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STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES AS AN EDUTOURISM SEGMENT FOR SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: This study focuses on factors influencing international students' selection of South Africa as a study-abroad destination. Using selected universities as a case study, a mixed methods approach was used for data collection by targeting 130 study-abroad students at the selected universities and 5 representatives at the international offices at these universities. Key indications from the data noted (1) a European dominance in the demographic distribution of participants and (2) a steady interest in the study-abroad programme niche. Furthermore, (3) a combination of pull and push factors was considered essential to marketing efforts in attracting prospective students. The significance of the study lies in underscoring the importance of combining known motives and marketing efforts to attract prospective students. The nuanced absence of regional participation and the study's enhancement of theory development in this context was noted, and pathways for future research were proposed.

Key words: Edutourism, study abroad, student profile, motivations, South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

International higher education, as a distinct element of tourism attraction, can be a cornerstone of knowledge exchange, focusing on both the formal and informal sectors (Budayasa et al., 2018). The phenomenon of cross-border mobility in higher education, although relatively small, has attracted unprecedented growth in contemporary times and is progressively venturing into novel structures, including the mobility of students and faculty members, the movement of educational programmes and institutions as well as the introduction of online courses facilitated via advancements in technology (Bhandari et al., 2018). Studying abroad presents students with a unique opportunity as it represents more than travelling to another destination; it represents a pedagogical activity with several results and learning goals (Abrahams et al., 2023). The benefits of "education with travel" represent a key factor for expanding the edutourism sector (Eduan, 2019). Globally, there has been increased competitiveness for study abroad programmes, with many nations, including Canada, Germany, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa revealing bold plans to attract and enrol students/faculty members (Abrahams et al., 2023; Cheung et al., 2019). However, the growth in study abroad enrolment numbers saw a 15% drop due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Valls-Figuera et al., 2023).

Current data indicates that the number of students from abroad has returned to pre-pandemic levels (Open Doors, 2023). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that the number of internationally mobile students is projected to reach eight million by 2025 (OECD, 2023). This statistic is a testament to the growing popularity of studying abroad, highlighting that more and more students are recognising the value of international education and taking advantage of its opportunities, a trend which is likely to continue in the coming years as more students seek to gain a global perspective and expand their horizons (Abrahams et al., 2023; Doerr, 2012).

According to IEASA (2020:25), South Africa's international incoming student profile is dominated by African students, a statistic which is in contrast with recent findings that most study abroad students are made up of students from countries from the Global North, specifically North America and Europe (Abrahams and Bama, 2023). Although students from over 170 countries were registered between 2015 and 2018, the OECD Education at a Glance (2021) report 2018 noted that South Africa only attracted 3.6% of the total market share of international study-abroad students and was the only African country featured in the report. Many factors influence international student mobility trends at the individual, institutional, national, and global levels. Personal ambitions and aspirations for improved job opportunities, a shortage of high-quality higher educational institutions at home, the ability of higher education institutions abroad to attract talent, and government programmes to encourage cross-border mobility for education are also some of the considered factors (Bhandari et al., 2020).

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Table 1. Differences between the various study-abroad programmes
Source: Adapted from Study Abroad and Beyond (2022:1); University of Minnesota (2022:1); GEO, (n.d.:1); NJIT (n.d)

	Study-abroad programme	Exchange Programme	Faculty-Led Programme	Research Programme	Language Learning Programme	Independent Study Abroad/Freemovers	Non-credit Programme
Programme description	Organisations like CIEE, IES Global, SIT, Semester at Sea and DIS run these programmes, which contribute to the extensive range of programming options available to students. Many provider programmes come with pre-packaged accommodation options, on-site programme staff, optional weekend and day trips, an in-depth site orientation, specific group flight options, and more. Cultural exchanges, internships, volunteer opportunities, and other services are shared among programme providers.	An exchange allows students to enrol directly at a foreign university for a semester or an entire academic year. Students receive access to nearly all the university's courses in a variety of academic subjects. Exchanges frequently have lower overall costs than similar-length programmes. This is because exchange students have fewer organised excursions, on-site services, and individualised support.	Most faculty-led programmes are created to meet specific major and minor requirements in the faculty leader's department. These are usually short-term programmes with a pre-planned itinerary and a group that travels together.	In addition to classwork, some programmes have a research component. This applies to both field and laboratory research. If students want to create their research portfolio for future graduate school applications or a senior thesis, this could be a fantastic method to obtain hands-on research experience.	These programmes concentrate on language acquisition and are typically demanding and immersive! Students frequently participate in cultural activities and excursions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the target culture and language.	This programme allows students to work directly with the preferred host university's international student office in order to enrol as a visiting student for a semester. The international student office will then provide information about housing, visas, classes, orientation, and other relevant requirements.	Work, internship, volunteer, and teaching English programmes are examples of non-academic programmes that are not eligible for financial aid.
Duration	Ranges from 3 weeks - an academic year	Ranges from a semester - to an academic year	2-6 week or semester courses	Ranges from a semester - to an academic year	Ranges from a semester - to an academic year	A semester	Ranges from a semester - to an academic year
Credits	Credits are awarded for each course taken that can be applied towards a degree.	Credits earned from overseas universities are transfer credits	For most institutions, the programmes are short-term, led by a current faculty member that offers resident credits at home university	Credits are awarded for each course taken that can be applied towards a degree	Some programmes allow students to bring back a large number of language credits, even up to the equivalent of one year of language coursework	A contract is drawn up between the student and the institution that specifies how many credits will be provided upon successful completion of the project and/or research.	No academic credits granted
Fees	The student would pay the programme provider who would then be responsible for all payments towards fees	Depending on the agreements between the two universities either the scholarship or host university would cover all tuition costs	Depending on the programme, it is usually covered by a scholarship or an agreement between the two universities	Depending on the programme, the provider or student should cover all tuition and fees	Depending on the programme, the provider or student should cover all tuition and fees	The student is responsible for payments towards tuition and fees	Most non-credit programmes abroad are often unpaid and require students to pay an administrative fee in order to participate.
Travel arrangements	The programme provider would arrange and cover all travel costs	Depending on the agreements between the two universities either the scholarship or host university would arrange and cover travelling costs	Covered by scholarship if applicable or the host university	Covered by scholarship if applicable or the host university or student would need to arrange and cover all travel costs	Depending on the programme, the provider or student should make all travel arrangements	The international office would advise on all travel arrangements which the student would have to cover	Depending on the programme, the provider or student should make all travel arrangements
Housing arrangements	The programme provider would arrange and cover housing costs	Depending on the agreements between the two universities either the scholarship or host university would arrange and cover housing costs	Covered by scholarship if applicable or the host university	Covered by scholarship if applicable or the host university or student would need to arrange and cover housing costs	Homestays are the most common form of housing, which is arranged by the international office or student	The international office would advise on housing which the student would have to cover	Depending on the programme, the provider or student should make housing arrangements

Concurrently, IEASA (2015:8) claims that "geographic region, the quality of home-based higher education, the ability to transfer credits between countries, historical connections between countries, language, the perceived quality of a country's education and its accessibility, affordability, the ranking of universities and the 'employability' of qualifications obtained", are factors that influence mobility trends and motivates students to travel abroad.

There are several reasons why students study abroad, and many variables need to be considered, including which country and university are chosen (Eder et al., 2010). While there is a wealth of research on the motivations of international students to travel abroad (Casas Trujillo et al., 2020; Harazneh et al., 2018; Ozoglu et al., 2015; Anderson and Bhati, 2012; Ivy, 2010; Lu et al., 2009), there are comparatively few studies that examine the phenomenon in the Global South, particularly from a South African perspective. To attract prospective study-abroad students, it is essential to investigate the socio-demographic and motivational aspects that may impact their preferences for studying abroad (Åmo and Doornich, 2023; Nissen et al., 2022). Furthermore, as was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, an over-reliance on the Global North international student market is ill-advised, and marketing initiatives targeting prospective students from the Global South should be prioritised and developed.

Consequently, the current study seeks to (a) understand the profiles and motives of study-abroad students in South Africa, (b) identify the promotional and marketing strategies for attracting students, and (c) provide insight into strategies which could be leveraged to promote study-abroad travel within the South African context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tomasi et al. (2020) contend that internationally mobile students cross international boundaries to participate in educational activities at receiving destinations. Although the basic idea behind study-abroad programmes is the same: studying in another country, there are distinct differences that vary by cost, location, length, and programme type (Bama and Abrahams, 2023). Accordingly, seven study-abroad programmes were identified while delving through the extant literature—study-abroad programmes, exchange programmes, faculty-led programmes, research programmes, language learning programmes, independent study abroad programmes and non-credit programmes (Study Abroad and Beyond, 2022; University of Minnesota, 2022; Global Education Oregon [GEO], n.d.; New Jersey Institute of Technology [NJIT], n.d.). Study abroad students are not homogenous and have distinct impetuses for pursuing international experiences, such as an international cultural experience, the prestige of attending a world-class university, or more unswervingly linked to employment opportunities (Kanwar and Carr, 2020). Tabulated in Table 1 are the differences sourced from various university databases highlighting several factors that benchmark each programme; an understanding of these factors allows for a better grasp of the characteristics of each of the seven programmes.

Considering the nature of studies into the nature of edutourism in South Africa (Abrahams and Bama, 2022; Boekstein, 2017; Donaldson and Gatsinzi, 2005; Henama, 2013; McGladdery and Lubbe, 2017a; 2017b), most have focused mainly on defining edutourism from a South African perspective, as well as highlighting the benefits in terms of fostering global learning and addressing issues of poverty and inequality. For instance, Donaldson and Gatsinzi (2005) discussed foreign students as tourists and Boekstein (2017) analysed whether English language learners were students or tourists. Additionally, Henama (2013) explored the strategies of tourism, edutourism and global mobility in addressing issues of poverty and inequality, while McGladdery and Lubbe (2017b) proposed a new process model for educational tourism at the school level. More recently, Bama and Abrahams (2023) examined the effects of COVID-19 on edutourism, focusing on the study abroad segment and the prospects of the sector within the South African context.

The paucity of broader studies in the South African context highlights the need for further empirical inquiries into edutourism in South Africa, in this case, focussing on understanding the profiles of study-abroad edutourism stakeholders. Although Africa possesses a diverse culture, abundant natural resources, and a substantially good educational system, many African youths who reside there often dream about participating in tertiary education abroad, whether for shorter periods [credit-mobile students] or for the entirety of a degree program [degree-mobile students] (David and Masaki, 2023). As noted, consequently, destinations in the Global North are frequently featured in decisions to participate in a study abroad programme (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). Thus, these student migration flows often advantage Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia (Brooks and Waters, 2011; David and Masaki, 2023). As such, this study aims to propose strategies which could be implemented to attract the regional (African) study-abroad population, which extant research suggests is prone to gravitating towards the Global North in most instances (Brooks and Waters, 2011; David and Masaki, 2023; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023).

Despite evidence that a growing share of international students emanate from and move towards the Global South, the international student migration literature has focused mainly on students in or from the Global North and their experiences in programmes such as Erasmus (Hallberg Adu, 2019).

As highlighted in Figure 1, it is observed that while Asia is a significant source of international students (52%), Europe constitutes a primary source (16%) and a significant destination (39%). This suggests that more students from the Global North (Europe and North America) are studying abroad, and these regions are often selected as study-abroad destinations. In this regard, it is warranted to consider these power dynamics in relation to students from the Global North and within the Global South, particularly in Africa (South Africa). Nevertheless, regional (African) students, like students from other parts of the world, may choose to study in the Global North for a variety of reasons, such as quality of education, diversity of programs, research opportunities, employment opportunities, English as a medium of instruction, cultural exposure, internationalisation of education, political stability and safety, access to resources, visa and immigration opportunities, global networking, and perceived quality of life (Bhandari et al., 2018; David and Masaki, 2023).

However, international students' motivations and recruitment cannot be independent of the intersectional influences of historical, geographical, economic, political, and cultural contexts, as is highlighted in the global literature by the small number of international students who choose to study in developing or emerging nations (Gyamera and Asare, 2023). The current enquiry, therefore, should shed light on the South African context.

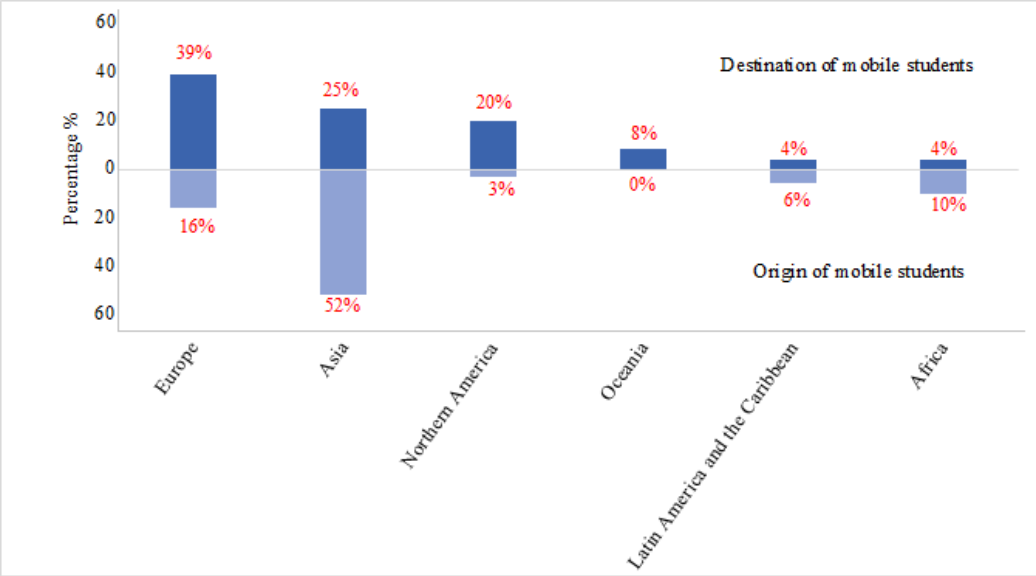

Figure 1. Destination and origin of international students across the continents (Source: Guillerme, 2022)

Many institutions in emerging destinations such as South Africa have worked hard to reposition themselves to compete with other universities worldwide for the attention of international students, following global trends. These include creating mission statements, growing current programmes, working with "prestigious" institutions abroad, and using the counsel and direction of international experts (Gyamera, 2015). Despite certain improvements, these higher education institutions draw comparatively fewer students (Statista, 2023). Therefore, a concerted focus is needed for these institutions to reposition themselves as worthy competitors. This study aims to shed light on a better understanding of the decision-making process of study-abroad students in the South African context and the Global South more generally.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theoretical frameworks seek to explain students' profiles and motivations for studying abroad. A familiar theory for understanding travel motivation is the "push and pull" model, which has been used to describe international ecotourists decision-making processes while choosing edutourism destinations (Statista, 1977). The core concept of this model supposes that an individual's choice of a travel destination is broken down into two factors.

Push factors encourage the student to study abroad, whereas pull factors entice the student to a particular region, nation, or university (Åmo and Doornich, 2023). If the student chooses to study abroad, the model shows a sequence for choosing a destination and then a university (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Additionally, social and psychological factors often trigger the desire to study abroad. Dann's theory of push and pull motivations (1981), when extrapolated by Crompton's socio-psychological motivations (1979) and Pearce and Lee's travel career patterns (TCP) (2005), illustrates how different theories are related in that students who study abroad develop a desire to advance, whether it be academically, mentally, or physically, (Abrahams et al., 2023).

According to Eder et al. (2010:233), deciding to participate in a study-abroad programme includes a complex set of factors, including the decision to explore studying abroad, which country to choose, and which institution. Several researchers have attempted to identify international students' motives; it is evident that various factors motivate the respondents to study abroad, such as cost, family, better job prospects, quality, environmental, regulatory, cultural, political, safety and social factors (Casas Trujillo et al., 2020; Harazneh et al., 2018; Ozoglu et al., 2015; Anderson and Bhati, 2012; Ivy, 2010; Lu et al., 2009). Intriguingly, Prazeres (2017) investigated students from the Global North and their motives for participating in short-term international exchanges in the Global South and discovered that students see these experiences as chances to "leave their comfort zone" and develop a stronger sense of self. From there, it explored the idea of a "comfort zone" and examined why young people study or intern in the Global South. This revealed that being removed from familiar and comfortable environments—physical, emotional, and cultural—is conducive to self-awareness and self-change.

The characteristics of the study-abroad student profile are critical factors in understanding the nature of students who opt for study-abroad mobilities in South Africa. As noted by Steber (2017), profiling is the process of cultivating insight, facts, and knowledge about the target audience's personalities. To identify the characteristics of tourists, socio-demographic and travel motivational/intention variables are typically utilised in tourism research. Age, gender, income, marital status, occupation, education, and nationality are the main socio-demographic factors.

According to Cordua and Netz (2022), students' socio-demographic characteristics significantly impact their decision to study abroad. As a result, the decision to pursue studies abroad is influenced by micro-level variables related to the

student's personal circumstances, traits, and goals, such as age, language proficiency, prior exposure to international environments, financial resources, socioeconomic background, social connections, familial obligations, and the expected impact on their academic achievements (Souto-Otero et al., 2013; Van Mol and Timmerman, 2014; Netz, 2015). The Integrated Student Choice model is predicated on the notion that students' intentions to study abroad are influenced by sociodemographic traits, financial situation, cultural and social capital, and habitus, which is shaped by social class, educational and home environments (Salisbury et al., 2009). The campus environment can expand a student's habitus, which offers possibilities to increase social, cultural, and human capital (Kim and Lawrence, 2021). Social capital describes how different social networks and organisations allow students to access materials, assistance, and knowledge. Cultural capital is the sum of a person's knowledge, values, and beliefs from their ancestors' social classes and formal education. Unlike financial capital, which primarily represents money resources obtained from social class membership, human capital comprises academic preparation and accomplishments (Salisbury et al., 2009; Kim and Lawrence, 2021).

Kim and Lawrence (2019), Salisbury (2011), and Salisbury et al. (2010) assert that the Integrated Student Choice Model (ISCM) posits a three-stage decision-making process for studying abroad. Accordingly, prospective students first create an educational goal (in this regard, a propensity to study abroad), then recognise and weigh the benefits and drawbacks of chances (through discovering programmes and determining opportunity costs), and then pick which course of action to take (Kim and Lawrence, 2019). Students' habitus and capital frame the formulation of ambitions (intentions) and decisions to study abroad and entail balancing the costs and benefits of possibilities and selecting one that maximises benefits (rational choice). The model presupposes that the student habitus (campus) provides an important context that can broaden a student's habitus by offering opportunities to deepen their social, cultural, and human capital (Petzold and Peter, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research context

The Western Cape Province of South Africa labelled the “Rainbow” nation due to the diversification of people and climate seasons, is one of nine provinces that draw the most tourists during peak seasons (SA-Venues, 2023). The province is known for its agriculture, wine and tourism industries (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). The area is also acknowledged for its higher educational institutes (IEASA, 2020). As illustrated by Figure 2, there are four universities in the Western Cape, namely the University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Western Cape (UWC), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Stellenbosch University (SU). Three are listed among the top 2000 universities globally (South Africa - The Good News, 2021; Centre for World University Rankings, 2022). According to IEASA (2020), UCT and SU are amongst the oldest universities in South Africa. Moreover, CPUT, with campuses in Cape Town, Bellville, Mowbray and Wellington, is the only university of technology and the largest university in the province.

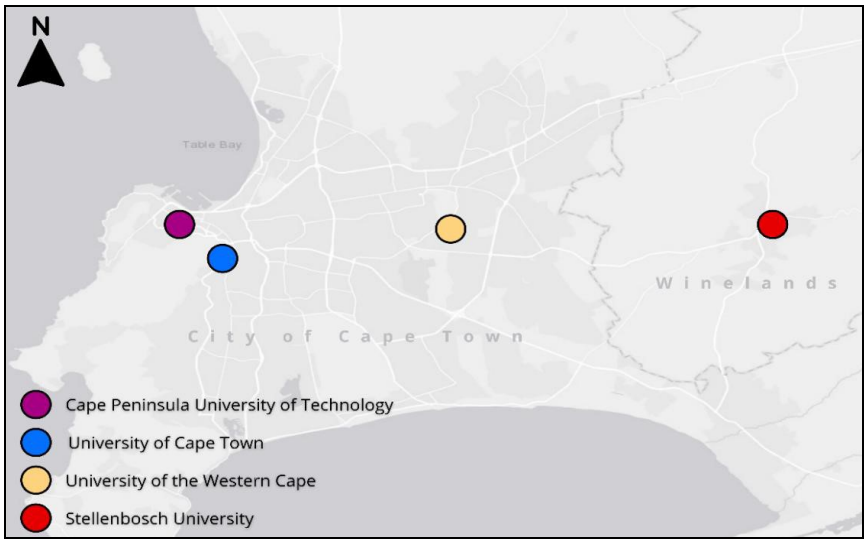

Figure 2. Universities in the Western Cape (Source: Author’s construct)

Data collection and analysis

For this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. The quantitative data were collected in two phases. Phase one between September 2020 and October 2021 and phase two between February – July 2023, via a questionnaire distributed among foreign students through the international offices of each of the universities. The data collection tool included questions about respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics, tourist activities during their study-abroad sojourn and reasons for choosing South Africa. With the average population of 726 foreign students at the universities between 2019–2021, an estimated sample size of 131 was decided upon.

In total, 130 responses were received at the end of the data collection period, and analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. For the qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2020 and December 2021 using purposive sampling with 5 key informant personnel [KIP01 – KIP05] (3 at international offices of the targeted HEIs in the WC and 2 coordinators from German

universities). The inclusion of coordinators from two German universities was given the fact that the biggest group of foreign students at the four universities were from Germany. Transcripts were pulled from the recorded interviews, and a content analysis was conducted to highlight common themes associated with the study's aim.

The findings, as collated, present (a) the demographic details of the sample, (b) factors influencing students' choice of South Africa as a study-abroad destination in terms of descriptive presentations and thematic annotations; discussions will accompany these presentations and focus on the potential implications of the responses collated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic profiles of respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of the respondents according to which a homogenous pattern in terms of age and gender is identified, which is consistent with extant literature (Anderson and Bhati, 2012; Lam et al., 2016; Harazneh et al., 2018). 59.2% of the respondents were female, 40% were male, and 0.8% were gender variant/non-conforming. The data collected further reflects that most participants (84.0%) were between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-four (24) years of age, while the remaining 16.0% were between the ages of twenty-five (25) and over thirty-four (34) years of age. In terms of the origin of the international students, the feedback highlights a European dominance of the respondents as reflected in Table 2, with Austria (0.8%), Belgium (3.8%), Brazil (0.8%), Finland (1.5%), France (20%), Germany (35.4%), Hungary (0.8%), Italy (4.6%), Japan (0.8%), Netherlands (4.6%), Norway (2.3%), Slovakia (0.8%), Slovenia (0.8%), Sweden (1.5%), Switzerland (5.4%), Ukraine (0.8 %) and United Kingdom (0.8%). The remainder of the respondents (1.5%) were Multinational and from the United States of America (13.1%).

Regarding their majors at the various universities, the majority (43.1%) were undertaking business studies, 23.8% enrolled in social sciences, 9.2% in natural sciences, 4.6% in humanities, 3.1% in education and engineering respectively, 2.3% in media studies and communication, and another 2.3% selected the 'other' category (automotive, business/economics, foreign trade). The remaining students were spread over other disciplines, such as architecture, hospitality and tourism, health sciences, mathematics and art and design, with 0.8% each. In addition, computer sciences, social and community welfare and education all had 1.5% representation, respectively. Regarding their source of funding, most of the respondents (44.6%) noted that they were self-funded, 23.0% were partially self-funded and partially on a scholarship, 14.6% on a full scholarship, 6.2% were on a financial aid scheme from their country's government, and 11.5% noted their parents funded them. Asked to indicate what category of international student they were, most (87.5%) noted that they were exchange students, 6% indicated they were freemovers, 5.5% were visiting graduate students, and 0.8% indicated they were research students.

Table 2. Summary of sample profile of the respondents (n=130)

Characteristics	Category	Total (in %)
Nationality	Austria	0.8
	Belgium	3.8
	Brazil	0.8
	Finland	1.5
	France	20.0
	Germany	35.4
	Hungary	0.8
	Italy	4.6
	Japan	0.8
	Multinational	1.5
	Netherlands	4.6
	Norway	2.3
	Slovakia	0.8
	Slovenia	0.8
	Sweden	1.5
	Switzerland	5.4
	Ukraine	0.8
	United Kingdom	0.8
	United States of America	13.1
Gender	Male	40.0
	Female	59.2
	Non-conforming	0.8
Age (in years)	18-24	83.8
	25-34	16.2
Current place of residence (accommo-dation)	Homestay (living with a host family)	1.5
	Purchased condominium or house.	3.1
	Renting by myself	22.3
	Renting with family members	2.3
	Renting with strangers	31.5
	University residence	39.2
Study type	Freemover	6.3
	Exchange Student	87.5
	Visiting graduate Student	5.5
	Research Student	0.8
Study major	Agriculture	3.1
	Architecture	0.8
	Art and Design	0.8
	Business (Marketing, Commerce, Accounting)	43.1
	Computer Science & Information Technology	1.5
	Education	1.5
	Engineering	3.1
	Health Science	0.8
	Hospitality & Tourism	0.8
	Humanities	4.6
	Mathematics / Actuarial Science / Statistics	0.8
	Media Studies / Communication / Journalism	2.3
	Natural Sciences	9.2
	Other (Automotive Business/Economics, Foreign Trade)	2.3
	Social and Community Services / Law enforcement	1.5
	Social Sciences	23.8
Main source of funding	Parents	11.5
	Self-funding	44.6
	Scholarship	14.6
	Self-funding and partial scholarship	23.1
	Student loans	6.2

Finally, when the respondents were asked to indicate their current form of accommodation, 31.5% stated they were renting with strangers, and 39.2% were using the university's residences. 22.3% of the respondents were renting by themselves, 2.3% were renting with family members, 3.1% in a condominium, and the remainder (1.5%) resided in a

homestay (that is, living with a host family). These results are important when considered in light of South Africa's place within the context of Africa and the Global South more generally. With some universities, such as the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, ranked among the best globally (Abrahams and Bama, 2022; Abrahams et al., 2023), the results point to an allure for students from the Global North.

With extant research highlighting an increased involvement of students from the Global South and Africa, in particular, in the higher education academy, the results of this study present a somewhat surprising outlook with an absence of participants from countries in the region. Such a result may suggest these South African universities' lack of focused promotional strategies in targeting students from the continent. Current literature on international higher education notes that African students have been drawn towards the Global North by the allure of financial support through grants and scholarships (David and Masaki, 2023; Ke et al., 2022). This scenario may not be accessible in the South African context or perhaps is blurred by the absence of focused marketing initiatives. Financial constraints could also explain the absence of students from other parts of Africa, who may be studying in South African universities but not enrolled on the international student category due to other considerations and, therefore, not part of this enquiry.

South African universities as study-abroad destinations

Through the statistical analysis of factors influencing study-abroad students' selection of South African universities, the current study noted a cross-section of both push and pull factors accounting for this attraction. Statements about motivational elements were posed to respondents on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all important, unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, and very important. In some analytical cases, replies were categorised as Important (important + extremely important) or Unimportant (not at all important + unimportant) for convenience of reporting. The attractiveness of a different cultural experience (97.3%), living in another country (97.3%), international experience (96.0%), and making new friends (81.4%) were cited as crucial considerations for enrolling in a study-abroad programme by the majority of respondents. Unimportant considerations, on the other hand, were being with my partner (89.3%), a lack of available programmes in my native country (82.7%), funding (78.7%), and where my friends are going (78.3%). Such feedback could be beneficial to study-abroad marketers.

Furthermore, an Oblivion rotation with Kaiser normalisation was used to perform a factor analysis on a pattern matrix of the principal component, which identified five motivating factors that push students to participate in a study abroad experience, which were labelled based on similarities in characteristics, as shown in Table 3. The factors explained 64% of the total variance, with a high-reliability coefficient of 0.77 (the highest) to an acceptable coefficient of 0.55 (the lowest) (Taber, 2018:1278), suggesting that each component had internal consistency. Finally, all the factors loaded with a loading larger than 0.3 suggested a relatively high correlation between the factors and their component items. The factor scores were derived as an average for all relevant items to allow interpretation with respect to the original five-point Likert scale of measurement. Furthermore, the standard deviations ranged from 0.799 (the lowest) to 4.339 (the highest). The following push factors influenced students to enrol in study abroad courses, as shown in Table 3: quality and network aspects (Factor 1), marketing and financial concerns (Factor 2), foreign exposure (Factor 3), socio-cultural (Factor 4) and regulatory (Factor 5). International exposure was the most important push element for students, with a mean score of 4.82, followed by quality and network aspects (3.34), socio-cultural (2.47), marketing and financial concerns (2.39), and regulatory (1.57).

Table 3. Push factors for selecting South African universities (n=130, in %) KEY: FL= Factor loading; Mean= M; Reliability coefficient= RC; Average interitem correlation= AIC; Standard deviation= SD

Motivational Factors and Items	FL	M	RC	AIC	SD
Factor 1: Quality and Network Aspects		3.34	0.73	.471	4.133
Further career prospects	0.79				
International exposure in the field of study	0.69				
Quality education	0.69				
Parental encouragement	0.49				
To make new friends	0.47				
Factor 2: Marketing & Financial Considerations		2.39	0.77	.460	4.339
Cost of study	0.79				
Sponsorships	0.70				
University marketing activities	0.66				
University counsellor influence	0.61				
To become independent	0.47				
Factor 3: International exposure		4.82	0.64	.472	0.799
Living in another country	0.82				
International experience	0.70				
Factor 4: Socio-Cultural		2.47	0.56	.406	2.324
Where my friends are going	0.76				
To be with my partner	0.54				
Factor 5: Regulatory		1.57	0.55	.383	1.768
Expected as part of the university programme	0.84				
Lack of available programmes in the home country	0.53				
Total variance explained:	64%				

Respondents' motivations for selecting South African universities were considered. Natural and environmental factors (93.3%), favourable climate and weather conditions (86.6%), use of English as a teaching medium (82.6%), common language (65.3%), and lower cost of living in South Africa (56.0%) were cited as primary motivators for choosing South Africa as the destination by respondents. Moreover, the factor analysis yielded the following results as shown in Table 4; the factors accounted for 66% of the total variance, explained in terms of a high-reliability 0.88 (the highest) to an adequate coefficient of 0.65 (the lowest) (Taber, 2018:1278), indicating that each of the factors has internal consistency. The standard deviations ranged from 2.515 (the lowest) to 6.570 (the highest). The following pull factors for students to participate in study abroad programmes in South Africa were identified: quality (Factor 1), socio-political (Factor 2), marketing (Factor 3), environmental (Factor 4) and social (Factor 5). With a mean value of 4.13, environmental was the most important push factor for students, followed by social (3.58), quality (2.77), marketing (2.45) and socio-political (2.12). Table 4 highlights the feedback from the factor analysis (pull factors) from the respondents.

Table 4. Pull factors for selecting South African universities (n=130, in %) KEY: FL= Factor loading; Mean= M; Reliability coefficient= RC Average interitem correlation= AIC; Standard deviation= SD

Motivational Factors and Items	FL	M	RC	AIC	SD
Factor 1: Quality		2.77	0.88	.653	5.393
Qualified and friendly academic staff	0.80				
Expertise and specialisation in area of study interest	0.75				
Availability of labs and research instruments	0.67				
Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institutions	0.62				
University services	0.62				
Factor 2: Socio-Political		2.12	0.86	.688	6.570
Low rate of discrimination	0.84				
Safety and security	0.75				
Favourable government policies	0.67				
Familiarity with own culture	0.62				
Closeness to the home country (proximity)	0.49				
Political or historical ties with South Africa	0.48				
Easy to get visa/visa-free	0.46				
Factor 3: Marketing		2.45	0.83	.516	5.604
Referrals from friends, family members and social media	0.76				
Domestic websites	0.69				
Media advertising	0.67				
Overseas websites	0.65				
Lower cost of living in South Africa	0.54				
Easy admission	0.51				
Factor 4: Environmental		4.13	0.74	.798	2.515
Natural and environmental factors, e.g., landscape and beach	0.89				
Favourable climate and weather conditions	0.88				
Factor 5: Social		3.58	0.65	.449	2.946
English as the teaching medium	0.84				
Common language and travel	0.69				
University ranking	0.50				
Total variance explained:	66%				

Mounting evidence, especially in the developing context, suggests that the edutourism sector represents an essential segment of the tourism industry that could be leveraged. For instance, with 2.2% of the worldwide share and 40,712 foreign students, South Africa was the world's eighth most popular foreign student-receiving location in 2019. In this light, one of the participants, a coordinator of the international office of one of the universities, noted the following about the future of study-abroad programmes. South Africa, in general, is very popular with our students, they feel it is cheap, beautiful and everyone speaks good English, so it is very popular. However, not many students are going there because, as I said, a partner company employs them during their entire studies, so they alternate with three months of studies here at [home university]. Three months of practice, so if they want to study abroad, they have to check the semester dates of the partner university. So, the problem with Cape Town [South Africa] is that all universities have very long semester dates, which is a problem. They have to negotiate with their company that they will be set out for longer, which does not always work. Therefore, not many students end up going there, but if they did not have this length issue, I am sure there would be many more students because many would be interested in going there (KIP04). Supporting this nuanced optimism, a representative from another university stated: From what I have seen, many students want to come to the Western Cape, Cape Town [South Africa]. I have seen an increase in the number of students who want to travel here they want to come, and I think it is because of the destination…

Also, students have seen the advertising and the university and what it has to offer. South Africa is a good destination; foreign students want to come here, and I hope they will keep wanting to come (KIP02). In line with the existing optimism, the participants were asked what could be done to make these programmes more attractive.

Suggestions were made to focus on marketing efforts, increasing internationalisation within the respective institutions, engaging in partnerships with more institutions with aligned programmes for exchange purposes, and increasing co-funding models. Furthermore, partnerships with government and other sector partners that could market the destinations were highlighted as a potential leverage. In this light, and related to marketing efforts, one of the key informants noted that with the current generation of study abroad students, social media platforms can effectively promote study abroad programs. It also gives students to stay a part of the community they joined when coming to a study program.

This can be expanded through advertisements on sites like TikTok and YouTube (KIP03). Further emphasis on partnerships and funding arrangements saw one of the representatives indicate that most international offices in higher education universities have partnerships with other universities, and staff travel happens at that level.

Nevertheless, this still needs to be developed more because it would be nice for staff, especially those doing this work, to see how it is done in other countries because study abroad is such a big field. There is study abroad at every university that is exchanging students. The only difference is that the European Union makes funding available for students to study abroad and staff exchanges such as ERUMAS+ funding for programmes (KIP01).

The findings of this study highlight that South Africa is considered a popular study-abroad destination, with several push and pull factors accounting for the destination's allure. Cultural diversity, international exposure and experience, and the opportunity to visit friends and family are posited as some of the push factors. In addition, ease of communication, cost of living, and environmental factors were the key pull factors highlighted. Given the current levels of international student mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa (430 000), which should hit close to 900000 by 2050, South Africa's position as a prime destination for study-abroad programmes on the continent looks promising (Kigotho, 2023; Oyeleye, 2023). Nevertheless, the glaring absence of students from other African countries as part of this study raises nuanced concerns about the quality and quantity of marketing efforts currently dedicated to the segment. Ke et al (2022) assert that marketing efforts are essential if a destination is to leverage to potential of their international student niche in developing both the educational and tourism potential it can engender. In addition, the interviewed key informant personnel from the international offices also lend their voices to this element by highlighting the various avenues through which marketing efforts can be dedicated. To maintain the current positive outlook, focused marketing campaigns with effective, efficient and transparent communications are suggested. The streamlining of visa regimes is contended to be a limiting element for the student within the content who may be interested in such programmes.

CONCLUSION

The current study presented an initiation point for analysing study-abroad participation initiatives within the South African and Global South context more generally. The study involved 130 students and 5 key informants. It concluded that combining pull and push factors were essential for successfully leveraging the study-abroad segment as a sub-niche within the edutourism sector. To ascertain and obtain further insights into the value and potential of the study-abroad programmes in promoting edutourism in South Africa and Africa more generally, longitudinal studies should be undertaken, given the limitations that were experienced during this study, prime among which was the limited sample due in part to the impacts of the COVID-19 regulations which restricted access to a broader sample.

Furthermore, a key issue that was not considered as part of the scope of the research entailed examining the factors and reasons for the complete absence of students from countries in Africa from the study sample. Given the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, much evidence points to the need to leverage the African student market, most of whom paradoxically gravitate towards the Global North for study-abroad opportunities (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). Evidently, in the context of probable future disasters, leveraging regional student markets provides a prudent approach to safeguarding the study-abroad segment in the face of stringent regulations. It is recommended that HEIs, in making suggestions, engage with the government authorities and consider the broader ramifications and realities that the investments into the study-abroad segment are bound to attract.

Additionally, the study found a concerted paucity of consultation between key stakeholder groups. It is, therefore, imperative to set up a framework to guide how the communication between the different stakeholder groups involved in developing and marketing the study-abroad segment of the edutourism industry should be managed more broadly.

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