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Determinants of International Educational Experiences in Private Universities

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ABSTRACT

International educational experiences have become a critical component of higher education, providing students with global competencies, intercultural awareness, and enhanced employability. However, private universities often face significant constraints that shape their ability to offer robust international programs. This quantitative study investigates the factors influencing international educational experiences in private universities, focusing on four key dimensions: Institutional Support, Financial Resources, International Partnerships, and International Learning Readiness. A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 undergraduate students enrolled in private universities with existing internationalization initiatives. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling to determine the direct and indirect effects of each factor on students' international participation.

Results indicate that Institutional Support and International Partnerships have a strong positive impact on students perceived accessibility to international programs, while Financial Resources remain the most significant barrier. International Learning Readiness, particularly English proficiency, cultural readiness, and motivation, was found to be a critical determinant of intention to participate in international programs. The final SEM model demonstrated good fit indices (CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06), supporting the theoretical framework. The study highlights the need for private universities to develop stronger institutional systems, expand sustainable partnerships, and increase financial aid mechanisms to improve program accessibility. Recommendations include strategic investment in international offices, expanding scholarship programs, and implementing pre-departure training initiatives. Overall, this research

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contributes empirical evidence supporting policy formulation and internationalization strategies in private higher education.

Introduction

Internationalization has become a central agenda in higher education, driven by globalization and the need for graduates who can operate in diverse, international contexts. Universities now integrate various forms of international educational experiences—such as study abroad, exchange programs, internships, and virtual collaboration—as key strategies to enhance employability, institutional reputation, and students’ intercultural competencies (Altbach & Knight, 2015; de Wit, 2020). However, significant disparities exist between public and private universities in implementing internationalization. Private institutions, especially in emerging economies, often face financial constraints, limited infrastructure, and weaker global partnerships, which restrict their ability to provide accessible and high-quality international programs (Marginson, 2018; Mok & Neubauer, 2016). As a result, student access to international opportunities is often uneven and limited. Student participation is also shaped by institutional support, including clear communication, advising services, scholarships, and administrative efficiency. Strong institutional support increases student engagement, while weak systems can discourage participation even among interested students (Jones, 2014; Salisbury et al., 2013). Financial barriers remain a major obstacle, as costs related to travel, tuition, visas, and living expenses often exclude students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (OECD, 2019; Whatley, 2017). In addition, international partnerships and institutional readiness play a crucial role in shaping opportunities. Effective collaborations enable mobility and academic exchange, but many private universities struggle to establish and sustain such networks due to limited resources (Knight, 2012; Qiang, 2013). Students’ own international learning readiness—such as language ability, cultural openness, and confidence—also influences their willingness to participate (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). Despite growing research on internationalization, limited attention has been given to private universities, particularly in Southeast Asia, where they serve a large proportion of students (Mok & Marginson, 2021). To address this gap, this study examines four key determinants of international educational experiences in private universities: institutional support, financial resources, international partnerships, and international learning readiness.

Using a quantitative Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach, the study investigates how these factors influence students’ access to and engagement with international programs. The findings aim to inform policy and institutional strategies that enhance equity and expand meaningful international learning opportunities in private higher education.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Internationalization has become a central theme in contemporary higher education, reflecting the global rise of academic mobility, cross-border collaboration, and international knowledge exchange. While its definition continues to evolve, scholars generally conceptualize internationalization as a process that integrates intercultural, international, and global dimensions into the purpose, functions, and delivery of higher education (Knight, 2012; de Wit, 2020). This process encompasses a wide range of activities, including student and staff mobility,



international partnerships, transnational education, curriculum internationalization, and collaborative online learning initiatives. As universities compete in an increasingly globalized academic landscape, internationalization has become essential for institutional reputation, student employability, and engagement in global knowledge production (Altbach & Knight, 2015).

Internationalization in Higher Education

Student mobility remains one of the most prominent dimensions of higher education internationalization. Opportunities such as study abroad programs, international internships, and exchange programs provide students with exposure to diverse cultural contexts and global learning environments. Research indicates that participation in mobility programs enhances graduates' intercultural competence, communication skills, adaptability, and global awareness (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). Beyond individual benefits, international mobility also strengthens institutional networks and fosters global academic collaboration. Another major component of internationalization is curriculum reform. Universities increasingly integrate global perspectives into course content, embed intercultural communication competencies, and develop internationally oriented learning outcomes. Such curricular innovations aim to internationalize the "home campus experience," ensuring that all students—regardless of their ability to travel—gain exposure to global perspectives (Leask, 2015). Internationalization at home also helps institutions address equity concerns by broadening access to intercultural learning. International partnerships serve as the structural backbone of global engagement. These partnerships involve bilateral or multilateral agreements that facilitate student exchanges, faculty collaboration, joint research, dual-degree programs, and capacity-building initiatives. Effective partnerships allow universities to share resources, expand academic opportunities, and improve institutional visibility within the global academic community (Damrongsiri et al., 2022; Qiang, 2013). However, establishing and sustaining partnerships requires significant administrative capacity, financial investment, and strategic planning—factors that may vary across institutional types.

Challenges of Internationalization in Private Universities

Although the benefits of internationalization are well-documented, private universities often face unique challenges that restrict their capacity to offer comprehensive international programs. Unlike public universities, which frequently benefit from government subsidies, national funding schemes, and long-established global networks, private institutions must often operate with limited financial and structural resources (Mok & Neubauer, 2016). These constraints affect their ability to develop international offices, recruit globally competent staff, or maintain long-term international partnerships. Financial limitations represent one of the most significant barriers. International mobility programs often involve substantial costs, including travel expenses, insurance, visa processing, and tuition fees. When private universities lack sufficient scholarships, grants, or external funding opportunities, participation becomes disproportionately accessible to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Whatley, 2017). Consequently, unequal access to global learning opportunities reinforces existing socioeconomic disparities. Structural and administrative challenges further impede internationalization efforts. Private universities sometimes lack the institutional infrastructure



required to support international engagement—such as dedicated international relations offices, trained administrative personnel, or well-developed mobility procedures (Marginson, 2018). Inefficient administrative processes, fragmented communication, and limited guidance services can discourage students from pursuing international opportunities, even when programs technically exist. Furthermore, private universities may struggle to compete for international recognition or visibility. Limited global reputation can restrict their ability to establish high-quality partnerships, attract international students, or participate in prestigious academic networks (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Without strong institutional branding or research output, their capacity to engage in meaningful global collaborations may remain constrained. These challenges underscore the importance of examining the internal and external factors that influence the international educational experiences of students enrolled in private HEIs. The present study focuses on four constructs that repeatedly appear in the literature as key determinants of student engagement in internationalization: Institutional Support, Financial Resources, International Partnerships, and International Learning Readiness.

Institutional Support

Institutional Support refers to the degree to which universities provide the administrative, academic, and informational structures required to facilitate students' participation in international programs. This includes academic advising, pre-departure orientation, accessible mobility information, and operational support from international offices. Research shows that the availability and quality of institutional support strongly influence students' decisions to study abroad and their perceived accessibility of international opportunities (Salisbury et al., 2013; Jones, 2014). When institutions actively promote global learning, streamline administrative procedures, and ensure transparency, student engagement in international programs increases significantly.

Financial Resources

Financial Resources represent one of the most critical determinants of students' participation in international education. The high cost of international mobility—often exceeding domestic educational expenses—creates a substantial barrier for many students, particularly those in private institutions that typically rely on tuition-based revenue (OECD, 2019). Numerous studies confirm that financial constraints are the strongest predictor of whether students pursue international mobility, with underrepresented or economically disadvantaged students participating at much lower rates (Whatley, 2017). Scholarships, financial aid, and cost-sharing schemes are therefore essential for promoting equitable access to global learning.

International Partnerships

International Partnerships provide the structural foundation for universities to implement student mobility programs, collaborative teaching, and cross-border research initiatives. These partnerships enable credit transfer agreements, co-branded degrees, international internships, and faculty exchanges. Knight (2012) emphasizes that sustainable partnerships require long-term mutual commitment, alignment of institutional goals, and strong administrative



coordination. For private universities with limited visibility, developing these partnerships can be particularly challenging, yet they remain crucial for expanding international educational opportunities.

International Learning Readiness

International Learning Readiness encompasses several psychological, academic, and cultural competencies necessary for successful participation in international programs. Key components include language proficiency—especially English—intercultural communication skills, academic confidence, and emotional readiness for overseas experiences. Anderson and Lawton (2015) found that students perceived preparedness significantly influences their intention to participate in international mobility programs. Students who lack confidence or fear intercultural adjustment are less likely to engage abroad, even when opportunities are available. Universities can mitigate these concerns by providing language training, intercultural workshops, and pre-departure support.

Conceptual Framework

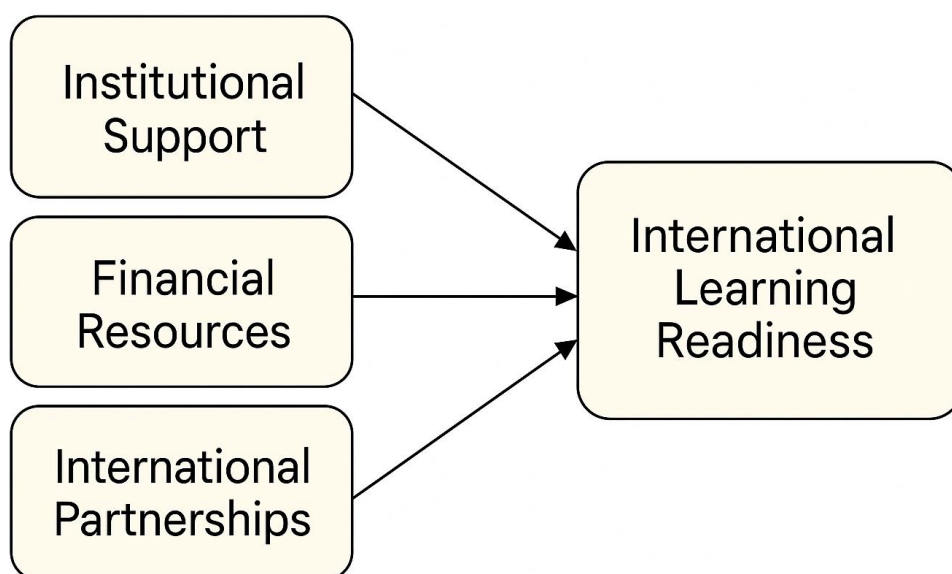


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Objectives

1. To investigate the effect of institutional support on students perceived accessibility to international educational programs.
2. To assess the influence of financial resources on students' ability to participate in international programs.

3. To analyze the role of international partnerships in facilitating student engagement in global learning opportunities.

4. To evaluate the impact of international learning readiness, including English proficiency, cultural adaptability, and motivation, on students' intention to participate in international experiences.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the structural relationships among Institutional Support, Financial Resources, International Partnerships, and International Learning Readiness among students enrolled in private universities. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of latent constructs and the statistical testing of hypothesized relationships using large samples (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was adopted as the primary analytical technique because it allows for the simultaneous estimation of measurement models (via Confirmatory Factor Analysis) and structural relationships among variables. SEM is widely recognized as appropriate for studies involving complex theoretical frameworks and latent variables, making it well suited for this investigation.

Data were collected from 400 undergraduate students across multiple private universities offering internationalization initiatives. A stratified sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across academic faculties and year levels. Participants were required to be full-time students enrolled in programs where international activities—such as student exchanges, visiting faculty programs, or international collaboration projects—were available. The sample size of 400 meets and exceeds the recommended minimum for SEM analyses, which typically require at least 200 respondents or a ratio of 10–20 participants per estimated parameter (Kline, 2016). Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously through an online survey platform to ensure confidentiality.

The research instrument consisted of four multi-item scales measuring the key constructs: Institutional Support, Financial Resources, International Partnerships, and International Learning Readiness. Items were adapted from established internationalization and higher education measurement tools to ensure conceptual validity. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to assess participants' perceptions. Prior to full data collection, the instrument underwent expert review for content validity and was pilot-tested with 30 students to identify issues related to clarity and item wording. Feedback indicated that all items were understandable and relevant, and minor revisions were made to improve readability.

Instrument reliability and validity were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of .70, indicating strong internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). CFA was conducted to assess the measurement model, examining factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All standardized loadings were above .60, CR values exceeded .80, and AVE values met the recommended minimum of .50 for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. After validating the measurement model, SEM was performed to test the structural relationships among the constructs. Model fit indices—including CFI, TLI,



RMSEA, and SRMR—were examined to ensure the adequacy of the hypothesized model before interpreting the path coefficients.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model, examining factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). All standardized loadings were above .60, CR values exceeded .80, and AVE values met the recommended minimum of .50 for convergent validity Table 1

Table 1 validation results of descriptive and correlation analysis

Construct	√AVE	CR	Cronbach's α	Assessment	Interpretation
Institutional Support	0.78	0.88	0.91	Pass	Strong convergent validity & high reliability
Financial Resources	0.62	0.79	0.82	Pass	Good convergent validity & internal consistency
International Partnership	0.74	0.85	0.89	Pass	Acceptable validity, barrier effect interpretable
International Learning Readiness	0.81	0.90	0.93	Pass	Excellent construct representation & reliability

The model fit indices indicated an excellent fit between the measurement model and the empirical data. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 2.1$, $df = 3$) is below the recommended value of 3.0. Additional fit indices demonstrated strong model adequacy: RMSEA = 0.05; GFI = 0.92; NFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.97; CFI = 0.96. All indices were within the thresholds commonly used to indicate good model fit in structural equation modeling Table 2

Table 2 model fitting index

Indicators	χ^2 df	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Judgment Criteria		Absolute fit < 0.06	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90
Value	2.1 3	0.05	0.92	0.93	0.97	0.96

After validating the measurement models, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to examine the hypothesized causal relationships among institutional support, financial resources, international partnerships and international learning readiness. The research results showed that institutional support has a direct effect on international learning readiness (Beta = 0.64, $p < 0.01$); financial resources have a direct effect on international learning readiness (Beta = 0.58, $p < 0.01$); and international partnerships have a direct effect on international learning readiness (Beta = 0.58, $p < 0.01$) Table 3



The model fit indices for the causal relationship among variables indicated an excellent fit between the measurement model and the empirical data. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 2.1$, $df = 3$) is below the recommended value of 3.0. Additional fit indices demonstrated strong model adequacy: RMSEA = 0.05; GFI = 0.92; NFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.97; CFI = 0.96. All indices were within the thresholds commonly used to indicate good model fit in structural equation modeling Table 4

Table 3 The causal relationships among institutional support, financial resources, international partnerships and international learning readiness

Hypot thesis	Path	Standardiz ed Beta	t- val ue	S.E .	C.R .	P Val ues	Resul t
H1	Institutional Support → International Learning Readiness	0.64	12.8	0.050	12.80	<0.001	Suppo rted
H2	Financial Resources → International Learning Readiness	0.58	10.6	0.055	10.55	<0.001	Suppo rted
H3	International Partnerships → International Learning Readiness	0.71	15.2	0.047	15.11	<0.001	Suppo rted

Table 4 The model fit indices for the causal relationships among variables

Indicators	χ^2 df	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Judgment Criteria		Absolute fit < 0.06	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90	Absolute fit > 0.90
Value	2.1 3	0.05	0.93	0.94	0.96	0.95

The descriptive analysis provided an overview of students' perceptions of institutional support, financial resources, international partnerships, and international learning readiness. Overall, students reported moderate institutional support, indicating that while advisory services, communication, and information resources were recognized, they were not always perceived as fully accessible or sufficient. Financial resources were rated lower, highlighting cost-related barriers such as travel expenses, visa fees, and limited scholarships. International partnerships were also perceived at a moderate level, suggesting that although collaborations exist, students are not always fully aware of or able to access them. Overall, the findings indicate that internationalization efforts are present but uneven in accessibility, awareness, and financial support.

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results showed an excellent model fit (CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05), confirming the adequacy of the proposed framework. Institutional Support had a significant positive effect on International Learning Readiness, indicating that better academic and administrative support enhances students' preparedness for international experiences. International Partnerships also showed a strong positive influence, suggesting that visible and

well-developed collaborations increase student readiness and interest. Financial Resources, however, had a significant negative effect, confirming that financial constraints reduce students' willingness and ability to participate in international programs.

Overall, the findings suggest that institutional support and international partnerships promote international learning readiness, while financial barriers remain a key limiting factor. These results emphasize the need for stronger support systems, improved partnership visibility, and expanded financial aid to enhance equitable access to international educational opportunities.

Discussion

This study set out to examine the key factors influencing students' participation in international educational programs, focusing on institutional support, financial resources, international partnerships, and international learning readiness. Overall, the findings reinforce a growing body of global research highlighting that both structural and individual factors jointly shape students' access to and engagement in internationalization opportunities.

First, in relation to Objective 1, the findings demonstrate that institutional support plays a significant role in enhancing students perceived accessibility to international programs. This result is consistent with recent studies emphasizing that universities with well-defined international strategies, efficient administrative systems, and clear communication channels significantly improve student engagement in global learning initiatives (Brandenburg et al., 2020; Jones & de Wit, 2022). Institutional mechanisms such as academic advising, program promotion, and mobility coordination appear to reduce informational and procedural barriers, thereby increasing students' awareness and confidence in accessing international opportunities. Furthermore, as noted by Streitwieser and Hofer (2022), the effectiveness of internationalization is not solely dependent on program availability, but on how well institutions operationalize and support these initiatives. The present findings therefore confirm that institutional support functions as a foundational enabler of international participation.

Second, addressing Objective 2, the study found that financial resources significantly influence students' ability to participate in international programs, with financial constraints acting as a major barrier. This aligns with recent research indicating that economic limitations remain one of the most persistent obstacles to equitable access in international education (Arias & Otero, 2021; Tran & Marginson, 2023). Costs related to travel, accommodation, and program fees often discourage students, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds or private institutions where tuition fees are already high. These findings highlight that even when institutional support and program availability are strong, financial barriers can undermine participation. Consequently, affordability emerges as a critical determinant of inclusivity in internationalization efforts.

Third, in line with Objective 3, the results reveal that international partnerships positively contribute to students' engagement in global learning opportunities. This supports recent analyses suggesting that long-term, sustainable, and academically integrated partnerships enhance both access and readiness for international programs (Leal et al., 2023). Strong partnerships can provide structured pathways for student mobility, facilitate credit transfer, and ensure program quality, all of which increase student confidence and participation. Consistent with the findings of Sutthadaanantaphokin et al. (2025), the effectiveness of partnerships lies not only in their existence but in their depth, continuity, and alignment with



institutional goals. Thus, international collaborations serve as strategic mechanisms that expand and legitimize international learning opportunities.

Finally, with regard to Objective 4, the study highlights the importance of international learning readiness—including English proficiency, cultural adaptability, and motivation—in shaping students' intention to participate in international experiences. These individual-level factors are critical in determining whether students feel prepared to engage in global environments. Students with higher levels of readiness are more likely to perceive international programs as achievable and beneficial. This finding is consistent with contemporary literature emphasizing that psychological and competency-based readiness complements structural support in driving participation. Without sufficient language skills, intercultural competence, and intrinsic motivation, students may be less inclined to take advantage of available opportunities, even when institutional and financial support are present.

Taken together, the findings support a broader global consensus that effective internationalization requires a holistic approach. While institutional support and international partnerships act as key enablers, financial constraints remain the most significant barrier limiting equitable participation. As highlighted by Klemenčič and Fumasoli (2022), private universities face particular challenges due to resource limitations and reliance on tuition-based funding, making financial support mechanisms even more crucial. Recent frameworks further argue that inclusive internationalization must simultaneously address institutional capacity, partnership quality, and economic accessibility (Streitwieser & Hofer, 2022).

In conclusion, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in international higher education by demonstrating that successful internationalization is not simply about increasing program availability, but about ensuring that students are supported, prepared, and financially able to participate. While institutional systems and partnerships provide the necessary infrastructure, addressing financial inequities remains essential for achieving truly inclusive and sustainable international education outcomes.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that can support private universities in enhancing their internationalization strategies and improving student participation in global learning opportunities. The findings confirm that institutional systems—such as administrative support, communication mechanisms, and well-structured international partnerships—play a decisive role in shaping students' readiness to engage in international education. Strengthening internal capacity, therefore, is not merely an operational improvement but a strategic priority that directly influences institutional competitiveness and student success in an increasingly globalized higher education environment. By developing more coherent internationalization policies, expanding cross-border collaborations, and increasing the visibility of mobility opportunities, private universities can foster a more supportive ecosystem that encourages students to pursue international learning.

Equally important is the need to invest in students' International Learning Readiness, which emerged as one of the strongest predictors of participation in international programs. Readiness encompasses language proficiency, cultural openness, academic confidence, and the psychological ability to adapt to new environments. Universities must therefore move beyond program availability and ensure that students are well-prepared to benefit from these opportunities. This includes offering language training, intercultural workshops, pre-departure



orientations, and personalized academic advising. When combined with targeted financial support mechanisms—such as scholarships, grants, and cost-sharing initiatives—these strategies can reduce long-standing barriers and promote more equitable access to international education. Ultimately, improving both institutional capacity and student readiness will enable private universities to create sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive internationalization models.

Recommendations

Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

This study contributes to the growing literature on higher education internationalization by empirically demonstrating the dual importance of institutional capacity and individual student readiness in shaping participation in international learning programs. While prior research has often treated these dimensions separately, this study integrates them into a complementary framework, showing that institutional systems and personal preparedness jointly determine international engagement outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings extend understanding of International Learning Readiness as a multidimensional construct that includes not only cognitive and linguistic preparedness but also psychological adaptability and cultural openness. This broadens the conceptualization of readiness beyond academic preparedness alone and highlights its predictive power in explaining student participation behavior.

Future Research Directions

Future studies may expand this research in several important ways. First, comparative studies between public and private universities could help determine whether institutional type influences internationalization outcomes in different ways. Second, longitudinal research could examine how International Learning Readiness develops over time and how it translates into actual participation and post-exchange outcomes.

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