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Article

Exploring Determinants of International Students' Satisfaction and Destination Choice: A Study of South Korea's Higher Education Landscape

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Abstract

As South Korea positions itself as a competitive global education hub, understanding the determinants that attract and satisfy international students is critical. This study investigates the factors influencing the selection of South Korea as a higher education destination and examines the key predictors of international students' satisfaction with their academic and social experiences. Drawing on a quantitative, cross-sectional design, the study surveyed 231 international students across various South Korean higher education institutions. Key destination choice factors included safety, quality of education, scholarship availability, and cultural interest. Satisfaction predictors were assessed through logistic regression analysis, revealing that quality of education, facilities and resources, research opportunities, support services, cultural engagement, and exploration of Korea significantly influenced overall student satisfaction. Safety and living conditions emerged as the most influential reasons for destination choice, while language barriers and geographic proximity were less critical. The study underscores the importance of tailored institutional support, culturally inclusive strategies, and expanded academic opportunities to enhance student satisfaction and retention. The findings offer evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educational leaders aiming to strengthen South Korea's global education appeal while addressing diverse international student needs. This research contributes to the broader discourse on international student mobility by highlighting the interplay between destination appeal and student satisfaction in a non-traditional host country.

Keywords: international students; higher education; destination choice

1. Introduction

With the declining birth rate and subsequent low domestic enrollment in schools in Korea (Republic of Korea) [1,2], recruitment of international students to fill this gap, especially in higher education, is one of the acceptable pathways by the government to avert this threat to the educational sector and its ripple effect on the human capital capacity of the nation. To realize and sustain this agenda, the Korean government has set up key international student support initiatives to drive this vision. This, among other reasons, has led to a continuous increase in the number of international students in Korea. Within two decades, international student enrollment in Korea has grown from 16,832 in 2004 to 208,842 in 2024 [3] as a result of this concerted effort by the government. To further this vision, the Korean government in 2023 launched a new policy to increase international student enrollment to 300,000 by 2027 [3].

This achievement would be significant for an emerging education destination. Recent records show that international students are open to non-traditional destinations that offer similar quality and opportunities, like Korea, due to the tougher requirements and regulations by most traditional

international education destinations, such as the US, Canada, UK, and Australia [4]. Known for its hi-tech, high digital and innovation index, unique cultural heritage and history, and miraculous economic growth and development, Korea can become a top global education destination after decades of being an OECD member.

Student satisfaction needs to be monitored periodically as international student growth continues in Korea. Factors that predict the selection of Korea as a study destination by international students such as education quality and institutions, availability of financial aids and scholarships, cultural interest and lifestyle, living conditions and safety, career opportunities, language and recommendations, cost of living and tuition fee, and proximity to home country need to be studied and periodically reassessed to understand the satisfaction level of students after enrollment. Until now, few studies have been available on international students' satisfaction in Korea [5]. Also, the previous study did not mention top issues such as career opportunities and safety, which are among the unique strengths of Korea. Additionally, the study was carried out about 8 years ago when the number and pool of students in Korea was smaller and less diverse than it is now, and the student type in the study was not mentioned.

In this study, the determinant factors that attract international students to Korea were used to evaluate the satisfaction levels during their study, especially the regular students (not exchange and short-term students). The study aims to explore international students' satisfaction in Korea by comparing their expectations with learning experience outcomes. Using correlation and ranking analysis, the outcome of this study reveals the degree of impact each factor has on the satisfaction of the students and offers insight into areas of concern and improvement. These results will serve not only as a show of the uniqueness of Korea as an emerging international education destination but also as a comparison to other regions and countries.

Research Questions

- What factors predict international students' selection of South Korea as a higher education destination?
- What factors predict international students' satisfaction in South Korea (academic and social experience)?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Trends of International Student Education in Korea

Internationalization is now an acceptable trend in every sector, including higher education. The internationalization of higher education creates cross-cultural competence, which has become an invaluable skill employers seek in the workplace [6]. Students with this experience have wider access to the global labor market since they can easily adapt to the workforce outside their cultural origin. Furthermore, building more inclusive and prosperous communities will require future leaders with knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding that transcends the borders of this interconnected world [7]. As the demand for higher education continues to increase, especially among developed nations, developing nations have continued to experience increased exit of their local students to destinations known for quality education, human capital need, and other competitive advantages such as language of learning, good facility, quality faculties, unique offerings, high demand majors, safety and security, affordable tuition and friendly international education policies while offering a career opportunity.

Over the years, the Korean government has strategically improved the chances of attracting more international students through several policies and programs. Between 2023 and 2024, international student enrollment grew by over 14% [3], which was higher than the growth rate in the US (7%) [7] and France (4.5%) [8] and Germany (2.4%) [9]. Such growth is a great development for a non-traditional study-abroad destination like Korea. There are several reports on the increase in enrollment in non-traditional international education destinations such as the Middle East, Europe,

and Asia [4,5,10,11]. Some contributing factors to Korea's international student enrollment growth could be improved immigration policies, scholarship opportunities, economic and cultural boom, widespread diplomatic interaction and contribution, and a good global image.

2.2. Factors that Attract International Students to Korea

In 2009, through the Ministry of Justice, the Korean government introduced the Korean Immigration and Integration Program, known as KIIP [12]. The main aim of KIIP is to improve the transition and integration process for foreigners in Korea, including international students graduating from Korean universities, offering them the necessary tools to adapt and be adopted smoothly into Korean society. This inclusive settlement program offers free language training, cultural support, and social integration assistance to foreigners, including international students. Through this free support program, foreigners are inundated with the necessary knowledge that helps them transition with cultural skills for occupational careers [13]. This program offers a smoother and surer transitional pathway for foreigners from temporary residency into a permanent one and the opportunity for naturalization [12], giving lighter requirements to graduates from Korean Universities.

Another impactful program contributing to international student enrollment growth is the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS). GKS is a merit-based, full-funding program for international students studying in Korea. Formally known as the Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP), the GKS is operated by the National Institute for International Education and Development (NIIED) under the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea. GKS, which started in 1967, offers International students from over 150 countries full scholarships at the bachelor, master, and doctorate levels. In 2024, the government invited about 2,200 students through this program. As the name implies, it is a global scholarship that impacts the lives of many by offering them access to quality education without financial stress, allowing students more time for learning and participation in social and cultural activities. Students who graduate from Korean Universities through this program are often offered easier requirements for long-term visas if they wish to work in Korea. GKS support has not only helped improve the number and diversity of students in Korea but also alleviated the burden of support required by international students from their parents and home countries [14].

Also contributing to the number of international students in Korea is the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Founded in 1991 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KOICA grants funds to key areas of development such as agriculture, education, rural development, health, governance, technology, the environment, and energy, making it one of the global scholarship programs. However, KOICA prioritizes education because it views it as the foundation for sustainable economic growth and good societal governance. KOICA scholarships are fully funded scholarships to graduate and postgraduate students, mostly from Africa, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, helping them to acquire specialized knowledge in their fields [15]. Unlike the GKS program, KOICA offers a pathway through which developing countries can access and benefit from Korean education. This kind of specialized scholarship empowers unique sectors of society that drive development through this peculiar scholarship program. Either way, GKS and KOICA programs are successful foreign diplomacy tools that have greatly influenced Korea's perception and global identity, especially in the global education field.

Local universities in Korea are not left behind in the drive to boost the international student population. To sustain enrollment numbers and attract quality students, universities in Korea offer enrollment scholarships and continuing scholarships for tuition reduction to motivated students. This form of scholarship, sometimes measured by previous academic performance, language ability (Korean and English or both), journal publications, recommendations, and extracurricular activities, contributes to the international student enrollment pool in Korea. University professors also support local and international students who are motivated to study and work as research assistants in various areas of specialization, using research grants from the government, non-government

organizations, and industries. Outstanding research professors in Korea, through this process, recruit numerous international students to mentor in research, teaching assistance, article publication, and student management during their study. This unique route also contributes to the number of international students in Korea [16].

Despite the various support initiatives by the government, most of the international students in Korea are self-sponsored. Though they could benefit from available support programs, their top motivation is not government support. They constituted over 90% of the enrollment in 2023 and 2024 (164,910 out of 181,842 enrollments in 2023 and 193,131 out of 208,962 enrollments in 2024 [2]). This group includes all categories of students (long-term, short-term, and trainees) from across the globe. It includes regular students, those studying abroad, those with dual degrees, exchanges, and those studying the Korean language. Self-sponsoring students' reasons for choosing Korean higher education range from cultural, social, academic, economic, historical, and tourism [17]. The economic development, science and technology, manufacturing, and innovation in Korea have created a curiosity effect across the globe, strengthening the motivation for international students to study in Korea. Korean drama, music, food, and general lifestyle, known as K-culture, are fascinating to many youths across the globe. Exposure through social media and global entertainment streaming services like Netflix, YouTube, and others offers some euphoria, attracting diverse interest and impacting the global community. It is not unusual for many young students to decide to study in Korea because of their online exposure to Korean culture. Economic programs like the Saemaul Undong have attracted political and economic leaders to study in Korea and benchmark Korean establishments. With education as the backbone of Korea's achievements, many countries and international organizations are open to training in Korea [18].

Another category of international students in Korea is students under international or inter-university agreements and memorandum of understanding (MOUs). These students are under the full or partial sponsorship of the national governments, government agencies or ministries, and other institutions, including Universities. These nations and institutions trust the quality of Korean systems, including education standards, and are open to partnering and collaborating. Sometimes, it could be a special government or ministry program based on MOUs and ODAs. These students receive support for education in specific areas through MOUs between the country's government or institution and the Korean government and institutions on behalf of the other country. The conditions and terms of agreement bind this class of students [19]. Sometimes, these classes of students are the best brains in the country, top workers, business executives, people with exceptional talents, or members of a particular agency or institution. The group includes exchange students, trainees studying abroad, language students, and other tailor-made programs. This pool is sometimes time-bound in their program and, therefore, has to leave when their program time is up [5].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the factors influencing international students' satisfaction with studying in South Korea, particularly emphasizing the impact of exploring the country. Logistic regression analysis assessed the relationship between cultural exploration and overall satisfaction. The cross-sectional design was selected because it allows researchers to analyze data simultaneously, offering a comprehensive snapshot of students' experiences and perceptions [19].

3.1.1. Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised international students enrolled in higher education institutions across South Korea. A sample of 231 students was recruited using a stratified random sampling method, ensuring representation from diverse nationalities, academic disciplines, and levels of study (e.g., undergraduate, master's, and doctoral). Stratified sampling was chosen to ensure

the sample reflects the heterogeneity of the international student population, consistent with best practices for achieving diversity in educational research [20]. Participants were recruited through institutional email lists, student organizations, and social media platforms, effective channels for reaching diverse student populations [21].

3.1.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire to measure demographic characteristics, satisfaction levels, and key factors influencing satisfaction, including opportunities to explore South Korea. The survey included Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing students' participation in cultural activities, visits to historical sites, and social engagement with local communities. Similar survey designs have been widely used in higher education research to measure satisfaction and related variables [22]. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot group of 20 international students to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity [21].

3.1.3. Variables

The primary dependent variable was overall satisfaction, measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The independent variable of interest, "exploring South Korea," was operationalized through questions about participation in cultural, social, and travel-related activities. Control variables included demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, nationality), academic factors (e.g., field of study, duration of stay), and institutional support (e.g., language programs, scholarships). This variable selection follows guidelines for ensuring comprehensive control of confounding variables in educational research [19].

3.2. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, medians, and standard deviations) were calculated to summarize the data. Logistic regression analysis was used to test the relationship between exploring South Korea and satisfaction, controlling for demographic and institutional factors. The overall model was significant ($\chi^2(4)=16.32$, $p=.003$), indicating that exploring South Korea contributes significantly to satisfaction. The model's goodness-of-fit was assessed using Chi-square tests, and odds ratios were interpreted to determine the likelihood of higher satisfaction among students actively engaged in exploring the country [23].

3.3. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the survey. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing responses and avoiding collecting personally identifiable information. The institutional ethics committee reviewed and approved the study protocol consistent with ethical research guidelines involving human participants [19].

3.4. Limitations

While the cross-sectional design provided valuable insights, it limited the ability to infer causality between exploring South Korea and satisfaction. Self-reported data may also introduce response bias, as participants may exaggerate or minimize their satisfaction levels due to social desirability. Future research could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs or mixed-method approaches to capture more nuanced and causal relationships [19].

4. Results

4.1. Factors that Predict International Students' Selection of South Korea as a Higher Education Destination (RQ1)

Analyzing factors influencing international students' selection of South Korea as a higher education destination reveals significant insights. The ANOVA analysis (f -statistic = 28.74, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates that the factors vary significantly, suggesting that students prioritize certain aspects more heavily when deciding to study abroad. Among the factors, safety and living conditions (mean = 4.37) and quality of education and institutions (mean = 3.8) emerged as the most influential. These findings align with previous research, indicating that perceptions of safety and academic reputation are critical in attracting international students [22]. Conversely, language, ease of communication (mean = 2.34), and proximity to home country (mean = 2.26) ranked lower, implying that these considerations are less central to students' decision-making processes. However, such factors may still hold importance for specific subgroups of students, particularly those from neighboring countries [23].

Table 1. Factors that predict international students' selection of South Korea as a higher education destination (mean, median, and standard deviation).

Factors	n	Mean	Median	SD
Quality of education and institutions	231	3.8	4	1.14
Availability of scholarships and financial aid	231	3.71	4	1.24
Cultural interest and lifestyle	231	3.6	4	1.16
Safety and living conditions	231	4.37	5	0.96
Career opportunities after graduation	231	3.03	3	1.27
Recommendations from friends/family	231	3.55	4	1.24
Language and ease of communication	231	2.34	2	1.23
Cost of living and tuition fees	231	3.32	3	1.11
Proximity to home country	231	2.26	2	1.37

The correlation analysis identified a significant negative relationship between the means and standard deviations ($r = -0.776$, $p = 0.014$), suggesting that factors with higher variability, such as language, ease of communication, and proximity to home country, tend to have a lower average impact. This variability may reflect the diverse demographic and linguistic backgrounds of international students in South Korea. For instance, while some students may benefit from the growing availability of English-taught programs, others may struggle with Korean language requirements [12]. Similarly, proximity to the home country may be more relevant for Asian students than for those traveling from other continents, underscoring the need for context-specific interpretations.

The ranking analysis provides further clarity. Safety and living conditions, which ranked highest, reflect South Korea's strong infrastructure and reputation as a secure country, a finding supported by global surveys on safety and quality of life [24]. Similarly, the high rank of quality of education highlights the value placed on academic excellence and institutional prestige, consistent with studies that emphasize the importance of perceived educational quality in destination choice [25]. By contrast, the lower ranking of proximity to home country underscores the willingness of students to prioritize academic and safety considerations over geographic convenience, a trend observed in studies of international student mobility patterns [26].

These findings have important implications for South Korean higher education institutions. Efforts should focus on maintaining high-quality education and promoting South Korea's safety as a study destination. Expanding scholarships and financial aid opportunities could further enhance the

country's appeal. To address lower-ranking factors like language barriers, universities could offer comprehensive language support programs and increase the availability of English-taught courses [12]. Recognizing the variability in student preferences, institutions should adopt tailored strategies catering to diverse student populations. By leveraging these insights, South Korea can strengthen its position as a leading destination for higher education while addressing the evolving needs of international students.

4.2. Factors that Predict International Students' Satisfaction in South Korea (Academic and Social EXPERIENCE) (RQ2)

4.2.1. Research Opportunities

The logistic regression analysis reveals that research opportunities significantly predict international students' satisfaction levels ($\chi^2(4)=16.44$, $p=.002$, $n=231$). This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of academic engagement and professional development opportunities in shaping student satisfaction [26]. Access to meaningful research activities enables international students to deepen their academic understanding and gain practical skills, fostering intellectual and career growth. For international students, who often choose study destinations based on the perceived quality and accessibility of academic resources, research opportunities play a pivotal role in determining overall satisfaction [27].

Contrasting perspectives, however, suggest that research opportunities alone may not be sufficient to guarantee satisfaction. Studies indicate that without adequate mentorship and institutional support, students may struggle to fully benefit from these opportunities. Additionally, cultural differences in research expectations and practices can create barriers for international students, potentially limiting their participation and satisfaction [28]. In the context of South Korea, a country known for its emphasis on research excellence, universities must address these potential challenges by providing tailored mentorship and fostering a supportive research environment. By doing so, they can ensure that international students access research opportunities and derive meaningful outcomes, enhancing their overall satisfaction and success.

4.2.2. Quality of Education

The logistic regression analysis indicates that the quality of education is a significant predictor of international students' satisfaction levels ($\chi^2(4)=23.84$, $p<.001$, $n=231$). This finding supports previous studies highlighting the role of perceived academic quality in shaping students' overall satisfaction [29]. High-quality education is often associated with well-structured curricula, effective teaching methodologies, and access to advanced resources, all of which contribute to positive student experiences [22]. For international students in South Korea, the reputation of the country's higher education system and its focus on academic excellence likely enhance the importance of this factor.

Contrasting evidence, however, suggests that the perceived quality of education alone may not fully determine satisfaction. Other factors, such as cultural adaptation, social integration, and financial stability, often intersect with education quality to influence the overall experience [30]. Additionally, language barriers and unfamiliar teaching styles may diminish the perceived quality for some international students [27]. In South Korea, where universities are actively internationalizing their programs, it is critical to address these barriers by providing culturally inclusive teaching approaches and language support services. Such efforts would ensure that the high quality of education translates effectively across diverse student populations, reinforcing its impact on satisfaction and retention.

4.2.3. Facilities and Resources

The logistic regression analysis shows that facilities and resources are a significant predictor of international students' satisfaction levels ($\chi^2(4)=34.8$, $p<.001$, $n=231$). This result aligns with existing research emphasizing the importance of adequate infrastructure and resource availability in

enhancing students' learning experiences and overall satisfaction [29]. Access to well-maintained facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, and housing, as well as sufficient technological and academic support resources, directly impacts students' ability to achieve academic success and feel comfortable in their study environment [22]. For international students in South Korea, where expectations for technologically advanced facilities are high, these factors may play an even more pronounced role in determining satisfaction.

However, some studies suggest that the impact of facilities and resources on satisfaction can vary depending on how students access and utilize these resources [30]. For instance, international students may face challenges in fully utilizing these resources due to a lack of guidance, language barriers, or cultural differences in expectations of service quality [12]. In South Korea, universities must ensure that facilities and resources are state-of-the-art but also accessible and user-friendly for a diverse student population. Strategies such as providing orientation programs, multilingual support, and culturally inclusive environments can help maximize the perceived value of facilities and resources, thereby enhancing their impact on satisfaction levels.

4.2.4. Support Services

The logistic regression analysis reveals that support services significantly predict international students' satisfaction levels ($\chi^2(4)=10.78$, $p=.029$, $n=231$). This finding underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems in addressing international students' unique challenges, such as cultural adjustment, academic pressures, and social isolation [31]. Effective support services, such as academic advising, career guidance, counseling, and language support, enhance students' academic and social integration, contributing significantly to their satisfaction. For international students in South Korea, where cultural and linguistic differences may pose substantial barriers, well-designed support services can create a positive and inclusive educational environment.

However, the effectiveness of support services depends on their availability and quality, accessibility, and cultural relevance [17]. Some international students may underutilize these services due to unfamiliarity, stigma, or mismatched expectations, reducing their potential impact on satisfaction [28]. For South Korean universities to maximize the effectiveness of support services, they must offer culturally sensitive, multilingual programs tailored to the diverse needs of their international student population. Furthermore, actively promoting these services and encouraging their use can help mitigate barriers to access. By prioritizing these strategies, institutions can foster a supportive environment that enhances student satisfaction, improves retention, and strengthens South Korea's global reputation as a destination for higher education.

4.2.5. Learning and Experiencing Korean Culture

The logistic regression analysis demonstrates that learning and experiencing Korean culture significantly predict international students' satisfaction levels ($\chi^2(4)=17.5$, $p=.002$, $n=231$). This finding reflects the growing recognition of cultural experiences as a key factor in shaping international students' satisfaction. Exposure to Korean culture, including traditions, food, language, and social norms, can enrich students' overall experience, providing a sense of immersion and connection to the host country. Previous studies have emphasized that cultural learning fosters personal growth and intercultural competence and enhances students' perceptions of their educational experience [25].

However, not all cultural experiences lead to positive outcomes. Challenges such as cultural misunderstandings, feelings of exclusion, or difficulty adapting to societal norms can hinder the perceived benefits of cultural immersion [28]. For international students in South Korea, these challenges might be amplified by language barriers or differences in social etiquette. To maximize the positive impact of cultural experiences on satisfaction, South Korean universities should offer structured opportunities for cultural engagement, such as language classes, cultural exchange programs, and events that promote inclusivity. Additionally, providing support to navigate cultural differences can help students better integrate into the local environment, ultimately enhancing their satisfaction and retention.

4.2.6. Exploring South Korea

The logistic regression analysis demonstrates that exploring South Korea significantly predicts international students' satisfaction ($\chi^2(4)=16.32$, $p=.003$, $n=231$). This finding highlights experiential factors' critical role in shaping international students' overall satisfaction. Engaging with the country through travel, cultural events, and social experiences allows students to develop a deeper appreciation of South Korea's culture and lifestyle, fostering a sense of belonging and personal growth. Studies have shown that opportunities for exploration and cultural engagement enrich students' study-abroad experiences by enhancing intercultural competence and global perspectives [25]. For South Korea, known for its unique blend of modernity and tradition, such experiences can be particularly appealing.

However, not all students may benefit equally from exploring South Korea due to language barriers, financial constraints, and cultural adjustment difficulties. For instance, students with limited Korean language proficiency may struggle to fully engage with the local culture, which could hinder their satisfaction. Furthermore, cultural differences in social norms or perceptions of inclusion can influence the extent to which exploration is seen as a positive experience [28]. To address these disparities, South Korean universities and policymakers should create inclusive opportunities for exploration, such as organized cultural trips, subsidized travel programs, and multilingual resources. These initiatives would enable students from diverse backgrounds to fully engage with the country, enhancing their satisfaction and overall educational experience.

5. Summary of Findings

Analyzing factors influencing international students' decision to select South Korea as a higher education destination revealed significant insights. Safety and living conditions (mean = 4.37) and quality of education (mean = 3.8) emerged as the most influential factors, emphasizing the importance of South Korea's strong infrastructure and academic reputation. Conversely, language and ease of communication (mean=2.34) and proximity to home country (mean=2.26) ranked lower, suggesting that while these factors are less central overall, they may still be significant for specific subgroups of students, such as those from neighboring countries [26]. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between means and standard deviations ($r=-0.776$, $p=0.014$), indicating that factors with higher variability, such as language barriers and geographic proximity, have a lower average impact. These findings align with previous research highlighting the interplay of academic, cultural, and experiential factors in shaping international students' decisions [22].

RQ2 explored factors predicting international students' satisfaction in South Korea, focusing on key dimensions such as quality of education, support services, facilities and resources, research opportunities, and cultural engagement. Logistic regression analysis revealed that all tested models were significant, with the strongest predictors being quality of education ($\chi^2(4)=23.84$, $p<.001$), facilities and resources ($\chi^2(4)=34.8$, $p<.001$), and research opportunities ($\chi^2(4)=16.44$, $p=.002$). Learning and experiencing Korean culture ($\chi^2(4)=17.50$, $p=.002$), Exploring South Korea ($\chi^2(4)=16.32$, $p=.003$), and support services ($\chi^2(4)=10.78$, $p=.029$) also significantly influenced satisfaction, albeit to varying degrees. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of international students' experiences, where academic, cultural, and institutional factors converge to shape overall satisfaction.

Table 2. Factors that predict int. students' satisfaction in South Korea (Chi-square).

Factors that predict int. students' satisfaction in South Korea	χ^2	p-value	(n)
Quality of education predicts int. students' satisfaction	23.84	< .001	231
Facilities and resources predict int. students' satisfaction	34.80	< .001	231
Research opportunities predict int. students' satisfaction	16.44	0.002	231
Learning & experiencing Korean culture predict int. students' satisfaction	17.50	0.002	231

Exploring South Korea	16.32	0.003	231
Support services significantly int. students' satisfaction	10.78	0.029	231

6. Conclusions

The findings highlight that safety, living conditions, and quality of education are pivotal in attracting international students to South Korea. These factors align with global trends, where international students prioritize safety and academic excellence when selecting a study destination [25]. South Korea's strong infrastructure and commitment to high educational standards are critical competitive advantages. However, lower-ranked factors, such as language and geographic proximity, reveal variability in their influence depending on students' backgrounds and circumstances. This variability underscores the importance of tailored strategies to meet the diverse needs of international students [16]. The results also emphasize that while factors like safety and education quality are universally valued, others, such as language and proximity, require context-specific approaches, particularly for students from non-English-speaking or distant countries.

The quality of education emerged as a critical determinant of international student satisfaction, consistent with previous findings that highlight the role of effective teaching, structured curricula, and resource accessibility [29]. Similarly, facilities and resources significantly influenced satisfaction, underscoring the importance of providing a conducive academic environment that supports learning and well-being [22]. Research opportunities were particularly relevant for academic and career-focused students, aligning with studies emphasizing the value of practical engagement in fostering satisfaction [32]. Furthermore, cultural engagement uniquely enhanced satisfaction by fostering a sense of belonging and intercultural competence. However, challenges such as cultural adaptation and language barriers tempered its impact [25]. Support services, while significant, highlighted the need for quality, accessibility, and tailored programs to address the diverse needs of international students [31].

7. Implications for Future Research

The findings offer several directions for future research. First, qualitative studies could explore how safety and education quality influence the lived experiences of international students, providing deeper insights into why these factors are so impactful [25]. Second, longitudinal studies could examine how perceptions of safety, academic quality, and language barriers evolve, particularly as students adjust to their new environment. This approach could reveal whether factors that are initially less important, such as language, gain significance over time. Third, comparative studies could assess whether these findings are unique to South Korea or reflect broader patterns in international higher education. Finally, future research could test interventions, such as expanding English-taught programs or providing financial support, to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing barriers like language and cost. Such studies would offer actionable strategies to enhance South Korea's attractiveness as a global education hub [28].

These findings suggest several avenues for future research. First, longitudinal studies could examine how satisfaction evolves and identify the long-term effects of cultural integration and research opportunities on academic and professional outcomes. Second, qualitative research could explore the lived experiences of international students to uncover nuanced perspectives on the challenges and benefits of studying in South Korea [28]. Third, comparative studies across countries or regions could identify unique strengths and weaknesses in South Korea's approach to international education. Finally, future research should investigate the role of emerging factors, such as technology integration and hybrid learning models, in shaping satisfaction among diverse student populations. Addressing these areas will provide a deeper understanding of how to enhance the experiences of international students and position South Korea as a leading global education hub [12].

8. Recommendations

South Korea should prioritize safety, quality education, and financial support to enhance its appeal as a study destination. The country's strong safety and living conditions should be maintained and highlighted in marketing campaigns to attract international students. Investments in high-quality facilities, research opportunities, and faculty development can further solidify South Korea's reputation for academic excellence [22]. Expanding scholarships and financial aid programs, particularly those targeting underrepresented or economically disadvantaged students, would make higher education in South Korea more accessible and globally competitive [26].

Addressing language barriers is crucial to improving student satisfaction. Universities should increase the availability of English-taught courses and provide tailored Korean language programs through workshops, mentoring systems, and peer-led initiatives. Overcoming language challenges fosters better academic performance and social integration. Additionally, cultural engagement programs, such as guided tours and cultural exchange activities, should be developed to enhance students' connection to South Korea and promote intercultural competence, which is increasingly valued in the global job market [16].

Finally, institutions must adopt tailored recruitment and support strategies that address the diverse needs of international students. For example, proximity to home may matter more to Asian students, while financial aid may be a priority for those from low-income countries. Universities should leverage demographic data to design targeted approaches and use alum networks to promote success stories. Collaborating with global academic and corporate entities can enhance recruitment efforts and offer students unique opportunities, such as internships and exchange programs. By implementing these strategies, South Korea can strengthen its position as a leading destination for international education. 양식의 맨 위 양식의 맨 아래

To enhance international students' satisfaction in South Korea, universities should prioritize creating a holistic and inclusive environment. This includes investing in high-quality teaching by providing professional development for faculty and adopting culturally adaptive pedagogies to cater to diverse learning needs. Institutions should ensure robust support services, such as multilingual counseling, academic advising, and career guidance, while actively promoting their accessibility to address common barriers like unfamiliarity or stigma. Expanding opportunities for cultural engagement, such as language exchange programs and community immersion activities, can foster a sense of belonging and intercultural competence. Furthermore, improving facilities and resources, including state-of-the-art libraries, housing, and technological infrastructure, can enhance students' academic and personal experiences. Finally, providing mentorship and funding opportunities for research-focused students will strengthen academic engagement and career prospects, cementing South Korea's reputation as a desirable study destination.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
GKS	Global Korea Scholarship
IIE	Institute of International Education
KEDI	Directory of open access journals
KGSP	Korean Government Scholarship Program
KIIP	Korean Immigration and Integration Program
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NIIED	National Institute for International Education and Development
OECD	Three letter acronym

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