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**MOTIVATION-OPPORTUNITY-ABILITY NEXUS:
APPLICATION TO REGIONAL CENTRAL ASIAN STUDENT MOBILITY**

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Abstract: This study analytically distinguishes between motivational, opportunistic and ability (MOA) factors to extract important questions on international student mobility's decision-making process in its modern configurations. We use primary data from an online questionnaire associated with semi-structured interviews submitted to Central Asian Alumni from five different countries (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), to test the hypothesis of a significant variation in the MOA to study abroad across five nationalities. Our findings show minimal cross-country differences. The main differences remain modest in scale and are threefold: firstly, Tajik respondents prioritize physical opportunity and capital mobility within the ability factor; Turkmen respondents emphasize the role of constrained educational supply and imaginary experience, while Uzbek respondents are the most intrinsically motivated while deciding to study abroad.

JEL Codes: F29, C83, J61

Keywords: student, mobility, motivation-opportunity-ability nexus, Central Asia

MOTIVATION-OPPORTUNITY-ABILITY NEXUS: APPLICATION TO REGIONAL CENTRAL ASIAN STUDENT MOBILITY

1. Introduction

Decision-making processes are largely explored in the current literature and not only in the economic literature. Migration decisions are typically a favorable chance to study them and over time, different generations of analytical framework were suggested to explain these migration decisions. We do not pretend here to provide the reader with an exhaustive list of these studies, but aim to underline the lack of agreement upon a unified version. The first one aimed to discuss migration as an outcome of spatial differences in economic opportunities (Hicks, 1932). The model of Harris-Todaro (1970) revised the model of Hicks (1932) by introducing a risk factor to the decision-making process. Later on, studies introduced a sequential dimension in two steps to the decision-making process. A first step consists in the decision by a person to migrate or to stay, while the second step consists in the choice of the destination for people who actually decided to migrate (Alpes, 2014; Bal and Willems, 2014; de Haas, 2010; Docquier *et al.*, 2014). For instance, using this framework, Docquier *et al.* (2014) distinguish in their paper between aspiring or potential migrants and actual migrants to study cross-country determinants of international migration. More recently, studies started to focus on the decision-making process of students who decide to study abroad. Since mobility is a cumulative process, international student mobility (ISM) is usually considered a good signal for future –labour– migration and strategic in the knowledge economy. To the best of our knowledge, Carling (2002) who reviewed his approach in 2018 (Carling and Schewel, 2018), was the first researcher proposing a student mobility decisions-making model indirectly inspired from the migration economic, anthropologic and sociologic fields. He developed the aspiration-ability analytical framework to justify the difference between the wish or the desire to study abroad and the ability to do so. Declinations of this aspiration-ability are to be found since then. We can mention for instance the work of Carling, Ersanilli and de Haas (2012), Mondain and Diagne (2013), Creighton (2013) and Mains (2011). Nevertheless, we argue that we could disaggregate even more or differently this decision-making process.

Therefore, this study is motivated by the desire to integrate the current empirical evidence into an alternative and detailed student mobility decision-making framework that could analyze and discuss the respective role of the factors that lead young people to study abroad. The motivation – opportunity – ability (MOA) theory typically offers a structure to analyze the transition from intention to behaviour in this context.

Initially designed by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) within the context of information processing, the MOA approach has been successfully adopted by several scholars on various research topics including transit migration (Syed Zwick, 2019), travel decisions (Hung and Petrick, 2012) or teaching approaches (Lai *et al.*, 2018). The backbone of the MOA approach

postulates that behaviour is directly affected by motivation, which is in turn moderated by the respective effect of opportunity and ability (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). However, despite such academic acceptance, we did not find any study applying this analytical framework to ISM.

To do so, we decided to focus on Central Asian institutionalized intra-regional mobility, which remains too neglected in ISM literature. This region of the world is characterized by high emigration rates and student mobility appears a significant signal for future migration trends. Central Asia is one of the most dynamic region of student mobility in the world, led by the important weight in ISM of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (UNESCO, 2018). Central Asian countries are mainly source countries for student inflows to Russia (Takala and Piattoeva, 2012) and to Western countries (Helbich and Miskovicova, 2017; Chankseliani and Hessel, 2016; Holloway *et al.*, 2012). However, while they actively participate in the international student market, they remains currently located on its periphery (Kurzmann, 2014; Wilmoth, 2011). Regional mobility within the region is therefore of utmost importance to reduce the push-factor role in emigration and the understanding of its mechanisms remain to be addressed due to a number of gaps and shortcomings in previous studies.

Data of un-organized mobility remaining incomplete and unavailable, we collected our own data of an organized (or institutionalized) mobility by relying on the experience of Alumni of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Academy based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. This regional centre of postgraduate education offers since 2004 a unique opportunity to young Central Asian undergraduates to enroll a one-year Master degree in a multicultural environment either in political science or in economic governance and development with full scholarship. The Academy welcomes therefore not only students from Kyrgyzstan, but also from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and even Mongolia.

Precisely, our study is based on a primary data collection method: an online questionnaire survey with 72 self-reported answers to central Asian students who enrolled an institutional program based in Kyrgyzstan over the academic years 2004 to 2019. Five representative nationalities are significantly represented (Tajik, Uzbek, Afghan, Turkmen, and Kazakh) in our sample. We aim to answer the following question: is there a significant variation in the motivations, opportunities and abilities to study abroad across our five nationalities?

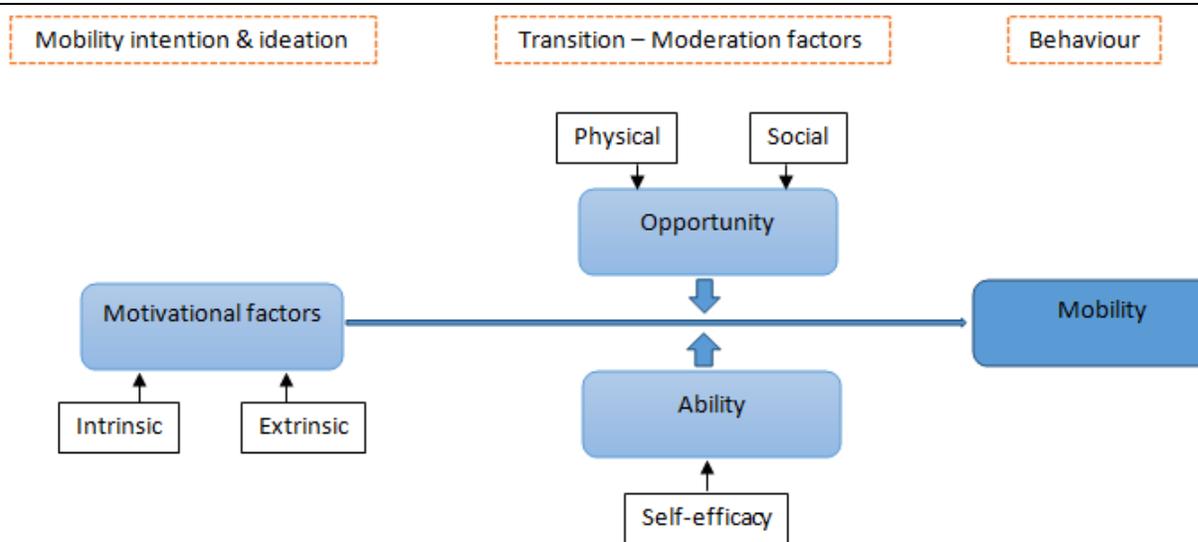
The paper is structured as follows: subsequent to the introduction, section 2 presents and discusses the theoretical origins and conceptual rationale of the MOA approach. Section 3 reviews the previous literature, whilst section 4 presents the participants, measures and methods for data analysis. Sections 5 displays and discusses the main findings and last section concludes.

2. Theoretical origins and conceptual rationale of the MOA approach

The theoretical framework of the MOA approach is structured around three main elements, motivation, opportunity and ability. These elements are declined and considered important drivers to transit from a migration intent and ideation to a migration behaviour. The below figure (figure 1) synthesizes the model.

This framework indicates that motivational factors ground a migration intention and ideation to the individual. This intention is defined as a person's perceived likelihood or subjective probability that he or she will engage in a given behaviour. This intention depends on the motivational factors (M) and is then moderated by opportunities (O) and ability (A). More accurately, in reference to Michie *et al.* (2011) motivational factors activate or inhibit behaviour, opportunities enable the behaviour while ability factors enact the behaviour.

Figure 1: The MOA model – Transition from migration intention and ideation to migration



Source: Author's computation

2.1 Motivational factors

Motivation is the first element of the MOA approach which plays a role in the decision-making process. Motivation can directly affect the occurrence of individual behaviors, in terms both of intensity and direction (Bettman, 1979; Hung and Petrick, 2012). It includes behaviors that are derived from an individual's beliefs and values. Scholars usually distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations which lead to different behaviors (Kagan, 1972, Ryan and Deci, 2000). While the first refers to stable personality traits and

known academically as the challenge motivation, the latter refers to external impacts and is known as the compensation motivation (Amabile *et al.*, 1994; Lai *et al.*, 2018). Intrinsic motivation derives from intangible factors, arising from within and is personally rewarding. On the contrary, extrinsic motivation arises from outside and leads to perform a behaviour to avoid a penalty or earn a reward. In our case, investigating students' motivational differences can help understand and predict behaviors in terms of future mobility.

2.2 Opportunistic factors

The second element of the MOA which affects decision-making process is opportunity. As per Hung and Petrik (2012), opportunity is the circumstances that allow for or facilitate people to perform a behavior. It refers to behaviour under external environmental constraints (Lai *et al.*, 2018). It corresponds to the facilitating conditions' concept developed by Triandis (1977) in his theory of interpersonal behaviour. The author states that individuals may have the intention to perform a certain act however may be unable to do so as the environment prevents the act from being performed.

In our study, we distinguish between physical opportunity and social opportunity in reference to Michie *et al.* (2011). While the first one refers to the opportunities afforded by the environment, including time, location and resources, the latter is defined as the opportunities afforded by social factors, including cultural norms and social cultures. Cultural norms are defined as attitudes and behaviour that are considered normal, typical or average within a society or a group. Literature distinguishes four degrees of cultural norms from the taboo to the laws, through folkway and mores which can define how a society or a community deals with a specific topic. A taboo in sociology is defined as a topic refrained from being talked over normally and implying harsh shocks if broken, while a folkway is a taboo for which breaking the topic does not cause such severe impact. Mores denote topics that sound normal in normal circumstances in a given society, while the last degree is laws, corresponding to a set of agreed rules and regulations. Depending on the cultural origins, ISM could be seen as a taboo, folkway or mores. Social culture is another dimension of social factors which is defined as a complex set of meanings, habits, values and behaviour adopted by one or more social formations, like the family or the religious institution. Again, ISM might be a taboo in some societies and a habit or a value in others impacting therefore different migration intentions and behaviour of their members.

2.3 Ability factors

The third element of the MOA is ability. Ability refers to behavioral decisions under the constraints of available resources and knowledge. A person must possess the appropriate set of skills and knowledge in the relevant area of behaviour, in order to be able to perform a given behaviour. Ability is commonly measured in the literature by self-efficacy, which defined as the perceived capability of one's self to perform a behaviour (Bandura, 1977). In

other words, self-efficacy refers to a person's self-confidence related to his ability to perform an action which could lead to desired outcomes.

Most research has suggested that empirical measurement of self-efficacy is based on four elements (Bandura, 1977; Maddux, 2005). The first one is performance experience, which incorporates the notion of habit. A habit is defined by a frequently executed behaviour in the past that seems to be less guided by intentions. A habit develops both specific knowledge, which is the awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a situation or a fact and skills that are useful to take decisions. Evidence shows that past behaviour, especially in the field of migration, moderates motivational factors. In our case, performance experience is defined as the past international mobility experience of the individual, prior to migrating to Kyrgyzstan, that we call the capital mobility (Syed Zwick and Syed, 2015; Teichler and Jahr, 2001). The second category of self-efficacy is social persuasion from family and friends who persuade that one possesses the capabilities to master specific activities. It relates to all direct learning experiences. Getting encouragement affects behaviour since one will be more self-confident and then more likely to put in the effort and sustain it when problems arise. The third category is imaginary experiences. One might visualize future success and may get some images deriving from actual experiences with situations similar to the one anticipated, or deriving from social persuasion. Finally, vicarious experience by opposition to social persuasion, relates to all indirect learning experiences. In our case, modeling student success help one judges his abilities by comparing himself to individual that he believes are like himself.

3. Literature review

There is a vast and growing literature on ISM. The mainstream approach within the ISM tends to generate a vision of student flows that occur either within the Western countries, or from South countries to North ones. While these still remain the historical and leading flows, built upon histories of colonialism and underdevelopment, and ongoing post-imperial economic and geopolitical networks of power (Hansen, 2014), there are also substantial flows of students within the South or across less developed countries (Shields and Edwards, 2010; Welch, 2010 among others). However, there is no abundant literature on that.

ISM scholars have extensively engaged in ISM motivation studies to understand students' behavior and decisions better (Brooks and Waters, 2011; Findlay *et al.*, 2017; Raghuram, 2013; King and Sondhi, 2018). They mainly rely on economic and financial factors to distinguish between three main reasons for students to decide to study abroad. The first reason theoretically refers to the capacity-building thesis (Rosensweig, 2006, 2008; Lowell and Khadka, 2011; Clemens, 2009). Students rationally decide to study abroad because they see it as a first step towards an international professional career. ISM is therefore first, considered as a *career-enhancing* investment by human capital theoreticians (King and Sondhi, 2018, Findlay *et al.*, 2017; Dreher, 2013) and second, as a subgroup of highly-

skilled migration or brain circulation (Collins *et al.*, 2017; Van Mol, 2014; Rosensweig, 2006). Both dimensions are well explored in the literature, but remain two sides of the same coin. Empirically, Rosensweig (2006) for instance show that student outflows from 124 countries to the United States are mostly sensitive to skilled wage differentials between students' origin country and the United States, which indicate the close link between ISM and labour migration.

The second type of reason refers to opportunistic behavior in a global society where mobility is life-stage consumption good (King and Sondhi, 2018). This approach goes beyond economics. It belongs to a multidimensional stream in the literature which includes also ethnographic and sociologic studies (Soong *et al.*, 2017; Urry, 2000, 2007; Cresswell, 2006; Waters, 2008; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). These latter scrutinize social norms of mobility in general based on the Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1986) forms of capital. They consider mobile students' international and multicultural experiences as embodied in a specific form of mobility capital (Syed Zwick and Syed, 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Therefore, one would not be surprised not to find a broad literature dedicated directly on ISM in this approach. Mobility is part of the culture. In their studies, respectively, Mondain and Diagne (2013) talk about an "almost obligatory rite of passage" (Mondain and Diagne, 2013: 512) and Newell (2012) investigate migration as a consumption good in Côte d'Ivoire. In our case, students consume mobility programs as they would have consumed any other mobility programs, without having specific motivations.

The third type of reason refers to the constrained-schooling thesis which applies to the origin country. This thesis appeared in the 70s and 80s and found ground in the emergence of Africa and Asia as post-colonies and origin countries of mobile students (Lee and Tan, 1984; Cummings, 1984). This thesis holds that students study abroad because they lack of study and training opportunities in their origin country: fees might be too high, or the tertiary-education supply might be too low. It therefore assumes that there is a negative relationship between tertiary-education supply and student outflows (Haeley, 2008; Chen, 2007 among others). Neglected during twenty years, Kritz (2016, 2011) recently brought it up to date by assessing its relevance to current student outflows. In his most recent study (Kritz, 2016), he found for 190 countries a significant negative relationship between the two dimensions. He found also that the nature of this relationship slightly changes when introducing other factors like the size of the total population for both origin and destination countries, and the gross domestic product per capita.

These three waves refer to the motivational factors of the MOA approach. However, we found that the previous literature significantly neglected opportunistic and ability factors. We found that only Kubota (2016) explored and critically examines social imaginary experiences from study abroad which is one dimension of self-efficacy. The author explains that such social imaginary experiences are reflected in the imagined benefits that study

abroad would generate among which, for instance, developing language skills, fostering cultural understanding and intercultural competence and increasing career opportunities.

One unique feature of our study is the utilization of the MOA conceptual framework that allows us to encapsulate a variety of factors which comprehensively explain the decision-making process of study abroad.

4. Research method

We specify the following research question: Is there a significant variation in the motivations, opportunities and abilities for studying abroad across our five nationalities? We shall describe in this section the research methods used to gather data to respond to this research question.

4.1 Measures

This study uses a self-administered questionnaire which is structured in three main sections that followed a brief introduction, and consent. It aims to reveal the motivational, opportunistic and ability factors which determine students' decision to study abroad. Screening questions are not included in the questionnaire since we already rely on the Alumni office's network. The respondents are therefore Alumni of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

Section 1 of the questionnaire consists of eight socio-economic and socio-demographic questions and aims to identify the socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondent. Questions like age, gender, birth country, nationality or citizenship are therefore included in this section. Section 2 is dedicated to mobility capital prior to and after studying at the academy. It aims to identify the past experience of the respondent regarding international mobility to discuss capital mobility. Questions about the duration and the purpose of a journey abroad are for instance included in this section 2. The following section focuses on the multicultural experience at the Academy and includes measures of the motivations, opportunities and ability to study abroad. Item AA_8 assesses the role of social imaginaries' importance of language improvement, multicultural understanding fostering and career opportunities increasing. Table 1 gives an overview of the survey questionnaire by including the scale of the variable (binary, scale, ordinal, cardinal).

Table 1: Questionnaire

Category	Question items	Scale
<i>Socio-economic-demographic</i>		
SED_1	Sex	Binary (Female / Male)
SED_2	Age	Cardinal
SED_3	What is your country of birth?	Ordinal
SED_4	What is your citizenship?	Scale (6 levels)
SED_5	What is your current occupation?	Scale (5 levels)
SED_6	What is your area of usual residence?	Scale (2 levels)
<i>Mobility capital</i>		
MOB_1	Have you ever lived in another country outside your origin country for at least six months prior to studying at the OSCE Academy?	Binary (Yes / No)
MOB_2	If you answered yes to MOB_1, which were the main countries and why did you live there?	Ordinal
MOB_3	Have you ever lived in another country outside your origin country for at least six months after studying at the OSCE Academy?	Binary (Yes / No)
MOB_4	If you answered yes to MOB_3, which were the main countries and why did you live there?	Ordinal
<i>Studying abroad, motivations and ability</i>		
AA_1	What is the master degree that you enrolled at the Academy?	Binary
AA_2	Which academic year did you graduate?	Scale (7 levels)
AA_3	Did you have to leave your country to study at the Academy?	Binary (Yes / No)
AA_4	What were the main decisions to study at the Academy?	1-4 scale of importance
AA_5a	Did you see your studies at the Academy as a first towards living abroad after graduation?	Scale (3 levels)
AA_5b	If you answered yes to AA_4, at that time where were you planning live, and what career path did you hope to follow?	Ordinary
AA_6	To what extent do you consider your experience at the academy worthwhile with regard to the following?	Scale (4 levels)

Source: Author's computation

The following section is dedicated to data collection and the profile of our survey's respondents.

4.2 Data collection and participants

This study relies on a primary dataset of 72 participants among a total pool of 420 Alumni who voluntarily accepted to complete an online survey accessible from October 9 to November, 15, 2018. A pilot test with 5 students revealed no problems with questionnaire, confirming its reliability and validity. The completion ratio reaches 18%, a relatively satisfying level for an external survey. The survey questionnaire was submitted in English and shared through social media's pages used by the Alumni office from the OSCE Academy. There are no missing data for the survey responses since the participants could not submit the questionnaire online without having answered all the questions.

Following the questionnaire, we decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with respondents drawn from the sample. We personally directed all the interviewing, transcription and analysis. Also, due to space considerations, rather than including full case studies, we have included pertinent information from the interviews at appropriate point in the discussion.

Table 2 displays the socio-economic and socio-demographic information of our respondents. The sample consists of 56.3% men and of an average age of 29 years old. The origin countries of our respondents include Kyrgyzstan (28%), Tajikistan (24%), Afghanistan (20%), Uzbekistan (11%), Kazakhstan (8.5%) and Turkmenistan (4.2%). Other origin countries include, among others, United States, Mongolia or Bahrain. However, because of the low number of students coming from other countries, we decided to conduct our study only on the five main nationalities represented, namely Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Answers show that birth country and nationality match for all respondents. We decided then not to include nationalities in table 2 to avoid redundancy.

Table 2: Socio-economic and socio-demographic information of the respondents (N=72)

Variables		%	Variables		%
Gender	Male	56.3	Area of residence	Urban	97.5
	Female	43.7		Rural	2.5
Birth country	Afghanistan	28	Current occupation	Full time employed	67.7
	Kazakhstan	17		Part time employed	4.2
	Tajikistan	30		Unemployed but actively looking for a job	7
	Uzbekistan	15		Student	19.7
	Turkmenistan	10		Unemployed not looking for a job	1.4
Average age (years)	29				

Source: Author's computation

5. Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the main findings of the quantitative survey in respect to motivational, opportunistic and ability factors.

5.1 Motivational factors

Results for motivational factors are displayed in table 3. Table 3 relies on the four-point response scale of 'very important', 'important', 'somewhat important' and 'not important'. It plots two sets of results, those for 'very important' in the top part of the table, and those for the combined ratings of 'very important' and 'important' in the bottom half of the table.

Some commonalities and differences across country groups emerge from the first set of results. Starting with intrinsic motivation, we notice that our respondents rate uniformly and highly around 50 for ‘very important’ scores and 70 when ‘important’ is added the element ‘seeing study abroad as a unique adventure’. Uzbek respondents are the most intrinsically motivated while considering ‘very important’ scores only (63% of Uzbek respondents). Afghan, Tajik and Turkmen respondents on the contrary consider it as a secondary factor in their thinking. The consumption behaviour hypothesis of mobility is therefore partially accepted in our case and seems relevant only for Uzbek respondents.

Table 3: Online questionnaire results: Percentage of respondents rating study abroad motivational factors as important or very important

<i>"Very important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Intrinsic</i>					
- Unique adventure	57	50	47	33	63
<i>Extrinsic</i>					
- Supply limited in home country	29	17	53	67	38
- Fees rising in home country	14	-	12	-	-
- Job career in home country	50	17	53	-	38
<i>"Very important" or "important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Intrinsic</i>					
- Unique adventure	86	67	71	67	75
<i>Extrinsic</i>					
- Supply limited in home country	71	50	71	67	75
- Fees rising in home country	43	-	35	33	13
- Job career in home country	93	50	71	67	75

Source: Author's computation

Extrinsic motivational factors include three dimensions. The ‘limited educational supply in home country’ and the ‘rising fees in the same home country’ help measure the role of the school constrained hypothesis. The limited educational supply in home country is a primary factor for Tajik and Turkmen respondents (53% and 67%, respectively) and a secondary factor for Afghan and Uzbek respondents (71% and 75%, respectively when ‘important’ is added). Interestingly, the second element ‘fees rising in the home country’ does not appear a significant factor for any of our country group. A Tajik respondent explains:

"I did not study in Tajikistan for two main reasons: corruption and weak education system. [...] I think that I would have stayed in my home country to study if we had similar Kyrgyz institutions"

Finally, the capacity-building hypothesis is measured by ‘job career in the home country’. Afghan and Tajik respondents see this as a very important factor governing their decision to study abroad (50% and 53%, respectively). A Tajik respondent says

Studying abroad for me was the stepping stone for the further academic carrier. I expected to improve my academic skills in order to have an opportunity to continue study abroad.

When ‘important’ is added, we notice that Turkmen and Uzbek respondents see this as a secondary factor. Finally, Kazakh respondents consider uniformly extrinsic factors as weak determinants of their decision to study abroad.

5.2 Opportunistic factors

Findings for opportunistic factors are given in table 4. Physical opportunity is measured by the ‘full scholarship’ element. Surprisingly, this is considered a primary opportunity only for Tajik students (with 71% rating this element ‘very important’). On the contrary, when the ‘very important’ and ‘important’ scores are combined, all the respondents agree with the secondary role of the scholarship as an opportunistic factor to decide to study abroad. Such finding can be related to the economic and developmental situations of our countries. Tajikistan has the second lowest GDP per capita among our five countries, with 861 USD in 2019 after Afghanistan with 620 USD. By contrast, GDP per capita in Uzbekistan has twice this value with 1350 USD, while GDP per capita in 2018 in Turkmenistan is around 7200 USD, and Kazakhstan is about 9350 USD. The World Bank classified therefore both Afghanistan and Tajikistan as low-income economics, whilst Uzbekistan is considered a lower-middle income economy and Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are considered two upper-middle income economies. The important role given to full scholarship is in this context expected for all our countries, but more especially for Tajikistan. Surprisingly, Afghani respondents are only 57% rating this factor as a very important one.

Table 4: Online questionnaire results: Percentage of respondents rating study abroad opportunistic factors as important or very important (in %)

<i>"Very important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Physical</i>					
- Full scholarship	57	50	71	33	50
<i>Social</i>					
- World-class university	36	33	35	-	38
<i>"Very important" or "important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Physical</i>					
- Full scholarship	93	83	88	100	100
<i>Social</i>					
- World-class university	71	67	65	-	50

Source: Author's computation

The social element of opportunistic factors is measured in our survey by the opportunity to attend a world-class university, which is a factor well discussed in the literature (see King and Sondhi, 2018 for instance). Respondents unanimously rate such factor more as a

secondary one than a secondary one, since only one third rated it as ‘very important’ and around 50% for Uzbek respondents and 71% for Afghan respondents rated it as ‘important to very important’.

The targeting of a world-class university seems to reflect a strategy of internationalization and networking especially for students who aspire to a career in international organizations. An Alumni from Afghanistan says

This opportunity to study abroad in such a high-quality institution is a way for me to develop an international network while working in Afghanistan.

We note that this student is not willing to find a job outside Afghanistan but is rather willing to benefit from an international network while remaining and working in his/her home country. A Tajik respondent explains

I chose to study at the academy mainly because of its standing and of its academic standards of some of the professors. Besides, graduates (Alumni) have in general a good reputation in our home countries.

This quote reveals the importance of reputation in the decision-making process to study abroad.

5.3 Ability factors

The role of ability factors are assessed through the four elements of self-efficacy. Since they do refer to facts rather than perceptions, we use other types of scaling to measure their respective importance to the decision to study abroad.

Regarding the performance experience which measures the capital mobility, results show that 69% of the respondents have lived in another country outside their origin country for at least six months prior to studying to the academy. 65% of them have a limited mobility experience with only one other country than Kyrgyzstan and their home country visited for at least 6 months, whilst 5% of these 69% spent more than six months abroad in at least three different countries.

Table 5 presents the performance experience per origin country of the respondent before migrating to Kyrgyzstan. We notice significant different mobility patterns in intensity and destinations: while most Kazakh respondents (66%) do not have any mobility experience, 83% and 75% of Tajik and Afghan respondents respectively stayed at least in one foreign country for more than six months. Destinations differ significantly as well. Mobile Kazakh respondents mainly went to a European country (Austria, United Kingdom), whilst Afghan respondents travelled and stayed to neighboring countries (Pakistan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Iran). Tajik respondents have a more diversified mobility experience preferring neighboring countries (Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Kazakhstan) or the United States in most of the time for academic purposes.

Table 5: Distribution of experience abroad by origin country and by number of visited countries for at least six continuous months (in %)

	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
No country	25	66	17	-	50
One country	50	34	60	34	50
Two countries	25	-	18	66	-
Three countries or more	-	-	5	-	-

Source: Author's computation

The focus on the destination countries by origin country is interesting. Unsurprisingly, Kazakh respondents are more connected with Western countries than the other origin country group. Kazakhstan is a well-integrated economy in the international economic and financial system and this reflects in the international system of migration as well. Besides, the fact that Tajik respondents have the most developed mobility experience among our five origin country groups reflects the high level of emigration in the country, an issue commonly discussed in the literature (see for instance Ivaschenko and Danzer, 2010). International mobility became a norm in Tajikistan with about one in four Tajik households having engaged at some point in migration (World Bank, 2011).

The second element of self-efficacy is social persuasion disaggregated into family and Alumni encouragements in our survey (table 6). One third of Turkmen, Afghan and Uzbek respondents consider family encouragement as a secondary factor. They rated it 38%, 36% and 33%, respectively. A Turkmen respondent says

My Mom told me that I should try and file an application to the programme, to give a shot and see what happens next.

Besides, all the origin country groups consistently consider Alumni encouragement as a secondary factor, except for Kazakh respondents who do not consider this factor as a discriminating one (only 33% rated it ‘very important or important’).

Imaginary experience is the third element of self-efficacy. This dimension generally feeds students’ representations and beliefs about potential benefits of study abroad. Our questionnaire discusses the social imaginaries’ gains after a study abroad in terms of academic and professional knowledge, language proficiency, multicultural understanding, maturity gain, and career opportunities.

Table 6: Online questionnaire results: Percentage of respondents rating social persuasion's dimensions (family encouragement and Alumni encouragement) as important or very important (in %)

<i>"Very important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Social persuasion</i>					
- Family encouragement	36	17	12	33	38
- Alumni encouragement	7	17	24	33	13
<i>"Very important" or "important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
<i>Social persuasion</i>					
- Family encouragement	64	67	53	67	50
- Alumni encouragement	50	33	59	100	75

Source: Author's computation

Findings shown in table 7 are interesting. They indicate that Uzbek respondents have overall the lowest percentages, meaning that they do not consider imaginary experience a primary factor to take the decision to study abroad. This is consistent with the low level of experience in migration and the fact that they consider the study abroad as a unique experience rather than an element of a strategic plan. In that sense, they adopt an opportunistic behaviour, by choosing to study abroad if the opportunity appears, and to stay in Uzbekistan otherwise. This interpretation is confirmed by the secondary role played by general career prospects and multicultural knowledge enhancement. However, a majority of Turkmen respondents considers these seven indicators as primary determinant to decide whether to study abroad or not. Their expectations in terms of language proficiency improvement and multicultural knowledge enhancement are of particular importance. A Turkmen respondent clearly says about her expectations before leaving

In terms of skills, I expected to acquire deeper and more tailored skills and knowledge [...]. In general I did. [...] I hoped to make new friends, new contacts from other countries due to ethnic diversity and cultural environment.

Tajik and Kazakh respondents consider only the enhancement of academic knowledge and the improvement of language proficiency as a primary factor. Additionally, the improvement of professional knowledge appears a secondary factor. Finally, Afghan respondents' results show a specific pattern with only one primary factor, the enhancement of academic knowledge and one secondary factor, the general career prospects. This last comment is confirmed by an Afghan respondent

I expected from studying abroad to get introduced to a bunch of scholars and professionals from other countries in Central Asia, to experience a new study environment, method and approach and to learn how different cultures impact mindsets, behaviour, and skills of people.

Table 7: Online questionnaire results: Percentage of respondents rating imaginary experience's dimensions as important or very important (in %)

<i>"Very important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
- Academic knowledge	71	67	88	67	38
- Professional knowledge	50	0	35	67	25
- General career prospects	50	33	53	67	25
- International career prospects	50	50	53	67	25
- Language proficiency	43	67	71	100	38
- Multicultural knowledge	36	50	59	100	50
- Maturity	50	50	53	33	50
<i>"Very important" or "important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
- Academic knowledge	100	83	94	100	63
- Professional knowledge	86	100	82	100	75
- General career prospects	100	100	76	100	100
- International career prospects	86	83	82	100	88
- Language proficiency	64	100	88	100	88
- Multicultural knowledge	71	83	100	100	100
- Maturity	86	83	100	33	88

Source: Author's computation

Such findings show that Uzbek respondents are the less sensitive to imaginary experience, contrary to Turkmen respondents.

Finally, vicarious experience is assessed through the influence of family members and/or friends who already moved abroad. Table 8 summarizes the findings.

Table 8: Online questionnaire results: Percentage of respondents rating vicarious experience's dimensions as important or very important (in %)

<i>"Very important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
- from relatives	42	27	48	25	23
- from friends	39	18	35	23	25
<i>"Very important" or "important"</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>KZ</i>	<i>TJ</i>	<i>TK</i>	<i>UZ</i>
- from relatives	54	58	76	64	54
- from friends	45	35	76	41	54

Source: Author's computation

Again, this influence appears unanimously limited for a majority of our respondents. None of the vicarious experience from relatives or from friends appears a primary factor for any of our five country group. When we consider both 'very important' and 'important' dimensions, vicarious experience from relatives becomes a secondary factor especially for Tajik and Turkmen respondents. Results for vicarious experience from friends shows more mixed results since it is a secondary factor only for Tajik respondents with a score of 76% while it does not exceed 54% for our Uzbek respondents and reaches even only 35% for

Kazakh respondents. The secondary role of vicarious experience is illustrated in a Tajik respondent's answer:

I searched for a programme abroad on my own. I had some friends already studying abroad and their experience was mostly positive. Only the negative point was missing home, children and relatives. Otherwise, they explained that studying abroad is a way to improve one's ability and develop skills.

Similarly, an Afghan respondent says

I have many friends abroad, who always told me about all the positive sides of studying abroad. A friend of mine who did his bachelor and master degree in Germany told me all about his experiences there. Plus, I saw how competent he was compared to those who studied in Afghanistan. It made me plan to study abroad.

The analysis of the role of self-efficacy in the decision-making process to study abroad confirms a slight variation across our country groups.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to comparatively identify, map and discuss the respective role of three types of factors by reference to the motivation, opportunity and ability theoretical framework on the decision-making process of Central Asian students to study abroad. To do so, we surveyed Alumni from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, who all enrolled and graduated from the same Central Asian institutionalized mobility program between 2006 and 2018 based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The analysis of data collected confirms the relevance in relying on the MOA approach to comprehensively understand the mechanisms behind the decision to study abroad. Returning to our main research question –namely identifying and discussing significant variations in these mechanisms across our five nationalities– allows us review and evaluate the key findings. Table 9 summarizes them.

The respondents' ratings for each of these three dimensions proved to be similar, and with minimal cross-country differences. The main differences, modest in scale, are three: firstly, Tajik respondents give greater importance than the other country groups to physical opportunities (full scholarship opportunity) and capital mobility within the ability factor. Secondly, Turkmen respondents give greater roles to constrained educational supply within the motivational factor and imaginary experience within the ability factor than the other country groups. Thirdly, Uzbek respondents are the most intrinsically motivated while deciding to study abroad.

Table 9: Key findings summary

		AF	KZ	TJ	TK	UZ
	Intrinsic	++	++	++	++	+++
	Extrinsic					
Motivation	- <i>supply c/</i>	++	+	++	+++	++
	- <i>fee rises</i>	--	--	--	--	--
	- <i>job career</i>	++	+	++	++	++
Opportunity	Physical	++	++	+++	++	++
	Social	++	++	++	--	+
Ability	Capital mobility	++	--	+++	++	--
	Social persuasion	++	+	+	++	++
	Imaginary experience	++	++	++	+++	+
	Vicarious experience	+	+	++	+	+

Source: Author's computation

Notes: +++, ++, + and -- refer to primary importance, secondary factor, tertiary factor and not important, respectively.

The approach taken in this study indicates useful directions for future research, but has also limitations. Firstly, the use of descriptive statistics prevents any causal inferences being formulated. Secondly, the analysis is based on a unique sample, cross-national but limited one, which cannot allow for a generalization of the findings.

Finally, to sum up, this analytical distinction between motivational, opportunistic and ability factors helps extract complex issues around why students decide to study abroad. Such study is of particular importance for theorizing student mobility's decision-making process in its modern configuration and for more successful policy partaking with the drivers and moderators of student mobility. Finally, we look forward to deploy a theoretical basis for new research on ISM.

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