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## Travel Motivations of Educational Tourists Arriving in Georgia

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### Abstract

Over the years, researchers have empirically studied the determinants of travel motivation and taken into account the diverse approaches and perspectives of travel motivation. The dynamic nature of travel motivation has led to a wide range of research in this area. Decisions made by tourists that are reflected in their travel behavior are essential for the tourism industry to maintain or improve the status quo. The paper aimed to identify the motivational factors that determine the decisions of educational tourists through quantitative research. According to the existing studies, significant travel motivations were identified and a survey was conducted with international students who choose Georgia as the destination for their studies at accredited higher educational institutions. The research has revealed that for international students, arriving in Georgia for educational purposes, the field of medicine is the first choice of interest. Educational tourists choose Georgia for the following main reasons: security and political stability, the cost of learning and living, quality, and duration of the study.

**Keywords:** Educational tourism, travel motivations, COVID-19

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Tourism is a major economic force in many countries. There are various types and forms of tourism. However, despite its economic strength, tourism remains the most vulnerable sector to internal and external crises. The desire

to visit unfamiliar places pushes people to travel to new destinations and motivates them to visit new attractions. The knowledge of travel behavior can facilitate marketing and product planning and development, which can increase the number of travel products and visitors. Tourists attach more importance to new ways of exploring different tourist destinations. Therefore, learning opportunities increase significantly. Consequently, the motivations that influence travelers to make decisions change. Over the past decade, many tourist destinations have been in crisis, ranging from natural disasters, man-made incidents, terrorist attacks, and health crises to natural disasters. Nevertheless, after such a crisis, the tourism industry was still able to recover. Tourism has an incomparable potential for resilience. However, the world is now in an unprecedented crisis. The risk posed by the Covid-19 pandemic is not localized but is general and international. The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the mobility of people around the world. Therefore, it has affected the field of educational tourism.

### **Literature Review**

The knowledge of travel behavior can facilitate marketing and product planning and development, which can increase the number of travel products and visitors. The concept of motivation is derived from the word 'motive', which means to take action (Dann, 1977). Behind any human action, there is a motive that compels the human to act in a way that ensures the fulfillment of a specific need. In tourism motivation studies, the tourist is the main subject and each traveler is as different from others as are the factors that motivate them. The overall motivation of tourists is influenced by many factors when it comes to decision-making. Studies have classified both intrinsic (psychological carriers) and external (destination-related) motivations (P.S. 2020).

Dann's push and pull theory introduced a structural basis for tourism literature. (Dann, 1977) Dann grouped two factors that affect tourism motivation - the Push and Pull factors. According to Dann, push factors are what motivate tourists to travel. Push factors are the most important internal factors that create a need or desire to travel. Pull factor theory explains the specific reasons for choosing a destination that is related to ego-enhancement. Pull factor theory is more associated with external factors that attract visitors to a destination, such as travel with prestige, self-awareness, and so on. Whereas, the TCL (Travel Career Ladder) theory has attracted attention from the very beginning due to some criticisms and limitations of inconsistency. The theory focused more on the term "ladder" and that term was indefinite. (Pearce, 2005) Pearce and Lee revised their existing theory of motivation intending to introduce more diverse and empirical motivation patterns. TCL theory focused on travel motivation analysis for specific purposes. Travel

Career Patterns TCP (Travel Career Patterns) emphasizes a more complete understanding of travel motivation patterns. Researchers Pierce and Lee have established career patterns in travel with some modifications to TCL theory. According to TCP theory, travel motivation can be defined as a set of patterns and it will be a combination of different motivational factors as a result of past travel experiences and age group influences. (Pearce, 2005)

Tourists are exposed to certain behaviors before, during, and after the trip. This is conceptualized as a travel behavior. This behavior is a direct result of the interaction between certain personal and environmental variables. Thus, travel behavior can be defined as the behavior of tourists towards a certain product. Depending on their attitudes and product use, various researchers have identified factors influencing tourist travel behavior, such as motivated tourist travel variables, tourist attitudes, various situational factors, and environmental factors that influence tourists' importance. According to March and Woodside, travel motivations can be considered one of the most important psychological influences on tourist behavior. Motivations are a person's inner state, or certain human needs and desires, that compel them to act or behave in a particular way and thus maintain human behavior and the energy level of the human body. (Gross, 2007)

In the pre-pandemic period, tourism was one of the fastest-growing economic sectors and the main source of employment in the world. The travel and tourism sector grew by 3.5% in 2019, contributing 8.9 trillion \$ to the world GDP, 330 million jobs, and \$ 1.7 trillion in visitor revenue. Given the preliminary data on COVID-19, countries need to resume tourism as it has undoubtedly contributed to revenue generation, regional development, and a better life for the community associated with it. Experts predict that it will take about 10 to 35 months for the tourism and hospitality business to recover. Several studies have attempted to study the impact of COVID-19 on travel and tourism, tourism prospects for future travel, and future tourism behavior. There are positive signs in most of the studies on post- COVID-19 tourism, which shows that tourism will never decline permanently and is expected to revive again as people will never stop moving. (Wachyuni, 2020)

Motivational factors that respond to travel-influenced situations such as family, economy, interests, health, and experience change over time. The fears created by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly overestimated the trust, perception, and motivation of people who stopped mobility and, therefore, had a major impact on tourism revenues. The created situation has been described by experts as the worst crisis and has been compared to World War II (Ulak, 2020).

Universities are adopting internationalization strategies, enabling them to attract and hire international students and increase their market share. Felix and Steve identified the pull and push factor framework, which shows that

factors of attraction from the perspective of the host country include: easy acceptance, international recognition, and a safe environment; in terms of the institute, withdrawal factors include course availability, experience, cost of living, accommodation, and prospects for future employment in the labor market. At the same time, the pushing force behind the economic, political, and host country opportunities depends on friends, family, private agencies, media, and the WOM, as noted by the researchers Felix and Steve. (Maringe, 2007)

Naturally, the pandemic has affected the motivations of tourists in general, as well as the attitudes of educational tourists. Extensive research has not yet been conducted into what will be the main driving factors behind the pandemic travel, including the desire of those traveling abroad to study. Likely, the popularity of the countries with the highest rates of vaccinated population will emerge.

## **Methods**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic is still an ongoing crisis, literature and research on this topic are still limited. Several researchers have studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism in general, and studies are underway to explore general perspectives on the coronavirus epidemic for travel and the future of tourism. A small-scale quantitative study was conducted with a general overview of the findings. As it is widely known, quantitative research is one of the main techniques for obtaining data on social events and, consequently, it is the main method of social science. (Tsuladze, 2008) This study describes the current situation using a quantitative approach. A non-random sampling type was used for the study to select foreign students in Georgia studying at one of the accredited higher educational institutions. To do this, a chain-referral selection process was used, namely the snowball principle - because it is a method of determining a selective set from numerically small groups. (Tsuladze, 2008) The snowball principle helped the study to have easy access to target groups — in this case, international students. Through the connections of professors and lecturers, a questionnaire was sent to foreign students, who were studying in Georgia.

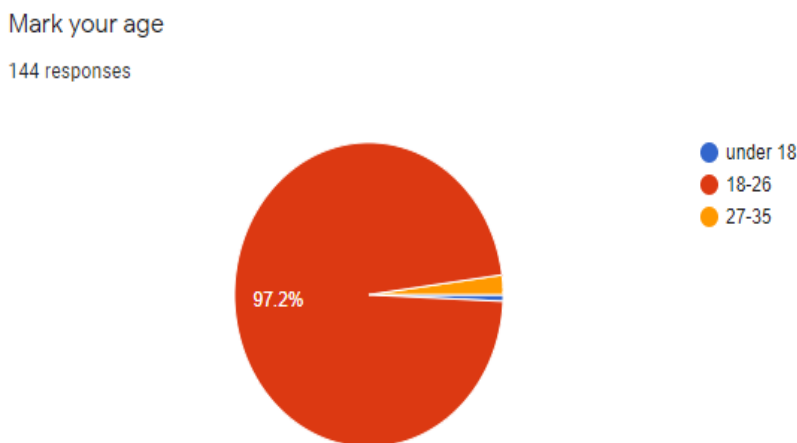
The survey tool was developed after reviewing the literature to determine the defining attributes of travel motivation based on popular motivation theories. The questions asked were different: an open-ended question aimed to enable participants to openly express their motivations and aspirations. In addition, closed-ended questions of various choices as well as scaled questions were created.

## Results

The questionnaire was sent to the respondents between December 2021 and January 2022. The survey was conducted online and a link to the survey was posted and shared through various social platforms. Students were asked to voluntarily participate in the study at an appropriate time. As it is well known, such a friendly approach increases response speed and data quality. (Bronner, 2007) Overall, the research link was active for about two months.

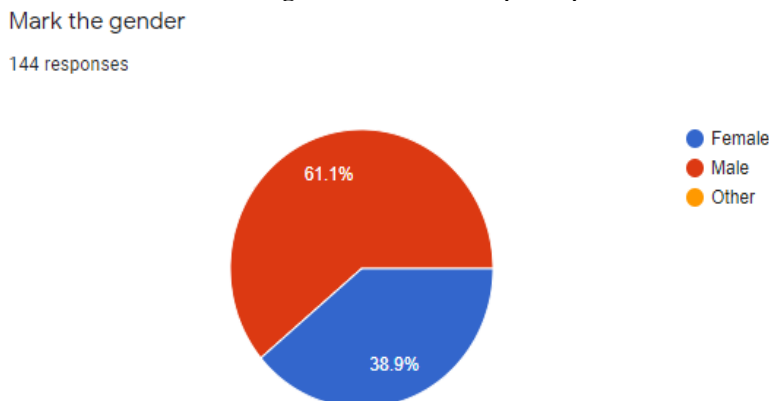
Approximately 150 international students, who were studying in Georgia during the research, took part in the quantitative research. The age of the majority of respondents was 18-26 years. (Diagram 1) Among them, 61% were male and 39% were female. (Diagram 2)

**Diagram 1-** Age of participants



Source: Author's research

**Diagram 2 –** Gender of participants



Source: Author's research

The vast majority of the educational tourists participating in the study were undergraduate students. It was interesting to find out which country the respondents were from and it turned out that most of them were from Angola, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, and Jordan.

The students participating in the survey studied at different accredited higher educational institutions in Georgia: Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Grigol Robakidze University, European University, Teaching University "Geometri"

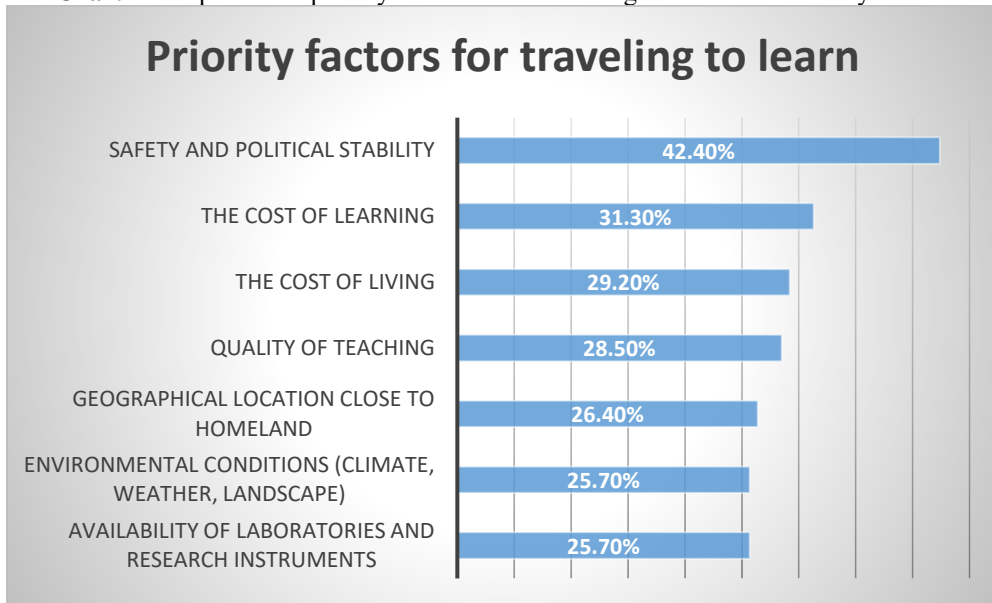
For international students, as it has been revealed, medicine is a major subject of their study interest, namely:

- Dermatology;
- Cardiology;
- Dentistry;
- Neurosurgery;
- Pediatrics;
- Gynecology;
- Orthopedics;
- Surgery;
- Ophthalmology;
- Oncology;
- Pharmacology;
- Endocrinology.

Based on the results of previous surveys, popular motivational factors were identified and respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the reasons why they have chosen the country for their studies. Respondents were asked to select 1 point for the least important reason and 5 points for the most important reason from the listed factors. The results revealed that the majority of respondents prioritize security and political stability. (5 points) Almost equal, 4-point grades were given to the cost of teaching, quality, and environmental conditions. Respondents considered the cost of living relatively less important scoring it 3 points. 2 points were assigned to the availability of laboratories and research instruments, and the proximity to the homeland - 1 point.

The results were ranked according to which, the priorities were sorted by percentage (Chart 1)

**Chart 1-** Respondents' priority factors when choosing a destination to study abroad



Source: Author's research

It was also interesting to see what other personal motivations international students travel with. Most of the following factors were identified:

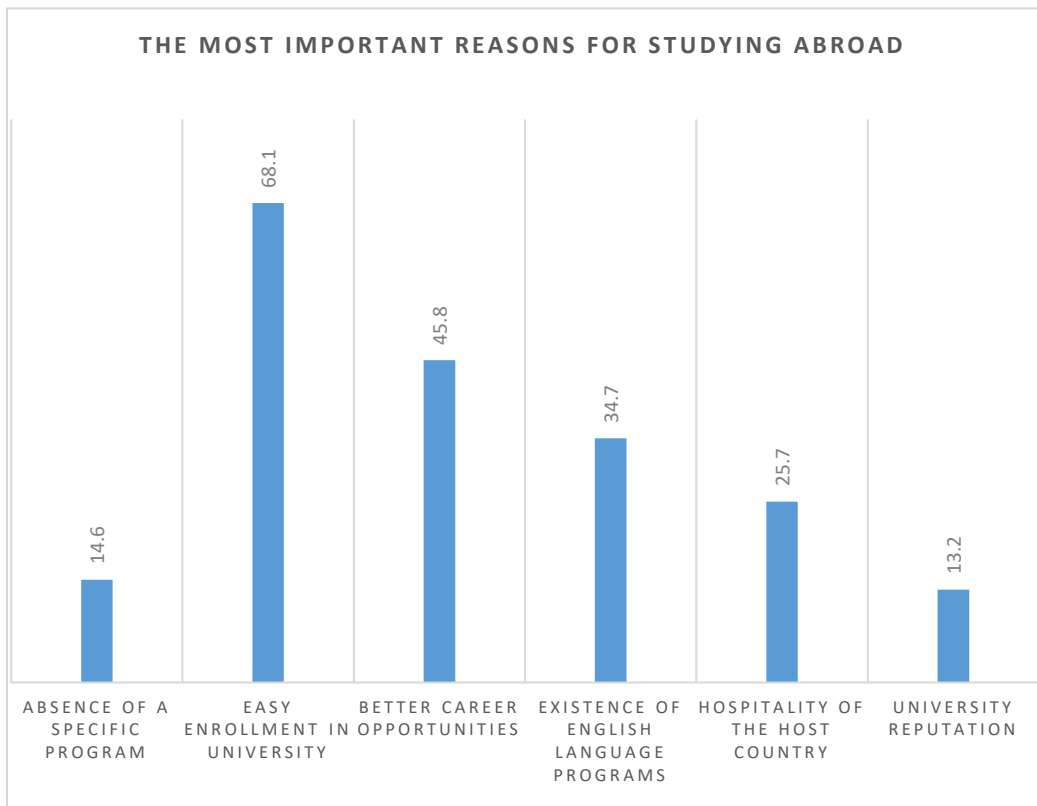
- Desire to live independently;
- Exploring new places;
- The interest of different cultures;
- Save money;
- Accelerated learning process;
- Communication in a foreign language;
- New experience;
- Better learning system;
- Security;
- International experience;
- Acquisition of new interests and hobbies;
- New environment;

The purpose of the research, the task at the same time, was to identify the main personal reasons for educational students, why leave their home country to study elsewhere. Based on previous studies, a list of reasons was included in the questionnaire and it was found that the most important factor for international students is the ability to easily enroll in a foreign university rather than in their own country. (68.1%) Respondents also prioritized better

career opportunities when they return to their home country. (45.8%). The availability of English language programs was identified as another important factor for them. (34.7%) The hospitality of the host country also turned out to be one of the reasons for choosing the destination for educational purposes. . (25.7%) Another reason for international students traveling to study abroad was found to be the lack of a specific program in their own country. (14.6%) (Chart 2) Students also selected the reputation of the university as one of the factors. (13.2%). (Chart 2) The survey also revealed other, relatively less important reasons:

- Self-development;
- Tuition fees;
- Job opportunities;
- Duration of studying period.

**Chart 2** – The reason for international students traveling to study abroad



Source: Author's research

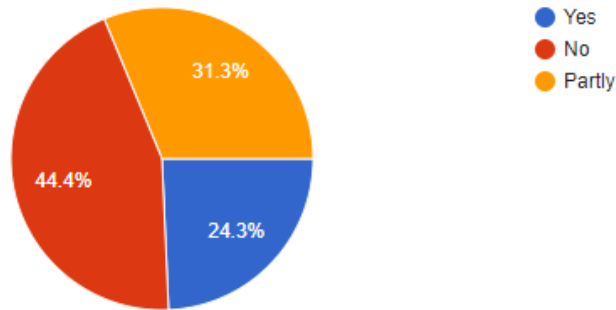
Since the study was conducted during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the last question enquired whether the pandemic was a deterrent to educational students. Part of the respondents said it was not a deterrent factor for the - 44.4%, partly the pandemic affected the education of students in 24.3% of the



cases and the pandemic was found to be a hindering factor for 31.1% (Diagram 3).

**Diagram 3** – Covid-19 impact on educational students’ decision  
Was the pandemic a deterrent factor to you from studying abroad?

144 responses



Source: Author’s research

The tourism sector has been affected by the global pandemic situation, especially during the lockdown periods. Nevertheless, there are signs of improvement in the educational tourism sector and a full resurgence should be expected once the current situation will have eventually normalized (Bunghez, 2022).

## Discussion

Through the existing research results, it can be judged that the motivation for educational tourism is growing every year with the growth of the popularity of educational tourism. More and more people want to get an education in prestigious educational institutions, do special courses or get internships abroad to raise their intellectual and educational levels. It is especially important that on such a tour there is an opportunity for rest and study. It is a common practice nowadays to send children and teenagers abroad for holidays with the purpose to master the language and, at the same time, have a nice vacation. Recent trends also show that the global education market is expected to grow even more. Europe is also anticipated to exhibit the highest growth rate over the forecast period 2022-2028 (MarketWatch 2022).

Educational tourism is a specific niche of tourism. The market segment of educational tourism is significantly smaller compared to the segments of mass tourism. Thus, educational tourism offers a wide range of products and services related to academic research, skills acquisition, school excursions, sports training, career development courses, language courses, and much

more. Consequently, the motivations of travelers who want to get some kind of education outside their country vary.

With the available results, the following can be agreed upon: It is interesting for international students arriving in Georgia at this stage to receive education, mainly in the field of medicine. Educational tourists choose Georgia for the following main reasons:

- 1) security and political stability;
- 2) the cost of learning and living;
- 3) quality and duration of studies.

The results revealed that the personal motivation of international students to study abroad includes the following:

- the desire for independent living, exploring new places
- interest in different cultures
- saving money
- accelerated learning process
- means of communication in a foreign language
- new experience
- better learning system
- security
- international experience
- acquisition of new interests and hobbies
- new environment.

Most of the international students visiting Georgia are from Asia and Africa, and for most respondents, the pandemic did not prove to be a deterrent to travel education. Moreover, they believe that Georgia is a safe and secure country for educational travelers.

## **Conclusion**

This research provides evidence that is consistent with the existing literature on the motivations of educational tourists. Students travel outside of their own country, which is a unique opportunity to learn about other nationalities in a multicultural atmosphere. In addition to the widely recognized benefits of travel, educational travel enhances the skills that are specially developed as a result of this activity. The survey revealed that international students have various motivations when choosing a country to study abroad and that has to be considered by universities and other interested parties in educational tourism. Universities have to create a competitive environment to attract more educational tourists. The results of the study will

be interesting for individuals or organizations working in the field of education and tourism in Georgia. The findings clearly show which directions of educational tourism should be improved and developed in Georgia.

Future researchers need to find out how to develop and popularize strategies that will attract international students. Educational tourists have different expectations and needs, further research should help related industries and policymakers to develop a thorough understanding of the expectations of these different tourist groups to formulate their strategies.

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