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## Development and validation of a Multidimensional Motivations to Study Abroad Scale (MMSAS) among European Credit Mobility Students

Giovanni Aresi<sup>a,\*</sup>, Sara Alfieri<sup>a</sup>, Margherita Lanz<sup>a</sup>, Elena Marta<sup>a</sup>, Simon Moore<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Psychology Department, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano, Italy<sup>b</sup> Violence Research Group, School of Dentistry, Cardiff University, Heath Park, Cardiff CF14 4XY, UK

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## ABSTRACT

The aim was to establish and validate the Multidimensional Motivations to Study Abroad Scale (MMSAS) to measure university Credit Mobility Students' (CMSs) reasons (e.g., academic, cross-cultural, personal growth) for studying abroad. The instrument was administered to a multi-language sample of 1333 European CMSs. The final measure included 27 items.

Results supported nine factors for the English (both for native English speakers and the version for non-native English speakers), French, German, Italian, and Spanish versions; invariance across languages was demonstrated and evidence for construct validity is provided. Further research should explore the relevance of this measure to other populations (e.g., other languages, degree mobility students) and determine the relationship with students' experiences and behaviours abroad.

## Introduction

Studying abroad as part of one's academic career is usually elective and motivated “to achieve a particular purpose” (Bochner, 2006, p. 182). Students' decisions to study abroad can be framed within the Push-pull Model, which distinguishes between “push” (i.e., that influence the demand for international education) and “pull” (i.e., that influence the selection of the destination) factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Motivations to study abroad (i.e., push factors) are a crucial factor influencing students' social and cultural adaptation during the experience of studying abroad (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007), the development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding (Kitsantas, 2004), and even behaviours impacting on their health while abroad (Aresi, Moore, & Marta, 2016a; Pedersen, Skidmore, & Aresi, 2014).

There is a need to develop a multilingual, valid and reliable measure of students' motivations to study abroad. Such a measure could be used in higher education institutions to plan orientation activities, screen student applications, and develop intervention strategies to both promote social and cultural adjustment and healthy behaviour. Attempts have been made to develop such a measure but there are notable methodological and psychometric limitations in the existing literature, including a lack of disclosure on the process of scale development (e.g., Pope, Sánchez, Lehnert, & Schmid, 2014; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003), aggregating conceptually similar items into dimensions (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014), and a lack of assessment of construct and criterion validity, and factor structure invariance, even when using a multi-country/multi-language samples (Beerkens, Souto-Otero, de Wit, & Huisman, 2015;

Abbreviations: MMSAS, Multidimensional Motivations to Study Abroad Scale; CMS, Credit Mobility Students

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [giovanni.aresi@unicatt.it](mailto:giovanni.aresi@unicatt.it) (G. Aresi), [sara.alfieri@unicatt.it](mailto:sara.alfieri@unicatt.it) (S. Alfieri), [margherita.lanz@unicatt.it](mailto:margherita.lanz@unicatt.it) (M. Lanz), [elena.marta@unicatt.it](mailto:elena.marta@unicatt.it) (E. Marta), [mooresc2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:mooresc2@cardiff.ac.uk) (S. Moore).

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Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). Furthermore, many instruments have also been developed using limited samples, including single-country single-language (e.g., Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Chirkov et al., 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003), short-term study abroad summer programmes (Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011), or discipline-specific students (Pope et al., 2014). Any instrument should therefore reflect the diversity of study abroad students, in terms of discipline, country of origin and language (Kalocsai, 2014).

### *The present study*

The present study was designed to develop and validate the Multidimensional Motivations to Study Abroad Scale (MMSAS) to measure European higher education students' motivations to study abroad. The MMSAS is expected to assess the different reasons why students decide to initiate a study abroad programme. We also aimed to test the structural validity of the English (for both native and non-native speakers), Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish versions of the scale. Finally, we aimed to verify the construct validity of the new scale and its dimensions.

## **Methods**

To develop the MMSAS, a multi-step approach was implemented across six phases (see Supplement 1: Methods). Phases one to five included a literature review and a pilot qualitative study that generated a first pool of items ( $N = 100$ ), followed by the assessment of their content adequacy by five experts<sup>1</sup> in the field. From this work 61 items (Pool 2) were retained. Analysis of data drawn from a pilot sample of 357 study abroad students supported nine factors and lead to retaining 41 items (Pool 3). Phase six implemented the measure and is described here.

### *Final sample administration*

#### *Procedures*

This study was part of a larger research project on health behaviours during study abroad experiences. The study used a longitudinal design, and the data were collected upon arrival abroad ( $T_1$ ) and four months later ( $T_2$ ). Two cohorts were invited to participate. The first cohort was invited at the beginning of the first semester (September 2015), and the second cohort at the beginning of the second semester (February 2016). At  $T_1$ , leaders of an international student association approached approximately 1800 Credit Mobility Students (CMSs) (across both cohorts) who had just arrived in 200 cities across 40 European countries. At this point, European university students participating in exchange programmes were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire which included the Pool 3 items. Four months later ( $T_2$ ), the participants were emailed a link to the second survey, with entry into a lottery for flight vouchers offered as an incentive. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were either participating in a study abroad programme, internship or language training programme for an expected four months or more, and were normally residents of a European country.

#### *Measures*

Students were prompted as follows: “Think about the reasons why you want to study abroad. How important is each one of the following motivations to you?” Students were then presented with the randomised list of the 41 items in their preferred language and response options ranging from “one,” not important at all, to “five,” very important).

The items had been translated by native speakers into Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish and subsequently reverse translated into English (Brislin, 1980). The participants were also required to disclose their gender, age and other socio-demographic information (e.g., country of origin, primary language). They also completed questions regarding the type of study abroad experience (i.e., study abroad programme, host country, the amount of time they plan to spend abroad). The  $T_2$  survey contained some criterion measures used to assess the validity of the scale, specifically students' self-reported host country language proficiency (Roever & Powers, 2005), their recreational habits at night (Calafat, Gomez, Juan, & Becona, 2007), and other measures of lifestyle habits, such as the number of hours a week spent studying or doing assignments (from 1 “None” to 7 “About 11 or more”). Students also completed three acculturation-related measures to assess their home and host country acculturation orientation (Brief Acculturation Orientation Scale). The scale assessed how effectively students were adapting to the host country (Brief Sociocultural Adaptation Scale) and their psychological well-being (Brief Psychological Adaptation Scale). These scales had been validated in different languages (English for natives, English for non-natives, German, Italian, Thai, Spanish, Portuguese, French) on a sample of study abroad students (Demes & Geeraert, 2014).

#### *Data analyses*

We performed a series of Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) on the overall sample for parsimony. A nine-factor solution was imposed in accordance with results of analyses on the pilot sample (Supplemental 1). The extraction method employed was Principal Axis Factoring with Oblimin Rotation.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Janice Abarbanel (Boston, MA, USA), Dr. Ed de St. Aubin (Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA), Dr. Virginie Mamadouh (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands); Professor Laszlo Dörner (Eszterházy Károly College, Eger, Hungary), and Dr. Eric Pedersen (RAND, Santa Monica, CA, USA).

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