

Behavioral and Motivational Determinants of Students' Intentions to Pursue International Education: Evidence from Nepal

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of behavioral and motivational factors on students' intention to pursue international education in Nepal by integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior and Self-Determination Theory. Using a structured questionnaire, primary data were collected from 300 students across different provinces of Nepal. The specific objectives were to describe students' behavioural and motivational constructs, examine their relationships with intention, and determine their predictive influence on students' intention to pursue international education. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design the data were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression techniques. The findings reveal that perceived behavioral control is the most significant predictor of students' intention, followed by extrinsic motivation and subjective norms, while attitude shows a weak positive effect and intrinsic motivation is statistically insignificant. The results indicate that students' decisions to study abroad are primarily driven by external constraints and opportunities, including financial capability, career prospects, migration pathways, and social expectations, rather than intrinsic academic interest. The study provides strong support for the Theory of Planned Behavior and partial support for Self-Determination Theory in the Nepalese context. By offering a comprehensive behavioral-motivational framework, this study contributes to the limited empirical literature on international student mobility in Nepal and provides practical insights for policymakers and educational institutions to better align strategies with students' motivations and constraints.

Keywords: Student mobility, Study abroad intention, Perceived behavioral control, Self-Determination Theory and Theory of Planned behavior

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, international education has been recognized as a characteristic of global higher learning environments due to the increased speed of globalization and the advancement of technology at a tremendous scale. With the increased internationalization of higher learning environments, choices made by students to study at foreign institutions have changed from the conventional academic choices to a considerable level of influence by non-

academic choices and behaviour linked to self-developmental activities (Yue & Lu, 2022). Such an evolution has made international education no longer a grand institutional activity but a complex behaviour driven by attitudes and motivation to control decisions made by students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Globally, a range of theories of behaviour and motivation have been widely employed to analyze international student mobility patterns. Two key theories that identify the relation between intentions and behaviour are the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which assumes that a person's intentions are affected by attitudes towards behaviour performance, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control; and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000), who classify motivations for goal-related behaviour with regard to intrinsic and extrinsic desires. Empirical evidence validates that internal motives like personal development and international understanding and extrinsic motives like employment and recognition of status have been identified as impacting international study patterns at a significant level for international students (Chirkov et al., 2007; Nghia, 2019). In addition, recent literature asserts that self-efficiency, opportunities for travel, and recognition of influences generated by technological applications are of paramount importance to boosting one's behaviour and intentions for international study programs (Gutema et al., 2024; Mendoza-Jiménez et al., 2025).

However, the key to understanding existing literature for the foreseeable future appears to be that it mostly pertains to developed or newly industrialized nations with strong institutional structures and a strong sense of personal freedom. Students from developing nations must make decisions in a socio-economic environment that offers limited institutional and personal freedom (Bodycott, 2009; Mpinganjira, 2009). This results in a scenario where global educational ambitions are influenced by family needs, individual perceptions of the constraints in one's developing nation, and personal aspirations for status recognition.

In the context of Nepal, there has been an increasing trend of Nepalese students seeking educational opportunities abroad. Australia, Japan, Canada, and the UK have been the top attracting destinations for the maximum number of Nepalese (Singh, 2024). Prior studies focus on the lack of quality educational institutions, lack of job opportunities, and political instability, which have been pinpointed as some of the key push factors for this trend of going abroad for further educational opportunities (Karki, 2023; Mahatara, 2024). Based on past study patterns, it can be noted that the study relies heavily on macro-level factors and doesn't account for the behavioral or mental processes that influence study choices.

A key research gap still exists in the Nepalese context. Firstly, while the key constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior like study abroad attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behaviour control are conceptually understood and recognized, hardly any study has operationalized and examined their impact empirically. Secondly, motivation has been studied as a unitary concept without understanding the differences between intrinsic (self-driven) and extrinsic (outcome-driven) types of motivation as made apparent by Self-Determination Theory. Thirdly, the existing literature largely remains descriptive, without conducting any meaningful quantitative analysis to assess the relative weight of behavioral and motivational constructs for study abroad intentions among Nepalese students. Therefore, the existing study offers a quite minimalist understanding of the impact of the factors and constructs discussed here. Addressing this gap, the present study makes an original contribution by being among the first to empirically integrate the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Self-Determination Theory within a single, statistically tested model of Nepali students' study-abroad intentions, thereby

extending both theories beyond the developed-country contexts in which they were originally validated.

Bridging this gap remains a critical activity for the advancement of theory-building and the formulation of policy. On the one hand, a blend of the theory of planned behaviour and self-determination theory, framed by the socio-educational settings of Nepal, should add depth to international literature by demonstrating the working of behaviour theories in emerging nations. On the other hand, deriving the primary behaviour-motivation factors should aid policymakers and educational experts in devising better-crafted guidance structures to better fit the interests of Nepalese students than current economic motives. This study proposes to test the primary behaviour-motivation factors for influence over international enrolments of Nepalese students by using a combined framework of the theory of planned behaviour and self-determination theory.

The objectives of this study are (1) to describe the behavioral constructs (attitude towards studying abroad, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) and motivational dimensions (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) among Nepalese students intending to pursue international education. (2) to examine the relationship between behavioral constructs and motivational dimensions with students' intention to pursue international education. (3) to determine the predictive influence of behavioral and motivational factors on students' intentions to pursue international education.

Literature Review

Over the last three decades, the international literature on student mobility has evolved from more macroeconomic or institutional approaches to behaviorism and motivation. The earlier literature on the subject (Becker, 1993; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) was more focused on the application of economic rationalism, human capital theory, or the relative benefits of international education. However, this approach received criticism later on for not considering the cognitive, psychological, or affective role of student choices (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen, 2016). Hence, other approaches grounded in behaviorism (the theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen, 1991) or self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan (2000), among others, received more acceptance as research tools using attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, or intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations.

Organizing the empirical evidence relationship-wise clarifies what is already established for each construct. For attitude, Chen and Zimitat (2006), Li et al. (2009) and Tung et al. (2021) consistently report a significant positive link between favorable attitudes toward studying abroad and behavioural intention. For subject norms, Presley et al. (2010) and Nguyet (2021) confirm that family and peer expectations significantly shape study abroad intention, particularly within collective societies. For perceived behavioral control, Ajzen and Madden (1986) and Nguyet (2021) establish it as one of the strongest predictors of behavioral intention, a pattern corroborated in Asian contexts by Cubillo et al. (2006) and Salisbury et al. (2011). For intrinsic motivation, Mostafa and Lim (2020) and Borodina (2022) link it to persistence and resilience among international students, whereas for extrinsic motivation, Garant-Jones (2007), Bist and Dagley (2015) and Zhang (2023) show that scholarships, career prospects, and migration opportunities exert an especially strong pull in developing country contexts. This relationship-wise synthesis shows that while each of the five constructs has an established individual link to study-abroad intention, very few studies have tested them jointly within a single integrated model.

Moreover, empirical evidence supports the predictive effectiveness of the behavioral-motivational models explored in international student mobility. Cubillo et al. (2006) pointed out institutional values, compatibility, or the social environment as specific behavioral controls among the influential factors in student mobility in Europe. The role of self-efficacy, attitudes, or perspectives as significant behavioral controls among US students was also revealed by Salisbury et al. (2011). Moreover, 'behavioral controls' emphasized by Nhi (2025) stressed that 'personal motives,' including 'self-enhancements' or 'intercultural interests,' tend to dominate 'external motivations' of employability or 'international migration opportunities' from East Asia. The 'behavioral or identity approaches' of Altbach & Knight (2007) first of all pointed out the 'cultural or global identity' of identified global forces. Moreover, another supporting argument from Marginson (2004) explored 'global or local networking patterns' of international mobility. Li et al. (2025) and Zhao (2025) argue that enhanced 'digital networking patterns, global marketing policies, and peer influence patterns' significantly impact students' 'behavioral controls' regarding international mobility. Evidently, all of the above researchers demonstrate that international mobility among students operates on a "behavioral motivation" level rather than "economic interests" or rationality.

Research in developing regions reveals that patterns of behavior and motivation could differ from place to place. According to Agarwal (2021), in South and Southeast Asia, the intention of "studying abroad" is highly influenced by the expectations of one's family, "materialistic motivations," and "social status." Research in Indian, Indonesian, and Malaysian institutions reveal that 'extrinsic motivation' often dominates 'intrinsic motivation' (Rachman, 2021), where 'collectivist societies' accord more importance to 'social' as well as 'economic outcomes.' However, in this region as well, there is a lack of research work on 'behavioral modeling' that utilizes both 'Theory of Planned Behavior' and 'Self-Determination Theory' simultaneously.

In the context of Nepal, political instability, scarcity of postgraduate opportunities, and lack of infrastructure act as push factors among students planning international education from Nepal (Pokharel et al., 2025). Students' preferences for countries such as Australia, Japan, Canada, or the United Kingdom are influenced by academic standards, scholarship opportunities, employment prospects, or migration possibilities (Baral et al., 2024; Mahatara, 2024). The sociocultural environment of international mobility among Nepalese students plays an important role in this regard.

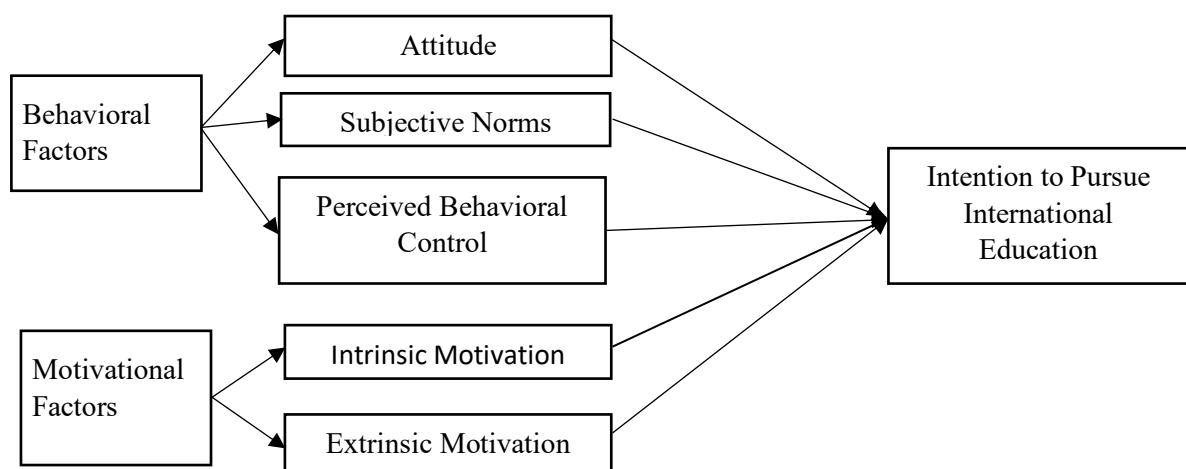
Although there is an escalation of studies on Nepali students' motivations for pursuing overseas education, most of the literature still uses a descriptive methodology. The majority of the literature focuses on the macroscale issues of cost, job prospects, and institutional reputation. The literature ignores the mediating variables of planned behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991) or self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although there is some acknowledgment of the role of family, peer, or professional motives (Koirala, 2025; Gautam, 2024; Mahatara, 2024), there is no quantitative handling of the variables. The role of attitudes, perceived control, or intrinsic or extrinsic motivation has not been examined.

This gap indicates the necessity for an empirically based framework in Nepal that incorporates behavioral and motivational factors to forecast students' intentions to pursue studies abroad. Quantifying the relative influence of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and motivational dimensions can enhance theoretical comprehension and provide pragmatic insights for policymakers, universities, and educational consultants aiming

to develop interventions that align with genuine student motivations in Nepal's dynamic higher education environment.

Conceptual Framework

The use of a conceptual framework enables a clear understanding of the key variables involved in a research as well as their levels of importance. The application of this study will help generate an understanding of the influences of both behavioral and motivational constructs on the students' intention of participating in study abroad programs, as presented in Figure 1. This framework, adapted from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), is more accurately described as a theoretical framework, since it integrates two established behavioral theories rather than proposing new, untested constructs.



Methodology

The study combines both descriptive and causal-comparative methods. The descriptive research methodology helps to establish existing patterns and characteristics, while the causal-comparative research methodology evaluates any cause-and-effect relationship. The combination of both methods helps provide a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions involved in the study-abroad intention for the participants. It should be noted, however, that no distinct comparison groups were formed for this study; the design is therefore more precisely described as a descriptive-correlational design that examines statistical associations among variables rather than group-based causal comparisons.

This study is based on empirical data gathered using a structured questionnaire administered to respondents through both online and in-person modes. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured primarily on a five-point Likert scale to assess respondents' perceptions and responses. Data were collected between February 2025 and May 2025. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The target population comprised Nepalese students intending to pursue international education, ranging from higher secondary (also referred to as Plus Two) students to research scholars across different provinces of Nepal. As the exact size of the target population was unknown and no comprehensive population frame was available, a probability-based sample

size calculation based on a known finite population was not applicable. Instead, purposive sampling was employed to identify respondents who met the study's eligibility criteria and possessed relevant experience or intentions concerning international education. This sampling approach was considered appropriate because the study required participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives.

A total of 545 questionnaires were received. Following data screening and validation, 300 responses were considered valid for the final analysis, representing approximately 55% of the total responses collected. The final sample therefore consisted of 300 eligible respondents from different educational levels and provinces of Nepal.

Model Specifications

The analysis of the questionnaire responses used a structured statistical technique to ensure that they were reliable and valid. The pilot test was used to remove items that either had missing values or could introduce biases during the study. The reliability and correlations were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis.

An econometric regression model was then formulated to analyze the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. This model formed the basis for hypothesis testing, facilitating a quantitative analysis on the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, controlling for any confounding variables.

The relationship can be expressed using a multiple regression model as follows:

$$\text{INTENT} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A + \beta_2 \text{SN} + \beta_3 \text{PBC} + \beta_4 \text{IM} + \beta_5 \text{EM} + \epsilon$$

Where:

INTENT = Students Intention to Pursue International Educations.

A = Attitude

SN = Subjective Norms

PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control

IM = Intrinsic Motivation

EM = Extrinsic Motivation

β_0 = Constant term, representing the intercept of the regression model.

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ and β_5 represents coefficients of the explanatory variables, reflecting the magnitude and direction of their effects on the dependent variable.

The model offers a rigorous framework for examining the impact of these factors on students' intentions to pursue international education, enabling a systematic assessment of their significance.

Diagnostic analysis was conducted to check the underlying assumptions of the multiple regression model before the interpretation of the regression results. Multicollinearity among independent variables was checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. It follows that all VIFs were within the acceptable limit (Less than 5), while the tolerance values were above the threshold levels; hence, it was assumed that the multicollinearity issue did not seriously affect the estimation and interpretation of the regression coefficients. The applied thresholds (VIF < 5; tolerance > 0.10) follow established diagnostic guidelines (Hair et al., 2010).

The following section describes the independent variables used in the study. Building on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Self-Determination Theory outlined above, the following five directional hypotheses are proposed, each corresponding to one predictor in the regression model and grounded in the specific empirical studies reviewed for that construct.

Attitude

Chen and Zimitat (2006) study revealed that Taiwanese students' positive attitudes towards higher education in Australia enhance their intention to study overseas, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Similarly, Li et al. (2009) reported that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all positively affect students' intentions to enroll in international education programs. Tung et al. (2021) also confirmed that Vietnamese students' favourable attitudes towards studying abroad significantly increase their intention to pursue education overseas. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H₁: There is a significant positive influence of students' behavioral attitudes toward studying abroad on their intention to pursue international education.

Subjective Norms

Tung et al. (2021); Nguyet (2021) found this effect among Vietnamese students, with Nguyet also highlighting the role of perceived behavioral control and family cohesion. Similarly, Presley et al. (2010) observed subjective norms as significant predictors among business students, while Li et al. (2009) confirmed the positive impact of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on enrollment intentions, in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H₂: There is a significant positive effect of subjective norms on students' intention to pursue international education.

Perceived Behavioral Control

Ajzen et al. (1986) demonstrated PBC's role in predicting intentions and goal achievement. Nguyet (2021) and Presley et al. (2010) found PBC to be a significant predictor of study-abroad intentions, while Li et al. (2009) confirmed its positive impact alongside attitudes and subjective norms, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H₃: There is a significant positive effect of perceived behavioral control on students' intention to pursue international education.

Intrinsic Motivation

Omar et al. (2016) found that intrinsic motivation positively affects first-year Malaysian business students' choice of a marketing major. Mostafa and Lim (2020) reported a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and resilience among international students, while Borodina (2022) observed that international students are more driven by intrinsic than extrinsic factors, highlighting the role of internal motivation in pursuing education abroad. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H₄: There is a significant positive effect of intrinsic motivation on students' intention to pursue international education.

Extrinsic Motivation

Garant-Jones (2007) and Bista and Dagley (2015) found that extrinsic factors such as scholarships, financial support, and career opportunities positively influence students' decisions to study abroad. However, Zhang (2023) noted that while extrinsic motivation contributes to this intention, it exerts a weaker effect compared to intrinsic motivation, which more strongly supports students' adaptation and engagement. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H₅: There is a significant positive effect of extrinsic motivation on students' intention to pursue international education.

Result and Discussion

Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used measure in behavioral and social science research to assess internal consistency of measurement scales (Liu et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha was used in this study to check the internal consistency of all the multi-item constructs measured in the survey on a five-point Likert scale.

Acceptable reliability was informed by established psychometric standards. According to Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of at least 0.70 is considered acceptable for determination of adequate scale reliability. Some scholars, however, maintain that acceptable values are slightly higher than this, although the corrected item-total correlations must be at or above 0.30 (Shelby, 2011).

The detail of the result of Cronbach's alpha is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Inter Item Reliability Analysis of the Constructs

Constructs	No. Of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Intention to Pursue International Education	5	0.768
Attitude	5	0.713
Subjective Norms	5	0.735
Perceived Behavioral Control	5	0.784
Intrinsic Motivation	5	0.788
Extrinsic Motivation	5	0.717

Notes: Researcher's Collection

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

In this section, Demographic variables i.e., Gender, Age, Academic Qualification, Marital Status, Job level/ Position and Family Income are presented to overview the characteristics of the respondents. The detailed of the demographic profile of the respondents were presented in table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents of the study

Factors	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	182	60.67
	Female	118	39.33
Age	15 to 25	195	65
	25 to 35	71	23.67
	35 & Above	34	11.33
	Higher Secondary	145	48.33
Academic Qualification	Under Graduate	75	25
	Post Graduate	80	26.67
Marital Status	Single	208	69.33
	Married	92	30.67
	Student	135	45
Job Level / Position	Managerial	76	25.33
	Non- Managerial	89	29.67
	Up to 50,000	50	16.67
	50,001 to Rs. 100,000	60	20
Family Income	Rs. 100,001 to Rs. 150,000	49	16.33
	Rs. 150,001 to Rs. 200,000	86	28.67
	Rs. 200,000 and above	55	18.33

Notes: Researcher's Collection

Descriptive Statistics

In this section, Descriptive statistics i.e., minimum values, maximum values, mean and standard deviation are presented. The detailed of the descriptive statistics of the respondents were presented in table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
A	1.0	5.0	2.29	0.6586
SN	1.0	5.0	2.33	0.5628
PBC	1.0	5.0	2.24	0.7174
IM	1.0	5.0	2.23	0.7202
EM	1.0	5.0	2.31	0.6419
INTENT	1.0	5.0	2.24	0.7034

Notes: Researcher's Collection

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 indicate that mean score for all constructs cluster narrowly around the lower-to-moderate end of the five-point scale ($M = 2.23 - 2.33$), with intrinsic motivation and perceived behavioral control showing that the lowest means ($M = 2.23$ and 2.24 , respectively) and subjective norms the highest ($M = 2.33$). The relatively small standard deviations ($SD = 0.56 - 0.72$) indicate limited dispersion in responses, suggesting that Nepalese students' self-reported attitudes, norms, behavioral control, and motivations toward international education are homogenous across the sample.

Correlational Analysis

Having indicated descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation coefficients are computed and the result are presented in Table 4.

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates that all independent variables—Attitude (A), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Intrinsic Motivation (IM), and Extrinsic Motivation (EM)—are positively and statistically significant in relation to students' intention to pursue international education (INTENT) at the 0.01 level. Among the variables, Perceived Behavioral Control ($r = 0.769$) shows the strongest association with INTENT, followed by Subjective Norms ($r = 0.728$) and Attitude ($r = 0.664$). Additionally, Extrinsic Motivation ($r = 0.634$) and Intrinsic Motivation ($r = 0.623$) exhibit moderate positive relationships with the dependent variable.

The inter-correlations among the independent variables range from 0.581 to 0.723, indicating moderate to strong associations. The highest correlation is observed between Attitude and Intrinsic Motivation ($r = 0.721$), suggesting related but not overlapping constructs. None of the correlation coefficients exceed the critical threshold of 0.90 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern. This suggests that the independent variables maintain sufficient distinctiveness and are appropriate for inclusion in regression analysis.

Table 4: Pearson's correlation coefficient matrix

Correlations						
	INTENT	A	SN	PBC	IM	EM
INTENT	1					
A	.664**	1				
SN	.728**	.641**	1			
PBS	.769**	.669**	.692**	1		
IM	.623**	.721**	.695**	.636**	1	
EM	.634**	.581**	.669**	.723**	.624**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Notes: Researcher's Collection

Overall, the findings confirm that all selected behavioral and motivational factors are significantly associated with students' intention to pursue international education, while maintaining acceptable levels of independence, thereby supporting further multivariate analysis.

Regression Analysis

Having indicated the Pearson's correlation coefficient, the regression analysis has been performed and the results are presented in Table 6. More Specifically, it presents regression result of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

The results of the multiple regression analysis in table 5 indicate that the model is statistically significant and explains a substantial proportion of variance in students' intention to pursue international education ($R^2 = 0.786$). Diagnostic tests further confirm that multicollinearity is not a concern, as Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remain within acceptable limits.

Table 5: Estimated regression results of independent variables on dependent variables

Model	Constant	A	SN	PBC	IM	EM	R ²	SE	F- Ratio
1	0.618** (5.594)	0.709** (15.318)					0.441	0.53	234.65
2	0.121 (1.017)		0.910** (18.347)				0.530	0.48	336.63
3	0.116** (3.508)			0.950** (67.626)			0.639	0.17	4573.29
4	0.888** (8.564)				0.608** (13.734)		0.388	0.55	188.64
5	-0.126** (-2.314)					1.024** (45.203)	0.573	0.25	2043.30
6	0.121 (1.027)	0.187 (2.406)	0.726** (7.985)				0.539	0.48	173.91
7	-0.041 (-1.031)	0.101** (-3.763)	0.224** (6.912)	0.891** (48.068)			0.748	0.16	1787.70
8	-0.05 (-1.243)	0.179** (-3.427)	0.250** (7.018)	0.883** (46.73)	0.064 (1.733)		0.767	0.16	1350.61
9	-0.098** (-2.865)	0.113 (2.539)	0.10** (3.024)	0.670** (26.382)	0.035 (1.137)	0.341** (10.843)	0.786	0.14	1530.93

*Note(s): Two ** and one * asterisks indicate statistical significance at 5% and 10% level respectively.*

Notes: Researcher's Collection

Among the predictors, perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.670$, $p < 0.05$) emerges as the strongest determinant, followed by extrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < 0.05$) and subjective norms ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$), thereby supporting hypotheses H3, H5, and H2, respectively. Attitude ($\beta = 0.113$) demonstrates a positive but relatively weak effect, providing partial support for H1, whereas intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.035$) is found to be statistically insignificant, leading to the rejection of H4. These findings are largely consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes the role of perceived behavioral control and social influence in shaping behavioral intentions, while offering partial support for Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as extrinsic motivation significantly influences intention whereas intrinsic motivation does not.

In the context of Nepal, the dominance of perceived behavioral control and extrinsic motivation suggests that students' decisions to pursue international education are primarily driven by external constraints and opportunities, such as financial capacity, career prospects, migration pathways, and social expectations, rather than intrinsic academic interest. This reflects the broader socio-economic conditions and collectivist cultural orientation of Nepal, where external and structural factors play a more decisive role in shaping educational aspirations.

These findings, however, diverge from several prior studies. Whereas Omar et al. (2016), Mostafa and Lim (2020), and Borodina (2022) report intrinsic motivation as a significant, sometimes dominant, driver of international study intentions, the present results show no significant intrinsic-motivation effect, suggesting that in resource-constrained, collectivist settings such as Nepal, intrinsic academic interest may be overridden by structural and financial pressures. Likewise, the comparatively weak effect of attitude departs from the Theory of Planned Behavior literature (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Li et al., 2009; Tung et al., 2021), where attitude is typically among the strongest predictors; this suggests that in the Nepalese context, general favorability toward studying abroad may matter less than students' perceived practical capacity (PBC) and access to external resources (EM) to act on that favorability. These divergences underscore that behavioral-motivational models developed largely in Western or economically advanced settings may not transfer directly to developing-country contexts without contextual adaptation.

Conclusion of the Study

This study set out to describe, examine, and determine the predictive influence of behavioral and motivational factors on Nepali students' intention to pursue international education, integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior and Self-Determination Theory. The regression result shows that perceived behavioural control is the strongest predictor on intention, followed by extrinsic motivation and subjective norms. An Attitude exerts only a weak positive effect, while intrinsic motivation is statistically insignificant. These findings provide strong support for the Theory of Planned Behavior and only partial support for Self-Determination Theory, confirming that external, structural factors — financial capacity, career prospects, migration pathways, and social expectations — outweigh intrinsic academic interest in shaping Nepalese students' study-abroad decisions. Theoretically, the study contributes one of the first empirically tested integrations of TPB and SDT within the Nepalese higher-education context. Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers, educational institutions,

and consultancies seeking to guide or retain students should address the external and behavioral-control barriers such as financial accessibility, procedural clarity, and career-linked incentives that most strongly shape students' intentions, rather than focusing solely on promoting positive attitudes toward domestic education.

Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the use of cross-sectional data restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Second, the reliance on self-reported responses may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects. Third, although the sample includes respondents from different provinces of Nepal, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of all student groups, limiting generalizability. Fourth, the study focuses only on selected behavioral and motivational factors, excluding other potential influences such as institutional quality, policy environment, and economic conditions. Finally, the absence of longitudinal or qualitative analysis limits a deeper understanding of changes in students' intentions over time.

Future Research Implications

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to track how students' intentions evolve over time and translate into actual enrollment behavior. Qualitative or mixed-methods approaches would help capture the nuanced, context-specific meanings students attach to constructs such as perceived behavioral control and extrinsic motivation. Comparative studies across provinces, institution types, or neighboring South Asian countries would help establish the generalizability of the present findings, while future models could incorporate additional constructs such as institutional quality, policy environment, digital and social-media influence, and financial literacy to build a more comprehensive predictive framework for international student mobility from Nepal.

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