

THE ROLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY IN SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Sabrina Habbiche *, László Kinyó **

** Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged*

*** Institute of Education, University of Szeged*

Keywords: Self-Determination Theory (SDT); psychological adaptation; socio-cultural adaptation

Self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes satisfying three essential psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The application of this theory can serve as a critical framework to understand the universal requirement for psychological well-being in the cross-cultural transition of international students, particularly in their socio-psychological adaptation. By fostering control and competence, SDT helps international students develop a sense of agency by navigating new cultural norms and expectations. It also enables effective interactions with their environment, handles academic, social, and cultural demands, and overcomes language barriers. Hence, the satisfaction of these basic needs reduces acculturative stress, empowers self-determined motivation to study abroad, and promotes both psychological well-being (PWB) and socio-cultural adaptation (Chen et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018). The systematic review explores the role of SDT in shaping a successful cultural transition by addressing three key questions: (1) how does the satisfaction of SDT's core needs influence psychological and socio-cultural adaptation? (2) What role does SDT play in reducing acculturative stress and fostering motivation during cross-cultural adaptation? (3) How are motivation and mental health interconnected through the lens of SDT in this context? The review followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol guidelines to analyze and identify empirical studies, summarize the findings, extract key characteristics, and provide recommendations for future research. Two databases Scopus and The Web of Science were used for electronic search. A detailed search strategy using Boolean search was employed resulting in 669 articles. The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journals and English articles published in the last decade 2014 to 2024. Exclusion criteria eliminated non-English articles, conceptual papers, books, and conference proceedings. Preliminary findings show that the satisfaction of SDT's basic psychological needs enhances mental health, reduces acculturative stress, and supports socio-cultural adaptation among international students. The interplay between motivation and mental health is essential in navigating the difficulties in the cross-cultural adaptation process. The review highlights the role of SDT in higher education, offering theoretical and practical insights to better equip educational environments with interventions to promote resilience and well-being among international students. These findings will form the basis for future research and interventions to support diverse student populations in global academic settings.