploma
 ICM International Credit Mobility
 Other: _____

Motivation

8. 8. How many other times have you traveled abroad (prior to Portugal)?

Mark only one oval.

- Never
 One time
 Two times
 Three or more times

9. 9. Please select the reason(s) why you decided to study outside home country.

Tick all that apply.

- Poor economic conditions in the home country
 Standard of education not plausible
 Family influence
 Difficulty to get admission in home country
 Personal growth
 Long-term plans related to migration
 Other: _____

10. 10. Why did you chose Portugal as a study destination?

Tick all that apply.

- High-quality education system
- Affordable tuition fees and low cost of living
- Job opportunities
- Desire to explore the country and culture
- Proximity to home country (similarities in culture, language etc.)
- Language learning
- Other: _____

11. 11. Was IPB your first choice when you decided to study abroad?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

12. 12. What was the main reason(s) which led you to choose IPB?

Tick all that apply.

- IPB has an agreement with my home institution
- The number of international students enrolled at IPB
- Quality of education
- Cost of living and tuition fee
- The reputation of IPB
- Previous student's recommendations
- Other: _____

Transformative learning

13. 13. How would you rank your general knowledge about Portugal BEFORE ARRIVAL?

Mark only one oval.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- No k Extensive knowledge

14. 14. How would you rate your feelings toward Portugal BEFORE ARRIVAL?

Mark only one oval.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Neg Positive

15. 15. During your stay at IPB did you socialise with people from other nationalities?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

16. 16. If NO, please name the reason(s) why you didn't socialize with other nationalities.

17. 17. During your stay, did you participate in any event at IPB or in the city?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I have no knowledge about any event that occurred.

18. 18. During your stay, did you have any opportunity to present or share your culture?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

19. 19. How would you rank your general knowledge about Portugal AFTER ARRIVAL?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

No Extensive knowledge

20. 20. How would you rate your feelings toward Portugal AFTER ARRIVAL?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Neg Positive

21. 21. What aspects of the host culture (Portuguese) have you appreciated the most and why?

22. 22. Please select the options that apply AFTER your international experience at IPB:

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree/ disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Studying abroad increased my confidence and self esteem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have become more culturally aware and sensitive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It influenced my personal and professional goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I developed new ways of thinking or problem-solving skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It helped me understand other cultures and clear some misconceptions/stereotypes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. 23. Is there any misconception or stereotype that changed due to this international experience?

24. 24. Do you (or people around you) feel that you have changed after your studies abroad? If yes, what are those changes?

25. 25. If you wish to make an observation, please, fill the following blank space.
You can mention any positive or negative aspect that you feel is relevant and was not approached in the previous questions.

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