

International Brazilian Students: Motivators, Barriers, and Facilitators in Higher Education

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Abstract

International students have an increasing economic and cultural impact: In 2011 there were 4.3 million international students around the globe, and this number is expected to exceed 8 million by 2025. From this scenario, this article aims to discern the main barriers, facilitators, and motivators for the internationalization of students. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 international students at different academic levels. The results indicate that the barriers to internationalization are intrinsic and extrinsic to individuals. The main facilitators of internationalization were networking training and access to student resources; and the main motivators were personal development and career opportunities. Therefore, this article brings three main contributions: (a) academically vis-à-vis the theme, (b) managerially, for institutions, and (c) for students, especially those at the master's and PhD level. Findings from Brazilian students may also apply to different academic contexts, especially those from emerging countries.

Keywords

internationalization of students, higher education, international students

Introduction

Considering the current socioeconomic transformation we are undergoing, we observe in the academic environment the need felt by students to seek increasingly consistent training and dialogue with the context of different countries. We know that internationalization of a professional resume by taking courses overseas can enhance personal and professional networks, leading to greater professional development, market visibility, and student experience. This phenomenon grows continuously each year and has attracted the attention of governments and higher education institutions (HEI), which in parallel seek to develop strategies for their own internationalization as organizations.

Countries that seek to strengthen the process of academic internationalization include United States, England, Scotland, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. Student internationalization in the context of these and other countries can be a key point for the development of strategies at the institutional level, since international students inject into the economy, for example, in the Canadian case, about \$ 11.4 billion per year (Canada News, 2017).

At the macro level, in 2001 international students numbered 1.58 million in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member nations, with more than 5% of OECD international students enrolled in the US,

followed by the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia (Marginson, 2006). The overall number of foreign students is increasing—in 2005, to 3 million, and in 2011, 4.3 million (OECD, 2013, p. 324). The OECD (2016) forecast for 2025 is 8 million international students worldwide.

Within this phenomenon, the Brazilian context appears to be quite atypical. If, on the one hand, public investment in education in the country is showing signs of growth—in 2011, for example, the Brazilian government invested 19% of its total public spending on education, above the OECD average of 5.6% (OECD, 2014)—on the other hand, Brazil has the lowest number of foreign students among all OECD countries—less than 0.5% of enrollments in higher education. Most internationalizing Brazilian students are enrolled in US (23%), Portuguese (18%), and French (10%) educational institutions, according to the Education at a Glance

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report (2014), thus demonstrating that in addition to low international participation there is also a high concentration of Brazilian students in just a few countries, given that more than half of international students from Brazil are in one of the three mentioned nations.

Given the importance of international students for countries and HEIs, and the need for Brazil to promote the internationalization of its students, our objective in this article is to analyze the main barriers, motivators, and facilitators of the internationalization of Brazilian students. In a broader view, we seek to bring new reflections on the subject, encourage HEIs to adopt different internationalization strategies and, encourage students to reflect on the importance of internationalization in their careers.

To achieve the objective proposed for our qualitative study, we carried out a literature review on internationalization in higher education, at the individual level of analysis and with the student as the research unit. As the main technique for data collection of the study, in-depth interviews based on a semi-structured script were conducted with 17 Brazilian students with international experiences, followed by content analysis. Our study provides contributions in three dimensions: (a) managerial (HEI-specific); (b) academic (for the research topic and for researchers); and (c) individual (student-specific).

Literature Review

Internationalization in Higher Education

Higher education continues to develop and accompany human evolution, just as everything related to the transformation of individuals must too evolve. Thus, higher education is becoming increasingly international as students become increasingly willing to study abroad (Batista & Romani-Dias, 2021; Pinto & Martinez, 2018).

Internationalization in higher education has come to be seen as necessary from an educational standpoint and become a critical issue for policymakers (Mulliqi, 2011) due to the important role of countries in training, income generation, mutual understanding, and qualified migration. Indeed, countries such as England, United States (Pinto & Martinez, 2018), and Spain (European Commission, 2019) have already established incentive strategies to foster the mobility of students, educators, and programs.

Note that the early relationships in this context were based on international programs that sought to gain strength in order to develop into research and investigation projects. Ellingboe identifies internationalization as “the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-looking, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many participants working to change the internal dynamics of an institution” (Ellingboe, 1998, p. 199).

From a multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary leadership perspective, it is worth noting that higher education has a great multiplying influence on the production and distribution of knowledge (World Bank, 1999). And, indeed, the main distributor of knowledge is the individual, who has the capability to develop skills of learning absorption, application, and dissemination in various fields of activity.

In order to understand how a student’s international performance takes place, in the literature we identified that the activities that involve internationalization range from public/private overseas study programs, to various individual international activities such as full-time student, educator, and researcher, based on the PRID model (place, relationship, impact, and dissemination). Thus, internationalization in higher education manifests in several ways (Romani-Dias et al., 2019).

Among the benefits of internationalization, Knight (1994) states that “internationalization is the process of integrating the international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education” (p. 21). Thus, internationalization is a sequence of activities carried out jointly rather than in isolation, which contributes to the sustainability of the international dimension.

This facet of internationalization is what attracts the attention of governments and universities—the fact that cultural flow in the country that receives students makes the latter powerful sources of knowledge in terms of teaching and research. According to Bista (2018) and Romani-Dias (2018), the concept of internationalization has not always been seen as something promising and natural within institutions. Although traditional internationalization can significantly increase competitiveness, prestige, and strategic alliances, it rarely turns out to be a profitable activity.

Internationalization is part of a process of integrating the factors associated with the concept. International initiatives occur in almost all developing countries given that they host thousands of foreign students, whom they seek to attract strategically in order to improve the quality and cultural composition of the student body (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

This exchange of cultures is essential to promote integration between people with the most diverse backgrounds, given that internationalization presents a global phenomenon with prospects for accelerated growth. De Wit (2017) assumes that internationalization is linked to a process integrating the intercultural dimension. In order to understand the objectives of internationalization, Qiang (2003) concluded that it does not represent a single objective, but rather an important resource for the development of higher education.

Internationalization of Students

We observe an increasing academic interest on the part of students in terms of their internationalizing their professional careers, in order to increase their opportunities in the job market and gain national and international visibility and practical experience. For Leask (2015), the internationalization of a

curriculum has the potential to align institutional agendas focused on internationalization with the student's learning process. Thus, the internationalization of the student becomes essential, both for the student to expand their career horizons and for the educational institution that gains insights into new strategies to promote its own internationalization and thereby gain visibility in the global context (Romani-Dias et al., 2019).

We can define an international student as anyone who has studied or studies at an international educational institution (Bohne, 2014). Such students can conduct activities within the educational institutions that host them, including teaching classes, organizing seminars and workshops, participating in short language courses—thus generating financial movement and a mutual cultural outcome.

Knowing that international students can add substantial value to their own careers, to countries, and to institutions, we observe the presence of factors—both internal and external—that can hinder or favor students' internationalization processes. We call these factors internationalization *barriers*, *facilitators*, and *motivators* and assume that international students will play an important role in making society culturally diverse by exposing the destination country to a rich variety of cultures and new experiences.

However, although enriching a country's culture can be interesting from the standpoint of the international student, it turns out that they will face certain barriers to enter the international context. The barriers can be understood as factors intrinsic to the individual, such as fear, homesickness, stress, and anxiety (Kwon, 2009). According to Baklashova and Kazakov (2016), difficulties with the diet and climate in the new country are, for example, factors that may result in students dropping out.

The extrinsic barriers faced by students weigh especially when it comes to mastering the foreign language and difficulties in communicating with other students of the destination institution (Gomes, 2015).

Additional external factors include financial, housing, work, and safety factors, as well as academic, culture-shock, loss-of-status, and identity issues (Bradley, 2000). We believe these factors can sometimes lead students to withdraw from international study when they are unable to overcome problems inherent in the process.

If, on the one hand, there are barriers that hinder the students' internationalization process, on the other, there are facilitating agents that positively influence students' decisions to specialize overseas. These are important external factors for the student; indeed, the HEIs and the state—in conjunction with public policies—are fundamental to nudge the student in the direction of internationalization. According to Baklashova and Kazakov (2016), student funding is a significant facilitator the internationalization decision since financial insecurity can pose a barrier in the internationalization process.

For the international student to be able to progress, integration with educational institution faculty and staff

is essential; moreover, the student's development of social networks, new friendships, and sharing of knowledge and information are factors that can improve their ability to advance to the end of the course (Urban & Palmer, 2016). It is worth mentioning that the relationship with classmates, faculty, and other social groups with whom they are inserted, can offer good sources of support for students enduring problems in this process (Kwon, 2009).

Kwon (2009) also emphasizes that the exchange offices and integration programs are there to facilitate students in their adaptation to the new environment. Consistent with this point of view, Rienties et al. (2015) argue that offering a support system for students is critical since it provides students with physical and emotional stability.

Another facilitating factor concerns language support courses in the host country. Although students may have language skills, many find it difficult to communicate orally, especially during classroom interactions, a critical component of such courses (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016).

According to Finn and Darmody (2015), studies on the theme point to the importance of creating government strategies for HEIs to invest in internationalization by increasing foreign student recruitment and helping to theorize the phenomenon of internationalization, social capital, and cultural capital in structuring aspects of students' social context. In addition, we note that the HEIs' internationalization strategies themselves act as facilitators for students seeking internationalization.

The marketing strategies established by the institutions to attract international students can also be seen as facilitators of the process and can contribute with a range of incentives, such as funding, housing, and work permits (Khatri & Sharma, 2011). The importance of teaching quality and the reputation of the institution that wishes to attract potential students are also major factors (O'Loughlin et al., 2013).

Although students may encounter barriers to internationalization, certain facilitators can also contribute to the realization of this desire. Beyond the aforementioned factors, it is worth noting that aspects that motivate students are predominate and can provide the impetus for them to overcome many of the difficulties to becoming an international student.

According to Urban and Palmer (2016), the three top motivators for the internationalization of students in the United States are related to professional development. Studying outside the country of origin can enhance students' job opportunities, in addition to improving their fluency in the foreign language, in this case English. Learning about new cultures is also a motivational factor for students aiming to become professionals with international recognition (Kwon, 2009).

When the home country recognizes the student's efforts, another fundamental element becomes manifest in the sense that the student realizes that their intellectual, cultural, and professional contributions are relevant to improving the educational prospects of their own country. Nilsson and

Ripmeester (2016), indicate that studying abroad can enrich the prospects of a professional in relation to career and job opportunities in general, since international study provides the student with an experience of learning in practice, in addition to language and communication skills, cultural experience, and the expansion of horizons; indeed, all of these are motivators for the student to seek to overcome barriers in the internationalization process. Academic motivation is another factor encountered in students who aim to achieve high educational standards and levels of quality (Min et al., 2014).

For Doyle et al. (2016), a student's ease of mobility or movement to study in other countries also ranks as a motivational factor. It is worth noting that promoting and incentivizing students' transition to internationalization is important to gain visibility and for internationalization to be seen as an attractive option for students. Moreover, for students who are going to study in another country, mobility is important in terms of employability insofar as students will gain visibility from the intercultural experience, raising of their awareness, and foreign language training through the labor market.

Indeed, the attitude of employers toward international students appears to play a key role in motivating them to consider the opportunity provided by an international experience as part of their studies (Trooboff et al., 2008). The professional recognition that employers afford students who seek to develop their skills and competences outside the country are reasons enough to encourage them to go international.

According to Urban and Palmer (2016), students are concerned about issues related to their professional career, planning, experience, and skills development in their search for a job. In sum, students' international experiences have the potential to positively impact both their personal and professional lives.

Methods

In our qualitative study, which integrates a set of studies that we developed on internationalization in higher education, we sought to triangulate the data to increase the scientific rigor of the proposed investigation. As such, we started with a literature review followed by a series of in-depth interviews. We then conducted a second series of in-depth interviews with 17 individuals (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The interviews were in the form of a semi-structured script based on the literature review of internationalization in higher education, using students as the unit of analysis. The interviews were conducted during the second semester of 2018: 10 were face-to-face; 5 were via telephone; and 2 were via Skype.

Average duration of the interviews was approximately 60 minutes. The content of the interviews was recorded with the consent of the participants, whose anonymity was assured. The content was then transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

To find prospective interviewees, we initially used a direct network composed of academics from some of the main graduate business schools in Brazil, where we work as researchers. In the second stage, additional participants were interviewed, based on the Snowball method of sample selection, following the precepts of Martin and Eisenhardt (2010). To invite students to participate in our study, we used email; then, after the participants' acceptance, an additional email was sent to set the interview appointments.

Participants

We adopted strict criteria to qualify respondents: (i) currently or previously enrolled in an international higher education institution; (ii) studying or having studied abroad at the undergraduate, master, doctorate, or post-doctorate level. In accordance with these criteria, the participants are students, researchers, faculty, or coordinators of undergraduate and graduate programs in Brazil who had experience as an international student. The reports were with respect to the following countries: Switzerland, Israel, Spain, United States, England, Portugal, Mexico, France, and Chile. This diversity in participant profiles tends to enrich the subsequent analysis and strengthens the internal and external validity of the study.

Data Collection

The script was structured in two main sections: (i) spontaneous questions, which allowed the interviewee freedom to express their actual perceptions about the international experience; (ii) specific questions, designed in such a way that the participant would provide important elements with respect to the research objective. It should be noted, however, that it was not possible for the interviewee to know which category we were dealing with in our study due to the questions being tailored to each interviewee. In order to address three dimensions for the study, the following logic was followed: (a) the interviewees' academic trajectory; (b) interviewees' perceptions of the meaning of internationalization and the important factors in the decision-making process; (c) the main barriers, motivators, and facilitators for the internationalization of students based on the influence exerted by the main actors of the process, such as receptivity of the labor market, internationalization policies of the country of origin and the country of destination, influence of networking, and international activities carried out on the institutional campus.

The way the participants reacted to and explored the questions allowed them to reflect on their perceptions in relation to the studied phenomenon and evaluate their career outcomes in terms of their choices. It should be pointed out that due to the quality of the sample we did not seek additional participants to be interviewed when new elements related to the central question were no longer presented (Creswell, 2003), that is, when the answers generally presented similar patterns.

Data Analysis

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, we analyzed the data that emerged from the reported experiences using the content analysis technique. Content analysis is a word-based research technique and generates in a practical and objective way inferences about the content of the replicable spoken-word text to the social context (Caregnato & Mutti, 2006).

This study adhered to Bardin's (2011) proposal, which comprises the following steps: (1) organization of the material used, including formulated questions, interviews, and transcripts; (2) exploration of the material (data encoding); (3) derivation of categories. Following these steps and based on our interpretations of the collected results, we selected the most important analysis categories for the study, according to the guidelines of Glaser and Strauss (1967). It should be noted that this procedure allows the trustworthiness and confirmability of the results to be ascertained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We employed strict criteria in terms of controlling how the data were collected, coded, classified, and analyzed, following the precepts of Miles et al. (1994). We use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of respondents.

Utilizing the open coding methodology proposed by Locke (2001), we encoded the data. We then identified key concepts for analysis and ascertained the relationships between these key concepts, forming groups of categories and subcategories according to their nature and properties (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After verifying the consistency of the concepts emerging from the discourses, we organized the data into descriptive categories that, in this study, were mostly based on the participants' reported experiences. Table 1 presents a summary of the coding scheme that we built:

Based on this coding scheme, we obtained the results and present a discussion from the perspective of the data found in the literature, which is presented in the following section.

Results and Discussion

The analysis enabled us to verify points that differ in relation to the studies found in the existing literature and what we encountered in the interviews; however, initially we will address the categories that converge, based on the testimony of the participants. We encountered three of the dimensions addressed by previous studies as factors that can favor or hinder the student's internationalization process, and which appear to have an important role in influencing the aforementioned process.

Emotional, Financial, and Communication Barriers

For example, for Ana, the experience of entering a country that has strict defense policies was quite difficult, especially as a woman traveling alone. This difficulty generated

feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress, which could have become an insurmountable barrier and meant Ana had to give up the program:

Entering the country was very traumatic. It is another reality: inspections are very unpleasant [. . .] their security is very rigid. (Ana)

Confirming that the barriers to internationalization of students may arise from the students' own difficulties and feelings, intrinsic factors, such as fear, stress, and anxiety, are factors that may influence the student to withdraw from the program (Kwon, 2009). With respect to Ana's case, we note that the fear of an inspection does not commonly occur in the same way in Brazil. Problems related to money, housing, and work (Bradley, 2000)—that is, the insecurity and instability experienced by the student—can become barriers that are difficult to overcome and that can hinder academic progress. For Maria, for example, the high cost of the program can provoke financial insecurity during the overseas experience:

[. . .] it is expensive to study in another country. The student may not be able to support themselves. So it is difficult to be able to study outside the country of origin. (Maria)

Based on Maria's speech, we noticed frequent financial difficulties among students from emerging countries, which is aggravated by the poor exchange rate of their local currencies when compared to those of the United States and Western European countries. Currency devaluation can sometimes end up making international student's program unfeasible.

Additionally, the extrinsic barriers faced by international students are often related to communication within the academic community and proficiency in the foreign language (Gomes, 2015). For example, for João, the internationalization process involves language-related issues; for Ana, communication with others was difficult, which is consistent with the mentioned study:

One barrier to internationalization that you need to overcome is in relation to the foreign language. You cannot go international unless you can read an article in English. (John)

[. . .] communication was difficult; it was often done through mimicry, since I don't speak Hebrew and many people did not speak English [. . .]. (Ana)

Both João and Ana have stories that are commonplace among Brazilian students who opt for international dialogue. Brazil is located on a continent in which the predominant language is Spanish; as such, this Portuguese-speaking country is, to a certain extent, isolated from its neighbors in terms of communication. Brazil did not have a strong English colonization, which has historically made it difficult for Brazilians to master this language. In other words, Brazilian international students do not, in general, have a broad history of

Table 1. Data Encoding Scheme.

Theoretical factors and main references	Second order categories	First order themes	Citation examples
Factors	Professional		
Motivators	Opportunities	Development	“[. . .] global knowledge, up to date, experience that we acquire.”
Kwon (2009)	Learning	Employability	“[. . .] institutions will increasingly want professionals who publish internationally in partnership; so now a market has opened up that there’s no going back [. . .]”
Urban and Palmer (2016)	Recognition	Cultural	
Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016)		Professional	
Doyle et al. (2016)	Relationship	Dialogue	“In Israel, I had the opportunity to meet many people and see new places and cultures [. . .] that I would otherwise never have the opportunity to do, leading me to reflect on a range of values.” “the opportunity of a practical experience was what made me to decide to study abroad”
Trooboff et al. (2008)		Fear and anxiety	
	Emotional	Insecurity	
Factors that Hamper	Financial	Instability	
Mairéad and Merike (2015)		Language	
Bradley (2000)	Communication	Integration	
Baklashova and Kazakov (2016)		Sharing	
	Networks		
Facilitators			
Khatri and Sharma, (2011)			“In my view, internationalization means the community that exists abroad—that based on your field you can be part of some community. So, for me there is no greater degree of internationalization if there is no sharing”
Liu (2016)			“[. . .] I was afraid, terrified. So, I said to myself, I’m a long way from home, so what if something happens to me here?”
Rienties et al. (2016)			“[. . .] it’s an investment of time and money with no guarantee that you’re going to accepted. You could lose money if you aren’t approved [. . .]”
			“[. . .] student financial aid is not available for the program at the institution I attend. What is available is infrastructure [. . .] with classroom, computer, and guidelines [. . .]: What they offer you is an academic experience”
			“[. . .] I have a hard time with the language. Sometimes I need a translator with a headset to participate in the meetings”
			“The institution frequently organizes events related to the cultural aspects of the country, get-togethers—social actions to get international students involved”
			“Wow. It’s amazing here. I have nothing to complain about vis-à-vis the group, who give you a basic structure to internationalize”

proficiency in two of the main languages of academic dialogue in the world, which ends up making their internationalization process all the more difficult.

The content of our interviews did not highlight several of the difficulties encountered by other authors on the topic. This is the case with homesickness, loneliness, or difficulties with diet and the climate of the country of destination (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016). Just as there are barriers that negatively influence the students’ internationalization process, on the other hand there are facilitators that can positively influence students’ decision-making.

Integration and Sharing Networks as Facilitators

For Urban and Palmer (2016), the student’s integration with the institution’s faculty, staff, and wider community, combined with the development of social networks and knowledge sharing, contribute to their ability to stay until the end of the course. The findings in the above studies are borne out in the words of Maria and Pedro:

Interaction and sharing of experiences are essential [. . .] it’s essential that the HEIs promote events, workshops, and courses for students to form their own networks. (Maria)

It's particularly important. [. . .] students are inserted in research groups, not only academic research, but especially in engagement groups in which they can exchange ideas with people from all over the world. And that's how they develop at a personal level. (Pedro)

It appears that the creation of engagement networks is essential, and this is true for the entire period in which the student conducts their studies. Indeed, it is essential that networks are effectively maintained so that the results obtained from a course taken abroad continue to provide the benefits achieved by the student. Although the literature describes factors identified as facilitators of the internationalization process, such as exchange offices and international clubs (Rienties et al., 2015), government policies, and HEI internationalization strategies (Finn & Darmody, 2015), the interviews suggested that government incentives, in particular, do not act in a concrete way to support and subsidize Brazilian students, as illustrated in Paulo's testimony:

[. . .] the previous government had Science without Borders (Brazilian government program for the internationalization of education and science); but there were many criticisms of the program [. . .] we really need to develop much more to internationalize; Brazil it is still very inward looking. You have to create a much more pro-active policy [. . .] Government incentives are being cut back. We endured an economic crisis in the Brazilian context, and the government was inaccessible. (Paulo)

However, there is the possibility of the Brazilian students participating in the selection processes of international institutions, which in turn offer scholarships and other facilities, thereby allowing the student to attend the institution. One example was the case of João, who is Brazilian but won a scholarship in another country:

[. . .] the Swiss government has a specific scholarship for foreign students. It is more rigorous because it is all in English. You have a certain amount of bureaucracy to cut through, but the chances are much greater. (John)

It should be noted that while government financial support is indeed a facilitator for the student's internationalization process, policies, laws, and incentives must be in place in order to make academic growth within the country feasible. In sum, strategies and policies are already part of the expansion and growth planning of HEIs in some countries, which helps to theorize the phenomenon of internationalization and social and cultural capital by structuring students' social context (Finn & Darmody, 2015).

Professional Motivators of Learning, Recognition, and Engagement

Regarding motivators, we found several with respect to the internationalization of students in the profile selected.

Motivators were mentioned more frequently than barriers and facilitators in the expressions. For Kwon (2009), internationalization provides the student with recognition, professional development, and an advantage in the job market—all of which are motivational factors for the student to complete their studies.

For Pedro and Alice, the professional opportunities were motivating elements for them to complete their studies in another country. This phenomenon is also discussed in the study by Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016), who state that studying abroad can enhance a student's career prospects—all the more so when we note the relative scarcity of Brazilian students who can highlight their foreign experience:

[. . .] the market is very receptive to this kind of information. My particular experience has been great. The market really values this international experience, especially when we study in a good country and at a good university. (Pedro)

It seems to me that internationalization is becoming a requirement to be viable in the job market. (Alice)

Learning about new cultures, according to Urban and Palmer (2016), is among the motivational factors that prompt students to embark on a process of internationalization. The interviewed participants confirmed an interest in learning, especially in relation to the academic culture in other countries; however, it is interesting to note that cultural learning sometimes appears as a motivating factor and sometimes as a barrier due to insecurity and fear of not being able to communicate.

Another point of contrast between the literature and the current research, according to Doyle et al. (2016), pertains to academic mobility, which appears in the literature as a student motivator because of the ease of movement. However, when analyzing the data collected, none of the participants mentioned this facility; it may be that the managers of HEIs, as well as of the government officials who aim to increase the presence and performance of the country in the academic field, should pay more attention to this phenomenon. This result may also be a corollary of the incipient status of Brazil in the context of the internationalization of higher education (Romani-Dias et al., 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our assessment of the global scenario of internationalization suggests that the international student represents a great economic and cultural impact for the countries and for the host HEIs: Such students stimulate financial movement, and boost on-campus numbers and learning about new cultures. The objective of our study was to analyze what are the main barriers, motivators, and facilitators for the internationalization of Brazilian students. Utilizing a qualitative method, we performed a literature review on the internationalization of

higher education from the standpoint of the individual—with the international student as the unit of analysis—and conducted 17 interviews based on a semi-structured script.

We highlight as the main barriers that hamper international students in this process intrinsic factors, such as the student's emotional state, and extrinsic factors, such as their financial status, in addition to the difficulty of mastering the language. The main motivators are the career opportunities that arise from the student's immersion in the international academic context as well as their personal development. Facilitators include the fostering of sharing networks and integration between students and the academic community.

However, in the triangulation that we performed in this study based on (a) the literature review; (b) interviews with international students; and (c) our analysis, we found that perceptions differed in relation to the analyzed categories that emerge depending on the interviewees' different profiles. If, on the one hand, cultural learning is a motivator for a certain profile, for another, it constitutes a barrier that manifests as fear and anxiety.

Our study offers contributions in terms of three dimensions: for HEIs, for academia within the theme of internationalization, and, of course, for the students themselves. The first contribution, for educational institutions and of a managerial nature, relates to insights with respect to developing strategies for sending, hosting, and developing international students. In the domain of research, as a second contribution, our survey indicates that internationalization is a potential tool for cultural dissemination and contributions to the scientific community and society. Our third contribution is addressed to the students themselves: the very deepening their understanding of a phenomenon may be a key driver for the development of their careers.

However, we should mention that the good results of internationalization for the student go far beyond the student-institution relationship. We refer to the fact that the sustainability of the student's career will depend on how they structure the delivery of the results obtained to the market, knowing how to assertively consolidate their efforts, maintain their networks, generate publications, and contribute to research. Students must clearly understand that it is not enough to be an international student: they must have an established strategy on the best way to sustain the process, growth, and consolidation of their career. We understand that the contributions we bring in our study are important insights for the three dimensions discussed here, being the fundamental pillars for the solid construction of the study on international education.

With respect to the limitations of the research, we acknowledge the absence of a main and therefore guiding theory regarding internationalization in higher education; indeed, this is a recurring limitation in this theme, which lacks proper theories to explain the phenomenon of internationalization. In view of the above, future studies on expanding the level of individual analysis can contribute to theory development. We

also recommend that individuals' perceptions be investigated in three contexts when they return to their country: family, social, and professional. Finally, further studies are needed to investigate internationalization strategies in higher education between countries on different continents, given the peculiarities of each society, especially as regards their political, economic, and social and technological aspects.

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