



Factors influencing international students satisfaction in Korean universities



Aye Mengistu Alemu, Jason Cordier*

Solbridge International School of Business, Republic of Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Higher education
Student satisfaction
Logistic regression
Korea
International students
East Asian cultural sphere

ABSTRACT

Despite South Korea emerging as one of the new players in the international education market over the last decade, our knowledge of the extent of international students' satisfaction studying in South Korean universities is modest. To fill this research gap, our study used 873 valid survey responses from international students originating from 69 countries studying at 62 Korean universities. An exploratory factor analysis was first used to extract a set of important factors from a number of variables. Then an ordered-logistic regression was conducted to identify factors influencing international students' overall satisfaction. A number of recommendations and areas of intervention have been identified ranging from learning experience to living and support services. Equally important, this study confirms the validity of the hypothesis that international students from the East Asian cultural sphere attain more satisfaction than other international students who are more culturally dissimilar from members of the host population. The findings of this study contribute to the overall effort of raising student satisfaction and thereby supporting the enrollment of additional students and managing attrition and retention problems through continuous improvement.

1. Introduction

It is estimated that 5 million students were studying outside their home countries in 2014, more than double the 2.1 million who did so in 2000, and more than triple the number in 1990 (ICEF, 2015). This astounding growth of border crossing activities (Teichler, 2004), or student mobility, accompanies the wider expansion of higher education in general, where enrolments have gone from 97 million in 2000 to what was estimated to be 293 million in 2015 (Kim and Strandberg, 2013). While the traditional English speaking nations (USA, UK and Australia) still provide the most substantive amount of internationalized education, (Altbach and Knight, 2007), the dynamics of mobility have begun to shift to other emerging contenders such as Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan and South Korea (Lasanowski, 2009; Kim and Strandberg, 2013).

While the literature has largely been devoted to understanding international students within traditional higher education markets (cf. Huang, 2007; Lee and Rice, 2007; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Zhao et al., 2005), much less is known about emerging contenders, particularly non-English speaking higher education destinations (Jon et al., 2014). Of the *emerging contenders* of higher education, South Korea stands out specifically in this respect because of language. Both Malaysia and Singapore's shared British colonial pasts have resulted in a legacy of English language proficiency where English is employed and required in daily life settings (Moslehifar and Ibrahim, 2012;

Pennycook, 2014).

Jon et al. (2014) used a mixed methods single case approach within South Korea to gather international student motivations and experiences in which they conclude that there is a possibility of South Korea positioning itself as regional hub in education for East Asia. We build on Jon et al.'s (2014) work by going beyond a single case setting to 62 Korean institutions. Our study expands the work done so far by additionally accounting for the increasingly diverse origins of international students within a rapidly proliferating number of Korean universities seeking to attract international students. By doing so we answer the calls of Jon et al. (2014) to "further examine the diverse experiences of international students from nearby and far away countries" (:709).

Despite significant international student growth over the last decade, our knowledge of the extent of international students' satisfaction studying in South Korean universities is modest. To the best of our knowledge, there is a scarcity of information about the levels of satisfaction between what international students expected in Korean universities and what they experienced.

Furthermore, this study hypothesizes that international students from the *East Asian cultural sphere* (China, Hong Kong (China, Taiwan (China), Japan, Vietnam and Mongolia) may attain more satisfaction than other international students who are more culturally dissimilar from members of the host population due to the nature of cultural and historical proximity to the host country. Again, to the best of our

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jcordier@solbridge.ac.kr (J. Cordier).

knowledge, to date there has been no study that has addressed this issue within South Korea. Thus, we argue that Korean universities have very high potential to attract considerably more international students from the East Asian cultural sphere, since the region is also one of the most dynamic regions in the world in terms economic development and political stability.

Accordingly, addressing the above-mentioned research gaps and identifying the potential improvement areas which contribute to raising student satisfaction levels in South Korea is timely, given the status of the extant literature on student satisfaction. In other words, addressing these contextual dynamics of a non English speaking emerging contender would allow for South Korean higher education providers to better conceptualize and address elements that impact international students as a means to better support the enrollment of additional students and manage attrition and retention. Eventually, the findings of this study have the potential to inform higher learning institutions and other stakeholders in Korea about how to best address the needs and expectations of an increasingly diverse international student population within a country with both “real and perceived cultural and racial homogeneity” (Watson, 2010:338). In doing so, this study empirically investigates the following two major research questions:

- 1) What are the main influencing factors for overall international students’ satisfaction within South Korean Universities?
- 2) Is there a significant difference in overall satisfaction between international students from the East Asian cultural sphere (China, Hong Kong (China), Taiwan (China), Japan, Vietnam and Mongolia) that have more cultural and historical proximity with the host population on one hand, and other international students who are more culturally dissimilar from members of the host population on the other hand?

This paper is organized in the following manner. We first explain the background of higher education in South Korea before we present the extant literature on factors influencing international student satisfaction. The research methodology and data set used in this study will then be illustrated, followed by the regression results, main findings and the discussion section. Our paper then addresses the implications of our findings and contributions before finally presenting our concluding remarks along with the limitations of our research and avenues for future research.

1.1. Background of higher education in South Korea

Increasing student mobility in higher education is a phenomena that extends across a number of countries in East Asia (Moon and Kim, 2001). China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea all seem to be using similar tactics to pursue their goals in multiplying the number of international students into their countries (Table 1).

Addressing East Asia’s growing attractiveness to international students, the South Korean government announced a new national strategy to nearly triple the country’s international student enrolment by 2023. Just under 85,000 foreign students studied in Korea in 2014 (Fig. 1). The government seeks to increase this number to 200,000 by 2023. This target also aims to reverse a trend in declining foreign enrolment from a record-high of 89,537 students in 2011 to 84,891 in 2014 while addressing Korea’s imminent and rapid decline of domestic students. Despite 95% of Korean students graduating high school, and 70% of these enrolling in higher education (Kim and Lee, 2006), the Government of Korea expects low birth rates to decrease the higher education market by a staggering 40% by 2022.

Nevertheless, international students account for only about 2% of total higher education enrolments in Korea at present. This compares to 18–19% in the UK or Australia, and to an OECD average of 8%. As illustrated in Table 2, significant ground needs to be covered before South Korea can catch-up to regional players in attracting international

Table 1
Number of International Students in Major Countries of Destination.
Source: Project Atlas 2015: A Quick Look at Global Mobility Trends (**a 2012 data).

Destination	2013 Total International Students	2014 Total International Students	% Change
United States	886,052	974,926	+ 10%
United Kingdom	481,050	493,570	+ 2.6%
China	356,499	377,054	+ 5.8%
Germany	282,201	301,350	+ 6.8%
France	295,092	298,902	+ 1.3%
Australia	247,093	269,752	+ 9.2%
Canada	237,635	268, 659	+ 13.1%
Japan	135,519	139,185	+ 2.7%
Malaysia	116,310	135,000	+ 16.1%
New Zealand	97,283	110,198	+ 13.2%
Netherlands	87,073	90,389	+ 3.8%
South Korea	85,923	84,891	- 1.2%
Singapore	84,000**a	75,000	- 10.7%

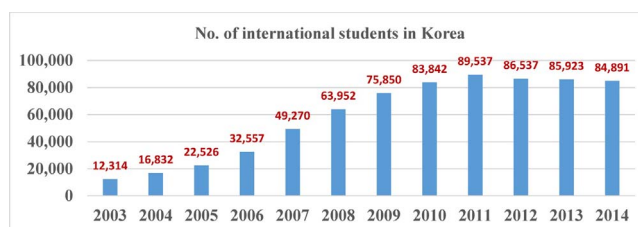


Fig. 1. Number of International Students in Korea (2003–2014).

Table 2
Status and Trends of International Students Enrollment in Selected East Major Asian Countries.

Country	No. of International Students in 2014	Targets by 2020
China (mainland)	377,054	500,000
Japan	139,185	300,000
Malaysia	135,000	200,000
South Korea	84,891	200,000
Singapore	75,000	150,000

Ryan M Allen, Beyond the Multiversity: adding and International Student Metric to East Asian High Education.

students. The Korea government announced a *Three-Year Economic Innovation Plan* in January 2014 aimed at realizing a *creative economy*. They presented a set of policy tasks that included boosting foreign direct investment and sharpening the global competitiveness of small businesses and universities by attracting internationally renowned scholars as well as outstanding young researchers from abroad (Young, 2015).

Korea’s motivation for further increasing its international student base is grounded in two related factors: *First*, the population of college-age students in the country is declining due to prevailing demographic trends and, in particular, a declining birth rate. While demand for higher education in Korea has long outpaced the available supply of university seats (Shin, 2012), that dynamic began to reverse itself in 2012. At some point during that year, the domestic prospect pool for Korean universities peaked and began to shrink. Ministry of Education projections indicate that the country will have a surplus of university seats for the first time in 2018, and that the number of excess spaces could reach 160,000 by 2023. In response, the government is taking steps to encourage international students to study in Korea:

Second, a soft economy has driven the 200,000-student target. With an economy heavily dependent on exports (50.6% of GDP), increased international student enrolment can serve as a basis for building stronger trade ties with important regional markets as international students who graduate from Korean universities can play an important

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4938448>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4938448>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)