

EXPLORING DETERMINANTS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' INTENTION TO ENTER UNIVERSITY JOINT PROGRAMS?

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Abstract: *Understanding what factors influence high school students' intention to enter university joint programs is important to promote internationalization of higher education from the demand side. Applying the structural equation modeling method to examine 207 valid responses from high school students in Vietnam, this study demonstrates the importance of family influence, personal development, and foreign partner's country image in high school students' intention to enter university joint programs. The study also highlights the moderating role of financial capability in shaping high school students' intentions. Based on these results, this study proposes practical recommendations to promote university joint programs in Vietnam.*

• **Keywords:** joint program, family influence, personal development, university image, student intentions.

Date of receipt: 20th Sep., 2025

Date of delivery revision: 26th Sep., 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71374/jfar.v25.i6.09>

Date of receipt revision: 05th Oct., 2025

Date of approval: 28th Oct., 2025

1. Introduction

University joint programs (UJPs) at the bachelor's and master's levels have become increasingly popular in developing countries as demand for international-standard education grows (Nguyen et al., 2021; Nghiêm-Phu & Nguyễn, 2020). UJPs enable students to access globally accredited curricula while studying domestically and at lower cost. Understanding high school students' intentions to pursue UJPs is therefore essential for advancing the internationalization agenda in higher education and developing human capital.

Existing studies point to several determinants of students' program choices, including foreign partner's country image, university reputation, personality traits (Krishnan et al., 2024), opportunities for personal and skill development, and family encouragement (Meerits et al., 2025). Financial capability is also a key factor, particularly in developing contexts where cost remains a significant barrier. However, most prior research focuses on full-time study abroad or domestic programs; empirical evidence on UJPs remains limited. This highlights the need to investigate what shapes students' intentions to enroll in UJPs, especially at the high school level.

Vietnam presents an appropriate context, as UJPs have become an important vehicle for internationalizing higher education. The country currently hosts nearly 500 UJPs with about 140,000 students, mostly in economics and management but increasingly in science and technology. Policy goals toward 2030 include raising the share of

UJPs partnered with top-500 global universities, establishing international branch campuses, and strengthening institutional capacity for global integration. Regulatory reforms have also enhanced quality assurance and diversified program offerings to align with labor-market needs, marking a shift from expansion to quality improvement in international higher education.

Using quantitative methods, this study analyzes survey data from 207 high school students to examine factors influencing their intentions to enroll in UJPs. The findings show that family influence, personal development opportunities, and foreign partner's country image significantly shape students' intentions, while financial capability moderates these relationships. Based on the results, the study proposes practical implications to support the promotion and sustainable development of UJPs in Vietnam.

2. Literature review

2.1. Joint programs

According to Knight & Lee (2023), UJPs are a part of cross-border education, which often features joint degrees granted by two or more universities. UJPs are characterized by close cooperation between international and local schools, with a shared responsibility for teaching and assessment (Nguyen et al., 2021). UJPs aim to share resources and improve the quality of education (Khakimovich & Abdullazhanovich, 2021). UJPs are beneficial to students as they are exposed to international education at home. Attending UJPs, students can study flexibly

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in the local and the international schools (Knight & Lee, 2023). UJPs contribute to internationalizing local universities and enhancing their reputation. UJPs are also instruments to foster research collaboration. Nguyen et al. (2021) demonstrate that UJPs meet the needs for sustainable socio-economic development of the host country.

In this study, UJPs are bachelor programs under the cooperation between a Vietnamese university and one or more international universities. Students are allowed to study full-time in Vietnam or partly in Vietnam and partly abroad for a degree granted by international universities.

2.2. Student intentions to engage in UJPs

An individual's intentions is defined as a psychological state that reflects a person's desire, expectation, and ability to perform a particular behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Intentions reflect not only desire but also include the expectation of the ability to perform a behavior, clearly distinguishing it from actual behavior. Intentions are formed from a combination of personal motivation and social factors. The stability of intentions over time influences the relationship between intentions and behavior, particularly when combined with past behavior.

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), behavioral intentions are determined by two primary factors: attitude toward behavior and subjective norms. TRA emphasizes that positive attitudes and social pressure from others will promote the intention to perform the behavior. This theory was later expanded by Ajzen (1991) by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), with the addition of the factor of perceived behavioral control, to further explain the ability to control and barriers to behavior. According to TPB, intentions will be stronger when individuals have positive attitudes, feel support from social norms, and believe that they are able to overcome obstacles to perform the behavior.

In this study, students' intentions to enter UJPs refer to their desire or plan to enter UJPs. Based on the TRA and TPB, the intentions to enter UJPs is influenced by students' positive attitudes toward global learning opportunities, subjective norms from family and friends supporting international education, and perceptions of behavioral control related to financial ability and language skills. Based on the TPB, this study evaluates the impact of factors including personal personality traits, skill development

opportunities, self-development opportunities, foreign partner's country image, university image, family influence, and financial capability on students' intentions to enter UJPs.

2.3. Hypothesis development

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes shaped by personality traits play a central role in forming behavioral intentions. Prior studies show that personality traits, including extroversion, are associated with intentions to participate in educational and training programs (Santoro et al., 2025; Franić et al., 2014). Extroverted students tend to be more open to new environments and international learning opportunities.

H1a: Extroverted personality traits promote students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Skill development enhances confidence, adaptability, and proactive learning behaviors, which in turn strengthen intentions to engage in international education (Franić et al., 2014).

H2a: Skill development promotes students' intentions to enter UJPs.

A country's image particularly its cultural appeal, safety, and education quality has been shown to significantly influence students' study choices (Petzold & Moog, 2018). A positive perception of the foreign partner's country may therefore increase the attractiveness of UJPs.

H3a: The foreign partner's country image promotes students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Personal development opportunities, including self-growth, intercultural exposure and increased self-awareness, are also important motivators for students considering international programs (Chen & Yu, 2020; Esser-Noethlichs et al., 2024).

H4a: Personal development promotes students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Institutional image such as academic reputation, program quality, and teaching excellence shapes perceptions of program value and influences students' international education decisions (Krishnan et al., 2024; Nghiêm-Phú & Nguyễn, 2020).

H5a: International university image promotes students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Family remains an important social force shaping attitudes, perceptions, and decisions related to education (Meerits et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2025). In the Vietnamese context, family support may mediate the influence of personal and external factors on UJP

intentions.

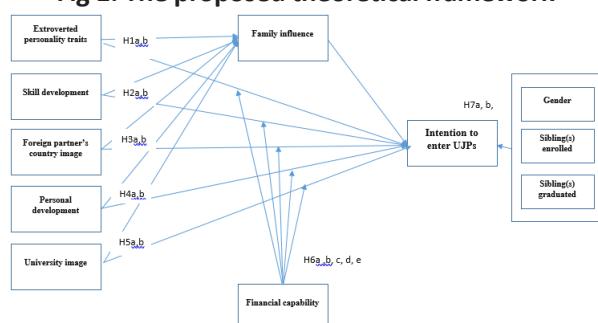
H1b-H5b: Family acts as a mediating factor between personality traits, personal development, skill development, country image, university image and students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Financial capability is a key determinant of participation in international programs, moderating the relationship between attitudes, motivation, and actual intentions (Amed et al., 2025). In UJPs often involving higher tuition financial considerations can either reinforce or weaken the effects of other factors.

H6(a-e): Financial capability moderates the relationships between personal/external factors and students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Based on the above arguments, this study proposes a research model to assess the factors influencing the students' intentions to participate in UJPs (Figure 1).

Fig 1: The proposed theoretical framework



3. Methodology

3.1. Scale of measurement

Based on the literature review, eight constructs were measured using validated scales. Personality traits, skill development and personal development were adapted from Franić et al. (2014); country image and university image from Nghiêm-Phú & Nguyễn (2020); family influence from Petzold & Moog (2018); and financial capability and intention from Wang et al. (2016). Each construct consisted of 2-7 observed items using a five-point Likert scale.

3.2. Sampling and data collection

To collect data for this study, we conducted a survey of 12-grade high school students who are preparing to take the national university entrance exams. This study used the cluster sampling method to ensure representativeness and feasibility of data collection. Specifically, three clusters were identified during university admission counseling programs organized in three regions: North, Central, and South. Convenience sampling was conducted within each cluster to select high school students to

participate in the survey based on their willingness and accessibility to the admission counseling programs.

A questionnaire was drafted in early 2025. It was then pre-tested with 35 high school students from three high schools in Northern Vietnam. Based on information collected from this pre-testing survey, we modified the structure and questions in the questionnaire. We also consulted with four experts and professionals who are deans and staff of faculties/ departments of international joint programs at two universities in Northern Vietnam to revise the questionnaire. A finalized questionnaire was then prepared for the official survey.

To conduct the survey in the three regions, 10 enumerators were employed and trained with the same finalized questionnaire. After the training, these enumerators travelled to conduct face-to-face interviews with 312 high school students who came to attend a series of university admission counseling programs organized from April to July 2025. By the end of the survey, 207 valid questionnaires with complete information were collected.

The study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the factors influencing students' intentions to enter UJPs. Specifically, the PLS-SEM was employed in this study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Reliability and validity test

Based on the information collected from the surveyed high school students, Table 2 shows that the proportion of female respondents is higher than that of male respondents (60.9% vs. 39.1%). Most of these respondents study English as their foreign language (74.9%). Their parents are mostly bachelor's degree holders or engineers.

Table 2. The information of the respondents

Gender			N=207	%
	Female	Male		
Sibling(s) currently enrolled in the UJPs	141	66	68.1	31.9
Yes	66	128	31.9	68.1
Sibling(s) have currently graduated from the UJPs	79	155	38.2	61.8
English	155	5	74.9	2.4
Chinese	31	9	15	4.3
Japanese	5	5	2.4	2.4
French	2	1	1	4.3
German	112	23	54.1	11.1
Korean	23	19	11.1	9.2
Father's education	53	53	25.6	74.4
Bachelor/Engineer	112	23	54.1	11.1
Master	23	19	11.1	9.2
Doctorate	53	53	25.6	74.4
Other	53	53	25.6	74.4

Gender		(N=207)	%
	Female	81	39.1
Mother's education	Male	126	60.9
	Bachelor/Engineer	107	57.7
	Master	31	15.0
	Doctorate	12	5.8
	Other	57	27.5

Source: Author's calculation

The results in Table 3 show that Cronbach's Alpha values of the factors range from 0.804 (HAN) to 0.874 (PKN). All of these values exceed the threshold of 0.6, which is recommended by Churchill (1979). Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) values of the factors range from 0.866 (HAN) to 0.924 (GDI), which are higher than the threshold of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994). These results confirm the internal consistency and reliability of the scales. In addition, the results show that the AVE values of the factors range from 0.619 (HAN) to 0.858 (GDI). All of these values exceed the threshold of 0.5, which demonstrates the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 3: The measurement model evaluation

Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Extroverted personality traits (DDT)		0.860	0.905	0.704
DDT1	0.834			
DDT2	0.831			
DDT3	0.861			
DDT4	0.830			
Skill development (PKN)		0.874	0.914	0.727
PKN1	0.784			
PKN2	0.906			
PKN3	0.850			
PKN4	0.866			
Personal development (TCP)		0.836	0.890	0.669
TCP1	0.823			
TCP2	0.866			
TCP3	0.805			
TCP4	0.774			
Foreign partner's country image (HAN)		0.804	0.866	0.619
HAN3	0.869			
HAN4	0.845			
HAN6	0.713			
HAN7	0.708			
University image (TDH)		0.849	0.897	0.685
TDH3	0.812			
TDH4	0.843			
TDH5	0.841			
TDH6	0.814			
Family influence (GDI)		0.836		0.858
GDI1	0.941			
GDI2	0.912			
Financial capability (TCH)		0.805		0.836
TCH2	0.898			
TCH3	0.929			

Source: Author's calculation

The discriminant validity of the measurement model is assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion, to determine the degree of difference between the constructs in the model. According to the HTMT criterion, the HTMT value between the constructs should be less than 0.85 to ensure discriminant validity.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

The results in Table 4 indicate that the intentions to enter UJPs is directly influenced by three factors: extroverted personality traits, the country's image with training links, and opportunities for personal development. The opportunity for personal development is the factor with the greatest impact on the student's intentions to enter UJPs (0.265). Therefore, Hypotheses H1a, H3a, and H4a are accepted. This result is consistent with the studies of Santoro et al. (2025) on the direct impact of extroverted personality traits. It is also consistent with the studies of Petzold & Moog (2018), which asserted that the image of the partner country (in terms of education and culture) positively affects the intentions to participate in UJPs. This result is also consistent with the research of Chen & Yu (2020) and Esser-Noethlichs et al. (2024), who emphasize that self-development, through enhancing personal awareness and motivation, is an important factor promoting the intentions to enter UJPs.

In addition, Table 4 reports that financial capability is a factor that strengthens the relationship between skill development opportunities and students' intentions to enter UJPs. Hence, Hypothesis H6b is accepted. This result is consistent with the literature that economic factors can reduce/increase motivation to participate in international education programs.

Table 4: Total effects

	Hypothesis	Path coefficient	S.D	T-stat	P-value	Result
H1a	Extroverted personality traits -> Intentions	0.155	0.072	2.157	0.031	Accepted
H1b	Extroverted personality traits -> Family influence -> intentions	0.004	0.01	0.375	0.708	Not accepted
H2a	Skill development -> Intentions	0.194	0.108	1.802	0.072	Not accepted
H2b	Skill development -> Family influence -> intentions	-0.006	0.014	0.45	0.653	Not accepted
H3a	Foreign partner's country image -> Intentions	0.183	0.081	2.247	0.025	Accepted
H3b	Foreign partner's country image -> Family influence -> intentions	-0.009	0.017	0.522	0.602	Not accepted
H4a	Personal development -> Intentions	0.265	0.11	2.416	0.016	Accepted
H4b	Personal development -> Family influence -> intentions	0.003	0.015	0.172	0.864	Not accepted
H5a	University image -> Intentions	0.096	0.104	0.914	0.361	Not accepted
H5b	University image -> Family influence -> intention	0.031	0.021	1.442	0.15	Not accepted
H6a	Financial capability -> Extroverted personality traits x Intentions	0.123	0.065	1.905	0.057	Not accepted
H6b	Extroverted personality traits -> Skill development x Intentions	-0.298	0.135	2.213	0.027	Accepted
H6c	Extroverted personality traits -> Foreign partner's country image x Intentions	0.003	0.079	0.032	0.975	Not accepted
H6d	Extroverted personality traits -> Personal development x Intentions	0.244	0.136	1.792	0.074	Not accepted
H6e	Extroverted personality traits -> Foreign partner's country image x Intentions	0.117	0.081	1.456	0.146	Not accepted
Gender	-> Intentions	-0.072	0.059	1.211	0.227	Not accepted
Sibling(s) currently enrolled in the UJPs	-> Intentions	-0.076	0.06	1.263	0.207	Not accepted
Sibling(s) currently graduated in the UJPs	-> Intentions	0.159	0.062	2.552	0.011	Accepted
Family influence	-> Intentions	0.149	0.074	2.009	0.045	Accepted

Source: Author's compilation

Additionally, having a sibling who has graduated from the UJPs enhances the high school student's

intentions to enter UJPs. This finding indicates that family plays a significant role in encouraging and motivating high school students to enter UJPs. The finding that high school students are still influenced by the experience of their siblings in UJPs implies an effective marketing strategy to attract new high school students to the UJPs of universities.

The results in Table 5 show that gender does not have a significant effect on the intentions to study in the UJPs. The effect of skill development on intentions is not statistically significant. This result is partly inconsistent with the literature, which emphasize that skill development, such as communication, promotes the intentions to study internationally. Perhaps, high school students have limited awareness of skill development for their future career. Therefore, they are not prioritizing the development of specific skills. Family influence is not statistically significant in mediating the relationship between the remaining factors and students' intentions to enter UJPs. However, family influence has a direct impact on students' intentions to enter UJPs.

Similarly, the impact of university image on students' intentions to enter UJPs is not statistically significant. This result is contrary to Krishnan et al. (2024), which emphasize the role of the school's reputation and educational quality in shaping the training program. It is likely that Vietnamese high school students do not have sufficient information or a clear understanding of the reputation of international universities. A possible reason could be that local universities have not effectively communicated the image and quality of the partner universities to high school students. This finding suggests universities in Vietnam to change their marketing strategies to effectively attract high school students.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to literature in three folds. Firstly, it confirms that extroverted personality traits and personal development have an impact on the high school students' intentions to enter UJPs. Perceived behavioral control is influenced by financial factors, especially in the context of UJPs. Secondly, this study contributes to the destination image theory by emphasizing that foreign partner's country image has a greater attraction than the specific reputation of the school or personal skills. Thirdly, this study highlights the importance of family and practical experiences of relatives in shaping high school students' behavioral intentions.

The results from this study contain practical implications to higher education institutions and UJPs in Vietnam. There are several ways to increase students' intentions to enter UJPs. Firstly, it is important to focus on personal factors and national image. Universities should prioritize promoting UJPs as an opportunity for personal development and take advantage of the extroverted personality traits of students through personalized mentoring programs or soft skills building workshops. Additionally, it is important to highlight the image of the foreign country through marketing campaigns or share success stories from students who have participated in the UJPs. Secondly, universities should offer financial support to mitigate the negative impact of financial capability. Thirdly, raising awareness of the university image and the role of the family through increased communication with high school students is essential. Finally, the UJPs should be designed in a flexible structure, focusing on both personal and international benefits, and monitoring feedback from graduates to improve its quality and increase participation rates.

This paper also has some limitations. There may be other factors from the external or internal environment that affect students' intentions to enter UJPs. Future research should supplement those factors in a reasonable and systematic way. Also, this article only examines students' intentions, without investigating specific behaviors such as students' decisions to participate or their willingness to participate. Future research should explore these dimensions.

Acknowledgement: This paper is a product of the research project funded by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam "Attracting international education institutions to invest in the development of international education in Vietnam", with the research number B2025-NTH-08.

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