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The underinvestigated giant: choices and challenges of Brazilian international students, based on the theory of planned behavior

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Introdução

Brazil is in the tenth position in the ranking of highest number of international students; is the twelfth largest economy in the world; has the sixth largest population on the planet, and the fifth largest territory. However, few studies address the internationalization of Brazilian students, especially on a theoretical basis. This qualitative methodological approach, based on multiple sources of evidence, analyze the experiences of Brazilian international students, in the light of the theory of planned behavior; we sought to understand their choices and the challenges they face.

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

The expansion in the number of international students should surpassed the mark of 8 million, by 2025 (OECD, 2021). We had difficulty in identifying studies that address specifically the internationalization of Brazilian students, and it is essential to better understand the choices made by international students from this important global player. This article analyzed the experiences of Brazilian international students, in the light of the theory of planned behavior (TPB), to understand better their choices and the challenges they face, bringing the voice of these students.

Fundamentação Teórica

For the theoretical support of the article, several elements involving international student's assessment, influences on the international student, self-efficacy perceived by international students and Theory of Planned Behavior. The choice of country, institution, and other means that influence the choice, the movement of students in internationalization, and changes in decisions throughout the process were also explained. Also, to the recruitment of students, the associated services, and of course, the evaluation of the teaching program.

Metodologia

To meet the article's goal, we carried out qualitative research using interviews, documents, and audiovisual material as the main sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Based on this research design, we did 23 in-depth interviews and analyzed more than 500 posts and 18 videos published on social media, covering more than 20 different destinations of Brazilian international students, focused on management courses. It uses the interpretivist paradigm, multi-case studies, and the exploratory-descriptive guiding method.

Análise dos Resultados

Reports of Brazilian international students, organized according to the theoretical dimensions of TPB (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control), and to topics that emerged: Attitude of management students (Assessment of career internationalization, host country, host HEI and advisor); Subjective norm related to management students (Influence of the advisor, home HEI, professional community, family and close friends); Perceived behavioral control faced by management students (Self-efficacy with the host language, culture, the established network and with the research topic).

Conclusão

Results indicate characteristics that mark the experience of Brazilian students: overvaluation of internationalization and foreign universities; fear of prejudice; dependence on intermediaries; family as source of inspiration and concern; heterogeneity in language use and cultural adaptation;

prevailing local findings; and ease of establishing networks in the medium term. These results can develop mutual understanding between international students, local students, and other members of the academic community, so the internationalization of education can fulfill its transformative social role.

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