Ed Process Int J

www.edupij.com

ISSN 2147-0901 (Print), 2564-8020 (Online)

EDUCATIONAL PROCESS
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

"Looking for a Better Future": Examining African Portuguese-Speaking Students' Motivation to Study in Portuguese Higher Education

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Research Article

Cite this article: Doutor, C., & Alves, N. (2024). "Looking for a Better Future": Examining African Portuguese-Speaking Students' Motivation to Study in Portuguese Higher Education. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 13(1): 68-83. https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2024.131.5

Received November 14, 2023
Accepted January 11, 2024
Published Online February 29, 2024

Keywords:
Portuguese-speaking African countries students, international students, motivations to study abroad, higher education, Portugal

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Abstract

Background/purpose. While the existing literature explores the internalization of higher education, a significant gap remains in comprehending the motivations behind international students choosing Portuguese higher education. This study aims to address this gap by examining the motivations of a specific group within Portuguese universities: international students from Portuguese-speaking African countries.

Materials/methods. The study was conducted with a qualitative approach using data obtained from biographical interviews with African Portuguese-speaking international students. The collected data were then analyzed according to content analysis.

Results. The findings demonstrate that the students' motivations for studying at Portuguese higher education institutions varied. Their reasons include the international reputation of Portugal, the quality of its education, upon recommendation from family members, the Portuguese language, lower tuition fees compared to their home institutions, cultural proximity, scholarship opportunities, and the perception of Portugal as a safe country.

Conclusion. Through an examination of the motivation of students from Portuguese-speaking African countries pursuing higher education in Portugal, this study provides fresh perspective on the existing literature concerning international student mobility. Opting to study in Portugal is seen as a chance for African students to access quality higher education and to obtain an academic degree with significant recognition in the country of origin, with anticipated positive impacts on the personal, social, and professional aspects of their lives.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the internationalization of higher education has garnered increased scholarly attention, significantly contributing to the diverse composition of the university student population (Bain, 2023). The allure of receiving higher education from prestigious foreign universities has played a crucial role in the surge of international student numbers (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2023; Weber & Van Mol, 2023).

Portugal has seen substantial growth in the internationalization of higher education over the last few decades. While the existing literature explores the internationalization of higher education, a significant gap remains in comprehending the motivations behind international students choosing Portuguese higher education. This study aims to address this gap by examining the motivations of a specific group within Portuguese universities: students hailing from Portuguese-speaking African countries (PSAC). Since 1975, following the Democratic Revolution in Portugal, Portuguese universities have welcomed a significant number of students from former colonies, including Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The enrollment of students from these countries into Portuguese higher education has seen remarkable growth in recent years. According to data from the Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência (DGEEC [Portugal's General Directorate of Education and Science Statistics], 2023), there were 8,784 such students in 2011-2012, and by 2022-2023, this number had risen to 23,204. This upward trend suggests that Portugal, particularly in terms of its higher education institutions, is becoming increasingly attractive as a place of study. However, the motivations driving students from PSAC to Portugal have not yet received substantial attention from Portuguese researchers.

The current study aims to comprehend the motivations of students from PSAC pursuing higher education in Portugal. Specifically focusing on the University of Lisbon, the study endeavors to identify the factors and motives that prompt these students to leave their home countries and select Portugal as their educational destination. The study explores the following research questions: (1) What factors drive students from Portuguese-speaking African countries to pursue higher education in Portugal? and (2) What factors contribute to students from Portuguese-speaking African countries choosing the University of Lisbon for their academic pursuits?

The study is presented as follows. Initially, we provide a concise discussion of the literature that was considered in the research and investigate the motivating factors influencing international students' choices of countries for their higher education studies. In the subsequent section, we explore the presence of students from Portuguese-speaking African countries in Portuguese higher education. The methodology section then outlines the approach employed for the study, before the next section analyzes data gathered through biographical interviews conducted with 22 students from PSAC. Finally, we present the study's findings and discuss them within the context of the existing prior research. The study then concludes by highlighting key insights from the research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivations to study abroad

In recent decades, there has been a global surge in the number of students pursuing higher education abroad, leading to significant developments in the literature addressing the migration of international students. Numerous studies have delved into the decision-making process of students from various countries, exploring the "push" and "pull" factors that influence their choice of a study destination (Hosgorur & Aysel, 2022; Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2023; Lam et al., 2011; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

"Push" factors are linked to unfavorable study conditions in the home country, encompassing economic, political, and social issues. The primary influences driving students to seek education in a

https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2024.131.5 Published online by Universitepark Press

foreign country often arise from economic and political situations within their home country and the limited capacity of local universities (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Slotwinski et al., 2023). Additionally, students consider factors such as travel expenses, tuition fees, security concerns, violence, and crime levels (Wu & Hou, 2023). Their motivations are frequently tied to recommendations received from parents and friends regarding higher education in the host country, their social connections with the host country, and limited job opportunities in their home country, among other factors (Huisman et al., 2022; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023).

As highlighted by Jiani (2017) and, more recently, Alves et al. (2024), having family or friends residing in the destination country has been identified as a factor influencing the decision to leave their home country. The reputation of the destination country, particularly the recognition of the education obtained, plays a crucial role. Some studies also emphasize students' perceptions of the academic and educational environment (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023). The desire for personal and professional development impacts their personality and future career prospects and is a significant motivation for studying abroad (e.g., Gong & Huybers, 2021; King & Shondi, 2018; Potts, 2015). Studying abroad is perceived as a valuable opportunity for developing independence (Alves et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024), and some students believe that having international study experience will be valued highly by future employers (Sison & Brennan, 2012).

"Pull" factors can encompass historical ties between the host and destination countries, geographical proximity, cultural similarities, living costs, recommendations from relatives and friends, the availability of financial support (scholarships), and the quality of higher education (Hosgorur & Aysel, 2022; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023). These factors pertain to the appealing aspects of the destination country (Maringe & Carter, 2007). The characteristics of universities, such as their reputation and quality, infrastructure, educational programs, and the market value of their degrees, have been identified as pull factors by various authors (e.g., França et al., 2023; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023). In choosing a university abroad, its location and proximity to the student's home country are also considered significant factors (Lam et al., 2011).

Numerous studies have highlighted the colonial, historical, cultural, and linguistic connections between the countries of origin and destination (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Furukawa et al., 2013; Glover, 2011; Weber & Van Mol, 2023). Others have emphasized the influence of family and friends as the most critical factor in students' decisions to study abroad (Alves et al., 2024; Schartner & Shields, 2023). Established social networks in the destination country can encourage or facilitate students' decision to study abroad (Sin et al., 2022). More recently, Ahmad and Buchanan (2017) stated that students' motivations for studying abroad are related to an institution's academic reputation, similarities between the education systems, lower tuition fees compared to their home institutions, cultural proximity, safety, and lower living costs.

The study conducted by Maringe and Carter (2007) focused on students from PSAC who chose England as their study destination. For them, this decision represented an opportunity and an investment in their current and future lives. As noted by King and Sondhi (2018), international experience contributes to "the creation of an international labor elite of skilled professionals" (p. 178) and, consequently, has a positive impact on the their employability (Larbi & Fu, 2017; Roy et al., 2019). Consequently, many international graduates choose to return to their home countries to contribute to the country's development and to support their families (Krannich & Hunger, 2022; Nghia, 2019).

2.2. African Portuguese-speaking countries students in Portuguese higher education

Over the past few decades, Portuguese higher education institutions (HEIs) have experienced a notable increase in the number of students from PSAC. These students constitute the second-largest group of international students enrolled at Portuguese universities. It is noteworthy that Brazilian students represent the largest contingent in Portuguese HEIs. Concerning the number of

students from PSAC, there was substantial growth between 2011 and 2022, with the count having risen from 8,784 PSAC students in 2011 to 23,204 in 2022 (DGEEC, 2023). This increase highlights that Portugal has become an increasingly attractive destination for these students over the past decade, emphasizing the necessity for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Only a few studies have explored the motivations of this particular group of students, revealing that the primary factors attracting them to study in Portugal are the prestige of obtaining a Portuguese diploma and the local support network, which includes family and friends (Alves & Iorio, 2021). Importantly, having family and friends already residing in the country is a significant pull factor encouraging students to choose Portugal for their studies (Nadă & Araújo, 2018). Other pull factors cited by these students include the Portuguese language, cultural proximity, the quality of Portuguese higher education, and the credibility of Portuguese diplomas in the job market, among others (Lima, 2018). For African families, possessing a Portuguese diploma is seen as a strategic move to enhance their status and bolster their social capital (Alves et al., 2024). Consequently, many students from PSAC enroll to Portuguese universities in order to improve their lives, gain higher qualifications, and to expand their future job prospects and employability. Investing in higher education is seen as a strategy for national development, particularly through the creation of a skilled workforce and, subsequently, the improvement of employment opportunities (Wiers-Jenssen & Støren, 2021).

For many students, Portuguese higher education institutions represent social and professional distinction. Portuguese universities are renowned for their reputation, and higher education signifies the possibility of having a distinctive professional career in the future (Alharbi & Smith, 2019). This implies that these students migrate in order to obtain qualifications that will enhance or secure better professional opportunities following successful completion of the education (Larbi & Fu, 2017; Marques & Góis, 2014).

3. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach (Flick, 2004) to investigate the motivations of PSAC students to study in Portugal. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), a qualitative approach is appropriate for comprehending the complexity of the phenomenon under study by delving into the perceptions and meanings provided by participants.

Participants. The study involved 22 participants, comprising 12 males and 10 females, with their ages ranging from 18 to 23 years old. The following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) African country of origin; (2) admission through a special access regime, and (3) being a first-year student. Concerning the participant students' nationality, 10 were from Guinea-Bissau, eight from Cape Verde, and four from Mozambique. Nine of the students were enrolled to study Law, three opted for International Relations, three took Public Administration, with the remaining participants studying disciplines such as Political Science, Computer Science and Engineering, and Mathematics, etc.

Instrument. The study used biographical interviews as the method to collect data from the participants, which is an approach used to facilitate access to individuals' motivations, life experiences, as well as their past and future perspectives (O'Neill & Einasche, 2019). Thus, the biographical method involves the active participation of individuals, not only in understanding their life paths, but also in interpreting their lived experiences (Amado & Ferreira, 2017). In the current study, biographical interviewing proved to be a valuable method for capturing the motivations of participant students from PSAC studying in Portuguese higher education.

Procedures. First, we contacted the African Student Associations at the University of Lisbon with the aim of obtaining the contact information of students who may be interested in

https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2024.131.5 Published online by Universitepark Press

participating in the study. Subsequently, candidate participants were contacted via email. Ethical procedures were also taken into consideration, with each participant signing an informed consent document in which they were provided detailed information about the aims of the study. In order to safeguard their confidentiality, the names of the students were replaced by pseudonyms in the reporting of this research. The data collection of the study was performed during March and May of 2018.

Data Analysis. The current study employed content analysis as the method of organizing and analyzing the collected qualitative data. After transcribing the interviews, we conducted an initial reading of the biographical interviews to identify data categories. Subsequently, we adhered to the phases of pre-analysis, coding, treatment of results, inference, and interpretation, as outlined by Bardin (2016), to formulate initial ideas for the analysis. Both a priori categories (derived from the literature review) and emerging categories (extracted from the interview data) were systematically coded. Therefore, this analytical approach was considered appropriate for understanding the issue and interpreting the collected data (Matsekoleng, 2023).

4. Results

In this section, we present the findings related to PSAC students' motivations to study in Portugal and in choosing the University of Lisbon in particular.

4.1. Motivations to study in Portugal

Family influence on a student's decision to choose Portugal as a destination country was highlighted by the findings. Some of the students mentioned that having relatives already living in Portugal was crucial to their decision. For example, one student referred to:

> *I chose Portugal because my grandmother lives here, and also my aunt. And I saw that it was easier to come here, to be here, and have their support should I experience an undesirable situation…and I am sure that if I had chosen another country, I would not have had that opportunity. So, I preferred Portugal to have support…since it would be better here.* [Ezidoro, 22 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

The presence of relatives in the destination country is deemed essential not only because they provide familial, financial, and emotional support, but also in terms of the student's safety in facing life in an unknown country. These findings align with other studies that discussed how social networks established in destination countries (Alves et al., 2024; Jiani, 2017; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023) can stimulate the migration of students and, consequently, promote their well-being and facilitate their social integration.

On the other hand, the choice of Portugal was also related to the language. Some students highlighted language proficiency as a determinant factor in their motivation to study in Portugal. Regarding to Portuguese language, one student stated:

> *Portugal is a country which has the official language of Cape Verde which is Portuguese. So, the language is a facilitating factor. We arrive here and don't have to learn the language. So, it is easier to learn everything.* [Kelly, 18 years, Cape Verde, Political Science]

In this sense, proficiency in the Portuguese language is essential for learning and their social and academic integration. As previously mentioned, students often migrate to countries where they have linguistic ties (Furukawa et al., 2013; Weber & Van Mol, 2023). Moreover, some of the participant students revealed that their skills in other languages such as English and French were not deemed sufficient to study in a non-Portuguese speaking country:

> *Oh, by the way, initially I was supposed to go to France, but I didn't want to lose 1 or 2 years just to gain the required level of French to enter university there. So, I decided to come to Portugal instead*. [Ariela, 18 years, Cape Verde, International Relations]
>
> *We don't have study vacancies available for all countries. We do have though for China, for Morocco, for Portugal….although for China we have to take a Mandarin language test.* [Kelly, 18 years, Cape Verde, Political Science]

As mentioned by Xu et al. (2023), "the geopolitical and economic position of Africa relative to China is a significant pull factor for African students" (p. 4). Nevertheless, these students need to pass a "Chinese Proficiency Test [that] is an international standardized exam which tests and rates Chinese language proficiency for non-native speakers" (p. 10).

Another important factor is the perceived quality of the education system in Portugal. Most students decided to pursue their studies in Portugal because of the prestige of its HEIs as well as the quality and credibility of Portuguese diplomas in their homeland labor market. The students were motivated by the potential reward that the Portuguese diploma could offer in the future lives. Some of the students had the perception that a degree gained in another country would be considered better than a degree from their home country (Alves & Iorio, 2021; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). For some of the participant students, the motivation was connected to the labor market:

> *…because the Portuguese diploma is very well known in Mozambique. Only by showing that diploma do you have the opportunity to enter the labor market. It is different from having a diploma from Mozambique.* [Nayma, 19 years, Mozambique, Public Administration]

Thus, the Portuguese quality of education and gaining a qualification from Portugal are both perceived as important assets. Diplomas earned in Portugal are seen as a mark of prestige, which can significantly improve a PSAC student's curriculum vitae, representing a certain position or promotion upon return to their home country. Also, Alves et al. (2024) highlighted that students from Angola and Cape Verde who were studying in Portugal expressed a desire to return to their respective home countries after having completed their higher education. For PSAC students, having a Portuguese diploma is seen as linked to their future employment prospects.

Similarly, recommendations from relatives and friends were of great influence. Of the participants in the current study, 13 of them mentioned having decided to study in Portugal because their parents had already attended a Portuguese university. In the following quote, one student mentioned being significantly encouraged by her mother to pursue higher education studies in Portugal:

> *My mother has a degree in management. She studied here* [in Portugal]*. So, she always gave me support, and she always wanted me to come to study here.* [Sadjo, 19 years, Guinea-Bissau, International Relations]

Another student highlighted that their father's Portuguese higher education was a determining factor in their decision to study in Portugal:

> *I came because of my father. He had already studied computer engineering here, so he already knew Portugal very well. He thought that it was better for me to come and study here. And that's why I came to Portugal.* [Abrão, 19 years, Guinea-Bissau, Public Administration]

These quotations show a tendency for families with members who had previously studied in Portugal to encourage their next generation to pursue higher education studies in Portugal, and even to attend the same HEI that they had. In this respect, the research published by Carlson (2013) regarding student mobility showed that "a higher social class background and prior (personal or familial) experiences of geographical mobility raise the likelihood of going abroad" (p. 169).

Moreover, those parents who had not themselves studied in Portugal were seen to have encouraged their offspring to opt for Portugal based on the reputational quality of Portugal's HE

system and its HEIs. These results corroborate with the findings of Shkoler and Rabenu (2023), who supported the idea that personal and relatives' recommendations are considered very relevant in the motivations of students to study abroad. In this sense, the role of parents in guiding and supporting the decision (Schartner & Shields, 2023) of where a student may study can be seen as an investment by the family to ensure a successful future for the next generation of their family. On the other hand, this requires that students' families have the necessary economic conditions to support higher education studies in Portugal, and that, probably, without this support, some students would not have been able to study in Portugal.

Teachers played an important role in the decision to access Portuguese higher education. The encouragement provided by teachers was seen as decisive in the academic training of some of the PSAC students interviewed in Portugal:

> *Some teachers studied in Brazil, others in Portugal and elsewhere, but those who studied in Portugal motivated us to come and study here. They always spoke about the higher level of education in Portugal, which is good. They would always motivate us, if an opportunity arose, to continue our studies in Portugal*. [Jônatas, 20 years, Cape Verde, Aerospace Engineering]

Additionally, it was observed that what motivated PSAC students to leave their home countries was a desire for a better life. The majority of students decided to come to Portugal to secure a better future and, especially, to provide financial support to their families in the future:

> *I came here to improve my prospects, but also to improve the situation of my family. These are my main motivations.* [Ezidoro, 22 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law].
>
> *One of the main reasons was related to looking out for others, for my mother and my younger brother. I thought if I came here* [Portugal] *I could graduate and do good for them.* [Nayma, 19 years, Mozambique, Public Administration]

Almost all of the interviewed students mentioned that they chose Portugal to gain and develop skills and knowledge that would later help contribute to their respective home country's development. The students expressed a strong commitment to hard work, holding on to optimistic aspirations for their future (Wu & Hou, 2023). Students' inner drive to learn, to experience a different culture, and to embrace challenges were factors also considered important to them. One student referred to this:

> *I came here to study and return to Guinea-Bissau. I think that my contribution is very important to the development of our society. I will be a lawyer to defend justice and reaffirm justice. There is no justice in Guinea. Society is divided, some people have more privileges than others. This is the reason why I came here to help the people, to help others.* [Djaló, 20 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

In this context, there were visible aspirations and desires seen in the students to contribute to the development of their home countries, taking into account the current situation of African countries. Research conducted by Krannich and Hunger (2022) on international students in Germany emphasized that "international students are conceived as essential contributors to the development of their countries of origin after they finished their studies abroad" (p. 1).

Moreover, some students mentioned the poor quality of their universities back home, the lack of educational offers, and poor pedagogical conditions as factors that push students to study abroad in Portugal. For example, one student stated that the education system in Cape Verde differed to Portugal's system, expressing that:

> *In Portugal, the students here were better prepared than we were in Cape Verde.* [Aila, 20 years, Cape Verde, Aerospace Engineering]

Besides, some of the participant students mentioned the poor standard of pedagogical conditions in their home countries, with one stating:

> *The lecturers miss a lot of classes. And most of the time we do not learn everything that is in the books.* [Salimato, 19 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

The literature reveals that the poor quality of local education, linked to a lack of pedagogical conditions or lecturers, contributes to students seeking studies outside of their origin countries (Huisman et al., 2022).

Additionally, factors such as the reputation of a destination country in terms of safety, quality of life, good weather conditions, and geographic proximity to their home country were mentioned by students. Some of the interviewed students revealed that Portugal was considered a safe country in contrast with their homeland:

> *Here, there is considerable safety. In Mozambique, I was assaulted many times, and here I feel better, much better really.* [Larisse, 19 years, Mozambique, Computer Science and Engineering]

The perceived safety of the destination country is a key factor highlighted by international students (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2017; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023). Additionally, geographical proximity and a positive impression of Portugal were also reported as important factors considered by the international students. Some of the other students highlighted quality of life, the weather, and the country's location as attractive factors:

> *It is closer to Cape Verde. When we intend to spend holidays, it is closer than some other countries, so we preferred coming here. It is a country with a good quality of life and good weather*. [Kelly, 18 years, Cape Verde, Political Science]

Also, the historical and cultural ties between Portuguese-Speaking African countries and Portugal was pointed out as being important. For one student, the idea that Portugal and Guinea-Bissau were "brothers," or culturally similar, marked their choice of Portugal. In this sense, culture was pointed out as one of the reasons for the students opting to complete their higher education in Portugal. The existence of a supposed proximity culture is deemed fundamental to facilitating adaptation and integration (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2023; Weber & Van Mol, 2023). Some students expressed that studying in Portugal was considered like a dream to them:

> *I always wanted to study in Portugal*! [Ismael, 20 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

Some students stated that the cost of living and studying in Portugal was lower than that of some other countries:

> *[Before] I was in London and I felt depressed. So, I decided to come here* [Portugal] *instead because here I have a house, the costs are less, and my parents can come and go without problems*. [Sadjo, 19 years, Guinea-Bissau, International Relations]

The current study's findings are in line with previous research, confirming that most students choose Portugal because the costs are relatively lower when compared to studying in other European countries (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023). They benchmarked both the cost and benefits of Portugal and other destinations, and concluded that the overall cost of living and studying is more acceptable in the case of Portugal. The cost of studying overseas represents a significant economic challenge for many families (Weber & Van Mol, 2023).

However, few students highlighted bureaucratic and financial aspects, such as securing a visa to study abroad. Due to established cooperation agreements between Portugal and Portuguese-speaking African countries, students have greater access to study visas as well as to gain a scholarship. Some students emphasized the lack of higher education opportunities in their home countries. In this context, the possibility of benefitting from a scholarship to study in Portugal constitutes a significant opportunity for many students:

> *It is easier to get a scholarship to study in Portugal than in Guinea-Bissau, where it is significantly more difficult.* [Dilson, 22 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

Students with a government scholarship find it helpful to subsist in a foreign country, and scholarships reduce the financial burden on students' families. However, research has shown that few international students mention scholarships as a motivating factor to leave their home countries (Haugen, 2013), indicating that students can face greater difficulties in obtaining scholarships to access higher education in their home countries. Moreover, admission issues are other pull factors mentioned by students:

> *Portugal is one of the countries that we can access….Portugal is a country that has fewer bureaucratic procedures.* [Kelly, 18 years, Cape Verde, Political Science]

Overall, these were the main motivations pointed out by international students having left their home countries to enroll in Portuguese higher education.

4.2. Motivations to study at the University of Lisbon

Regarding the international students' motivations to study at the University of Lisbon, the quality and reputation of the institution were highlighted by all of the interviewed students. The institution is renowned for its academic quality and this significantly influenced the students' choices:

> *Because it is the best university in Portugal, isn't it? I prefer the best; it makes sense.* [Ezidoro, 22 years, Guinea-Bissau, Law]

> *I searched on the Internet about Portuguese universities and I saw that this university was one of the best in Europe for engineering. It has a good reputation. It is one of the best!* [Jônatas, 20 years, Cape Verde, Aerospace Engineering]

Studying at a prestigious university is also a key consideration. The prestige of the institution (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2017; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023; Weber & Van Mol, 2023) is closely tied to the future career prospects and employability of higher education students. Employment opportunities post-graduation are among the primary motivating factors of students. The majority of the participating students believed that they would have better professional prospects in their home countries or even in Portugal having obtained a degree from the University of Lisbon:

> *The goal of studying here was to obtain a diploma and secure excellent employment because I know that graduates from this university always find good employment. That was my main goal*. [Larisse, 19 years, Mozambique, Computer Science and Engineering]

Numerous studies have already underscored that international experience can enhance graduates' employment prospects (Garvik & Valenta, 2023). Therefore, the quality of education and value for money are crucial in their motivations (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023; Wu & Hou, 2023) when seeking education abroad. A wide range of programs offered by Portuguese HEIs with relevance to the future employability of graduating students is also taken into account. The educational offerings are also considered, especially the variety of available programs and scientific fields they cover. The choice of academic programs is another factor influencing students' decisions to study abroad. The interviewed students mentioned that their choices were influenced by their area of academic interest:

> *When the application for admission to higher education in Portugal was opened, studying engineering physics was only available here in Lisbon. So, we only had access to study here at the University of Lisbon.* [Kelton, 19 years, Cape Verde, Engineering Physics]

Some of the students pointed out that they chose the University of Lisbon based on the proximity of accommodation provided by their relatives:

> *My aunt has been living in Lisbon for 20 years, and I wanted to study here. So, I chose the University of Lisbon, since I don't have to pay for accommodation*. [Ariela, 18 years, Cape Verde, International Relations]

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> *I have uncles living here in Lisbon and that makes it easier not to pay rent, and less expenses for my mother*. [Elsio, 18 years, Cape Verde, Engineering Physics]

This factor was also suggested by Lam et al. (2011). The location of universities and the distance to students' homes are relevant factors when students select their university. Thus, the cost of living in Portugal, particularly in terms of accommodation expenses, also affected the students' decisions. On the other hand, recommendations from families were also considered as important in their choice of university:

> *My cousins told me that the University of Lisbon is very good, an excellent university. They advised me to study here. So, that's it, I came here!* [Larisse, 19 years, Mozambique, Computer Science and Engineering]

The involvement of families in students' academic lives therefore plays a crucial and considerable role in making their choices about seeking higher education abroad. These findings align with previous studies, such as in research published by Huisman et al. (2022).

5. Discussion

The current study found the motivations of students from PSAC to attend university in Portugal to be diverse. The findings revealed various different push and pull factors that shaped the participant students' decision to pursue their academic studies in Portugal.

The interviewed students revealed a significant emphasis on academic and career advancement in their motivations to study abroad. They expressed that their decision to pursue higher education in Portugal was driven by a desire for academic and career development, with the aim of securing more favorable future prospects. This aligns with the findings of prior research by Larbi and Fu (2017) and Marques and Góis (2014). The current study's results underscore the notion that students hold "a positive view of the benefits of learning abroad for their early career experiences" (Potts, 2015, p. 449). The investment of being educated in a foreign country is perceived as a strategic approach to accessing improved opportunities, securing qualified positions, and attaining higher salaries, particularly in their home countries once students are qualified (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023; Wu & Hou, 2023).

The findings also underscore cultural and language-related motivations, which are closely associated pull factors (Weber & Van Mol, 2023). Regarding cultural and linguistic motivations, the majority of the participant students chose Portugal due to its historical and cultural connections to their country of origin, as well as the shared Portuguese language. Furthermore, the linguistic factor, as highlighted by Sin et al. (2022) as part of pull factors, serves as another motivating aspect for the decision to study abroad. Proficiency in the language can indeed facilitate migration and, consequently, contribute to their better adaptation and integration into Portuguese society. These cultural and linguistic motivations for studying abroad align with previous research findings in the literature (Furukawa et al., 2013; Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2023; Lima, 2018).

The current study's findings revealed that the international students emphasized social and family-related motivations for their studying in Portugal. The majority of the interviewed students highlighted the significant influence of having family members already living in Portugal on their decision making (Nadă & Araújo, 2018; Sin et al., 2022). Specifically, for students with relatives in Portugal, this connection serves as a crucial support mechanism, reinforcing the idea that the presence of "someone there reduced the discomfort associated with being in a new environment"

https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2024.131.5 Published online by Universitepark Press

(Jiani, 2017, p. 574). Additionally, positive endorsements from former students from PSAC in Portugal (whether relatives or instructors) were also cited as influential factors.

Another finding is associated with perceptions of quality and motivation driven by reputation. In the case of the current study, some of the students chose Portugal due to the perceived prestige linked to its higher education institutions. The findings also suggest that gaining admission to a Portuguese university is viewed as a symbol of personal, academic, and professional accomplishment. Students from Portuguese-speaking African countries attribute prestige and quality to the Portuguese education system, as well as the notoriety of their diploma and its future perceived value in the labor market. This finding is consistent with previous studies, indicating that many students aim to secure "a better future for themselves through higher education and higher-paid jobs" (Alharbi & Smith, 2019, p. 59). Additionally, some of the current study's participants expressed their intention to provide a better life for their relatives once they were qualified and in gainful employment.

On the other hand, some of the students emphasized scholarship opportunities provided by Portugal as a significant pull factor. The academic programs offered by Portuguese universities also play a crucial role in this important decision. It is worth noting that a few students pointed to a lack of certain courses in their home countries, making this lack a push factor in their decision making.

Moreover, the majority of the participants in the current study highlighted motivations related to national and socioeconomic development, expressing a desire to contribute to the progress or development of their home countries, which is consistent with previous research such as by Alves and Iorio (2021) and Massunga (2017). A significant number of the students interviewed intend to return to their home country after completing their higher education. In this context, the valorization of the Portuguese diploma emerged as a highly relevant and attractive factor, as it can foster a skilled workforce and consequently enhance employment opportunities (Wiers-Jenssen & Støren, 2021). Overall, these categories encompass a range of motivations that students may have when deciding to pursue higher education abroad. Each category represents the primary drivers behind students' decisions to study in a foreign country, as identified by the respective authors.

6. Conclusion

While exploring the motivations of international students to study abroad is not a novel subject, the current study distinguishes itself as one of the few that focused specifically on students from Portuguese-speaking African countries. Expanding on this perspective, the study identified key themes associated with the motivations of international students from PSAC in Portuguese higher education. Through examination of the motivations of these students, the current study provides a fresh perspective on the existing literature regarding international student mobility. The intertwining of historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic factors makes a compelling case for further research to enrich our understanding of global higher education dynamics and the trends associated with it.

In conclusion, opting to study in Portugal is seen as a chance for students from PSAC to access a higher quality university education, with anticipated impacts on personal, social, and professional aspects of their lives. While individual motivations may be influenced by the personal wishes of students, they were also found to be shaped by the structural conditions of both the home and destination countries, often categorized as push and pull factors (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen,

2023). The current study demonstrated that the presence of relatives already living in Portugal, proficiency in the Portuguese language, the quality and reputation of the Portuguese education system, credibility of its institutions' diplomas, and also scholarship opportunities were all significant pull factors that influenced the decisions of PSAC students to pursue their higher education in Portugal. As push factors, the students highlighted the poor quality of universities in their home countries, the lack of educational offerings available to them, and the absence of appropriate pedagogical conditions at universities in their respective home countries.

6.1. Suggestions and Limitations

Future research in this area could encompass a broader range of universities to explore motivations among the wider student population and through an increased sample size. Additionally, investigating potential variations based on student gender, level of study, and specific countries of origin may provide valuable insights into their motivations for pursuing higher education in Portugal. Understanding the motivations of international students to study abroad is crucial, making further exploration of these factors warranted in future research.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations of the current study. Specifically, the study was exclusively conducted within one Portuguese university. Another limitation is that interviews were not conducted with students from either Angola or São Tomé and Príncipe. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other research settings.

Declarations

Author Contributions. The authors contributed equally to the current research. Both authors read and approved the final published version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding. This research was nationally funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), under a doctoral grant (SFRH/BD/120463/2016) and a postdoctoral research grant (UIDB/05739/2020 CEAD BASE).

Ethical Approval. All ethical procedures were fulfilled in safeguarding the informed consent and anonymization of the study's participants following the principles of the Ethical Charter of Education Sciences, and ethical clearance was received from the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon (June 2016).

Data Availability Statement. The datasets are available from the authors upon request.

Acknowledgments. The authors would like to thank the participants of the study for their collaboration.

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