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Cross-Cultural Examination: The Interplay of Self-Esteem and Academic Help- Seeking Among British and Chinese Students

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ABSTRACT

Academic help-seeking is an essential self-regulation strategy that supports student learning, yet its use is influenced by cultural and contextual factors such as self-esteem and study-abroad experiences. This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic help-seeking among postgraduate students from different cultural backgrounds, focusing on British and Chinese students studying either in their home country or abroad. A total of 115 postgraduate students completed an online survey comprising the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, an academic help-seeking attitudes measure, and a help source preference scale. Quantitative analyses were conducted to compare self-esteem, preferred help sources, and attitudes toward help-seeking across groups, and to assess correlations between self-esteem and help-seeking behaviours. Results indicated significant cultural differences: British students reported higher self-esteem and preferred family or self-directed resources, whereas Chinese students—especially those studying abroad—reported lower self-esteem and were more likely to seek help from instructors. Self-esteem was positively correlated with constructive help-seeking and negatively associated with perceptions of threat. These findings suggest that studying abroad can amplify cultural variations in help-seeking, with the academic environment and educational system shaping students' preferences for support sources. The study highlights the importance of culturally responsive interventions, such as pre-departure orientation and peer mentoring, to foster inclusive learning environments. Limitations are discussed, and recommendations are made for longitudinal and mixed-method research to further explore these relationships.

Keywords: Academic Help-Seeking, Cross-Cultural Differences, Higher Education, International Students, Self-Esteem