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Profiling Norwegian business students considering studying abroad through credit mobility

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Authors:
Bjørn Willy Åmo[1]
June B. Doornich[2]

Affiliations:
[1]Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Nord University Business School, Bodø, Norway

[2]Nord University Business School, Bodø, Norway

Corresponding author:
Bjørn Willy Åmo,
bjorn.w.amo@nord.no

Background: Governments want students to gain an international learning experience by taking part of their study abroad through credit mobility. Only a few students are interested to take up this call to study abroad.

Aim: We study students' motivation for partaking in credit mobility and whether students' preferences for studying abroad can be profiled according to their motivation and socio-demographic characteristics. This study sheds light on the motivational and constraining factors that students consider when deciding to take part in their study abroad or not.

Setting: We study Norwegian business bachelor students in their 2nd year, at the time they need to take a decision for partaking in credit mobility.

Methods: This is a quantitative study applying principal correspondence analysis based on survey data collected among 2nd-year business bachelor students at a business school.

Results: The results show that students perceive that different countries or regions provide different benefits and drawbacks related to a credit mobility study situation.

Conclusion: Students consider their living situation, the safety and utility of the study to stay abroad, the benefit of alternative use of time, the extent to which the student views this as academically possible, and whether it is possible and wise to study abroad in a given country.

Contribution: We report students' preferences when selecting the host country for their potential credit mobility study. These inputs could inform credit mobility offerings, allowing the supply and demand of where and how students want to study abroad, to be met in a better way.

Keywords: study abroad; credit mobility; student preferences; motivational and constraining factors; sociodemographic characteristics; business students; survey; Norway.

Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education is becoming increasingly more in demand and governments and officials eagerly promote students to study abroad (EU 2021). However, research on factors that shape a student's decision to participate in short-term mobility programmes has not yet received adequate attention in the literature (Roy, Newman & Lahiri-Roy 2022). Not enough is known about which students want to go where and why. Hence, our offerings might not fit the need of students.

Students do not study abroad as much as many stakeholders, such as governments, higher education institutions, and policymakers could wish for (EU 2021; White Paper 2020–2021). The national motivation to enhance the international experience, knowledge, and competence to improve the nation's adaptability and competitiveness in glocalization, is pertinent and current. Global challenges and complexities related to climate, technology, demography, and democracy can only be solved by international cooperation. The government seeks to increase mobility to countries that are of strategic importance to the nation. This interest relates to trade and technology development (White Paper 2020–2021). However, little is known about the students' motivation for mobility and whether students meet the Norwegian government's intentions to increase student mobility. Hence, it is important to determine factors students consider in their choices about if and where to study abroad.

The Norwegian government has high ambitions and target figures for students to study abroad, but the students do not fully respond to this call from the government. Something is missing. There seems to be a lack of understanding of how the students perceive the option of taking part

of their study period abroad. Roy et al. (2019) reports extensive research on the outcome of student mobility programmes but find scant research on antecedents that shape a student's decision to participate in mobility programmes. Civera, Meoli and Paleri (2021) similarly call for studies integrating student motivation into research on international student models. We need to look into the issue of studying abroad from the students' perspectives. They are the ones that make the final evaluations and choices for crossing the borders during their studies. If we know more about why and how students would like this international learning experience to take place, we as educators, and the government as facilitators, could rearrange our offers according to the needs of the students. Better knowledge of the nature of antecedents for students' engagement in studying abroad is highly relevant to policymakers in shaping educational opportunities.

This need is actualised by the emerging changes in the Norwegian student population (White Paper 2020–2021). The student population has undergone significant changes in the last decades. An increasing share of the population is partaking in higher education. According to Statistics Norway, 38.4% of the young people aged 19–24 are currently pursuing higher education (SSB 2022a). Moreover, the students are also getting older. The SSB (2022a) further reveals that as much as 17.0% of youths aged 25–29, do pursue higher education. Lifelong learning is the new mantra. This trend of an ageing and increasing student population is evident elsewhere also (i.e. Arugaslan & Uysal 2021; Damalie et al. 2023; Statistics Canada 2010).

As teachers, we experience that our students nowadays live different lives than when we our self were students 20–30 years ago. Many of today's students are adults who have already established themselves, they have kids, they have a full-time or part-time job, and study is no longer their main occupation (Arugaslan & Uysal 2021). The Norwegian government defines credit mobility as being abroad for a period longer than 3 months. Obviously, the living situation influences the students' ability and willingness to take part in their study abroad. Previous work on the factors that influence students' choice regarding a host country has been well documented (Mazzarol 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; McMahon 1992). This is based upon old data; the characteristics of students have changed substantially since then. Moreover, the variables expressing which students are most likely to select which country or region, and specifically, how male and female students, students with and without kids, and students with or without job obligations relate to studying abroad, is still unknown. There is also an urgent need to determine how students' academic competence relates to a wish for studying abroad. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the influence of motivational factors on the decision to study abroad, further research is required (Nissen et al. 2022).

Universities and governments need to be mindful of the various socio-demographic factors that may impact students' preferences for studying abroad. These factors may include gender, parental status, job responsibilities, and academic performance. By understanding these variables, universities and governments can better develop credit mobility policies and offerings that meet students' needs. It is crucial to take into account these factors to ensure that studying abroad remains accessible and feasible for all students, regardless of the students circumstances (EU 2021).

Therefore, our study is guided by the following research questions. Firstly, which motivational factors do Norwegian business students consider when selecting a host country for their study abroad? Secondly, can the students' preferences for studying abroad be profiled according to their socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, parental status, job obligations, and academic performance? Thirdly, do the students perceive different countries or regions differently?

The main findings from our investigation are that students consider their living situation, the safety and usefulness of the studying abroad, the benefit of alternative use of time, to what extent it is academically possible, and whether it is possible and wise to do so while selecting the host country for their potential credit mobility and studying abroad. Students also perceive that different countries or regions provide different offerings along these conditions.

The next section focuses on the theoretical framework of the study focusing on the inputs to the decision process of staying home or opting for credit mobility, the factors influencing the students' choice of a host country, and profiling the students according to their socio-demographic characteristics. Then, we explain our method before we reveal our results and interpret them into conclusions for research and practice.

Theoretical framework

There are several theoretical frameworks that seek to explain students' motivation for studying abroad. McMahon (1992) proposes a sequential push-pull model to explain the selection process where the student first decides to study abroad or at home. Push factors are issues that suggest the student opt to study abroad, while pull factors are issues that invite the student towards a specific region, country, or university. If the student opts for studying abroad, then the model depicts a sequence for a decision regarding the country and then an educational institution (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002).

McMahon (1992) applied this push-pull model while examining the reasons why students from developing countries during the 1960s and 1970s chose to study abroad in developed countries. The sequential structure has later also been applied for understanding students from developed countries in their decision process of studying abroad (Altbach 1998). In the context of a developed country, different push and pull factors apply than those suggested by McMahon (1992), see Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño (2006), Maringe and Carter (2007), Mazzarol and

Soutar (2002), Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2012), Perez-Encinas, Rodriguez-Pomeda and De Wit (2021), and Huisman et al. (2022). Students from developed countries have a plethora of suitable educational offerings to choose from, both domestically and internationally. Still, some push and pull factors could be present even for students from these countries, as students gain many types of benefits from taking some of their higher education abroad.

Inputs to the decision process of staying home or opting for credit mobility

Self-determination theory could explain the rationale for the choice of going abroad or not, and where to go. According to self-determination theory, students put their effort into the activities that promise the most gain for their invested energy (Gagné & Deci 2005). Hence, self-determination theory might shed light on the motivational factors that the student evaluates in the different stages of the push-pull model. Within the framework of the self-determination theory, the push factors could be extrinsically motivating factors relating to the student seeking gain by studying. The pull factors could then relate to the intrinsic motivation of the student. Self-determination theory suggests an element is missing in the push-pull framework, which is the cost element: the cost element relating to the negative effects of the choice.

Self-determination theory proposes that people are rational actors, performing actions that they think will benefit them (Gagné & Deci 2005). We then assume that students put their effort into the activities that promise the most gain for their invested energy. The gain from studying abroad is then the motivator, while the effort and the risks associated with the stay abroad are then the other side of that coin. The gain could be intrinsically related to the joy of learning and the joy of experiencing new environments, cultures, and people. The gain could be extrinsically, related to the later benefit of improved employability, career advances, or higher salaries because of the study abroad. The cost could relate to the risk such endeavours imply for own safety, well-being, or social life.

Push factors as extrinsic gains

The extrinsic motivational factors for students relate to the outcome of fulfilling higher education. The desired outcome as seen from the student's perspective is a well-paid and secure job (Vallerand et al. 1992). This indicates that the gain the student hopes for could be related to future job opportunities. Studying abroad has been found to have a positive influence on outbound students' labour market outcomes (d'Hombres & Schnepf 2021; Iriondo 2020; Jacob, Kühhirt & Rodrigues 2019; Kratz & Netz 2018; Petzold 2017; Roy et al. 2019; Waibel, Petzold & Rüger 2018). Also, Tseng et al. (2021) report that candidates possessing an international study experience have positive employability effects, while Kratz and Netz (2018) reports higher earnings for students who have studied abroad.

The positive job opportunities that could result from a study abroad could relate to the skills, network, and local knowledge students gain from studying abroad. Norwegian business students will probably be involved in the export or import of goods or services in some way in their work life. According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Alsos et al. 2014), between 10% and 22% of new Norwegian firms expect to export more than 25% of their production. Students who would like to learn and experience business conditions valued by their potential employer might want to select a host country that is among Norway's most important trade partners. SSB (2022b) informs that the five countries Norway export most of its products to are: Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France. Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom (UK), and Germany are considered to resemble Norway in language and culture (Hofstede 2023; Hofstede & Bond 1984). The United States (US) is the 9th-second most important export country, and there are 12 European countries among the 20 most important countries for Norwegian exports (SSB 2022b). The US is also familiar to many Norwegians, as of its cultural influence on popular music and movies. In addition to this export opportunity, the gain could be externally motivated by expecting a more interesting job after graduation because of taking part in the education abroad.

Pull factors as intrinsic gains

De Winter, Van Mol and De Valk (2021) suggest that intrinsic academic motivation is a selection factor for studying abroad, as the total learning experience was the most important factor in the overall satisfaction of inbound students in their study. This is further underpinned by a study by Civera et al. (2021) among 10.710 students from 35 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries enrolled in Erasmus mobility programmes. Their findings suggest that students from wealthier countries are less career-oriented than students from more poor OECD countries.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that the following pull factors impact students' choice of a host country: the availability of information and ease of obtaining the information, the host country and institution's reputation for quality and acknowledgment of its qualifications, as well as personal recommendations that the student received from parents, relatives, and friends. Students' intrinsic academic motivation pertains to their internal desire to acquire knowledge, achieve their academic objectives, and actively pursue intellectually stimulating academic opportunities (Vallerand et al. 1992). Students with higher academic achievements may perceive studying abroad as a distinctive opportunity to boost their performance or as a recognition of their diligent efforts. Initial research suggests that individuals who went abroad had higher grades prior to their departure (Cardwell 2020; Hiller 2016). Furthermore, Kim and Lawrence (2021) found in a recent study that students with better academic performance have higher aspirations to study abroad. The pull factors related to acquiring improved knowledge include the variety of courses offered at a foreign

university, the expertise of lecturers or facilitators, the reputation of the institution, the promotion and marketing effort, resources, and relationships that the institutions have with other public and private organisations (Mazzarol 1998).

Civera et al. (2021) found that students are motivated by the desire for personal and cultural experiences and that students from wealthier countries are more sensitive to such motivational factors. They suggest that these students do not pursue career enhancement but rather a different life experience. The experiential dimension becomes primary and, in some cases, overriding in the student's choice regarding studying abroad (Prazeres et al. 2017).

Cost, loss, or risk

Some foreign students report feelings of alienation and loneliness, discrimination, and a lack of intercultural engagement as problematic during their study period abroad (Hanassab 2006; Laufer & Gorup 2019; Lee & Rice 2007; Sawir et al. 2008; Yu & Moskal 2019). Similarly, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) suggest that racial discrimination, high cost of fees, high living expenses, unfamiliar physical climate and lifestyle, a lack of social links, travel, and social costs, as well as safety and crime, all are issues the student evaluates while considering studying abroad. Moreover, issues such as safety and accommodation influence the students' satisfaction (Huisman et al. 2022). Furthermore, Ward and Kennedy (1993) found that students perceived a greater level of social difficulty while studying abroad in countries with greater perceived cultural distance.

Profiling students according to their socio-demographic variables

In previous work, scholars such as Salisbury (2011) and Kim and Lawrence (2021) introduced the Integrated Student Choice Model, which assumes that students' socio-demographics, socioeconomic status, and cultural and social capital influence their intentions to study abroad. The research of Cordua and Netz (2022) indicates that students' socio-demographics strongly influence students' choice to study abroad. Hence, the decision to pursue studies abroad is shaped by micro-level factors associated with the student's personal circumstances, characteristics, and aspirations, including age, proficiency in foreign languages, prior exposure to international environments, financial resources, socioeconomic background, social connections, familial obligations, and the anticipated impact on their academic achievements (Netz 2015; Souto-Otero et al. 2013; Van Mol & Timmerman 2014).

Gender is also an issue regarding studying abroad, this even as Roy et al. (2019) find very little work on the role of gender in participation in student mobility. Netz et al. (2020) found that in Western countries, there is a higher increase of female students studying abroad than their male counterparts. Cordua and Netz (2022) found that to some extent, women's better academic performance during school could explain their better chances to study abroad. Another explanation offered by Cordua and Netz (2022) on why females tend to study abroad to a larger extent than males, is females' higher interest in language. In their study among 5.408 German students, women's substantially better self-assessed foreign language skills are among the most important factors explaining the gender gap in study abroad intent.

Methodology
Norway as context

This study takes place in a business school at a Norwegian university located in the north of Norway. Norway is a prosperous country in Northern Europe with a strong export-oriented economy. A significant proportion of young people pursue higher education. Norway has been categorised as an innovation-driven economy, and its workforce is actively involved in innovation projects (Alsos et al. 2014). The country's unemployment rate is low, typically ranging from 2% to 4% and is mainly because of structural factors. Business graduates have an excellent job outlook, often receiving employment offers before graduating from business schools. The local industry in Norway is primarily made up of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The study's context highlights the dynamic business environment of Norway, which is characterised by a highly educated workforce, a focus on innovation, and a robust economy with low unemployment rates.

Norwegian society and working life have an increasingly global character that requires international knowledge and competencies in politics and business to meet new dynamics between globalisation and localisation. 'Glocalisation' merges the globalisation of politics, business, and culture that becomes sedimented in local communities and conditions that absorbs and blends the global with the local distinctness. It demands knowledge and experience to operate in such dynamic contexts. This dynamic of glocalisation is the backdrop motivation for the Norwegian Government's strategy to increase student mobility across borders (White Paper 2020–2021). The Norwegian Government has an ambition that half of the study population should study abroad for half a year during their studies. The desired national effect of studying abroad is to increase the future generations' employees and leaders' international experience, knowledge, and competence that can meet glocalisation and to increase the nations' adaptability and competitiveness in the global challenges and complexities.

The ambition of the Norwegian Government was stated in a white paper published in 2020 named 'A World of Opportunities: International student mobility in higher education'. At the entrance of the year 2020, under 20.0% of the student population studied abroad (SSB 2022a). Naturally, student mobility was drastically reduced in the year 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the borders were reopened for mobility in mid-2022, the target figure of 50.0% student mobility was resumed. The ambition for half of the student population to cross borders is in strong contrast to the few students who actually study abroad. About 19.8% of the Norwegian students who took part of their education abroad

in 2021 studied business subjects (SSB 2022a). The SSB data also reveal that countries in Europe were the most popular host country, as much as 59.7% of the Norwegian students studying abroad went to one of the EU countries (Europe except the UK). The UK was very popular, alone attracting 24.2% of the abroad studying students, while the US and Canada in total attracted 12.3%, and Australia 1.8% and far-away countries in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Mid- and South-America in sum attracted 2.0% of the outbound students.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) report that acknowledgment of the qualifications achieved abroad is vital to the students in their decision to study abroad or not. Student credits earned abroad could easily be accepted by the home university as relevant for the student's study progress. Norway has joined the Bologna convention regarding the structure of higher education. The Bologna convention aims to harmonise quality and standards in higher education across Europe. The Bologna convention offers a coherent education system that facilitates student and staff mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications at universities abroad. As many as 48 participating countries have adopted a common educational system. The education system is based on a three-cycle higher education including bachelor, master, and doctoral studies. The bachelor's is for three years and the master's is for two years. The common structure includes a consolidating credits system, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, that determines course workload and grading scale (Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation 2005).

Students' engagement in researching studying abroad

One of the authors of this research article teaches applied quantitative methods to BSc business students. As a part of the quantitative element of a method course for 2nd-year business bachelor students, we engaged the students in a discussion in class on where why, and how they would like to take part of their study abroad. The students in the course are required to write a mini-thesis on a common theme, which in this case is 'studying abroad'. The teacher explained the structure of a thesis and the governmental wish for students to study abroad for a semester.

The course's applied quantitative methods section begins with a discussion of studying abroad and its pros and cons. The class discusses their motivation for studying abroad. This discussion is based on student input and an extensive literature review conducted by the teacher on studying abroad and its motivations. The students reflect on their thoughts about studying abroad, while the teacher feed in new topics when needed. They then regroup to sort out their main reasons and concerns, which the teacher records on a mind map. The class then discusses what insights survey data on studying abroad can provide using frequencies, *t*-tests, and correlations. The teacher structures the mind map into a survey, which all students complete before the next class. The students are then given a data set and grouped into smaller groups, where they receive assistance in doing their selected quantitative analysis for the four-page long mini-thesis.

This discussion resulted in a survey to which all 76 students taking the course replied. In the class, these data were then used as input for some simple quantitative analysis, building a basis for the students to do a short quantitative report as one of the exam elements of the course. The data were then collected through a web survey e-mailed to all students, and they all replied to it as it was a compulsory element of the course to jointly create our own data. The students themselves were to analyse the data and in their hand-in report interpret their findings.

This study investigates what students consider when selecting a host country for their potential study abroad, given that they need to take part of their study abroad. The study then includes issues such as how the student's life situation, characteristics, and preferences influence their choice of country. We then address students who have a choice and investigate their opportunities, their concerns, and their evaluations. We do so quantitatively as we would like to know more about the preferences and the volumes of such preferences.

The data and our respondents

There were 35 males and 41 females in the sample of 76 2nd year business bachelor students. Among these, eight males and 17 females have kids, 17 males, and 20 females were single, 25 males and 26 females worked besides studies, five males and three females had already done parts of their university study abroad, two males and two females reported an A as their average grade during their bachelor studies so far, 9 males and 11 females reported a B, 19 males and 23 females reported a C, and five males and five females reported a D as their average grade. Females reported on average to have already visited 9.4 countries, while males reported to have already visited 11.8 countries.

We had a discussion in class regarding ethics related to surveys and quantitative research designs. This survey was compulsory, and the students were more or less forced to select a country. The students were told upfront of the survey and that they did not need to reply to invasive questions or questions that did not fit them at all, and that we were to discuss such items later in class. The discussion revealed that none of the questions were invasive, but some were non-relevant. Among the 76 students, only 60 provided a preferred country. The discussion with the students indicated that they reported true answers to the questions as they themselves had to interpret their findings for their home exam, and it would be easier to do this if they could rely on the data. The students replied to the survey anonymously.

We asked the students to list the country they would like to select as their abroad country to study, given that they hypothetically *had* to take part of their study abroad. We then grouped these countries as indicated in Table 1. Table 1 also

shows the number of students who preferred a given country as their first choice of host country for a study abroad. Only 60 students chose to respond to this item, indicating that 16 felt it was totally irrelevant to study abroad.

Students are previously reported to have different motivations for wanting to study abroad in specific countries (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye 2011). Furthermore, Davis and Knight (2021) found that students doing the same programme, but in different countries, had different learning experiences because of the specific characteristics of destination country. Based upon this, we find data supporting grouping our destinations. We then grouped the countries according to the list of important trade partners (SSB 2022b), that is the US, the UK, and the European Union (EU). Australia was sorted as a separate category as it is a very popular host country for foreign students. The US, the UK, Germany, and Australia are the top four destinations for studying abroad (Civera et al. 2021). Then there were seven countries that are far away from Norway, either in the physical distance (Canada, South Africa) or the cultural distance (Brazil, China, Japan, and Russia) (Hofstede 2023). The physical distance from the home country has an influence on the student's willingness to study abroad (Rodríguez González, Bustillo Mesanza & Mariel 2011). Geographic and time proximity are important for students in their selection of a country for their abroad studies (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Cultural distance could also play an important role in how students experience their study abroad (Iskhakova et al. 2022). Inglehart (ed. 2004) and Beugelsdijk et al. (2018) define cultural distance as the degree to which shared norms and values between people in one country differ from those in another country.

Data analysis

We analyse the data by means of a principal correspondence analysis (PCrA) by the prcomp package in R. A PCrA could be regarded as a many-to-many regression where the results are presented as a map displaying how the variables relate to each other. Through PCrA, the six country groups were positioned in a multi-dimensional space by the 10 vectors representing the students' concerns and their socioeconomic characteristics (Greenacre 2010). The points in the map position the mass-middle point of the group.

TABLE 1: The countries students could imagine selecting for when studying abroad.†

Students 1st priority	Countries (number of countries)
US (23)	US (23)
UK (11)	England (10), Scotland (1)
EU (11)	Austria (1), Denmark (1), France (1), Germany (3), Iceland (1), Italy (1), Poland (1), Spain (2)
Australia (8)	Australia (8)
Far-away (7)	Brazil (1), Canada (1), China (1), Japan (1), Russia (1), South Africa (2)
None (16)	Would not go abroad for studies

US, United States; UK, United Kingdom; EU, European Union.
†, The 17 countries the 76 students could select as host countries for a study abroad. The countries were grouped into five country groups in addition to the one none-travel group.

In this study, we would like to know how some variables (characteristics of the students and their preferences and concerns related to a study abroad) influence other variables (such as which country/region is preferred for studying abroad). The predicted variables, that is, the groups of countries (see Table 1), are then represented by positions on the map. The predicting variables are then depicted as vectors originating from the centre of the map. It is also possible to superimpose other variables into such a map, where the values of a given variable are represented as a point. The variable 'gender' is among the variables used to predict the positions of the country groups on the map and is then represented by a vector. This vector indicates how gender influences the positioning of the countries (see Figure 2). In addition, the gender values male and female, are passively regressed into the map to show how the different genders relate to the country groups (see Figure 3), then male and female are represented as a point.

Table 2 shows the variables used to position the six country groups in the PCrA-map. The list of predicting variables describes the living situation and the concerns of the students. We include topics such as gender, if they have kids to care for, and if they have work commitments. Then some descriptive variables depict their concern for security (healthcare, crime), their academic confidence (coping with the language, strong enough academically), and if it gains them (pay off in the long run, useful to know other cultures, relevant to their career). The numbers in the first column are the abbreviation shown in the map, the 3-character long text is the label shown in Appendix 1, and the following text is the item wording. A01, Gender, was measured as Male (1) and Female (2), while A03 and A07 were measured as Yes (1) and No (2), the other items were measured by a 7-point Likert scale where 1 was Totally Disagree, 4 were Neutral and 7 was Totally Agree on a statement: 'To what extent do you Disagree or Agree the following statements is valid for you?'

TABLE 2: Predicting variables used to position the country groups in the principal correspondence analysis map.

Code	Label	Item text
1	A01	Gender
2	A03	I care for children living at home
3	A07	I have work commitments
4	C07	I'm confident about the healthcare system abroad
5	D15	Fear of crime prevents me from studying abroad
6	D03	I'm good enough in English to cope
7	D06	A stay abroad will be relevant to my career
8	D09	A stay abroad will pay off in the long run
9	D22	It will be useful to learn to know other cultures
10	D05	I'm strong enough academically

TABLE 3: Passively regressed variable values.

Socio-demographic variable	Groups
A01 – Gender	Male or female
A03 – Parenting or parental status	Kids or no Kids
A07 – Job commitments or job obligations	Job or no Job
Previous university study experience	Only domestic / studied abroad before
Grades or academic performance	A,B,C,D

Table 3 shows the variables that are passively regressed into the map, which allows expression of which students are most associated with the country groups' position. These variables describe how males and females, those students with and without kids, and students with or without job obligations or work commitments related to studying abroad. We also include an item showing how students' average grade relates to studying abroad in different countries or regions. We also include a dichotomous variable revealing if they already have had a study experience abroad before, either at high school or at university as Iskhakova et al. (2022) expect the prior international experience to influence student's choices for studying abroad.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Figure 1 shows the scree plot output from the PCrA. The scree plot shows that the eigenvalue for dimension 1 (the *x*-axis) and dimension 2 (the *y*-axis) are higher than 1 and could be analysed (Hair et al. 1998). Dimension 1 explains 55.0% of the variance, while dimension 2 further explains 29.1% of the variance. This sums to 84.1% of the variance.

A summed average of the six country groups was used to enhance further cross-study comparison. The 10 variables containing students' characteristics and preferences were compared with their preferred country group (Greenacre 2010). These summed averages are then displayed in the Appendix 1. Through PCrA, the six groups were positioned in a multi-dimensional space by the vectors describing the 10 predicting variables. Figure 2 offers the overall covariance bi-plot, where the vector describes the direction and the force for the positioning of the different country groups or regions.

The position of the points and the direction of the vectors invite an interpretation of the dimensions and the axis, and then of the quadrants that the map depicts. The left side of the
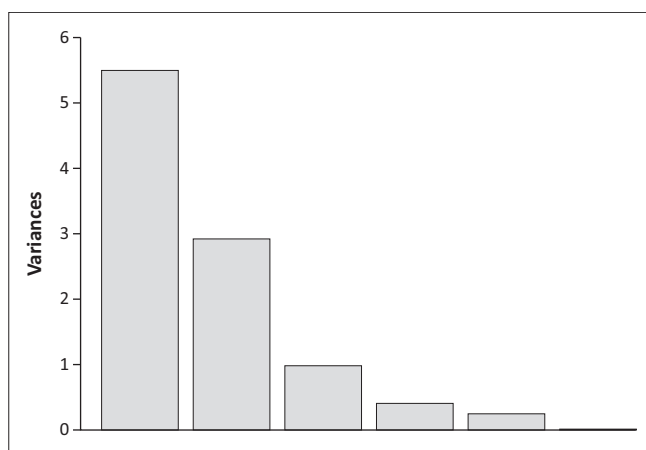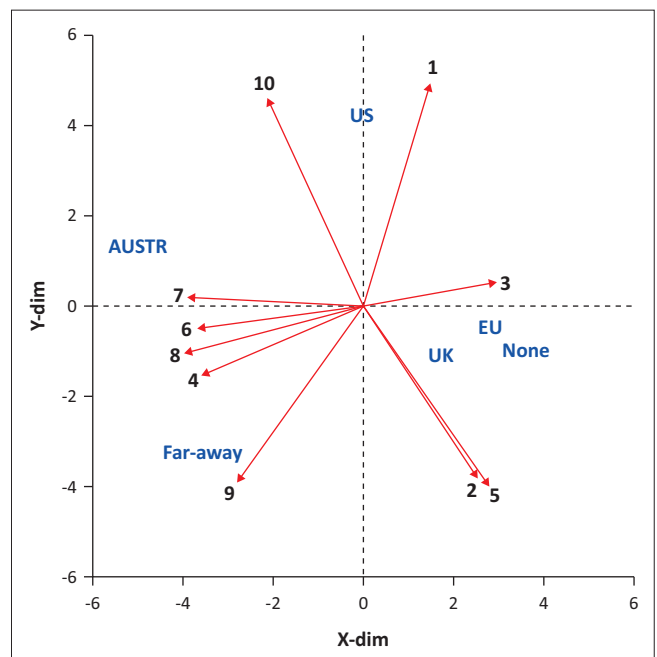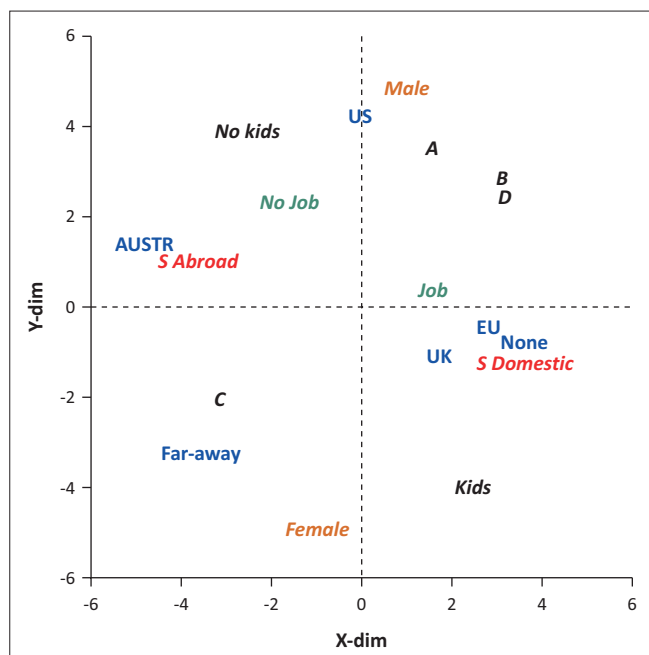
first dimension, the *x*-axis, is decided by variables 4 (confidence in the healthcare system), 6 (good enough in English), 7 (career relevance), 8 (pay off in the long run), and 9 (interest in other cultures). The right side is decided by variable 3 (work commitment). The right side is then related to a cost/benefit analysis of going abroad where the gain is career relevance, interest in other cultures, and hope that it will pay off in the long run. The gain is balanced by a concern for being able to cope in the foreign country and a concern for own health. The left side, decided by job commitment, is then related to other means for getting an interesting curriculum vitae (CV), or the need for money.

For the second dimension, the *y*-axis, the top is decided by variables 1 (gender) and 10 (a belief in one's own academic strength), while the bottom is decided by variables 2 (parenting) and 5 (fear of crime). The top is then related to a gender issue or academic confidence, while the bottom relates to whether it is possible or wise to go abroad. As a parent one has to secure one's kids as well as oneself. Hence, safety is a strong concern for parents.

This then offers a map of four quadrants. Upper right where the cost-benefit is combined with academic viability, here we find the US. Studying in the US is expensive, but the US is academically very well-reputed. In the lower right corner of Figure 2, where the cost-benefit is combined with an analysis of how wise and how possible it is to stay and study abroad. This is where we find students preferring the UK, and EU countries as well as the non-travelling students. The UK has traditionally offered well-reputed education and it is well known by Norwegian students. European Union countries are similar to Norway in many ways, both regarding living

FIGURE 1: Scree plot displaying the eigenvalues for the principal correspondence analysis dimensions.

Note: The red vectors build the axis, the axis positions the blue points.
AUSTR, Australia; US, United States; UK, United Kingdom; EU, European Union.

FIGURE 2: The overall covariance bi-plot placing groups of countries in a map of students' preferences and concerns.

AUSTR, Australia; US, United States; UK, United Kingdom; EU, European Union.

FIGURE 3: Positioning the passively imposed group-values into the principal correspondence analysis-map.

An interpretation

The results show that students consider their living situation, the safety and usefulness of their potential study abroad, the benefit of alternative use of time, to what extent the student view studying abroad as academically possible, and whether it is possible and wise to do so, when selecting the host country for their potential study stay abroad.

Our study is guided by a set of three research questions. Our third research question relates to: Do the students associate different countries or regions differently? Our data indicate that the students associate a different set of benefits and costs or drawbacks to different countries or regions. The students associated the US with good learning opportunities suited for high achievers. Europe together with the UK was considered like the Norwegian offerings related to living conditions and academic offerings, they are easily accessible, and the costs and benefits are predictable. The UK is considered more accessible than countries within the EU. Australia is regarded as exotic, while still Western and familiar. The more far-away countries were exotic and unfamiliar, preferred by the experienced traveling student.

Our second research question is regarding which factors Norwegian business students consider when selecting a host country for their study abroad. The factors that seem to influence the choice of Norwegian business students in their decision to take part of their education abroad is their life situation at home regarding family, job, and such obligations. Also influential is the expected living condition in the host country, how their health and safety could be ensured, if the stay is relevant for their future career and if the stay offers interesting learning opportunities both culturally and academically. It is also important that the students feel confident that they will master the abroad study situation regarding language and academic content and demand. The results show that students perceive that different countries or regions provide different benefits and drawbacks related to a credit mobility study situation.

Finally, we also investigated the extent to which one could profile the students' preferences for studying abroad according to their socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, parental status, job obligations, and academic performance. We see that the students who prefer the US, tend to be male, have a very good grade (A), and that the student has no job commitments/obligations. The students who prefer the EU or the UK, have done their studies in Norway, have work obligations, and have kids at home, these students have earned grades B or D. The students who could see themselves studying in an exotic host country tend to be females and report their average grade to be C. The students who prefer Australia tend to not have kids, have done parts of their study abroad already, and do not have job commitments and/or obligations.

conditions and academically, they are easily accessible, and the costs and benefits are predictable. Still, they are less preferred as host countries for Norwegian students than the UK. Europe, including the UK, is considered a safe place to go. At the right end of Figure 2, we find the students who do not intend to travel abroad or find it impossible to do so. The lower left combines the analysis of how wise it is combined or balanced with the benefits it provides. Here we find countries far away and more exotic differing from Norway in several aspects. The upper right combines the academic possibility with a reflection on the benefits studying abroad offers. Here we find Australia, a country selected by many who would like an exotic location combined with benefits often associated with Western-quality educational offerings. Australia provides good educational offerings in a well-structured way for incoming students (Zhai, Gao & Wang 2019).

Figure 3 shows the positioning of the passively imposed group values into the PCrA-map. The procedure for passively impose groups, is to regress the groups to the PCrA-map without influencing the positions of the vectors and points defining the PCrA-map. From this, we could provide some hints as to which types of students would prefer to go to which country and region, given that they *had* to study abroad. We see that the students who prefer the US, tend to be male, have a very good average grade (A), and they do not have jobs or kids. The students prefer the UK, or Europe or prefer to stay home, have done their studies in Norway, have a job, have kids at home, and have a B or D as the average grade earned so far in their BSc. The students who could see themselves studying in an exotic host country tend to be females and report their average grade to be C. The students who prefer Australia tend to not have kids, have done parts of their study abroad already, and do not have job commitments.

Conclusion and implications

This study sheds light on the motivational and constraining factors that students consider while deciding to take parts of their study abroad or not, hence we study students' motivation for partaking in credit mobility. Our study relates to the first and second stages in the McMahon (1992) push-pull stage model; study at home or abroad, and then which foreign country to choose. We applied the stage model as a frame for our investigation, knowing that the students do not necessarily need to follow all stages and that the student can revise a conclusion on a previous stage. Furthermore, the study investigated the influence of socio-demographic variables. Therefore, we study whether students' preferences for studying abroad can be profiled according to their socio-demographic characteristics.

Theoretical implications

The push and pull model were developed to explain the decision process among students from developing countries opting to take part of their study in developed countries. The implicit hierarchical three-stage model allows sorting out of elements of such decision processes also for students from a developed country. It does not equally well assist in understanding the concerns evaluated by the student in the actual decision.

Here we use the push-pull model as a frame for sorting the students' decisions. We address the decision for going abroad or not and which country to choose and the elements within this decision. The investigated students are in a position where they are supposed to decide whether to apply or not for doing parts of their study abroad. This study reveals that our respondents included other issues into consideration in this decision than suggested by the original model, which focused on students from developing countries. We see that our students also associate other issues with the push and pull components of the model.

The push and pull elements described in McMahon (1992) push-pull stage model relate to half of the cost–benefit analysis that the self-determination theory proposed by Gagné and Deci (2005) suggests. The push and pull factors relate to the gain from action. The push and pull model does not equally account for the cost side of the student's decision. Push factors propose the student into credit mobility. The push factors relate to the student's perception of the need for international knowledge and experience, as governments expressed expectations as well as the expressed need for international expertise among potential employers. This is then an instrumental decision balancing the expected later gain and present investment by the action, that is an extrinsic motivation. The pull factors relate to how the student perceives the study environment and the learning gained from the action. This relates more to the intrinsic motivation of the student.

Adding self-determination theory (Gagné & Deci 2005) to the McMahon (1992) push-pull stage model opens for a balanced decision, as it allows the decision model to also include a cost element. Our study shows that the student balances cost elements such as fear of crime, health issues, language difficulties, and misaligned academic content and learning environments with the gain. Then the concept of cultural distance introduced by Hofstede and Bond (1984) and Hofstede (2023) permits us to reflect upon which countries offer environments where such costly conditions are more or less eminent. We then suggest that the McMahon (1992) push-pull stage model should be revised to include or emphasise cost–benefit elements as important in students' decisions regarding studying abroad. Adding self-determination theory (Gagné & Deci 2005) to the equation allowed us to understand the student's choice situation better.

Roy et al. (2019) only finds five studies that compared mobile with non-mobile students while studying factors students choose regarding study abroad, and ask for more studies researching the motivation among students at a time when they are to make such a decision. They claim that pre-departure data are more likely to provide a better understanding of the issue. We asked students about their preferences. There is a long way from preferences to actual action. If we instead investigated which students actually went, and where they went, we would reveal students' actions. We chose to study preferences, as actions are limited to the available offer, and the offer and the want might differ. Some investigate students' preferences for conditions to study abroad, among students who have returned. The risk is that the student then seeks to rationalise their choice retrospectively. We ask students about their preferences at a time when they are to make such a decision, and where such an option is real. By our approach, we can inform universities and governments about students' preferences, these inputs could then be transformed into offerings, allowing supply and demand to be related to where to study abroad to be met in a better way. Therefore, this study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the motivational and constraining factors experienced by students when they have to consider taking part of their study abroad through credit mobility at higher education institutions.

Practical implications

We here provide practical advice to stakeholders in higher education based on the new insights derived from the present study. Universities could gain from offering credit mobility study abroad situations serving the different needs of different students, there is no such one-size-fits-all in studying abroad. If a university knows its students well, it could shape its offerings accordingly. Some students are adventurous and would like to explore exotic far-away locations, some are industrious and seek advanced learning situations while others prefer more modest challenges in more familiar settings. For some others again, studying abroad is not possible because of their living situation and their other commitments.

The latter group would be harder to tempt to take part of their study abroad. This as the Norwegian government defines studying abroad as staying away for more than three months. Staying away from family obligations for that long time is impossible for many of today's students. The Norwegian governments could install other, shorter, studying abroad possibilities to remedy this.

Students would gain from evaluating all sides of the pro and cons regarding engaging in credit mobility or studying abroad. A well-reflected decision increases the odds of a successful stay abroad. Such a considered choice is possible when the student is aware of his or her criteria and preferences. Administrative staff at universities responsible for outbound students has a responsibility to prepare the student for such a choice, as well as informing on the matching options. One way of motivating students for a study credit mobility element could be to invite students who have already done such abroad courses, to inform on the pros and cons of this to other students considering such undertaking. This will ensure that the students are informed on issues important to them, by students who know why this is important information. Business owners and potential employers could ease the decision process by being explicit on which international competencies and experiences they value, allowing students to select actions that respond to their call.

The internationalisation of higher education is a growing phenomenon. Therefore, universities and governments should be aware of and understand the different socio-demographic variables such as gender, parental status, job obligations, and academic performance that can influence students' preferences for studying abroad to better meet students' needs when developing and designing credit mobility policies and offerings.

Limitations and a way forward

Our results both align with, and challenge previous studies and the suggestions derived from our theoretical framework. All the same, our sample is small. Principal correspondence analysis is robust enough to discern differences in small sample sizes and allows for small groups (Greenacre & Primicerio 2013). Even so, we urge to interpret our findings with care. We explore preferences for credit mobility among Norwegian business students. A larger sample, and other student populations in other environmental contexts, might provide other, more nuanced results. We suggest further studies in other contexts.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

B.W.Å and J.B.D shared the work equally.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, B.W.Å., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors and the publisher.

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Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: Input to the principal correspondence analysis: The means for the predicting variables per country group.

Label	US	UK	Far-away	Europe	Australia	None
A01	1.608696	1.454545	1.142857	1.500000	1.428571	1.333333
A03	1.043478	1.545455	1.285714	1.500000	1.142857	1.400000
A07	1.652174	1.545455	1.571429	1.700000	1.571429	1.800000
C07	5.304348	5.090909	6.142857	5.500000	6.000000	5.200000
D15	2.217391	2.818182	2.857143	3.000000	1.857143	3.066667
D03	5.565217	5.454545	6.142857	5.200000	6.428571	5.666667
D06	4.260870	3.909091	5.285714	3.900000	5.571429	2.533333
D09	3.739130	4.000000	5.142857	3.500000	5.571429	3.600000
D22	5.000000	5.363636	6.000000	5.200000	5.428571	5.066667
D05	5.521739	4.818182	5.000000	4.900000	5.285714	4.800000

US, United States; UK, United Kingdom.