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Investigating enrolment trends amongst Chinese International students at UK Higher Education Institutions: A Model for Sustainable Marketing within a Post – COVID environment

by

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A thesis submitted to Birmingham City Business School in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

December 2025

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to fulfil the completion requirement for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration at the Birmingham City Business School at Birmingham City University, Birmingham, United Kingdom. I hereby declare that the entire thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations that I have appropriately acknowledged. I also declare that this work in full or part has never been submitted to any universities or institutions for any other purpose. I am responsible for any errors and / or omissions present in this thesis.

Signed

Andrew Salmon

Andrew Salmon

December 2025

Dedication

For my wife and daughter, the enduring lights in my life,
and for my parents, whose migration journey from the island of Jamaica in the 1960's paved
the way for my academic journey.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisory team, Dr Hui Wang, Dr Sepideh Zahiri and Dr Yonghao Wang who have been a source of constant support throughout this long journey. Were it not for their wisdom, patience, and ongoing encouragement, I simply would not have been able to complete this work. Their belief in me and their wisdom has been pivotal, especially during times when feeling like an imposter made it difficult for me to progress. They have not only helped shape the pages of this thesis but have also been highly instrumental in my development as a researcher.

I am also grateful to my many colleagues, mentors and friends at Birmingham City and Aston Universities. I have lost count of the many serendipitous meetings we have had as our paths have crossed on campus. The impromptu conversations during these brief moments have always been a great source of encouragement and left me with a renewed energy for my research. To my fellow DBA students, your ongoing friendship whilst undertaking your own doctoral research transformed what might otherwise have been a solitary path into a shared journey. I would also like to pay tribute to the participants of the study who generously shared their time and insights. Without them, this research could not have come to life.

Above all, I am indebted to my family. To my wife Jodie, your love and encouragement have been my anchor. Whilst my efforts have been highly visible, you have shouldered the less visible burdens of this journey with a strength that I could never muster and a level of persistence that leaves me in awe. Your faith in me has sustained me more than I could ever hope to express here. To my daughter, Bei you may be blissfully unaware of this but wanting to set an example for you has lifted me through some of the heaviest days.

Jodie and Bei, whilst the words I have written here may be mine, the story behind them belongs to the three of us.

I also wish to honour my parents, who from humble beginnings left the island of Jamaica in the early 1960s to build a new life for themselves in the United Kingdom. Their courage, resilience, and sacrifice are what have opened the doors of opportunity for me and enabled me to walk through. For that alone, this work is as much a testament to their journey as it is to mine.

List of Outputs

The following publications / sector reports were developed based upon the research undertaken as part of this thesis:

Salmon A. 2023. Investigating enrolment trends amongst Chinese International students at UK Higher Education Institutions: A Model for Sustainable Marketing within a Post – COVID environment. **Presented at British Academy of Management Conference 2023**

Salmon A. 2025. Beyond Admissions: Insights into the Chinese Student Journey into UK Higher Education. **Upon request of Elijah James, Director of International Recruitment & Development, Aston University, (19/09/2025).** Appendix A1

Salmon A. 2025. Beyond Admissions: Insights into the Chinese Student Journey into UK Higher Education. **Upon request of Prof David Mba, Vice Chancellor, Birmingham city University, (02/10/2025).** Appendix A2

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Abstract

The UK hosts many thousands of international students each year and students from China have traditionally been the largest group of non-EU international students in Britain. These students significantly influence the cultural diversity, commercial sustainability and internationalisation strategies of UK universities. The UK remained the world's second most popular destination for international students in 2023 (Cuibus, Walsh, & Němeček, 2025). The presence of international students has brought many economic benefits to communities located around university campuses, however, in recent times the numbers of these students enrolling in UK HE institutions has been in decline. This thesis investigates enrolment trends among Chinese international students at UK universities over the past 7 years. It identifies the antecedents impacting student choice, uncovers key patterns in enrolment numbers, explores the shifting socio-political and economic landscapes influencing these trends, assesses the implications for UK universities and discusses sustainable recruitment strategies.

Using a quantitative approach, the study collected and analysed data from an online questionnaire undertaken by Chinese international students. This is combined with longitudinal enrolment data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The findings reveal a year – on – year increase in enrolments until 2019, followed by a period of stagnation due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts in UK immigration policy, and geopolitical tensions between China and the West. Key drivers of enrolment amongst Chinese students have in the past included the perceived prestige of UK degrees, post-study work opportunities, and targeted marketing strategies by UK institutions. However, emerging challenges such as increased competition from other Anglophone destinations, concerns over student welfare, and policy unpredictability are reshaping the landscape.

This research contributes to the understanding of Chinese international student decision making and informs higher education policy and strategic planning. It advocates for the development of sustainable student recruitment strategies, enhanced student support systems, and continued engagement with government to increase demand amongst Chinese students for places at UK universities. In short, it investigates enrolment trends amongst Chinese international students at UK universities, evaluates the challenges and opportunities facing the sector, and provides strategic recommendations for increasing demand using sustainable marketing approaches. It is written with a practitioner focus, the emphasis being upon the provision of actionable insights, evidence-based strategies, and sector-wide recommendations that can guide Vice-Chancellors, International Directors, and Recruitment Teams. Whilst academic frameworks provide theoretical grounding, the core objective is to deliver market intelligence that supports decision-making and strategic planning. The findings reveal five core insights;

1. **Intensifying Competition:** The UK higher education sector is now facing increased competition from nations such as Australia, Canada and the US. Moreover, with increasing numbers of European destinations now offering simplified study visa options and post-study work options, new competitors are beginning to emerge within close geographical proximity to the UK
2. **Perception Challenges:** Word – of – Mouth is a very powerful factor amongst Chinese consumers. Recent negative media narratives relating to racism and of the UK being unwelcoming of foreigners fuel safety concerns amongst Chinese students and impact their willingness to apply to UK universities
3. **Over-Reliance upon China:** Whilst in recent years there has been an increasing trend amongst students from India enrolling at UK universities, the sector remains overly

dependent upon Chinese students. This has resulted in UK universities becoming financially vulnerable to fluctuations in demand amongst these students

4. **Decision-Making Drivers:** The decisions made by Chinese students relating to host country, university and course choice are strongly influenced by family expectations, employability outcomes, and institutional reputation. These perceptions are often shaped by trusted networks, alumni recommendations, and digital platforms

5. **Changing Recruitment Landscape:** Traditionally, UK universities have been highly reliant upon education agents as a route to market for Chinese international students. This approach is expensive, especially at a time when university finances are under pressure. Those universities that focus upon sustainable and innovative marketing approaches such as leveraging digital platforms, alumni networks, and partnerships within China are likely to reap the rewards of their efforts

The financial challenges faced by UK universities are significant and for the sector, the future looks bleak over the short to medium term. The marketing approaches taken in the past are now no longer sustainable in the face of contemporary threats. For UK universities to once again attract Chinese students in numbers approaching those of the recent past, they will need to adopt more sustainable, culturally informed, and diversified strategies. In the future, those universities that make news headlines for all the right reasons will be those that readily adapt their marketing approach to meet, head on, the challenge of changing mobility dynamics amongst Chinese international students. In response to the challenges faced by UK universities, this thesis establishes a set of strategic recommendations aimed at increasing demand from amongst Chinese international students. The recommendations have a sustainable marketing focus and include strengthening alumni engagement to generate positive word-of-mouth, enhance digital recruitment strategies tailored to Chinese cultural

values, lobby for streamlined visa processes, reinforce safety messaging, diversify recruitment into emerging Chinese regions, and building stronger UK–China partnerships.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

For many years, the UK has been seen as a welcoming destination for international students. It has a strong reputation for the delivery of high - quality education and therefore, it is unsurprising that enrolment amongst international students has been sustained over many years (NAFSA, 2022). Demand is bolstered by the belief held by prospective international students that the quality of education provided within the UK exceeds that which is available within their home countries. This contributes to the UK being recognised as an aspirational destination. Other factors, such as being a safe location and relative political stability have supported continued demand. The enduring view held by many prospective students and their families is that not all degrees are created equal, with degrees conferred by UK universities widely considered to be amongst the most valued by employers across the globe (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004).

Chinese students have traditionally been strongly motivated in availing themselves of high quality education (Wu, 2014). Sustained economic growth across the region has led to a growing middle class who are increasingly upwardly mobile and financially stable. Seventy percent of Chinese applicants come from the 10 most populous provinces and the four directly governed municipalities of China (UCAS & Pearson, 2023). Nowadays and largely due to the increasing globalisation of education, barriers that have previously made obtaining an overseas degree impossible, have largely disappeared. As a result, in ever increasing numbers, young well - educated South Asian students are choosing to leave their home countries and to immerse themselves in the western culture that is widely epitomised across digital media.

Overseas student enrolments have for many years been a reliable source of income for UK Higher Education institutions, providing an important enduring stream of revenue. There is evidence of strong demand amongst international students for places at UK universities and in 2017 there were 442,375 non - EU International students enrolled in UK Higher Education institutions. Of these students, some 42% were engaged in postgraduate study (UKCISA, 2018). In total, UK universities earned £13.1 billion in export receipts in 2014–15 through the revenue they generated from abroad, including international students' tuition fees (UK exports ONS, 2016).

Post – Brexit, continued demand from international students led to an upward trend in enrolment numbers amongst non – EU students. In 2019/20, some 35% of all non - EU students were from China and the number of these students had increased by 51,140 or 56% over the five - year period 2015 to 2020 (ibid). This trend suggested that Chinese international students who made up a significant proportion of total Non – EU student enrolments each year, would become increasingly commercially important to UK universities relative to those from other non – EU countries such as India, the US, Hong Kong and Nigeria. In 2020 however, the emergence of COVID and the associated lockdowns imposed by governments across the world resulted in a significant decline in enrolments amongst international students. percent showed no interest in studying abroad after the pandemic. For those respondents who decided to continue pursuing higher education abroad, Asian regions and countries, especially Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan, were listed in the top five. This being in addition to the US and UK Xiong et al. (2020). Much of the growth in overall international student numbers between 2018/19 and 2022/23 was driven by India and Nigeria (Migration Observatory, 2025). After the pandemic, most Western countries faced a decrease in the number of Chinese students

(EIU, 2024). This decline is not solely attributable to decisions made by individual students but primarily reflects the dynamic in China's diplomatic relations with these countries. Many enrolled Chinese international students returned to their homes overseas and, many who had planned to visit the UK to study, changed their plans. This perfect storm of COVID and Brexit led to significant challenges for many UK universities, placing some programmes at risk.

In 2023/24, the UK hosted 149,885 Chinese international students. Whereas previously China sent the largest number of international students to the UK of any nation, currently China is the UK's second-largest source. India is now responsible for the most inbound international students to the UK. GSL Global (2025) reports that this is in part reflective of the fact that Chinese student enrolments dropped by 4% – from 102,795 in 2022/23 to 98,400 in 2023/24. The UK's momentum as a destination may be slowing with any signs of growth concentrated among higher-ranked institutions.

It is widely considered by researchers that there are several key factors that contribute to the desire of South Asian international students to study in the west. Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) for example, undertook research into the mobility of students and concluded that there are four key factors that fuel students' desire to study overseas;

- The perception that the quality of a course was higher than within a local institution
- The ability of the student to gain entry to particular programmes of study
- Being highly motivated to learn about other cultures
- The perception of being able to migrate overseas after successful completion of a course

Moreover, Mazzarol & Soutar suggested that the decision making follows a three-stage thought process;

1. Study Locally or Internationally
2. Host Country Selection
3. Selection of HE institution within the chosen host country

Having decided to undertake study within an overseas university, the second phase of decision making pertains to the destination country. Srikatanyoo & Gnoth (2002) posit that the image which a country holds within the mind of the student is a key determinant of whether that location will be deemed most suitable or not. As regards the selection of higher education institution, factors at play here are varied and include university league tables / world rankings and the perception of high-quality education provision. Home – Country education agents play an important role too as many prospective students seek out their services in assisting with student visa applications. Having a captive audience, these education agents not only help to shape perceptions of particular universities but also make recommendations for which they are remunerated by way of commissions earned from said institutions. This suggests that overseas education agents occupy a dual – role, serving both prospective international students, and universities. There is evidence, that in the UK, universities rely heavily on overseas education agents to bring new international students (HEPI, 2020). It is no surprise then, that within a competitive environment amongst UK higher education institutions, education agents make commercial decisions as to which institutions to recommend, based at least in part upon the level of commissions received.

Marketing plays a significant part in influencing the decision of students as to whether to study at a particular university. This has been long argued and is an area of significant research with Choi and Nieminen (2013) suggesting that the reputation (quality) of a university, the academic value of the degree offered, as well as the perceived relevance of the foreign degree all play a part in influencing student choice.

All this having been said, some factors influencing Chinese student choice of university can be considered outside of the control of UK universities. MacEachern and Yun (2017) have suggested that the most important considerations of Chinese students were elements such as perceived safety, affordability, language and the opportunity (or lack thereof) to remain within the country after they had graduated. There has been a return to some level of normality for international student enrolments overall post – COVID. This having been said, Chinese students are yet to return to the UK at a level approaching their pre – COVID levels.

The research aims to understand the observed phenomenon and to provide unique insight into the push and pull factors influencing this student group when making the decision of within which host country and higher education institution to select. It seeks to extend current theory as it relates to the decision - making processes of this student group and to lay the foundations for the development of a model for sustainable Marketing of UK universities within a post – COVID environment. In so doing, it is envisaged that this research will support the sustainability of business programmes within Birmingham City Business School.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to understand the determinants of Chinese international student decision making and explore the factors underlying reduced demand at UK universities, whilst generating evidence – based insights that contribute to theoretical frameworks and the development of sustainable marketing strategies.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are to;

- Determine the drivers for overseas study amongst Chinese international students
- Identify the key elements which influence the choice of host country and higher education institution amongst Chinese international students and quantify the relative weighting of these variables in the decision-making process
- Develop theoretically informed, yet practically applicable recommendations that promote sustainability and support marketing activity at UK universities

It is envisaged that this research will support the longer – term future sustainability of UK universities at a time when they are facing significant challenges.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows;

- Which key factors influence the decision making of Chinese international students in their choice of UK HE institution?
- What is the relevant weighting of Reputation, Cost, Quality and Word of Mouth upon the decision making of Chinese international students?

- How can marketing approaches of UK universities be enhanced to achieve greater effectiveness and longer-term sustainability in recruiting Chinese students?

1.5 Rationale for the study

This research was borne out of personal observations made during the early years of my academic career, commencing in 2014/15. In classroom cohorts at that time, Chinese international students accounted for more than 60% of enrolments. This reflected the significant presence of these students within UK universities and highlighted their importance to the sector. In the years that followed however, a decline in the numbers of these students resulted in a noticeable change in the classroom demographic. Observing this phenomenon and understanding that demand from amongst this student group was in decline, prompted an interest in developing an understanding of the factors that influence the study choices of these students.

For over a decade, the UK has consistently attracted large numbers of Chinese international students (Migration Observatory, 2025). The presence of these students brings with it a host of benefits both financial and cultural. Being seen as a desired host nation has also helped to support the UK's 'soft – power' in the world and that has brought with it some geopolitical benefits. That having been said, recent shifts in the patterns of student mobility around the world, combined with increasing competition from geographically close host nations both in the EU and further afield has led to a decline in demand. This changing landscape presents both strategic and operational challenges for UK universities, particularly Business Schools, which rely heavily on international enrolments.

Whilst there exists a body of extant literature that identifies the determinants influencing Chinese student mobility choices, reduced classroom numbers raised important questions about how these factors may be changing over time. As a result, it was decided to undertake this research to better understand the determinants of student choice, and how these factors may currently shape the decision making of this student group.

1.6 Problem Statement

At present, the UK education sector faces extremely challenging times. Whilst there has been some research of the Chinese international student market, much of it was undertaken prior to BREXIT and the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, whilst much of the existing research provides an explanation of the changing demand, there remains limited contemporary empirical evidence identifying the specific factors influencing Chinese students' decision-making when selecting an overseas university. This is troublesome, more so as traditionally, UK universities have relied heavily upon education agents and less so upon evidence-based strategic marketing activities aligned with students' aspirations.

1.7 Research Scope

The overall objective was to contribute both to theory and practice through the identification and systematic measurement of the key influences of student decision making. This thesis advances current theoretical understanding, extending established conceptual frameworks. On a practical level, it proffers actionable insights for UK universities that can be leveraged to bring about sustainable, evidence-led policy approaches, recruitment strategies and marketing strategies.

Within this thesis, student recruitment activities are defined as those which comprise part of the broader enrolment management process (Kroc & Hansen, 2003). Recruitment strategies can be considered as the operational processes developed to convert prospective students into enrolled students. Tactics associated with these strategies may include agent partnerships, admissions engagement, recruitment events, open days and other student conversion initiatives (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Essentially these can be any activities undertaken where the objective is student acquisition.

Marketing strategies on the other hand relate to broader activities where the primary objectives are to build the institution's reputation, develop and communicate the value proposition and to influence student perceptions through branding, messaging and communications channels (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Waeraas & Solbakk, 2009), thus, this work contributes both to academic knowledge and sector practice in extending current theory and through the provision of actionable, practical insights.

1.8 Structure of this Thesis

This thesis has been developed such that it can be digested both by academics and practitioners. It utilises a logical flow from context, through to evidence and then to interpretation. Whilst early parts of the work provide the research context and a review of relevant literature, later elements discuss the research strategy and data collection methods. Towards the latter part of the work, the data analysis approach is highlighted, interpreted and completes the work with the development of a set of sustainable, strategic marketing activities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review Development

The literature review for this study was developed through a structured and iterative process with the aim of identifying the key theoretical contributions related to Chinese international student mobility, host country and university choice. Academic literature accessed through Birmingham City and Aston University library databases. These included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Business Source Complete. The review commenced with the examination of broad theoretical perspectives related to international student decision making and included push – pull theory, cultural dimensions and models associated with consumer choice. Following this phase of the review, a more focussed approach was taken, concentrating upon literature specifically relating to Chinese international students. Searches were carried out using combinations of key phrases such as ‘international student mobility’, ‘Chinese international country student choice’, ‘international student course choice’, ‘higher education reputation’, ‘word-of-mouth’, and ‘cost of overseas study’. Search filters were used to improve relevancy of search results. Precedence was given to peer reviewed journal articles and scholarly texts that may yield theoretical insights into the decision-making processes of these students.

Whilst the academic sources were of significant value, a collection of professional and policy literature was also reviewed to provide insights into current trends within the global higher education market. Industry reports developed by organisations such as the British Council, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Office for Students (OfS) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) were used to contextualise patterns in

international student mobility and recruitment. Whilst the academic literature formed the foundation for the conceptual framework and theoretical grounding of the study, industry literature played a supporting role in attaining contextual comprehension of the global higher education market. During this process, the wider literature review enabled the identification of the key determinants of student decision making which include Reputation, Quality, Cost, and Word-of-Mouth. Whilst there were additional determinants identified across the literature, this set recurred significantly more frequently than any others. This shaped the research questions and guided the development of the research hypotheses.

2.2 Introduction

For many years, the UK has been viewed as a welcoming destination for international students (British Council, 2025). It is no surprise then that demand amongst international students has been strong and sustained over many years, in part due to the UK's perception as being an aspirational destination. Other factors, such as being safe, politically stable and being perceived as being at the forefront in the provision of high - quality education have also fuelled demand. This demand is largely centred around the strong reputation that the UK has for its high - quality educational institutions and the belief by international students and their families that the quality of education provided in the UK, exceeds that available within their domestic education markets (Department for Education, 2018). The view held by many prospective students and their families is that not all degrees have been created equally, with degrees conferred by UK universities widely considered to be amongst the most valued by employers across the globe. Five themes will be explored within the literature review. They are;

- Push and Pull factors which motivate Chinese students to study overseas
- The factors affecting the choice of destination country
- The factors influencing the choice of higher educational institution
- Cultural factors that may have an impact upon the student experience
- Consumer Behaviour theory

Chinese students are highly motivated to furthering their education. Sustained economic growth across the region has led to a growing middle class who are increasingly upwardly mobile and financially stable. Nowadays, barriers that have for these students in the past made obtaining an overseas degree impossible, have fallen away and in significant numbers young, well - educated Chinese students choose to leave their home countries and to immerse themselves in the western culture that is widely epitomised across a variety of digital media that places the very latest information at their fingertips (Wang, 2020). In 2017 for example, there were 442,375 non - EU International students enrolled in UK higher education institutions and of these, some 42% were engaged in postgraduate study (UKCISA, 2018). Overseas student enrolments have for many years been a reliable source of income for UK higher education institutions, providing an important enduring stream of revenue. In total, universities in the UK earned £13.1 billion in export receipts in 2014–15. The source was revenue they generated from abroad, including international students' tuition fees (UK exports ONS, 2016).

International students make a significant positive contribution to the UK economy, providing over 14.8 billion pounds of revenue annually (Universities UK, 2023). The contribution goes beyond financial inflows however, with international students also providing cultural benefits that enrich the academic environment in a variety of ways. These include encouraging global

research collaborations and strengthening the UK’s soft power across the globe (Marginson 2022). Whilst these students place significant value upon a UK qualification, they also aim to develop ‘soft’ skills such as improved confidence and intercultural skills (Hattersley, 2024).

According to HESA (2021), up until 2019 China was sending more students to the UK than any other overseas country. In 2019/20, 35% of all non-EU students enrolled in UK higher education institutions were from China. The number of Chinese students studying in the UK increased by 51,140 or 56% over the five - year period 2015/16 to 2019/20 (ibid). This earlier trend suggested that Chinese international students who at that time made up a significant proportion of total Non – EU student enrolments each year, would become increasingly commercially important to UK Universities relative to those from other non – EU countries such as India, The US, Hong Kong and Nigeria;

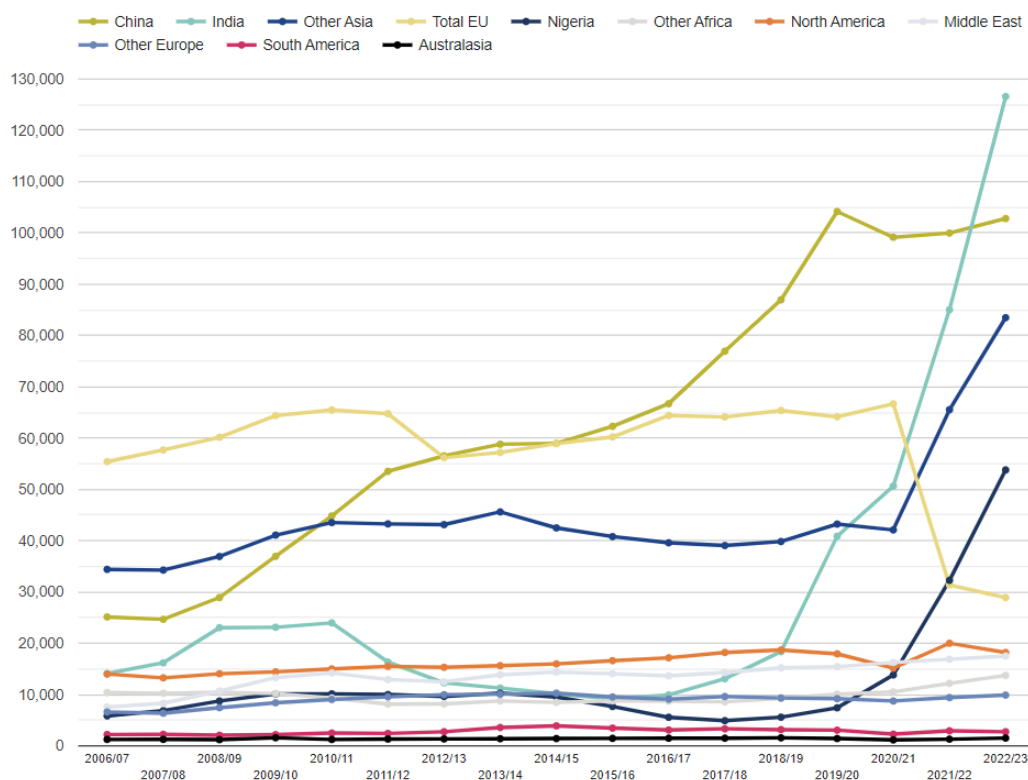


Figure 1: International student recruitment trends, 2006 – 2023 by country (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2025).

A recent trend has seen EU student enrolments declining since the 2021/22 academic year with the sector experiencing a 21% year-on-year decrease. This decrease in numbers can largely be attributed to the UK’s departure from the European Union and the resulting increases in fees faced by students living in the EU with an intent to study in the UK. Moreover, non-EU entrant enrolments declined by 7% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is of significance as it marks the first decrease in numbers since the 2016/17 academic year (HESA, 2025). India has shown a rapid surge in demand, and this marks India’s emergence as the fastest growing international market for UK universities. Nigeria too is an area of sustained, moderate growth over the past decade (World Bank, 2023). The data hints at an emerging geographical shift in demand away from China and towards India. It could be argued that were it not for an upsurge in demand from Indian students, that UK universities may well have experienced significantly greater financial challenges over the past three or four years (HESA, 2023; Universities UK, 2023).

Country	23/24	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17
China (PRC)	149,885	102,795	99,970	99,160	104,165	86,965	76,930	66,705
EU	75,490	95,505	120,145	152,930	147,950	65380	64,120	64,410
India	166,310	126,580	85015	50,635	43,235	18,960	13,085	13,660
Nigeria	57,505	53,790	32,270	13,830	7,420	5,585	4,905	5,570

Table 1: Numbers of international students in the UK by Country (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2025).

It could be argued that to some extent, international students (particularly Chinese students) were for a long time considered a ‘Cash Cow’ for UK universities (Times Higher Education, 2025). As can be seen above, student enrolment data over the past decade indicates a cooling in demand amongst Chinese international students for places at UK universities post COVID-19. The knock – on negative impact of this upon the inbound revenue of UK higher education institutions has raised significant concerns over the future financial viability of some UK universities and their ability to manage market shocks. With many UK higher education institutions relying heavily upon the fee income derived from international students, the reduction in the number of enrolling students has impacted their ability for continued investment in research and other programs (Bolton, 2023).

The reduction of international students into the UK in recent years has resulted in some universities facing severe financial strain and whilst to some extent, the gap left by Chinese students has been filled by students from India, overall international student demand has weakened (HESA, 2023). Initially this resulted in universities more closely examining their budgets which in some cases led to the reduction of programmes offered to international students due to them no longer being deemed commercially viable to run. Moreover, within this new and challenging environment being faced across the higher education sector, some universities have begun shedding academic staff deemed surplus to requirements (Universities UK, 2023; UCU, 2024). This has exposed universities to some condemnation and to the risk of union disputes. Essentially, the risk of reputational damage has increased.

Such has been the level of concern amongst ministers about the reduction in demand of international students to study UK HE institutions that in July 2024 a watchdog was

appointed to help in stabilising University finances (OfS, 2024). This has been an unprecedented intervention that has never previously been witnessed at any time in the history of the UK higher education sector. A question that naturally arises from this is how, when things were going so well, did they suddenly go so wrong? It is posited that several events which could have caused some ripples in the market had they occurred in isolation, took place simultaneously and in doing so, developed into a 'perfect storm' which has negatively impacted the sector.

The challenges facing UK universities are linked to elements which will be explored in this chapter. Whilst some of these are within the scope of control of UK universities, there are others which have contributed to the fiscal strain being of universities yet fall outside of the direct scope of influence of the higher education sector. They include;

1. Geopolitical Changes
2. Post-Brexit Immigration Policy changes
3. Increased Competition across the HE Sector Globally
4. Financial Constraints and Tuition Costs
5. COVID-19 impacts
6. Cultural Integration Challenges
7. Chinese Students changing their priorities

2.3 Geopolitical Changes

China and the UK have long sustained robust diplomatic links over the years however, in recent times these links have come under some strain. A negative outcome of this is that it has now become more difficult to recruit Chinese students into UK higher education institutions. Li and Lowe (2021) suggest that this is in part due to political disputes arising

between the two nations which have fuelled the growth in levels of uncertainty about future diplomatic links. Moreover, the Government of China has at times actively discouraged students from enrolling at UK higher education institutions by highlighting potential ‘risks’ inherent in doing so (ICEF Monitor, 2022). There have also been widespread concerns over academic freedoms and there have been espionage allegations leading to stricter scrutiny of Chinese students, particularly in STEM fields (Grimshaw, 2023).

What does this mean for prospective international students? Well, Chinese students deciding upon in which country to study could become quite concerned about possibly facing discrimination against in the UK, or fear undertaking the onerous task of applying for a study visa, only to have their application rejected without valid reason. A feeling of ‘not being welcome’ in the UK could contribute to these students rejecting the UK in favour of more welcoming host countries such as Australia and Canada (Ziguras & Gribble, 2021).

2.4 Post - Brexit Immigration Policy Changes

There is no doubt that the Brexit vote which took place on the 23rd June 2016 had a monumental impact upon the UK’s immigration environment, the effects being felt even prior to the UK’s actual departure from the EU on the 31st January 2020 (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). This has had an immense negative impact upon EU student recruitment through the loss of student mobility programmes resulting in much higher course fees for EU students planning to study in the UK. It also adversely impacted upon international student recruitment. This was particularly challenging for UK universities because the reduction of international student enrolments reduced the funds that could potentially have offset the fiscal shortfall in inbound EU student revenue. Brexit has resulted in many prospective students

from European nations to perceive the United Kingdom as less welcoming (Universities UK, 2019). This is in part due to increased tuition fees and a reduction in longer term employment opportunities. This has led to greater opportunities for Chinese international students to continue their studies in the UK (Peters et al., 2021).

In 2021 the UK Government relaunched a visa enabling international students to work in the UK post - graduation. It was seen as a positive step across the sector as it supported UK higher education institutions. The subsequent termination of the Tier 4 visa however, made applications for student visas to the UK troublesome (UKCISA, 2023). This was widely criticised in the media as being a retrograde policy position. When this was combined with the UK Government's position of reducing overall migration to the UK, it is not surprising that for Chinese students considering the long-term prospects for settling in the host country as part of their selection criteria, the UK was perceived as a hostile environment relative to some competing host countries (Findlay et al., 2022).

2.5 Competition across the Sector Globally

The global higher education sector sees the UK facing fierce competition from other Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada and the US, each of which have a good reputation for the delivery of high quality education. At present, despite the current geopolitical tensions, demand amongst Chinese students for places within North American universities remains buoyant (IIE, 2023). North America however, isn't alone in having competitive advantages over the UK. Australia is well positioned geographically for Chinese students with flights from most Chinese capitals reaching Australian airports in under 10 hours. Canada's visa requirements are not as strict than those of the UK, thus portraying a

more 'open' and welcoming image to foreign students (ICEF Monitor, 2023). The UK higher education sector also faces competition closer to home with some European universities, particularly those in Germany and the Netherlands experiencing increased international student demand. This is in part due to an improved reputation for the delivery of courses, lower tuition fees and the increasing availability of programs delivered in English (QS, 2023).

2.6 The Cost of Studying in the UK Relative to other Destinations

There is no denying that the cost of studying in the UK has for many Chinese students become a significant impediment. The primary source of funding for most Chinese students is either the family savings or loans (HESA, 2023). The ongoing upward trend of tuition fees has resulted in the cost to undertake some programmes now being in the region of £35,000 per year (Times Higher Education, 2023). This combined with downward pressure on the value of the Yuan relative to the British pound has reduced the spending power of the families of Chinese international students with the effect being that now the dream of undertaking a UK degree is out of reach of many prospective students (PIE News, 2023). Scholarships are one route to a UK education however the numbers of available scholarships being so small relative to demand makes them highly sought after and competition is fierce. In short, the financial assistance options available within the UK are minimal, especially in comparison to North American and some European higher education markets (ICEF Monitor, 2022).

2.7 COVID-19 and Technology Assisted Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic which first surfaced in late 2019 had a profound impact upon international student mobility and led to governments across the globe imposing travel restrictions which included the closure of national borders. The result was that many Chinese students had no option other than to defer their study and return home whilst they could still travel, or alternatively to cancel their plans for study in the UK altogether (Universities UK, 2020). Unfortunately, there were many cases of international students becoming ‘stranded’ and isolated in their accommodation, some of which made headline news both in the UK and in the student’s home countries. Whilst COVID-19 has now been well managed by governments and with widespread vaccination programmes having been rolled out, the experience of students who were unable to return home has left some students wary of the potential for disruptions due to a future pandemic (QS, 2023).

To keep staff and students safe during the pandemic, some steps that universities across the UK took included restricting access to and / or closing campuses and introducing remote learning methods. As most universities were largely unprepared for a pandemic of this type, the roll out and subsequent delivery of remote learning was far from optimal. This, amongst other issues resulted in growing dissatisfaction amongst Chinese international students who had an expectation of receiving an in – person learning experience in the UK (Li & Yang, 2022).

Despite much of the disruption caused by COVID-19 now no longer impacting the day to day lives of people across the globe, the impact continues to impact and shape higher education to this day. Nowadays the remote teaching approach, borne out of necessity at the height of the

pandemic has given rise to the widespread introduction of hybrid teaching at many universities. Whilst this has arguably led to greater teaching efficiencies, Chinese students wanting a more traditional taught experience could prioritise those universities offering more traditional on campus curricula (Times Higher Education, 2023). The current financial challenges across the sector have resulted in increasing numbers of universities consolidating courses now adopting a block delivered curriculum. At present it is too early to determine what impact this may have on future demand amongst these students.

2.8 Culture and its role in Human Behaviour

It is widely understood that cultural differences exist between populations from different countries and that these differences are manifested in observable behaviour. The precise definition of what culture is, however, can be difficult to pin down. Trying to do this is problematic as there are many definitions for culture with no universal consensus (Olie, 1995). Culture is "...a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one human group from another." (Hofstede, 1991). "Culture is a rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society." (Schwartz, 1999). "...a dynamic process of solving human problems and dilemmas in areas of human relationships, time, and nature." (Trompenaars, 1997).

Being aware of the cultural dimensions which underpin human behaviour aids effective cross-cultural communication and enhances marketing activity within the context of the globalisation of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Whilst there has been much research related to culture, that undertaken by Geert Hofstede is considered among the most highly valuable and is widely applied by academics and industry alike. Hofstede's cultural

dimensions provide a framework for analysing the variances of populations as they relate to culture and although only four dimensions were originally identified, later research led to the inclusion of two more, bringing the total to six. These are defined as, Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation and Indulgence versus Restraint. These cultural dimensions are explored below and to some extent aid in explaining the behaviours and decision making processes of these students.

2.8.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

Within the Power Distance dimension, the extent to which less powerful members within society expect that power is distributed unequally and accept that inequality is considered. China is considered a high Power distance culture and as such, this population readily accepts a hierarchical order and centralized authority, whereas low power distance cultures, such as Australia, value egalitarianism and participative decision-making. Chinese populations are accepting of hierarchical order in a way that populations ranking relatively low on this dimension simply are not (Hofstede Insights, 2024). Moreover, it is argued by Chen and Starosa (2000) that the high level of power distance is underpinned by a respect for social harmony and a reverence for authority that is borne out of Confucianism. This aligns with the somewhat stereotypical view of the ‘Chinese student’ in that they demonstrate deference to their tutors through their polite demeanour and the use of respectful language.

2.8.2 Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

Within this dimension the degree to which members of society are integrated into groups is measured. Individualist cultures such as the UK place significant emphasis upon personal

achievements and individual rights, whereas the collectivist society that is China focusses upon harmony and group cohesion. China ranks much lower than that of most western nations on this dimension which is typified by the ‘collectivist mindset’. ‘Guanxi’ – the close networks developed by many within Chinese culture is a system of favours and obligations (Luo, 2000). As collectivists, Chinese students have a strong orientation towards maintaining harmony and are uncomfortable with conflict. This can manifest within group exercises as disinterest or a failure to engage relative to more outspoken students from individualist cultures such as the UK.

2.8.3 Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

Within this dimension, the way in which societal roles between the genders are distributed is examined. Masculine cultures place high value upon competitiveness with a key marker of success being the acquisition of material possessions. The UK is a very good example of a masculine culture. Conversely, feminine cultures value relationships, modesty, and quality of life – an example of this being Finland. China tends towards Masculinity within this dimension. Within the Chinese context, masculinity is evidenced by a very strong desire for economic advancement and this manifests in a highly structured and traditional academic environment. Within the Chinese community, masculinity within the workplace results in enduring gender – based roles and the importance that education plays within this culture should not be understated. This having been said, the extent to which education is considered important, is more significant than in those countries that are higher on the masculinity index such as Japan and the UK (Fang, 2003).

2.8.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Uncertainty Avoidance measures the level of comfort a society has with uncertainty and ambiguity. Nations low on this scale include the UK and this can be evidenced in cultural norms that are more likely to embrace change. China is high on this scale, and Chinese populations have a preference for fixed rules and enduring cultural norms (Hofstede Insights, 2024). The educational approach to teaching is a longstanding one that is highly structured and largely didactic in approach. Rote memorisation is the focus in standardised tests. Whilst this is not an issue per se for Chinese international students, the differences between this approach and the problem – based pedagogical methods widely seen in UK higher education institutions are significant. This can amplify the difficulties that Chinese students attempting to adapt to life in the UK experience. Amongst tutors the perceived reticence to participate in class can be considered a failure to engage (Biggs, 1996).

2.8.5 Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation (LTO)

Chinese culture is high on Long – Term orientation and as such these populations value thrift, making it no surprise that Chinese families seek a positive return on the investment in their children’s overseas education. The UK is also high on this dimension, and this is contrasted by Short – Term oriented populations such as the US where the focus is very much on the ‘here and now’ and valuing quick results. This focus amongst Chinese populations upon future benefits rather than immediate gratification (Bond & Hwang, 1986) is highly consistent with traditional values. These Confucian values value persistence and patience, regarding them as praiseworthy traits within Chinese society.

2.8.6 Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR)

The way in which populations react to their impulses and desires is measured within the Indulgence Versus Restraint dimension. Cultures high in indulgence such as the US value unhindered gratification of their impulses with any attempt to curtail this considered an infringement of personal freedoms. Conversely, Chinese culture, high on the restraint dimension regulates behaviour of the population through social norms, ensuring that gratification of impulses is well controlled. As such, Chinese populations are more likely to feel that their actions are guided by duty rather than personal freedom (Hofstede Insights, 2024) with self control considered a praiseworthy trait. In practice, within a societal context this particular cultural trait influences organisational marketing strategies, workplace ethics and the behavioural patterns of Chinese consumers.

2.8.7 Chinese students and Cultural difference

Populations from some countries are quite similar culturally whereas it can be observed that significant differences exist between some others. China has a rich historical background and a cultural dimension profile that is steeped in Confucian traditions of collectivism, and hierarchical social structures (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural distance considers the level of difference in common cultural aspects such as language, spiritual beliefs, family structure, lifestyle, and values between one group and another. It is widely accepted that the larger the cultural distance between two populations, the more difficult it may be for an individual from either population to settle within the population of the other due to the difference in behavioural norms.

The cultural distance between China and the UK is significant. China is a country with a collectivist mindset and with a high level of uncertainty avoidance (ibid) whereas the UK tends toward being individualist and with lower levels of uncertainty avoidance. It is no surprise therefore that the cultural norms between Chinese and UK populations show some stark differences. Within China, pedagogical approaches such as problem – based learning are eschewed. Instead, the delivery is traditional in approach where students are considered the recipients of knowledge, thus a didactic approach is widely seen. Lecturers are afforded a great deal of deference, and it would be highly unusual under any circumstances to witness a Chinese student challenging or questioning their lecturer (Getty, 2011). “Instruction is dominated by didactic telling... students are merely passive learners sitting quietly listening to what teachers say.... there is no opportunity for students to raise questions of their own” (Gu, 2001).

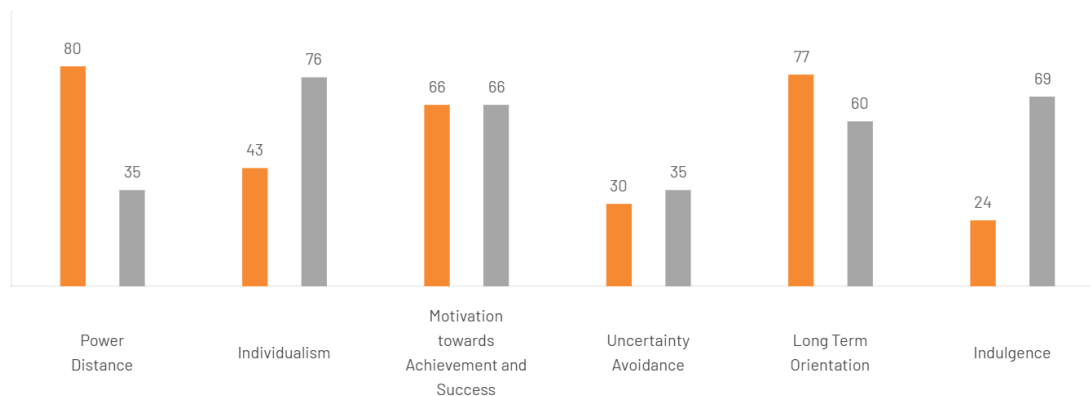


Figure 2: Illustrates cultural distance between the UK and China (Hofstede’s Insights, 2024).

2.8.8 Cultural difference and the impact upon Chinese student experience

When observing the behaviour of Chinese international students, especially within Problem Based Learning environments common to many UK Business Schools, they are often deemed to be failing to engage. This can be problematic as a growing body of research has linked

student engagement to “higher grades, achievement test scores, and completion rates” (Fredricks, 2014). It is argued by McMahon, (2011) that Chinese students may struggle with the Problem – Based teaching pedagogy that is common within UK Business Schools. Huang, (2008) reports that prior to their arrival in the UK, one of the key elements that Chinese students are concerned about is whether they will be able to successfully adapt to the change in culture.

Chinese students often experience difficulties when studying in the UK. This can be problematic as the Word – of – Mouth of alumni is highly trusted amongst this student group. The problems faced by these students can, to a lesser or greater extent be attributed to the cultural distance that exists between the UK and China. Language barriers and social isolation are just two of the many challenges faced by these students during their study in the UK (Wang, Moskal & Schweisfurth, M. (2022) and acknowledgement of them alone is not necessarily sufficient to address the issues at hand. A comparison of Chinese and UK culture (below) highlights the significance of cultural distance that exists between the two populations.

Dimension	China	UK	Explanation
Power Distance	High (80)	Low (35)	Chinese citizens accept hierarchical order and unequal power distribution. The UK prefers flatter organizational structures and more equal power relationships.
Individualism	Low (20)	High (89)	China is a collectivist society, valuing group harmony. The UK emphasizes

			individual rights, independence, and self-expression.
Masculinity	Moderate (66)	High (66)	Both cultures value achievement and success, but in China, it's often linked with status, while the UK emphasizes personal success and competition.
Uncertainty Avoidance	Low (30)	Moderate (35)	China is comfortable with ambiguity and flexible rules. The UK also has a relatively relaxed attitude to uncertainty and innovation.
Long-Term Orientation	Very High (87)	Low (51)	China focuses on long-term planning, perseverance, and thrift. The UK is more pragmatic but generally short-term and result-oriented.
Indulgence	Low (24)	High (69)	China is a restrained culture with a focus on social norms. The UK is indulgent, allowing more freedom for leisure and gratification.

Table 2: Cultural Dimensions comparison between the UK and China (Hofstede, 1986)

2.8.9 Chinese International Students & Culture Shock

Differences between Chinese and UK cultures make it highly likely that Chinese international students will experience varying degrees of culture – shock (Zhou et al, 2008). Culture shock can be defined as feelings of tension & frustration, of alienation, a desire to be alone or to return home and / or depression (Mead, 2005). Moreover, Hofstede (2001) states that “In a way, the visitor in a foreign culture returns to the mental state of an infant, in which he or she has to learn the simplest things over again... leading to feelings of distress, of helplessness and of hostility toward the new environment.”

Placing international students within multicultural groups in a bid to break down cultural barriers is a common practice within UK Business Schools however, for Chinese international students, this can exacerbate feelings of culture shock and lead to ethnocentric behaviour where they judge the new culture based upon the norms of their own. Thus, it can be argued that grouping students into culturally heterogeneous groups may not always bring about the desired result but instead actually strengthen the prejudices that individuals hold towards individuals within cultural groups that are dissimilar to their own. Clark et al (2007), assert that the practical problem of not being able to speak fluently limits the contribution of international students who are not capable in English. Suggesting that many students cannot express sophisticated concepts in English, and many are influenced by their own cultural manners and ways of thinking and speaking.

The application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions to Chinese international students studying in the UK could lead researchers to conclude that during their time in the UK Chinese students are highly likely to experience some difficulties in adjusting. An example of the cultural differences can be seen when considering the Individualism – Collectivism dimension; People within collectivist cultures, in contrast to those from within individualist cultures are likely to view themselves not as individuals per se but instead as members of a wider group. They are likely to focus significantly more upon the group objectives rather than their own personal objectives and place a greater emphasis upon the context within communication than the content itself. Students from collectivist cultures also tend to be self-effacing (Triandis, 2001) and this is backed by research which suggests that this group of students exhibit behaviours such as submissiveness and politeness within the learning environment (Durkin, 2008).

2.8.10 Critique of Hofstede's Model

Whilst Hofstede's cultural dimensions model has its protagonists, there is not universal acceptance of his approach. The model has been criticised and its relevance to contemporary cultural issues brought into question. Schwartz (1999) for example questioned the legitimacy of using a survey to measure cultural difference. Redpath, (1997) argues against the suggestion that cultural homogeneity exists and instead, suggests that within any country, different ethnic groupings lead to a cultural heterogeneity. As such, surveying one group would not yield data representative of the majority of a country's citizens. Further criticism of Hofstede's model suggests that due to ever increasing levels of globalisation, it may be outdated. Moreover, as Hofstede's study was based only upon employees of one organisation, it could be argued that the sample was not representative. All that having been said, Hofstede's model remains one of the primary cultural models utilised both within academia and the business world.

Hofstede, Schwartz and GLOBE are all popular frameworks that take a different approach to conceptualising culture. Hofstede's dimensions are very widely used whereas Schwartz's theory is perhaps less so as it emphasises universal human values and may not be so readily applied to managerial decision-making. GLOBE on the other hand, with its large set of dimensions can be complex in its application. It could be argued that the differences between these frameworks highlights the fact that neither presents a 'complete' view of culture. As such, in order to minimise the risk of error, triangulating multiple frameworks, whilst potentially more time consuming can be considered good practice.

So how do Chinese students attempt to overcome these potential pitfalls? Wu and Hammond (2021) suggest that Chinese students often prefer destinations with large Chinese communities, easing cultural adaptation. Moreover, universities able to demonstrate comprehensive support systems for international students, such as language assistance and cultural integration programs, are deemed more attractive by prospective students (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2022).

2.8.11 Cultural Adaptation and Social Integration

Universities that put into place comprehensive student support systems and processes and publicise them, are likely to place themselves at a competitive advantage. This is due to the perceived desirability of those institutions by prospective students. Where those universities also include language support and mental health services, they are highly valued (Smith & Khawaja, 2022). It is no surprise that Cultural factors influence Chinese students' comfort levels in host nations. Moreover, it follows that countries with large Chinese diaspora communities such as Canada and Australia, provide familiar social networks, ease cultural adjustment (Wu & Chiang, 2021) and are deemed more desirable amongst students and their families than those that do not.

Cultural adaptation is complex and is far from assured. Challenges related to cultural adaptation can be exacerbated by incidents of racial discrimination and anti-Asian sentiment which was particularly strong early during the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety concerns of prospective students have increased the challenges faced by UK universities as it has in part resulted in prospective students giving greater consideration to those host countries that are considered more welcoming, safe, and where a lower level of cultural distance has made

adjusting to a new environment less onerous (Yang, Shen & Xu, 2021). The extent to which the perception of safety can influence the decision of prospective students should not be underestimated. With the perception of safety being a key determinant of student choice, it is clear that universities located within host countries where a poor perception of safety exists will experience additional challenges in student recruitment.

2.9 Changing Perspectives of Chinese Students

Nowadays Chinese students are becoming increasingly more discerning in their study abroad choices. They prioritize employability, the rights to remain and work within the host country and importantly - the return upon their investment (QS, 2023). As a result, it behoves UK universities to demonstrate employability via very good graduate outcomes. Where UK universities are unable to do this, they appear less desirable and thus may lose applicants to countries where it is perceived that enhanced job prospects exist (HESA, 2023). The growth of high-quality universities within China should not be overlooked. Having a variety of high quality universities within the domestic education market makes for a compelling case to stay at home. The result is that in greater numbers than in the past, Chinese students are deciding to study domestically rather than abroad (ICEF Monitor, 2023). This presents as something of a challenge to UK universities and in order to meet this challenge, they need to communicate the quality of teaching, a strong employability record and the availability of good research opportunities. (Universities UK, 2022).

2.10 Push and Pull Factors fuelling overseas study

Push and Pull approaches are well established amongst marketers as strategies to attract prospective new customers. Pull factors are varied and can include the use of Word – of –

Mouth and search engine optimisations to raise awareness. Conversely, Push approaches could include direct mail and advertising. This model was originally utilised in the theory of migration by Lee (1966) where, the author sought to understand the various factors that had a bearing on the movement of people from one place to another. McMahon (1992) went on to use this model to better understand the movement trends amongst international students, the decision or motivation to study abroad (Maringe and Carter, 2007), and the drivers of students towards an overseas study destination (Muntasira, Jiang, and Thuy, 2009; Smith and Pitts, 2010).

As it relates to international students, Push factors can be considered those that exist within the domestic higher education market that motivate prospective students to look outside of their country when planning to undertake a new qualification. Pull factors can be considered the perceived positive factors related to the education provided by overseas higher education institutions. The factors which appeal to prospective students capture their attention, thus drawing them in by enhancing an already compelling proposition. It follows then that the push factors can be considered negative in nature with the pull factors being positive. There isn't universal agreement on this however as Chan (2012) suggests that the push factors include the perception of high quality education within overseas universities. Some authors would argue that this is not a push factor but rather a pull (positive) factor. Moreover, Kim et al (2007) suggest that the "push" factors are those associated with a desire to travel, whereas "pull" factors are associated with the choice of destination. All this having been said, there does appear to be wide agreement that there exists a certain prestige amongst international students and their families in holding a degree awarded by an overseas educational institution which in and of itself may be a significant pull factor.

It has been established that prior to the global pandemic, there was significant and increasing demand amongst Chinese international students for places at UK higher education Institutions and that following the pandemic, demand has decreased. This change in behaviour raises several important questions related to the drivers of such behaviour.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2001), undertaking research into the mobility of students concluded that there are four key factors that fuelled students' desire to study overseas. These factors are;

- The perception that the quality of a course was higher than within a local institution
- The ability of the student to gain entry to particular programmes of study
- Being highly motivated to learn about other cultures
- The perception of being able to migrate overseas after completion of a course

2.11 Factors Influencing choice of whether to study domestically or overseas

Within this part of the work, I explore the factors related to the decision as to whether to study domestically or overseas.

2.11.1 The Historical Context

It is important to understand and acknowledge that Chinese student mobility is not a new phenomenon. Chinese students have been studying overseas since the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally the desire to study abroad was fuelled by the opportunity to attain 'modern' knowledge (Wang, 2014). Following the introduction of new government policies in the late 1970's however, Chinese students were actively encouraged to consider continuing their education in the west (Li & Bray, 2007). The enduring demand for places at western universities has given rise to new commercial opportunities for universities not only in the

west but across the globe. Moreover, by the mid 1990's China had emerged to become the largest source of overseas students in the world. At any point in time it could be witnessed that millions of Chinese students were pursuing education outside of their home country (ICEF Monitor, 2022) and there were a number of factors driving this behaviour including;

- The pursuit of high-quality education
- Improved career opportunities
- Personal development

The seemingly insatiable appetite amongst Chinese students to study abroad resulted in profound social, political and economic implications for China as well as for those countries that became popular hosts.

2.11.2 Current Statistics

According to China's Ministry of Education (2023), in the 2022/23 academic year, China was the world's leading source of international students with over 700,000 Chinese students studying outside the country. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the top destinations included the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Japan (UNESCO, 2022). In the 2021/22 academic year alone, the US hosted almost three hundred thousand Chinese students (IIE, 2022) and the government of China has in the past actively promoted student mobility through scholarships and exchange programs (State Scholarship Council, 2022). What has been witnessed is China's rapidly growing middle-class demographic increasingly investing in overseas education as a form of cultural capital (Fong, 2011).

2.11.3 A Changing Paradigm

In the main, the traditional host country destinations remain ever popular. This having been said, new patterns are starting to develop. Destinations that have not been considered particularly popular in the past, especially European countries such as Germany and France have experienced strong growth in demand amongst Chinese students. This is largely due to lower tuition fees and strong engineering programs (Campus France, 2021). Moreover, the Belt and Road Initiative, introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 has focussed on developing a network of trade routes reminiscent of the ancient Silk Road. The government of China has actively encouraged students to select countries such as Russia and Malaysia instead of the traditional favourites (Xinhua, 2020) as the main aims of the BRI include enhancing trade connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the movement of Chinese students overseas, the easing of restrictions did see students looking to the west once again and there has been something of a recovery (ICEF Monitor, 2023) however, the numbers have not recovered to their pre pandemic levels.

2.11.4 Motivations Behind Chinese Student Mobility

There are several motivating factors for Chinese students to study abroad. One such motivator is the perception of a world-class education. It is a common perception amongst Chinese families that western universities provide excellent research opportunities and teaching methods that go beyond that available within the domestic market (Marginson, 2021). Top performing institutions such as Oxford in the UK, and Harvard in the US are in high demand due to their global rankings (QS, 2023). It would however be a mistake to

conclude that the motivation amongst Chinese students to study abroad stems purely from the perception that they will receive a high quality education. Career considerations are of paramount importance and these students believe that overseas degrees enhance job prospects back home in the domestic job market of China (Zheng, 2014). Many Chinese students hold aspirations to undertake work experience in the host country before returning home because holding overseas qualifications, as well as experience within the workforce overseas provides a valuable advantage in a competitive domestic job market (Liu & Lin, 2020).

2.11.5 Economic & Other Impacts

Chinese students contribute significantly to the economies of host nations. In Australia for example, international education generated AUD 40 billion in 2019, with students from China representing the largest cohort (Australian Government, 2020). Similarly, in the US., Chinese students contributed over \$15 billion to the economy (NAFSA, 2022). With such significant outflows of students and with many overseas countries offering liberal student visa conditions, the potential for brain – drain exists. One method of countering this was the introduction of the ‘Thousand Talents Plan, introduced by the Chinese government as a method of encouraging the brightest graduates to return home. This was introduced in 2008 and was specifically designed to attract Chinese experts in the fields of science and technology back to the country, thus supporting China's innovation and competitiveness on the global stage (OECD, 2019). Whilst it is true that small numbers of students do remain overseas and take up employment opportunities within their chosen host country, the vast majority return to China, bringing back with them, skills and knowledge developed within the overseas environment (Zweig & Wang, 2013).

2.11.6 Social and Cultural Impacts

Whilst we have explored the economic benefits provided by Chinese students, the social and cultural benefits should not be overlooked. Chinese students benefit their chosen host countries by promoting cultural exchange and through building mutual understanding between China and host countries (Yang, 2018). This having been said, challenges related to language and cultural barriers exist and can challenge social integration (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015).

2.11.7 Political Implications

The host countries most in demand amongst Chinese students tend to be those where close, mutually beneficial diplomatic ties have been developed and are enduring (Cheung, 2020). These ties result in many positive outcomes for China not only due to ever closer diplomatic relationships abroad but also through the returning students providing a positive contribution to the nation's continued development (Xiang & Shen, 2009). It would not be difficult to proffer an argument that increased Chinese student mobility paired to the capacity and willingness of overseas countries to provide high quality education to them is something of a match made in heaven. That having been said, the development of geopolitical tensions and associated uncertainty carry with them the potential to stifle demand within affected host countries. This can occur not only through messaging that students receive within China, but also through the introduction of stricter or more restrictive visa conditions (Reuters, 2021). The US - China trade war with restrictions on STEM visas for Chinese students for example, has led to declining demand for places at higher educational institutions across the US (Redden, 2023). This has led to a reduction in higher education fee revenues across the US and has limited the number of host country options for Chinese students.

In recent years, graduate employment opportunities and shifting global dynamics have also had an impact upon the choices available to Chinese students (Liu & Lin, 2021). The Geopolitical tensions that exist with China are not confined to the US and during the pandemic, they also developed with other western nations such as Australia. Whilst these tensions have decreased in recent times, the result at that time was a decrease in demand for places amongst Chinese students at Australian universities (ICEF Monitor, 2022).

To some extent the global education landscape has been changed, and the continuing deterioration of China's diplomatic relationships with much of the west has resulted in Chinese students, in significant numbers eschewing traditional host countries. This has not meant that they are studying at home in greater numbers, however. Instead, they have been giving greater consideration to alternatives with nations such as Japan for example experiencing significant increases in demand (ICEF Monitor, 2023). This is due, at least in part to their close proximity to China and to their improving reputations as providers of high quality education (Liu and Lin, 2021). The Belt and Road Initiative discussed earlier has also encouraged students to consider universities in partner countries. This has opened up access to countries in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa to Chinese students (Wen & Hu, 2023).

2.12 Factors Influencing choice of Country within which to study

Here the key factors which impact the decision making of Chinese students in their choice of host country are explored.

2.12.1 Country of origin image (COI)

Country of origin image reflects a consumer's general perceptions about the quality of products made in a particular country and the nature of people from that country (Erickson et al., 1984; Han, 1986, 1989; Haubl, 1996b; Parameswaran and Yaprak, 1987). Where the COI is favourable, organisations can leverage this and in doing so, attain a range of highly positive benefits. The reverse is also true however and where the COI is unfavourable, this can negatively impact the marketing efforts to reach groups of prospective customers. It is argued by Knight & Calantone (2000) that organisations grappling with an unfavourable COI often are at significant disadvantage relative to local competitors due to the existence of significant barriers to the market. When international students are deciding upon a host country and university, they weigh up various factors including reputation, quality, ranking, scholarships, tuition fees and the learning environment. (Chen, 2007).

Whether or not the quality of education within overseas universities is superior to that within China is debateable and authors such as Jimenez & Martin (2010) suggest that to a lesser or greater extent, the Country of Origin (CoO) has an impact upon the decision making of consumers. Moreover, Andehn et al (2016) describe the country-of-origin effect (CoOE) as occurring where the consumer's judgment is altered during the decision-making phase, due to an association between a product, service, or brand and a particular place. In other words, the country in which the product or service is developed and / or delivered has the ability in and of itself to influence the consumer's purchase decision, irrespective of the price and quality of said product or service. Gurhan & Maheswaran (2000) argue that CoOE is effectively a country stereotype and occurs where consumers act upon their perception of a country to evaluate all new products and / or services originating from said country. When one considers

the CoOE within the context of an increasingly competitive domestic environment for university places, it appears unsurprising that Chinese students consider studying overseas in increasing numbers. Having decided to undertake study within an overseas university, the second phase of decision making is centred around the host country selection. Srikatanyoo & Gnoth (2002) posit that the image which a country holds within the mind of the student is a key determinant of whether that particular location will be deemed most suitable or not.

All the above having been said, the drivers for Chinese students to study overseas as well as their choice of country can largely be considered outside of the control of UK universities themselves. This is perhaps unfortunate as Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016) argue that not only does country reputation affect the decision making of Chinese students when planning overseas study, but that cognitive country image is the single most important factor when deciding on a study destination. MacEachern and Yun (2017) have suggested that the most important considerations of Chinese students were elements such as perceived safety, affordability, language and the opportunity (or lack thereof) to remain within the country after they had graduated.

2.12.2 Academic Reputation and Institutional Prestige

One of the most significant factors influencing Chinese students' choice of host country is the academic reputation of universities. Institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics are highly regarded in China, with degrees from these universities being seen as prestigious (Marginson, 2021). The QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education rankings play a crucial role in shaping perceptions, with many Chinese families prioritizing those universities occupying the highest ranked positions. (Li & Bray,

2022). When it comes to host country selection, specific academic disciplines can aid in determining choice. It has long been considered that for STEM subjects, the US provides superior opportunities for learning due largely to its leading research facilities. Business and Finance students tend to have a preference for studying in the UK, in part because of London's long standing reputation as a global financial hub (Findlay et al., 2022).

2.12.3 Economic Considerations and Cost of Education

Financial factors play an important part in the selection process. Chen and Barnett (2021) argue that these considerations significantly impact Chinese students' decisions as they relate to host country selection. At the present time, the US is amongst the most expensive destinations, with annual tuition fees often exceeding \$50,000 (ICEF Monitor, 2022), placing the country out of the reach of many prospective students. Conversely, countries such as Germany and France now offer significantly lower tuition fees which may hold greater appeal for prospective students on a tight budget (Liu & Li, 2023). Other elements that may influence the choice of host country include the availability of work opportunities, with many host nations permitting international student visa holders to take up paid employment during their studies. Yang (2022) argues that this can be useful in offsetting living and / or tuition costs of students. Additionally, according to Wen and Hu (2019), scholarships sponsored by the Chinese government such as China Scholarship Council, encourage students to study in specific countries that have close academic ties to China. Countries such as the US., UK., and Australia are popular due to their post-study work visa policies (Xiong & Zhou, 2023).

2.12.4 Post-Graduation and Immigration Opportunities

Post-graduation work and immigration policies have for a long time been important considerations for Chinese students. Zhou and Xu (2022) posit that many students who are considering studying abroad, do so as a pathway to permanent residency. Whilst some nations offer favourable post-study work visas, making them attractive destinations for Chinese students (Hawthorne, 2021), others do not and are deemed less attractive to prospective students. Canada's express entry system for example, provided a useful route by which for graduates could transition to permanent residency (Robertson, 2023). The US government, on the other hand, introduced more restrictive immigration policies which have had a negative impact due to an increased level of uncertainty for Chinese graduates (Bound et al., 2021). This is in contrast with the UK's reintroduction of the Graduate Route visa in 2021 which made it a more appealing option, allowing students to stay for two years post-graduation (Home Office, 2023).

2.12.5 Chinese international student decision making within the UK Context

There are several elements that influence the decision making of Chinese international students that are important within the UK context. They include;

- Country-of-origin image
- Academic reputation and institutional prestige
- Economic considerations
- Post-graduation immigration opportunities

The UK benefits from a strong country-of-origin image which enhances its appeal amongst prospective students. This it could be argued forms the foundation upon which other favourable elements are built. The academic reputation and perceived prestige of UK

universities important metrics amongst Chinese applicants and their families. These are tempered by economic factors. Moreover, post-graduation immigration opportunities can have a powerful impact upon decision making as many Chinese students view international study as a pathway to skilled employment and career development (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). It follows then that changes to these factors can exert a positive or negative impact upon the perception of the UK as a serious option for overseas study.

2.13 Stages of the Decision-Making Process

In determining which host country and university to select, prospective students progress through a staged decision – making process. They gather information, shortlist countries, shortlist universities, submit applications and then make their final decision. Liu and Li (2021) suggest that the initial stage of the process commences with students researching host countries and universities through country and university web sites, education agents, and social media platforms which are particularly useful in accessing peer recommendations. Such platforms include WeChat which is extensively used across China (Xiong & Zhou, 2023). Following the information search, prospective students then start shortlisting host countries and universities. During this stage, prospective students narrow down a set of options. This is undertaken, according to Yang et al (2020) taking into consideration their academic interests, the overall costs, enrolment criteria and geography.

Next, students move to the third stage in which visa and course applications are completed and submitted via university websites and / or centralised online platforms (Li & Bray, 2021). It is only once these three stages have been concluded that students make their final choice. This choice is influenced by the visa policies of shortlisted countries, and the success rates

may also affect final decisions (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Essentially, the final decision is a balance between academic prestige, cost, and career prospects (Wu & Hammond, 2021).

2.13.1 Challenges associated with the Decision-Making Process

The decision as to which host country, university and course is most appropriate, whilst linear is not without its challenges. Gu and Schweisfurth (2022) posit that having too many available options can lead to some confusion. The difficulties with meeting the requirements for successful visa applications can also be challenging (Xiong & Zhou, 2023). This is especially true for students applying to the UK and US as recent policy changes relating to the granting of overseas student visas in these countries have led to stricter criteria.

Financial Barriers can be a challenge where the level of tuition fees need to be considered along with the living costs within different locations (Bodycott, 2020). This may limit the options of prospective students. Moreover, currency fluctuations can impact the perceived affordability of studying abroad. Cultural Adjustment concerns are another challenge and worries related to the likelihood of discrimination will have a bearing upon university selection. Exerting a negative influence upon a host country are media stories of anti – Asian activity (Wu & Hammond, 2021). The decision making of Chinese international students is multifaceted, involving academic, financial, social, and career-related considerations. Understanding these factors can help universities tailor their recruitment strategies to better attract Chinese students.

2.14 Factors Influencing choice of Education Institution at which to study

The choice of educational institution is of significant importance as the impacts of this decision can be far reaching. In their choice of educational institution, Chinese international students take several factors into account. These include university league tables / world rankings as well as the recommendations of education agents within their home country (Collins, 2012). In the decision related to university choice, prospective students progress through six stages;

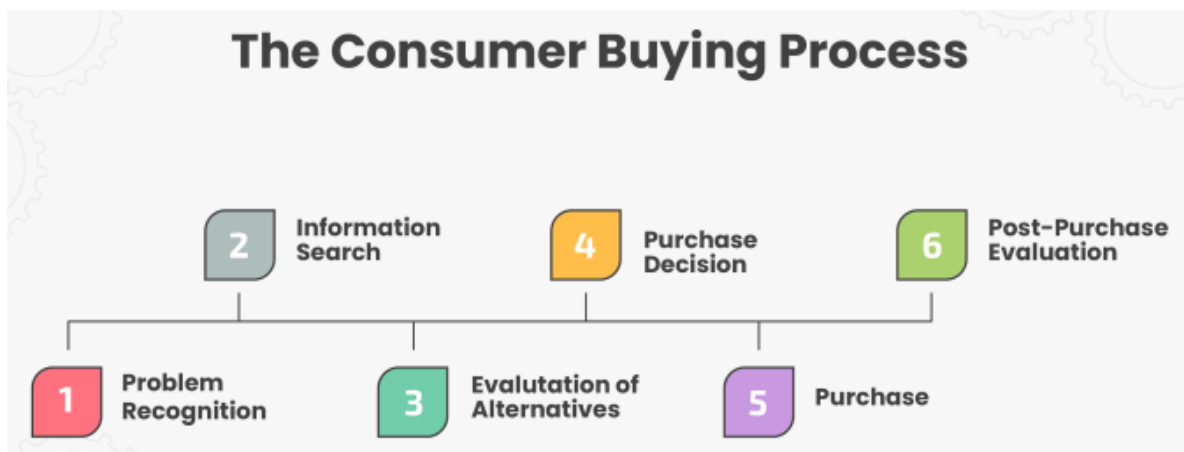


Figure 3: The consumer buying process (Global Reach, 2021)

It is argued that the decision progresses in stages where macro “push–pull” forces (e.g., domestic competition, perceived quality abroad), meso-level market signals (e.g., rankings, marketing communications), and micro-level considerations (e.g., safety, costs, family and peer influence) converge (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). It therefore follows that marketing plays a significant part in influencing the decision of students as to whether to study at a particular higher education institution. This has been an area of significant research with Choi and Nieminen (2013) suggesting that the reputation

(quality) of a higher education institution, the academic value of the degree offered, as well as the perceived relevance of the foreign degree all play a part in the decision.

Institutional reputation plays an important part in the decision making of Chinese students. That said, a significant body of evidence exists which suggests that Chinese consumers pay great attention to Word-of-Mouth recommendations when making purchase decisions. Liu (2006) suggests that Online Word of Mouth has considerable influence upon the decision making of Chinese consumers. Moreover, Maulana (2022) argues that Word-of-Mouth communication significantly influences prospective international students' decisions to enrol, highlighting that WOM from trusted friends/relatives with past study abroad experience is crucial.

Whilst individual universities cannot impact the perception of their country in the minds of Chinese students, word of mouth is something that higher education institutions can influence through effective marketing strategy. Wilkins and Huisman (2012) suggest that positive word of mouth is essential in attracting international students and therefore that strong alumni links should be developed with graduating students. This having been said, the source of WOM is also important with not all Word of Mouth having equal value. Electronic Word of Mouth EWOM plays a critical role, underscoring the significance of online reviews, ratings, and recommendations in shaping consumer perceptions and choices (Al-Dmour et al. (2024).

The factors related to this study are expanded upon below and are illustrated by a conceptual framework.

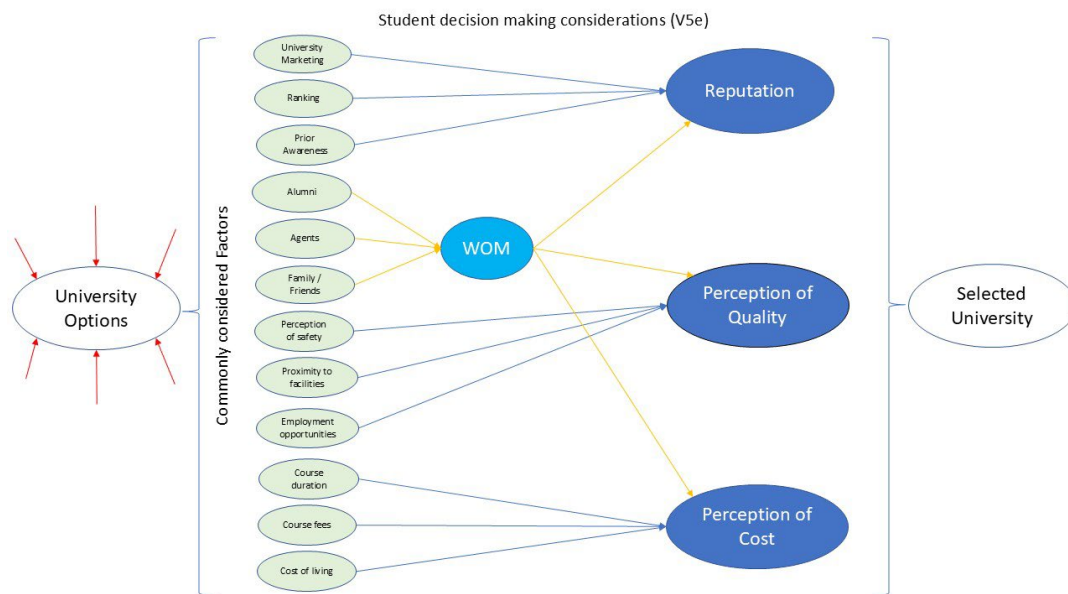


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework developed for the study

2.14.1 University marketing

Marketing activities undertaken by organisations promote the products and services to prospective customers. Some would argue that marketing has a much greater role in that it reduces uncertainty, highlights fit and value, and guides attention to attributes that matter most at each stage of the decision making process (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). For Chinese students, effective marketing activity would include that which uses native channels such as WeChat, includes video and where the content is in Mandarin. The story – telling should be evidence-led, highlighting career outcomes and graduate stories and be service-oriented. There is evidence that the efficacy of this type of content is significantly greater than generic brand messages as it directly addresses the concerns of students and their families (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

Delivering effective marketing messages can be useful in setting appropriate expectations related to elements such as cohort size and composition, potential work experience and teaching pedagogy. This can help prospective students when making comparisons and can be a potential source of competitive advantage when combined with rankings and employability.

2.14.2 University ranking / performance

For Chinese students and their families, rankings act as a powerful measure of quality during stage 3 of the buyer decision making process as outlined above (Hazelkorn, 2015; Marginson, 2006). Uniquely, a university's ranking outweighs many other performance metrics in providing a resounding measure of quality amongst these students and their parents.

Moreover, subject-level standings, research intensity, and accreditations such as AACSB and AMBA are considered significant when mapped to high-status career tracks (Li & Bray, 2007). Rankings have a unique power to influence the consideration set when other factors are misaligned (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

2.14.3 Prior awareness of the university

Put simply, awareness is a precondition for evaluation. Keller (2020) suggests that where the prospective customer has prior awareness, this affords the organisation certain advantages including a greater level of attention and increased trust amongst customers. Those universities that are regularly the topic of discussion on Chinese online social networks develop a marketplace advantage. Having increased visibility enhances the perceived legitimacy and students are significantly more likely to research universities that they have prior knowledge of (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). There is a cultural aspect to this also as name recognition minimises the perceived risk associated with a purchase. Moreover, greater levels

of recognition, often a result of multi channel repetition (for example Social channels, Education Agents, Alumni WOM) build a ‘cognitive fluency’ that relates to perception of quality and reputation.

2.14.4 Word of mouth (WOM)

Online and offline word – of – mouth is highly effective at transforming the customer experience into a persuasive narrative (Brown et al., 2005). With China having a collectivist culture, these students place a significant amount of trust in information shared about the lived experience of their peers already overseas, alumni who have previously studied overseas, family friends with international experience, and agents who can assist them with their decisions by comparing options (Pimpa, 2003; Bodycott, 2009). Notwithstanding what has been said above, it should be noted that word – of – mouth can highlight not only the positives associated with an organisation but also the negatives. Negative associations can be more heavily weighted than positive ones in the decision making process, thus isolated negative experiences which are not reflective of the experience as a whole, can be problematic.

2.14.5 Perception of safety

As it relates to university choice, safety can be considered a ‘threshold attribute’. In other words where a university does not meet the threshold for being a safe place, it is highly unlikely that it will be seriously considered, despite the presence of many other beneficial factors (Bodycott, 2009). Unsurprisingly, parents of prospective students often prioritise accommodation within safer neighbourhoods, with dependable university security and with highly supportive student services.

Aspects of safety include ‘physical’ (crime, harassment), ‘health’ (access to care, pandemic resilience), and ‘psychosocial’ (discrimination, inclusion). Chinese students consider the overall safety of an area by triangulating city crime statistics, anecdotal reports and news reports (Bodycott & Lai, 2012). Those universities that promote comprehensive safeguards such as regular campus security patrols, well-lit and signposted routes, mental-health support, and student mentoring reduce ambiguity related to anxiety. As such, they satisfy an important hygiene factor.

2.14.6 Proximity of the campus to facilities

Proximity to facilities such as supermarkets, eateries, religious buildings, libraries and reliable public transport improves reduces the non – financial costs associated with a purchase. These ‘friction costs’ form part of the decision making of students and can exert an influence upon the final choice made. As an example, having access to familiar foods can help to lessen the impact of culture shock. For Chinese students, having easy access to familiar food outlets and cultural communities may help to enhance the overseas experience and result in positive word of mouth (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). It follows then that where students must undertake a complicated, time consuming and / or onerous journey to engage with a local Chinese community that negative WOM could be a likely outcome. This would in turn make a university’s proposition less compelling to those students yet to make their decision.

2.14.7 Employment opportunities while studying

The decision of Chinese students and their families to study abroad is a significant financial

undertaking and one for which a return on investment is sought. The ability to attain employment whilst studying is a useful method of reducing overall costs. It enables students to develop new transferrable skills through gained work experience and enhances future employability (Tomlinson, 2017). A range of factors related to employability including visa conditions, university – industry connections and the potential to undertake industry projects as part of their degree programme are considered. The availability of internships also makes a contribution to destination choice (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

2.14.8 Course availability and duration

It is important to applicants that the available courses are closely aligned with their academic interests. Chinese students tend to be drawn towards disciplines that are related to high-growth sectors such as Artificial Intelligence, Fintech, Supply Chain and Creative Industries. Li & Bray (2007) posit that foundation degrees and other routes are considered valuable due to the perception that these carry a lower element of risk. Whilst course duration may not be considered of primary importance, it does have a direct impact upon the perceived cost.

2.14.9 Course cost and cost of living

The total cost of study abroad which consists of the course fees, living expenses and the opportunity cost (prospective students could for example enter the domestic workforce directly instead of undertaking further study) is highly relevant and relates to the family budget and expected returns (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Chinese families are typically budget conscious and consider overseas opportunities for study against those available domestically. Price transparency is therefore important, and unwelcome surprises erode trust

amongst students and their families.

2.15 The role of Gender in the Decision making of Chinese International Students

There exists some evidence that gender plays a part in the decision making process. Some authors (Li & Bray, 2007; Bodycott, 2009) suggest that different factors are more or less important when choosing a university and that these reflect broader societal expectations and individual motivations that differ between male and female students. One such factor relates to the differences in their career aspirations and perceptions of employability. A broad range of disciplines such as business, social sciences, and humanities are undertaken by female Chinese students (Wu & Hammond, 2011). While it is true that some female students also opt for STEM subjects when selecting a university, they are more likely to consider factors such as work-life balance and career flexibility (Shen et al., 2016). Some studies such as those undertaken by Yan and Berliner (2013) suggest that female Chinese students are more likely to consider universities with strong international student support systems, as they may perceive greater challenges in adapting to a foreign environment. Zhang (2019) argues that unlike their male counterparts, female Chinese students prefer courses that are perceived as providing long terms security and align with personal interests.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argue that male students often prioritize universities with strong reputations in STEM fields due to a perception of higher earning potential. Moreover, Yang et al (2018) posit that male Chinese students are more likely to enrol at institutions with strong reputations for traditional male roles such as computer science or engineering. Male Chinese international students are generally more willing to take risks by applying to highly competitive institutions, even if the acceptance rates are low (Huang & Turner, 2018). When

examining the differences in decision making between female and male Chinese students, it appears apparent that the decisions made, largely reflect the gender norms within China (Zhang, 2020).

2.15.1 Parental Influence and Family Expectations

Parental influence plays a crucial role in the university choices of Chinese international students, but its impact varies by gender. Male students often face stronger pressure to attend universities that align with family expectations of career success and financial stability (Fong, 2011). Parents may encourage sons to pursue degrees that promise high salaries, reinforcing traditional gender roles where men are expected to be primary breadwinners (Liu & Morgan, 2016). For female students, parental concerns may revolve more around safety and social reputation (Yang, 2020). Some studies indicate that parents of daughters are more likely to prefer universities in countries perceived as safer and more welcoming to international students, such as Canada or Australia, over those with more competitive but less accommodating environments (Collins, 2013). Additionally, female students may receive more advice on choosing universities with strong alumni networks that could facilitate future career opportunities in both domestic and international markets (Li & Yang, 2015).

2.15.2 Societal Expectations and Gender Norms

Societal expectations in China significantly shape the university choices of male and female students. Traditional Confucian values emphasize distinct gender roles, with men expected to pursue outward success and women encouraged to prioritize stability and social harmony (Hofstede, 1986). These norms influence how students perceive their academic and career trajectories.

Male students may feel compelled to select universities that enhance their social status, often preferring institutions with global rankings and strong industry connections (Zheng, 2014). In contrast, female students may place greater emphasis on personal development and cultural experiences, choosing universities that offer diverse extracurricular opportunities and inclusive campus environments (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). This divergence reflects broader societal trends where women increasingly seek autonomy in their education while navigating traditional expectations.

2.15.3 Financial Considerations and Scholarship Opportunities

Financial factors also influence decision-making differently across genders. While both male and female students consider tuition costs and scholarship availability, female students may be more proactive in seeking financial aid (Liu, 2018). Some research suggests that female Chinese international students are more likely to apply for scholarships and grants, possibly due to perceptions that they need additional support in male-dominated academic environments (Xu, 2021). Male students, meanwhile, may prioritize universities with strong industry partnerships that offer internships and job placements, viewing these as long-term financial investments (Mok & Chan, 2012). This difference highlights how financial decision-making is intertwined with career expectations and societal gender roles.

2.16 Reputation / Organisational character

Reputation can be difficult to define. A positive corporate reputation can be considered a highly valuable asset (Caruana et al., 2006) which provides a tangible, competitive advantage within the marketplace. Reputation is the result of a complex combination of interdependent antecedents, meaning that one resource can be leveraged by the presence of other resources to

generate “causal ambiguity, rareness, and intangibility”, (Boyd, Bergh and Ketchen, 2010; p. 603). Where organisations can achieve a good reputation, this provides a number of benefits as they relate to the acquisition and retention of customers. Moreover, Che-Ha et al., (2016) suggest that a strong reputation helps in the development of a competitive advantage within the marketplace. Lange et al (2011) found that reputation is built upon three dimensions;

- ‘Being Known’ generally is perhaps the most fundamental dimension as the prospective customer needs to have an initial awareness of the organisation prior to forming any conclusions relating to its suitability
- Being ‘Known for Something’ relates to the prospective customer being able to consider the quality of the product / service delivery against the specific objectives that they (the customer) hold (Rindova et al., 2005). It is important to understand that during this phase of consideration, the prospective customer will consider past performance (where this data is available) as a predictor of future performance (Dimov et al., 2007)
- Affinity is based around the prospective customer’s overall perception of the organisation. This perception can to some extent be considered the combined output of dimensions one and two as well as the level of affinity (or lack thereof) that the target audience has of the organisation. The level of affinity being the sum of a range of elements including perceptions of trust and the impact of word of mouth. This dimension is defined as ‘Generalized Favourability’ (Lange et al., 2011).

One of the factors taken into consideration by prospective international students is that of the reputation of the institution(s) being considered. A key element of reputation is the organisation’s ‘character’ and this can be considered as the collective personality of different individuals within an organization that can be experienced by interested parties, a persona if you will. This organisational ‘persona’ becomes the differentiator between organizations and

can be developed into an important source of differentiated competitive advantage (Resnick, 2003). This view is shared by Yu (2018) who goes on to suggest that as organic entities, organizations are similar to humans, having a unique organizational character which constitutes a source of competitive differentiation. Considering the educational context, it is further stated by Schlesinger et al (2006) that institutional reputation is a key determinant of student satisfaction and loyalty.

Trying to define organisational character can be problematic as there is some disagreement around precisely what it is and as such it has largely remained a broad idea. Moore (2015) for example suggests that it goes beyond the personality of individuals employed within an organisation and that it also includes additional elements such as the organizational strategy, culture, product / service positioning, employee personality, and other external facets of the business. Exploring organisational character takes on a different approach from the perspective of Otto (2006) who posits that the character of an organisation should not be considered as one would an individual's personality but instead that as far as organisational performance goes. The character should align with and reflect the expectations of key stakeholder groups such as customers, employees and shareholders. This is however also problematic as different stakeholder groups have different and often competing objectives.

Brown & Perry (1994) found that a myriad of research exists suggesting that there is a correlation between reputation and the organisation's commercial performance. This being the case, it could be argued that reputation management is highly important to higher education institutions and especially so where they are operating within an increasingly competitive environment. Deephouse (2000) agrees, stating that having a good reputation can

lead to many tangible benefits for the organisation, such as reducing cost. Moreover, Veloutsou & Mountinho (2009) posit that when considering the value of a good reputation within a higher education context, reputation is one of the key contributors to the perceived quality of education provided.

Proximity to a subject plays a key role in establishing the level of familiarity an individual has with a subject, such as a specific organization (Finch et al., 2015). If we accept this perspective, then it could be argued that it behoves HE institutions to develop and execute robust strategies aimed at enhancing their reputation amongst prospective international students. This is because they are unlikely to have the same proximity to or level of familiarity with the university brand as home country students would have. Where prospective students have direct experience with a higher education institution as is the case with domestic students through open days for example, their enduring perception of the organisation (whether positive or negative) is firmly based upon their personal experience of the organisation at various touch points. Conversely however, where students are at low proximity to the institution (have had extremely limited direct exposure), there is a greater reliance upon other elements. These elements include perceptions of trust of one university relative to a competing institution (Barone et al., 1996).

As reputation of higher education institutions specifically relates to international students, it is only after having arrived in the country and engaged with the university that the level of familiarity with the brand and learning environments improves (Kettle, 2011). This can be problematic however because by this time, the student has already enrolled within a higher education institution and an incorrect choice can be difficult and costly to remedy.

2.16.1 University Rankings and Reputational Impact

There are well over 160 higher education institutions in the UK currently and as such, prospective international students have more options related to where, what, and how to study than at any time in the past (HESA, 2022). Moreover, there exists an abundance of free online publications, providing helpful guidance with regards to university choice that prospective students can access. Reputation has long been a key feature of higher education, with images of quality and prestige being pivotal for the production of 'distinction' among institutions (Bourdieu 1984). Academic reputation is a primary consideration for Chinese students when selecting a university. Global rankings such as the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education significantly influence their decisions (Marginson, 2022). Prestigious institutions such as Harvard and Oxford are highly sought after due to their perceived academic excellence (Liu & Li, 2021).

When measuring one university against another, rankings have become the de facto metric in shaping consumer perception of the quality of education provided. Hazelkorn (2011) described university rankings as having "...become an all – pervasive feature of higher education landscapes. Delgado et al (2012) argue that the two primary functions of universities that contribute to the overall position within the ranking are teaching and research. As discussed earlier, a strong reputation, built carefully over time can be a powerful source of competitive advantage for higher education institutions, but it can also be disrupted by the metrics being used to measure performance. The internationalisation of higher education has contributed to the emergence of global university rankings (Stolz et al. 2010). A strong international reputation takes time and effort to cultivate and the metrics being used

such as arbitrary markers (top 10, 30, 100 etc) contribute to the organisational reputation in ways that can be problematic.

The power of ranking – essentially the position in which a higher education institution sits within the rankings relative to others nearby, helps to shape the perception of the institution in the mind of the prospective international student (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This is especially so in the case of international students who are situated at a low proximity to the institutions being considered. Being at a low proximity often results in prospective students seeking advice and guidance from a selection of credible (and not so) media sources (Kotler & Keller, 2016). An example of this occurs with the Times Higher Education University Rankings where it is unsurprising that higher education institutions that occupy the upper positions experience significantly greater demand for student places than their lower ranked counterparts. This raises an obvious question; How does a prospective international student determine which, out of a choice of many higher education institutions is ‘best’ having had extremely limited opportunities to experience the institution first hand?

With regards to reputation (one of the key elements affecting student decision making), it is widely considered that to some extent, a university’s position within the rankings provides some evidence of its academic quality. Further, Morrish and Lee (2011) suggest that it is widely believed by prospective students and their parents that a degree obtained from a university with a higher ranked position is more valuable in the jobs market, and that holding such a degree provides a tangible advantage over those holding degrees from lesser ranked universities when applying for jobs following graduation. This perception is routinely reinforced by a variety of online market labour reports that are easily accessed by prospective

students. Movements up or down in the ranking as well as in and out of arbitrary markers of top 10, 30, 50 as discussed earlier, shape the wider perception of an institution.

Performance within metrics used for rankings is bound up with institutional aspirations (Collins & Park, 2016). It aligns with earlier research by Sauder and Espeland (2008) who find that university rankings have a significant impact upon the decision making of prospective international students, more so amongst those wishing to enrol onto postgraduate programmes. Not all authors agree however, with some taking a different position. Vivader – Cohen (2007) argue that university rankings are inappropriate for use as a performance measure due to the ability of third parties to influence the measurement. Whilst this appears a valid perspective, it remains the case that a significant number of prospective students rely, to a lesser or greater extent upon these third parties for information in their decision making. It is clear that Chinese students prioritize universities that enhance their career opportunities. Yang et al (2020) argue that institutions with strong industry connections, internship programs, and high graduate employment rates are preferred.

2.16.2 Dimensions of organisational reputation

It is suggested by Kennedy (1977) that the reputation of an organisation is made up of two components that the customer associates with the organisation – these being ‘functional’ and ‘emotional’. The functional component is related to tangible attributes that can be readily measured so one could easily wrap metrics around this component. On the other hand, the emotional component is associated with psychological dimensions that are manifested by feelings and attitudes toward an organization. Attempting to develop metrics around this element presents some difficulties as it is largely associated with the consumer’s attitudes and

feelings towards an organisation which develop through the processing of information from various sources (ibid).

It has been argued that a university's wider reputation can only be as good as that which exists among its employees (Suomi et al. 2014). Other authors tend to agree with Morokane et al., (2016) finding that higher education institutions should focus as much upon the internal reputation which is present amongst academics that they employ as they do the external reputation. The reason for this being that their academics play a vital role in building and maintaining the external reputation of the institution not only on campus but also through their external interactions with the general public, thus amplifying the outward organisational persona. Alessandri et al. (2006) defined university reputation as being the "collective representations that the university's various internal and external constituents, including the media – hold of the university over time". Sontaite and Bakanauskas (2011) considering the stakeholder perspective, defined university reputation as "a personal and collective recognition, perception, attitude and evaluation of higher education institutions among all key stakeholder groups (internal and external) during a specific period, that is based on their past behaviour, communication and potential to satisfy expectations in comparison with the competition". It is further suggested by Su et al., (2016) that the strongest consumer-organisation relationships develop where the customer clearly identifies with the organisation and moreover where that organisation fulfils one or more of the customer's self – defined needs. It follows therefore that the greater the number of customer needs that are fulfilled, the stronger and more enduring the relational bond becomes.

2.17 The use of Intermediaries by UK Universities

Intermediaries can be a lucrative route to market for organisations aiming to attract overseas customers. Traditionally, a key method utilised by UK universities to boost international student numbers has been through the use of international student recruitment agents based within the home countries of targeted student groups. Education agents act as intermediaries between institutions and students, providing guidance on course selection, application preparation, visa processing, and pre-departure arrangements (Bohm et al., 2018). In recent times these agents have become a dominant force, particularly in major sending countries such as China (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Essentially, agencies utilise their knowledge of the global education market to be a source of advice related to key questions related (but not limited) to;

- Course selection and availability
- Enrolment requirements amongst a range of courses
- Visa eligibility requirements for different countries
- University rankings
- Student outcome data
- Fees and the availability of bursaries / scholarships
- Provision of support in submitting course and VISA applications

The value that prospective students place upon education agents varies. Whilst many will undertake their own independent research into universities and courses, Chinese students still tend to have agents assist them with navigating the university and visa application process (HEPI, 2020). What this does, is provide some insights into the way in which students use agent services. International student recruitment agencies give prospective students access to guidance related to their chosen career and deliver a range of services. It appears apparent

that they fulfil an important role that is in some respects an interface between the prospective student and the educational institution itself.

2.17.1 The Strategic Value of Education Agents

The strategic value of agents lies in their local market knowledge, linguistic competence, and established networks with educational institutions within China. They are also well regarded by students' families, and government agencies (Huang & Turner, 2018). Essentially, international student recruitment agencies operate independently of higher education institutions but in partnership with them on a commercial basis whereby they are remunerated on a 'per – student – enrolled' basis. In short – the greater the number of students enrolled, the greater the level of revenues are received by the agent. Intermediaries bridge the gap between prospective international students and overseas universities. In doing so, they have become an important route to market, providing a gateway to prospective students in regions that for a variety of reasons are hard to reach (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012).

Traditionally the use of education agents has meant that many UK universities have forgone some of the marketing activities within China that they would otherwise have undertaken. The use of overseas agents has meant that many UK higher education institutions have failed to capitalise upon the overseas market intelligence and experiential learning that they otherwise would have attained had they taken a more direct role in recruiting Chinese students. This has in part lead to many UK higher education institutions becoming overly reliant upon educational agencies working with Chinese students to stimulate demand for student places.

There have been concerns raised about the relationships that UK universities have with education agents with some organisations calling for the implementation of an agent quality framework to ensure that ethical standards in the recruitment of international students is preserved (IHE commission, 2024). As fewer Chinese students are now coming to the UK, it has to some extent become a ‘race to the bottom’ where UK higher education institutions, finding that they are struggling to recruit Chinese international students at anywhere near pre – COVID levels have found themselves having to pay increasing commissions per student in an environment where those universities that offer the highest commissions, receive a larger share of student applications. Within the current UK higher education sector, it could be argued that this approach is no longer sustainable.

2.18 Conclusion

This literature review reveals that for Chinese international students, the selection of host country and university is complex and multifaceted. It is driven by a complex interplay of academic aspirations and social influences. These are combined with contextual perceptions of safety, prestige, opportunity and cost. Contemporary literature confirms that push and pull factors associated with the UK underpin the mobility decision of international students. Competition for places within China’s prestigious domestic universities remains intense and this forms one of the drivers for studying abroad.

Whilst the UK higher education sector is currently experiencing significant challenges, the UK remains one of the most sought after destinations for Chinese students, due largely to its enduring global reputation for academic excellence, English-language instruction, shorter course durations, and perceived post-study employability.

Prestige is a significant factor, however this is only one determinant of choice. Other considerations such as word of mouth, perception of safety, cost, and employment opportunities exert equal or greater importance in shaping final decisions. One consistent theme that has emerged from the literature and aligns to the findings within this research is the importance of interpersonal trust and relational networks. Chinese students rely upon their social circles, alumni, and education agents for guidance. This is reflective of their collectivist orientation which places great weight upon the recommendations of trusted intermediaries over and above institutional marketing messaging.

Despite the maturity of this research field, notable gaps remain. The decision-making process continues to evolve in an environment of increasing digitalisation, social media influence, geopolitical influences and post-pandemic perceptions of safety and global mobility. From a wholistic standpoint, the themes explored here form a coherent foundation for the study's overarching research questions, the intention of which is to better understand the determinants of Chinese international students' choice of overseas host country and educational institution. Cultural factors, perceptions of academic reputation and institutional prestige, economic considerations, post-study work opportunities, and the influence of key influencers such as family, friends, alumni and agents interact in complex ways to shape decision-making. By synthesising these themes, the literature establishes clear conceptual links to the research questions. This provides focus for the direction of the study and underscores the need for an evidence-based model capable of informing both theory and practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

The primary purpose of this chapter is to thoroughly discuss the methodological strategy applicable to the research that has been undertaken. The method used in carrying out the research is discussed, the research paradigm presented, the research method and research strategies along with the rationale and justification for the chosen approach are also provided. In so doing, an ongoing narrative is seen, commencing with an exploration of the considerations that shaped the philosophical position of the research. This is explored with a detailed reflection and discussion of how this philosophy informs the research approach. Following this, the conceptual framework is introduced, along with an account of its development and how previous literature in this area has informed the research methodology.

3.2 Aims of the chapter

Building upon the insights drawn from the reviewed literature, the study now develops an empirical examination of the factors influencing Chinese international students' choice of host country and university. Whilst existing research has led to the development of a broad understanding of push-pull dynamics, perceived institutional reputation, and the role of social and cultural influences as they relate to student choice, a gap exists in that there is a need for context-specific study that captures the nuanced priorities of Chinese students within the UK higher education market. This chapter discusses the research design, methodological approach, and data collection procedures utilised to investigate these decision-making factors in greater depth. It explains the philosophical underpinnings that have guided the research, details the sampling strategy and instrument development.

One of the fundamental questions that researchers grapple with is that of how best to address their research questions. There exists a variety of research approaches and it is of the utmost importance that researchers select the most appropriate method to best meet their objectives (Bryman, 2016). The design of an appropriate research framework is key to the development of robust research output that can stand up to scrutiny. One consideration relates to what data may already be available (Silverman, 2020). Ontological and Epistemological considerations are highly important in research methodology design, and this chapter explores and discusses how ontological and epistemological positions have contributed to the specific methodological strategies executed. There is a reflection upon how these have influenced the methodological decisions which have evolved over time, throughout the journey. Towards the end of this chapter, there is a discussion of the decisions relating to the collection of data which includes an exploration of different data analysis approaches. Justification for the chosen approach is provided and a detailed explanation of the data analysis strategy which was developed for the study completes the chapter.

In short, the purpose of this chapter is to clearly describe and provide appropriate justification for the methodological approach that has been used to collect, analyse and interpret the data pertaining to the research, whilst also demonstrating an understanding of, and appreciation for alternative approaches. The tools and techniques utilised both for research and analysis will also be introduced and discussed. As with the research approach, justification for the utilisation of said techniques will also be provided. The relevant paradigms and related research methods are considered, and the cycles of research undertaken during the study are described. Ethical considerations are also explained, carefully considered, and appropriately addressed.

3.3 The Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research is to attain a deep understanding of the phenomenon that was observed as it relates to the significant shift in demand amongst Chinese Students to undertake study at higher education institutions outside of their home country, specifically within the UK. The significant downturn observed in the number of Chinese students enrolled on Business Programmes within Birmingham City Business School following a prolonged period of year – on - year growth, fuelled the imperative to understand the reasons behind the change in consumer behaviour. Moreover, identify and examine the key antecedents of host country and university selection are seen as key, leading to the generation of new knowledge which will have implications for academics and management. It is, armed with this new knowledge that this research aims to support the sustainability of UK university programmes post – COVID and post – BREXIT.

3.4 The Current UK higher education Environment

The UK higher education sector is facing an extremely challenging time currently with many universities having to reconsider and in some cases, making cuts to the number of courses offered. As a result, academics have in some universities been made redundant, with others placed ‘at risk’ of redundancy. This is largely due to reduced incomes from international students amidst a backdrop of increased costs that are not covered by domestic student fees which have remained frozen for many years. Such is the level of concern about the future of UK universities that the OfS (2024) has warned of the potential for some universities to become no longer viable, leading to closures – something that has never before been seen in the UK.

Improved levels of sustainability within Birmingham City Business School, at a time of uncertainty across the sector has the potential to provide the school with a competitive advantage in the marketplace. It is envisaged that greater levels of sustainability can be achieved through the development of strategic marketing recommendations, the implementation of which will have the potential to result in a renewed interest amongst this student group, thus providing the impetus for increased demand.

3.5 Research Aim

This overarching research aim is to understand the determinants of Chinese international student decision making and explore the factors underlying reduced demand at UK universities, whilst generating evidence – based insights that contribute to theoretical frameworks and the development of sustainable marketing strategies. It is envisaged that this research will support the future sustainability of the higher education sector.

3.6 Research Philosophy

Here, the philosophical approach related to this study is presented.

3.6.1 Introduction to research philosophy

Since the dawn of time, humans have sought to develop an understanding of, and to make sense of the natural world around us. In days gone by, ideas proposed by early civilizations were often not founded in logic or reason but in notions which gave rise to beliefs based upon superstition. These were accompanied by behaviours that we would eschew today. It is no surprise therefore that many of these beliefs have since been challenged, subsequently debunked and are at odds with contemporary thought. Differing perspectives on the nature of the universe saw early philosophers bringing some order to the way in which the nature of the

world was considered. Over time, logical statements, argument and reasoning replaced unfounded beliefs and thus philosophy, based upon science and scientific thinking was born. This begs the question “What is science?”. Science can be defined as “a system for organizing the knowledge about a particular subject, especially one concerned with aspects of human behaviour or society” (Oxford Dictionary, 2025). Whilst in the past logic and reasoning led to higher level thought, it failed to bring about one single unified view of nature and the world. As a result, different philosophical positions gave rise to differing paradigms associated with the social sciences (Kuhn, 1970). The Oxford Dictionary defines Social Science as the study of human society and social relationships. Social Science research methods include both Positivist and Interpretivist approaches. The positivist approach tends to be associated with Quantitative research design (for example statistical analysis) whereas the Interpretivist approach focuses upon attitudes and beliefs whilst aiming to attain deeper meaning. Quantitative and Qualitative research, whilst quite different in their approach are not mutually exclusive and it is not uncommon to find social science researchers using both as part of a Mixed – Method methodological research approach.

Each research methodology brings with it a unique set of advantages and disadvantages, and as such there exists no single perfect methodological approach. In other words, no single research methodology is suitable for applying to all scientific research (Schulze, 2003).

Selecting the most appropriate research methodology should be determined by the paradigm that guides the research activity. To be more precise, Creswell (2003) states that researchers should address five key questions related to their research;

- What is knowledge (ontology)?
- How we know it (epistemology)?

- What values go into it (axiology)?
- How do we write about it (rhetoric)?
- What will be the process for studying it (methodology)?

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and the assumptions that we make about said reality (Saunders et al., 2009), whereas epistemology on the other hand is related to the assumptions made by researchers about knowledge in a field of study. It aims to answer questions such as what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge should be disseminated (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The table below highlights the key methods of considering research philosophies: ontology and epistemology;

Beliefs of alternative enquiry paradigms Paradigm „World view“	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Positivism	<i>Naïve realism:</i> Reality is real and apprehensible	<i>Dualist/Objectivist:</i> Findings true	<i>Experimental/manipulative:</i> Verification of hypotheses: chiefly quantitative methods

<p>Realism (Perry, Reige & Brown) or Postpositivism (Guba & Lincoln)</p>	<p><i>Critical realism:</i> Reality is real but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible and so triangulation from many sources is required to try to know it</p>	<p><i>Modified dualist /objectivist:</i> Critical tradition/ community. Findings probably true</p>	<p><i>Case studies /convergent interviewing:</i> Triangulation, interpretation of research issues by qualitative and quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling. Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses</p>
<p>Critical Theory</p>	<p><i>Historical realism:</i> Virtual reality shaped by social, economic, ethnic, political, cultural, and gender values, crystalised over time</p>	<p><i>Subjectivist:</i> Value mediated findings</p>	<p><i>Dialogic/dialectical</i> Researcher is a transformative intellectual who changes the social world within which participants live</p>
<p>Constructivism</p>	<p><i>Critical relativism:</i> Multiple local and specific constructed realities</p>	<p><i>Subjectivist:</i> Created findings</p>	<p><i>Hermeneutical/ dialectical:</i> Researcher is a passionate</p>

			participant within the world being investigated.
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Table 3. Beliefs associated with alternative research paradigms. Adapted from Perry, Reige and Brown (1999, p. 17)

Unsurprisingly, different research philosophies are commonly associated with different research methods. Tuli (2010) discusses broad epistemological positions with the two major research methodologies being qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative being rooted in the interpretive paradigm whereas quantitative research is closely tied to the positivist paradigm. This said, it is no surprise that ongoing debates related to ontology and epistemology are common amongst researchers with many authors suggesting that these debates are simply reflective of the choices made between two research philosophies, those being positivist or interpretivist research philosophy. Saunders et al (2009, p128) adopt the position that “Objectivism is the ontological position which holds that social entities exist in reality independent of social actors whereas the subjectivist view is that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors”. It could be suggested then, based upon this interpretation, that the objectivist and subjectivist perspectives are mutually exclusive and cannot be reconciled.

Positivism, it is argued is a logical, rational and highly organized approach that combines deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity (Newman and Kreuger (2003). From this type of research, Tuli (2010) would suggest that statistical prediction and multivariate analysis techniques are commonly evidenced. If we

contrast this with the qualitative paradigm however, the interpretivist views the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems (Maxwell, 2012). This paradigm is highly useful when trying to understand the reasons behind a particular phenomenon (Farzanfar, 2005) as interpretive researchers adopt qualitative research methods to investigate, explain, and describe social reality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013). The interpretivist researcher on the other hand, views themselves as part of that being researched and places a strong emphasis on better understanding of the world through first-hand experience (Merriam, 1998). The positivist researcher regards themselves as being separate from that being researched (Healy and Perry, 2000) and may argue that their participation in said research has no influence whatsoever upon the results.

Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches typically;	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed methods
Use these philosophical assumptions	Postpositivist knowledge claims	Constructivist/advocacy/ participatory knowledge claims	Pragmatic knowledge claims
Employ these strategies of inquiry	Surveys and experiments	Phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, and narrative	Sequential, concurrent, and transformative

Employ these methods	Closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches, numeric data	Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text or image data	Both open and closed ended questions, both emerging and predetermined approaches, and both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis
Use these practices of research	<p>Tests or verifies theories or explanations</p> <p>Identifies variables to study</p> <p>Relates variables in questions or hypotheses</p> <p>Uses standards of validity and reliability</p> <p>Observes and measures information numerically</p> <p>Uses unbiased approaches</p> <p>Employs statistical procedures</p>	<p>Positions him/herself</p> <p>Collects participant meanings</p> <p>Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon</p> <p>Brings personal values to the study</p> <p>Studies the context or setting of the participants</p> <p>Validates the accuracy of findings</p> <p>Makes interpretations of the data</p>	<p>Collects both quantitative and qualitative data</p> <p>Develops a rationale for mixing</p> <p>Integrates the data at different stages of inquiry</p> <p>Presents visual pictures of the procedures in the study</p> <p>Employs the practices of both qualitative and quantitative research</p>

		Creates an agenda for change or reform	
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Table 4. Key paradigms associated with different research methods (Creswell, 2003, p. 19)

3.6.2 Different philosophical paradigms and principles

A paradigm is a set of assumptions about how the world is ordered. Kuhn (1977) refers to a research paradigm as “a research culture with a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research”. In the same way that there are many different human perspectives on any given matter with none necessarily being superior or inferior to another, no single superior research paradigm for business research exists. Today, two prominent philosophical paradigms can be seen to dominate business research. These are the objective and subjective paradigms which are quite dissimilar in their outlook;

Objectivism is an epistemological stance whereby researchers take the view that reality exists independently of human consciousness and that we engage with reality via the senses. In other words, reality can be touched, smelt, tasted, seen, and heard. This perspective tends to focus upon observable ‘facts’ which are experienced in an unbiased manner by researchers. The premise here being that a single truth exists independently of the subject being observed. The objectivist’s thinking aligns with authors such as Ayn Rand (1905 – 1982) amongst

others. Conversely, the subjective epistemological stance in contrast, starts out with the premise that there is no one, single truth.

Subjective researchers take the view that "our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience" (Richardson et al, 1983). As individuals experience reality differently, it follows that one person's 'truth' can differ from that of another. It is argued that as individuals, we view the world through our own subjective lenses such as the cultural lens with authors such as Schutz (1967) suggesting that our subjective lenses are often taken for granted and as such our own lens becomes invisible to us. Subjectivists tend to focus upon the interpretation of meaning rather than objective 'facts' and their thinking aligns with authors such as the economist and sociologist, Ludwig Van Mises (1881 – 1973).

3.6.3 Paradigms specific to business research

It is argued by Mkansi and Acheampong (2012) that an element of the difficulty encountered by contemporary researchers lies within the incoherent classification of research philosophies such as epistemology, ontology, axiology and doxology which can lead to confusion. "A number of studies (Saunders et al., 2009; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1989) have used different descriptions, categorisations and classifications of research paradigms and philosophies in relation to research methods with overlapping emphasis and meanings" (ibid). It could be argued that this complexity and ambiguity can lead to some difficulties for researchers in developing and clearly articulating their research approach. This having been said, having a set of assumptions that have been carefully considered and that are consistent can support a credible research philosophy. In so doing, it

may provide the underpinning for the chosen methodological approach (Saunders et al., 2015).

According to Quinlan (2011), the methodology used in research must support the research being undertaken, underpin the accomplishment of the aim of the research and facilitate the successful completion of the research. Moreover, it was suggested by O’Leary, (2017) that a researcher who (for example) is investigating cross – cultural communication should not simply default to a choice of an ethnomethodology, even though this may be the obvious choice. Instead, they should diligently explore and carefully consider alternative research philosophies within the context of their study and only having done this, adopt the methodological approach that is determined to be most appropriate based upon the unique context of the study. According to Saunders et al, (2016), research philosophy is comprised of the beliefs and assumptions whereby researchers develop the knowledge within their chosen area of investigating phenomena. O’Leary, (2017) highlighted three assumptions that are associated with research philosophy. They are:

- 1) **Axiological Assumptions-** These assumptions are one’s own values that will influence the research process
- 2) **Ontological Assumptions-** This is the study of what exists. These will be the realities that will be encountered during the research. Our personal ontological position will inform what we think exists and what we deem to be real
- 3) **Epistemological Assumptions-** These assumptions are about how we come to have legitimate knowledge of the world.

Moreover, O’Leary, (2017) also identifies five major research philosophies that a researcher can adopt;

- Positivism
- Critical realism
- Interpretivism
- Postmodernism
- Pragmatism

3.6.4 Philosophical assumptions for the study

Saunders (2015) states that having a set of assumptions that have been carefully considered and that are consistent will constitute a credible research philosophy and provide the underpinning for the chosen methodological approach. A research paradigm is “...the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn, 1962). The philosophical position is informed by assumptions and beliefs pertaining to the nature of reality and development of new knowledge.

Asvoll, (2014) states that researchers “attempts to derive their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of exposure to the phenomenon of interest”. The Constructivist paradigm asserts that people construct their own understanding and knowledge experientially through a process of experience and reflection (Honebein, 1996). According to Constructivists, the world is independent of human minds, but knowledge of the world is always a human and social construction (Crotty, 1998). Asvol, (2014) states that “The interpretive researcher attempts to derive his/her constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of exposure to the phenomenon of interest”. Originally, it was envisaged that

this research would be based largely upon the perceptions, lived experiences, feelings (Saunders, 2016) and interpretation of reality of students, and that this would influence upon their outward behaviour however, this turned out not to be the case.

Within the constructivist / interpretive paradigm exist different branches of thought. Radical Constructivists may for example posit that everything that we as humans perceive is part of an illusion and therefore not real. More widely accepted forms of constructivist thinking link with teaching pedagogy in that it is suggested that teaching (as is the view within problem based pedagogical approach) is not carried out by the teacher. In other words, knowledge is not transferred from the teacher to the student as a passive recipient. Rather, the teacher facilitates the development of knowledge by the student themselves. This is perhaps best summarised by Xunzi (340 – 245BC) who reputedly said, “Not hearing is not as good as hearing, hearing is not as good as seeing, seeing is not as good as knowing, knowing is not as good as acting; true learning continues until it is put into action.” (Purdue University, 2022).

Appropriate reflexive practices are intended to bring awareness to oneself as a participant in the research (Ortlipp et al, 2008). Although it would be useful for researchers to reflect upon the potential for their involvement to have an impact upon the research, this is not always easy to accomplish because of the difficulties with inward reflection and examining one’s own habitus (Bishop et al, 2011). A reflective log had been maintained throughout the study and reflection upon philosophical assumptions pertaining to ontology, epistemology and axiology was undertaken. It was originally expected that the aims of this research could not be achieved through an approach that was concerned primarily with the gathering and analysis of quantitative data. The phenomena being observed appeared too complex for that

hence it followed that the development of a deeper understanding would likely have required a focus upon a more naturalistic approach. Axiologically, it had been accepted that it would not have been possible to isolate that being researched from the researcher and therefore it was acknowledged that to some extent, the research would be subjective (Saunders et al, 2009).

A research instrument was designed and data collected for qualitative analysis as part of a pilot study and whilst it was considered to have yielded some useful insights, it was concluded that a qualitative approach would not fully address the research questions. Thus, it was determined that a significant rethink of the methodological approach, starting with the philosophical position would need to be undertaken.

3.6.5 Reimagining Research Philosophy: The journey towards Positivism

As mentioned earlier, the positivist philosophy is based upon the assumption that generalisable, verifiable knowledge can be attained from empirical observations rather than by subjective interpretation (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). It posits that social phenomena that can be observed objectively can then be measured systematically and finally explained through cause-and-effect relationships. The key differences between positivist and the interpretivist epistemologies and their related ontologies can be seen below;

Ontology (How the nature of reality works in the world)	Epistemology (How researchers study the objects of knowledge)
<p>Objectivism: The social entities are independent of social actors.</p>	<p>Positivism:</p>

	To gather credible data, the researcher relies on observable social reality and quantifiable observations that leads to analysis.
<p>Subjectivism:</p> <p>Individuals attach to social phenomena</p>	<p>Interpretivism:</p> <p>The researchers consider humans as social actors.</p> <p>The researcher is concerned with feelings and attitudes.</p>

Table 5. Ontological and Epistemological perspectives (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.6.6 The Origins of Positivism

Auguste Comte argued that in developing knowledge, speculation should be eschewed and instead, knowledge should be based upon clear, observable phenomena. Moreover, it was argued that research within the social sciences should exploit observations, experiments and measurement in the same way as studies carried out within the natural sciences. This philosophical stance assumes that reality exists independently of human perception (objectivist ontology) and that researchers can access this reality through systematic observation (empiricist epistemology). Positivist studies typically consist of one or more observations, the development of hypotheses, testing of said hypotheses and the identification of universal laws governing human behaviour (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers aligned to the positivist epistemology analyse data using statistical approaches thus ensuring that their work is reflective of measurable realities, free from potential misinterpretation due to personal biases (Smith & Noble, 2014).

3.6.7 Positivism and Quantitative Research Design

Within contemporary research, Positivism is most readily associated with statistical analysis methods. This is most suited to testing hypotheses, identifying patterns within datasets and measuring the relationships amongst different variables. Rather than using an inductive approach to the development of new knowledge, quantitative methods are bound to the use of deductive logic. Within the quantitative framework, hypotheses are developed and subsequently tested (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) using statistical analysis methods. This facilitates the drawing of meaningful conclusions which are then used to determine whether empirical evidence supports or refutes the hypotheses.

The research instruments used by positivist researchers include surveys and experiments as they support the aim of producing testable, reliable and replicable results. Standardised methods of statistical validation, and numerical measurement support generalisability of results and it is this which enables positivist researchers to produce quantifiable evidence of trends, correlations, and causal mechanisms (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.6.8 Applicability of positivism to this study

The positivist paradigm is highly appropriate for a study of the decision-making process of Chinese international students in that the literature reveals that student choice is influenced by measurable factors, including university reputation, course quality, tuition fees, safety, employment opportunities, and the recommendations of peers or agents (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Bodycott, 2009). Moreover, the variables lend themselves readily to statistical testing and based upon this, I concluded that the positivist paradigm, utilising a quantitative approach with statistical analysis of datasets to be most appropriate. Having operationalised

the identified factors into measurable constructs, it was possible to examine the relative influence on students' choices of host country and institution. One example of this can be seen with Li & Bray's (2007) theoretical framework push / pull model that distinguishes between the 'push' factors motivating students to study abroad (e.g., competition in China's domestic higher education system) and 'pull' factors such as the prestige of UK universities drawing them to study abroad. In this study, constructs were translated into Likert-scale survey items, enabling me to test hypotheses related to the strength and direction of relationships between each factor and the overall decision of in which host country to study.

3.6.9 Limitations inherent to the positivist Paradigm

It is apparent that the positivist paradigm offers clear advantages, when undertaking this study. That having been said, no research approach is perfect, and the quantitative approach used for this study has some limitations. As the captured data produced numerical results, whilst it was possible to determine *what* was happening, it was not always clear 'why' certain behaviours were being observed. Bryman and Bell (2016) argue that human behaviour is constructed through context and interaction and therefore cannot be understood through detached observation alone. In the case of Chinese students, deep Confucian cultural motivations such as family expectations, identity and notions of 'face' are not necessarily easily measured using numerical data.

3.6.10 The Positivist Paradigm justified

Quantitative research was most appropriate for this study as it allowed the drawing of statistically robust conclusions about which factors are most significant in shaping the decisions of Chinese students. Regression analysis as an example, led to insights related to

which of the identified factors exerts a stronger influence than others during the decision making process. The resulting data has then been used to inform evidence-based recommendations for sustainable marketing strategies, policy design, and international recruitment practices. As the research used a representative sample the results can be considered generalisable which may be particularly useful for UK higher education marketers and policymakers who require statistically reliable data to inform resource allocation and strategic planning.

Unlike qualitative approaches that may have utilised a questionnaire and analysed the data using thematic analysis resulting in deriving subjective meaning from the data, the quantitative method that was used provided numerical evidence, enabling the confirmation or refutation of hypotheses. This type of analysis was also useful to (for example) identify whether safety concerns of prospective students are more significant amongst a particular gender or age group. The capacity to track changes such as this over time through future research cycles underscores the impact of positivist research in identifying emerging patterns in a shifting international education landscape.

Everything having been said above, it appears clear that for this study, the positivist paradigm, with quantitative research approach was the most appropriate for achieving the stated research aims. Its strength lay in its ability to provide empirical evidence that is replicable and actionable. Moreover, this approach provided a gateway to insights which can inform university marketing strategies, policy design, and future research on international student mobility.

3.7 Introduction to Research methodology

Here, research methodology is discussed in the broader sense along with the research methods that were applied to this work. Methodology refers to how information is made and is firmly identified with epistemology, which is the philosophical hypothesis of learning (Creswell, 2007). Numerous researchers develop new strategies to solve real world issues, and there exists a myriad of work which specifically explains research methods such as case-based problem solving or combining cases with other knowledge (Roy, 2010).

Determining the most appropriate research method is highly important and as such a good place to start would be to understand what research and a 'research method' are. Research is defined by Ghauri & Gronhaug (2010) as comprising systematic data collection and interpretation of data, being based on logical relationships rather than beliefs. Research design refers to the type of approach used (Hair et al, 2012) which suggests that research is a planned activity that is sophisticated in its approach to the research question, that the data collection is systematic and that the way in which the data is analysed and interpreted is key to meeting the research aims.

Adams (2014) defines a research method as being the way in which research is undertaken. It encompasses the philosophy and approach behind all research. Moreover, Quinlan (2011) argues that the selected methodology needs to be appropriate so that it supports the completion of the research and its purpose. A natural question that flows from the above is – How do we define 'purpose'? Purpose, suggests Bryman & Bell (2015) can be defined as answering a question, solving a problem or making a discovery of some sort. The variety of research methodologies commonly in use to draw inferences from various sources of business

information can be broadly categorized as either quantitative or qualitative (Viswanathan, 2005). Researchers do not have perfect knowledge of problems being researched and applying imperfect knowledge when attempting to make logical, rational decisions related to the choice of research method can be problematic. Davis et al (2013) suggest that situational factors may influence this important decision. It therefore follows that the mere act of selecting an appropriate methodological approach can itself be a challenging endeavour that requires careful thought.

3.7.1 The Main Research Strategies for Business Research

When planning research within a chosen area of interest, there are decisions needed to be made concerning which research strategy to apply. These include descriptive, analytical, applied, action, fundamental, critical and interpretive (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2017). The strategy selected should support the research and aid in the selection of the most appropriate data collection and analysis methods (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). In business research, two commonly applied research strategies are Qualitative and Quantitative approaches. Silverman (2001) suggests that these are the two most recognised research strategies. For this work, quantitative, explanatory research was the chosen strategy. The deductive research approach consists of six sequential steps (Blaikie, 2010) with researchers starting by proffering a hypothesis which is subsequently tested and proven to be true or false. Creswell (2012) agrees, suggesting that with the deductive approach, hypotheses are developed from existing literature and subsequently tested. Induction, Saunders (2016) suggests, aims to develop new theory from a set of premises. This is in contrast with the deductive approach as with induction, researchers do not start with a hypothesis which is subsequently tested. Rather, within the inductive approach a set of premises is combined and a rational conclusion formed. For example;

Observation - “The wind chime in my garden is making a sound”

Pattern – “Wind chimes only make sounds during windy weather”

Tentative hypothesis / Theory – “As my wind chime is making a sound and wind chimes only produce sounds during windy weather, it follows therefore that it must be windy outside”

The abductive approach seeks to combine deductive and inductive approaches in order to counter limitations inherent to each of these approaches. (Saunders, M., et al., 2012).

Abductive research starts with the observation of unusual phenomena which it subsequently seeks to clarify (Kovacs, G. and Spens, K. 2005). “With the process of abduction, we begin with an occurrence or event, usually one that is unexpected or does not conform to current theories; and we then take an imaginative leap to think of some theory or explanation, which might account for the event. This is neither an induction or a deduction but is instead an explanatory or exploratory hypothesis as to why the phenomenon being observed might have occurred.” (Mingers, 2012).

Having in place a well-considered research strategy improves the quality of research (Kothari, 2004) and the methodology can be defined as a blueprint for how the research should be undertaken, considering the ontological and epistemological principles (Sarantakos, 2012). There are three primary research strategies commonly associated with the social sciences. According to Creswell (2003) these are Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed methods.

Table 6 below illustrates the differences between approaches;

Research Strategy	Characteristics
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimental designs • Non – experimental designs (for example surveys)
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives • Phenomenologies • Ethnographies • Grounded theory • Case studies
Mixed Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequential • Concurrent • Transformative

Table 6: Characteristics associated with different research strategies (Adapted from Creswell, 2003, p.13).

3.8 The research study design

Within this part of the work, the research study design is explored, highlighting challenges and assumptions made as well as the approach subsequently deemed most appropriate.

3.8.1 Pilot Study 1

A research pilot study is essentially a low – risk trial run of the proposed main study. It is designed to test the proposed research instrument and is invaluable in being able to identify potential issues prior to undertaking the main study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). These studies also aid researchers in further developing and refining the methodological framework and allow them to test the research instrument for appropriateness. One of the ways in which a pilot study tests the research instrument is by shining a spotlight on methodological weaknesses

so that modifications can be made where indicated. In taking this approach, the main study is afforded some protection. The data collected and knowledge attained from the pilot may also strengthen the case for the main study taking place and they can also inform the research strategy for future research.

The initial pilot for this study included testing the participant recruitment strategy, the data collection tool and the overall data collection and analysis approach. This was undertaken to minimise the risks associated with developing an instrument that is not fit for purpose. When the pilot was initially undertaken, the objectives associated with it were to.

- Test appropriateness of the proposed sampling criteria of staff and student participants
- Test the interviews and questionnaires to identify and / or validate current issues and / or themes within the literature as well as to identify any new or emerging themes
- Test the overall feasibility of the chosen approach
- To inform the main research strategy

It was envisaged that the pilot would result in one of the following conclusions;

- The proposed research approach is deemed suitable in its current form
- The proposed research approach is deemed suitable with minor modifications
- The proposed research approach is deemed suitable with significant adjustments
- The proposed research approach is deemed unsuitable

Initially, it was envisaged that this study would be undertaken using a qualitative approach. Originally the aims were not to develop and subsequently test hypotheses (deductive approach)

and the intent was to apply the induction as initially this appeared to be most appropriate based upon the observable phenomena. This approach starts with the observation of unusual phenomena which it subsequently seeks to clarify (Kovacs and Spens, 2005). Research interviews are a very useful tool in the gathering of valid and reliable data as well as an aid in refining research questions (Saunders et al, 2016).

The original plan involved using an evaluative approach, semi – structured interviews were deemed to be highly appropriate to the research strategy. It was envisaged that this would initially have comprised of a small sample of alumni interviews to gather data pertaining to the perceptions prior to study in the UK as well as their lived experience during their period of study. The proposed data collection tool was to be a combination of semi – structured interviews as well as online questionnaires. Semi structured interviews are useful in exploring and / or validating themes and this can be seen where a questionnaire consists of both semi structured questions which seek to uncover thoughts, feelings and experiences and those containing pre – coded responses (Tashakkori, Johnson & Teddlie, 2018). Whilst there were clear advantages to this approach, there were some issues that could potentially surface. These included reliability / dependability and bias (interviewer / interviewee / participation).

3.8.2 Sampling

Data for the pilot was gathered from three sources as this would lead to rich and meaningful data from three different perspectives;

- BCU Business School Teaching Staff
- Current Chinese International Students within the Business School
- Chinese International Programme Alumni

Purposive sampling was considered the most appropriate to the research and is essentially a method of non – probability sampling. In other words, it is an approach where participants are selected for their suitability, based upon the best judgement of researchers (Black, 2010).

3.8.3 Student Sample

Chinese international Students self-selected and participants were either from amongst an alumni group who had graduated within the past three years, or students currently enrolled upon the MSc Management Programme within Birmingham City Business School. There were four participants (2 x current students and 2 x alumni). Of these, three students were female and one male.

3.8.4 Staff Sample

As with both student samples, for the staff sample, non – probability, purposive sampling was the approach used. Colleagues who were teaching Chinese students on the MSc Management Programme within Birmingham City Business School self-selected.

3.8.5 Online Questionnaires

An online questionnaire was deployed to gather meaningful data from two groups of student groups; existing students and alumni who had graduated from Birmingham City University within the last three years. There were several reasons for this approach;

- To obtain the perspectives of both students who had past experience as a student within the university and to compare that to responses of students who were part – way through their studies
- In order to quickly gather three types of data variable (Dillman, 2014)

Collecting data face to face held the potential to result in some participants feeling pressure to participate due to the power relationship that exists between students and teaching staff. This represented something of a risk and therefore student participation was by email invitation with the appropriate participation information and consent forms being issued. The questions used the Likert scale to facilitate analysis of the data, and the questionnaire was distributed via Bristol Online Surveys (BOS). The questions asked were adapted from Cross and Hitchcock (2007).

Whilst online questionnaires are an excellent data collection tool, they too like other data collection methods are imperfect as they rely upon the respondents providing honest, open answers. With the questionnaire having been deployed online, there was the potential for some of the limitations of surveys to be amplified as there was no way to determine whether respondents answered truthfully, were able to recall their motivations for decisions previously made, or if any respondents intended to negatively impact the research through inaccurate responses. This had the potential to be particularly problematic however as no questions related to sensitive matters such as those containing medical, lifestyle or financial questions (Podsakoff et al., 2003) it was felt that this risk was largely mitigated. As the Voluntary Response Sampling method was deployed, it could have been argued that the results were less generalisable due to common traits amongst the respondents. It is also true that some individuals are generally less inclined to respond to surveys than others, resulting in under representation of some groups that can lead to biased findings (Groves et al., 2009).

Appropriate questionnaire design was of critical importance and that the correct balance between the number and type of questions asked and the need for collecting meaningful data

needed to be struck. Porter, et al (2004) argue that questionnaires which take a long time to complete can result in ‘survey fatigue’ where respondents stop providing honest answers, may disengage altogether or provide inaccurate responses. To reduce the potential for survey fatigue, the survey was designed to enable completion by most respondents, within 10 minutes.

3.8.6 Semi Structured Interviews

Semi – structured, face to face interviews took place, each with a duration of approximately 30 minutes. There were three participants from the staff sample (2 x male and 1 x female) with varying levels of teaching experience. Interviews took place at BCU City Centre campus, and the questions were distributed 5 days beforehand to enable participants to appropriately prepare – thus improving validity. Participants were free to discuss any topics which flowed from the questioning and the interviews were digitally captured prior to being transcribed.

3.8.7 Ethical Considerations

To minimise the risk to participants, the research undertaken adhered strictly to Birmingham City University’s guidelines. Ethical approval was obtained prior to any research being carried out.

3.8.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis methods for student and staff groups were not identical. The reason for this is that different data collection methods were used and therefore it would not have been appropriate to attempt to analyse them using the same approach. This is further discussed below.

3.8.9 Student Respondent Data

Student questionnaires for both groups were designed to obtain scale data. Apart from a small set of questions providing demographic data, Likert Scales were used to capture data. Chi Square Test was used to determine whether relationships existed between sets of themes and frequency analysis was also undertaken. The data suggested the following key points.

Student Group	Theme	What the data suggests
Alumni	Expectations prior to arrival	Not sure of what to expect prior to arrival Somewhat concerned about what to expect
	UK / Home Differences	Did not miss China once here in the UK
	Student interaction	Would have liked to meet / interact with non – Chinese students more
	Study and assessment	Found study in the UK easier than in China and preferred the UK method however found assessment – and in particular understanding what lecturers wanted of them, more difficult
Current students	Expectations prior to arrival	Not concerned about what to expect and their expectations proved to be correct

	UK / Home Differences	These students found that they missed their life in China once here in the UK
	Student interaction	These students do not appear to want to experience greater levels of interaction with non – Chinese students
	Study and assessment	Found study in the UK easier than in China and preferred the UK method however found assessment – and in particular understanding what lecturers wanted of them, more difficult

Table 7: Summary of pilot data (student groups)

Whilst the questionnaires were only undertaken by a very small sample for the pilot study it tended to suggest that the experience of current students was somewhat different to that of alumni. There may have been several reasons for this including that the perceptions of the experience in the UK do not remain static throughout their time studying here. This is one of several elements that would be explored further and explained within the main study.

3.8.10 Staff Respondent Data

A set of common themes was developed. Questions had been broken down into 8 topic areas, broadly covering perceptions and experiences of teaching Chinese International students within BCU Business School. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed as editable documents and imported into Nvivo 11 where coding at sentence and paragraph level was undertaken. This method of analysing qualitative data is robust whilst at the same time having a degree of flexibility for researchers (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following data collection, a frequency

distribution table was generated. The analysis suggested that in terms of this student group, teaching staff tend to hold the following perceptions;

Perception	Possible reasons
Listen but not ask questions in class	Experience of teaching this group
Students have difficulty with critical thinking	In – class experience as well as assessment experience
Could do with greater levels of English language support	Experience when marking student submissions and when speaking with students face to face
Not engaged / using mobile phones in class	Experience in - class
Getting help to overcome culture shock may be useful	Experience in – class and anecdotal evidence from colleagues

Table 8: Summary of key staff perceptions & associated reasons

3.8.11 Conclusions drawn from the 1st Pilot Study

The initial pilot study demonstrated that the overall research design, sampling approach, and data-collection procedures were not wholly appropriate for the aims of the thesis. It highlighted several areas requiring refinement prior to the main study and to this end was a success. The sampling strategy generated insights from Chinese international students, recent alumni, and teaching staff. Notable differences between current students and alumni were exposed. For example, alumni divulged feelings of uncertainty before arriving in the UK, holding limited

expectations of UK study, and of looking forward to intercultural interactions with their British peers. Current students on the other hand were more confident prior to arrival, less keen on intercultural engagement, and more likely to exhibit symptoms of culture - shock. There were some similarities between groups. Both reported that studying in the UK was easier than in China, albeit that assessment requirements, compounded by not always understanding the expectations of lecturers was something of a challenge. These responses suggest that perceptions of UK study are dynamic and do not remain static across the student lifecycle.

Semi structured interviews with staff also yielded useful insights with some recurring themes emerging. They mentioned the tendency for Chinese students to listen rather than ask questions in class, some difficulties with critical thinking, varying levels of English language proficiency in class, overuse of mobile phones use and cultural issues. The use of NVivo coding demonstrated that the data-analysis procedures were appropriate. All this having been said, the pilot did not appropriately address the research questions, and the findings provided a clear rationale for an alternative approach. To this end, it was concluded that a research strategy, utilising the deductive method may be more appropriate. This was subsequently developed and tested via a 2nd pilot study.

3.8.12 Pilot Two Design

Here, the development of the 2nd pilot study is explored. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggest that pilot studies serve as a "dress rehearsal" for the main study, allowing researchers to evaluate whether the chosen methods are appropriate and effective. The pilot study was designed to test the proposed new research instrument so that any issues with the approach could be identified. This would enable refinement of the instrument as necessary prior to launch

of the main study. Research tools should always be tested to safeguard against inadvertently compromising the validity of a study (De Vaus, 2013).

3.8.12.1 Surveys and supporting data reliability

When using surveys, data reliability is supported because all participants are required to answer the same questions, presented to them in a consistent manner. This is particularly appropriate where quantitative research is being undertaken and where researchers, as per this study, plans to undertake statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships that exist. Doing this makes it possible for the sample to be considered representative and the results, generalisable (Nikolopolou, 2023).

Another reason for survey use was that it was possible to allow respondents to participate either in English or in Mandarin (all respondents were Chinese). Confusing terms and / or being asked questions in an unfamiliar language can affect the validity of the data collected. As such, by deploying the survey using both English and Mandarin languages, respondents could participate using whichever language they felt most proficient in. This was undertaken to enhance the quality of responses as it would minimise the possibility of participants misinterpreting the questions posed. The mandarin translation was validated via a Chinese expert bilingual reviewer because linguistic accuracy is a core methodological issue (Dörnyei, 2007).

Undertaking a second pilot study prior to distributing the questionnaire for the main study supported the validity and reliability as proceeding without testing could have meant that an inappropriate research instrument was selected and deployed. Kim (2011), recommends

undertaking pilot studies, suggesting that they “enhance the transparency and replicability of research findings”. It is important to have a clear indication of the likely response and completion rates prior to launching a questionnaire as part of the main data collection. For this study, the pilot revealed no issues related to the questionnaire, the sample size or composition. Moreover, no logistical challenges or ethical concerns surfaced. Cronbach’s Alpha statistical technique was used to assess internal consistency and validity with the alpha calculated for each construct. Thresholds of ≥ 0.70 were considered acceptable, with values ≥ 0.80 considered good.

3.8.12.2 The Research Instrument

The methodological approach subsequently considered to be most appropriate was that of a quantitative survey design, capturing perceptions from Chinese international students who had either previously studied outside of their home country, or were considering doing so. The use of a survey would enable the systematic collection of comparable data across multiple constructs, allowing for the application of statistical techniques including reliability testing, descriptive analysis, chi-square, and regression modelling. Deploying a survey would facilitate the swift collection of data from an appropriate number of respondents within the finite timeframe available for the study. In building the questionnaire, a set of questions were developed, drawing upon previous literature in this area where key factors related to the decision making of Chinese international students had been identified. The questionnaire was designed to produce nominal and scale data from which quantitative analysis could be undertaken. The QuestionPro platform was used with links distributed through online social media networks. Validity was addressed through content validation during the pilot testing to refine the instrument. Recognised statistical techniques were then employed to assess the

validity of the constructs that had been developed. This approach ensured that the findings were both methodologically robust and generalisable to comparable populations.

3.8.12.3 Type of Sampling used for the Pilot

For this pilot study, Non-Probability Sampling was employed, specifically the Voluntary Response Sampling method. This sampling method is widely used in social science research where the objective is to obtain meaningful insight into a particular phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2019). As this research specifically examines Chinese international students and their overseas study decision-making processes, the sample needed to be comprised of individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon being studied. One alternative could have been the random sampling method; however this was deemed unsuitable as participants who lack the relevant experience may well have taken part. Only respondents who met the specific criteria required for the research, were invited to participate.

Prospective respondents self – selected, giving them agency to decide whether to participate, rather than simply selecting them for the study. Voluntary Response Sampling has the potential to reach a large group of respondents and whilst it is acknowledged that this could introduce bias, this sampling approach brought with it a host of benefits which included ease of data collection, the ability to target a specific group of individuals, attracting participants who were more willing to participate and attracting those who were interested in the research and would make a conscious decision to participate. The survey instrument consisted of items distributed across multiple constructs and subscales. Constructs were developed based on prior literature, with adaptation for cultural context. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The major constructs comprised of;

- Perceptions of Safety
- University Reputation and Academic Quality
- Employability and Career Prospects
- Role of Alumni and Word-of-Mouth Influence
- Use of Education Agents and Digital Platforms
- Perceptions of Value for Money

The intention of this pilot, as per the earlier study was to determine whether the research instrument was appropriate. The intention was not to create generalisable findings but to assess the suitability of the questionnaire items. Essentially it was designed to test initial reliability and validity as this would uncover issues prior to the launch of the main study. A sample of 28 responses was used however sample adequacy in a pilot should be judged merely by its function – that being to test the research instrument (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.8.12.4 Research Constructs used for the Pilot

A research construct is essentially an idea based upon observations. As they are ideas, concepts or themes, it is not always possible to measure them directly (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000) and therefore it is common to see researchers testing hypotheses to better understand them. Whilst research constructs have been developed for this quantitative research, they can also be used within qualitative approaches. Within this research, the constructs have been developed to further develop hypotheses associated with the study and to best make use of the variables. In this study, the constructs have been transformed using SPSS into measurable variables and doing so has enabled me to specify how each construct was identified (Babbie, 2020) in preparation for more in - depth analysis. The hypotheses were further built upon the grouping of interrelated constructs. This was undertaken to explain the observed phenomena, thus enabling them to be tested empirically (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

It is important to understand that whilst constructs are an idea or theme, the variables that they contain are measurable components. Trochim et al (2020) suggests that constructs may consist of several different variables, each of which can be measured. For this study, a set of 12 constructs was developed, each of which was comprised of several variables which have been derived from earlier literature on this subject. As a result, a set of testable hypotheses have been developed and the inferential statistics method used (described later) have enabled me to draw meaningful conclusions. For this study, the developed constructs were transformed using SPSS into measurable variables and doing so enabled me to specify how each construct was identified in preparation for more in - depth analysis. The set consisted of 12 constructs, each of which was made up of several variables, derived from earlier literature on this subject.

Within the conceptual framework, twelve research themes have been developed and relate to the set of four research constructs which were derived from the literature review. These are;

- **Word of mouth** – related to: Agents / Alumni / Family & Friends
- **Quality** related to: Perception of safety / Proximity to facilities / Employment opportunities
- **Reputation** related to: University Marketing / Ranking / Prior Awareness
- **Cost** related to: Course Duration / Course Fees / Cost of Living

In developing the questionnaire, previous research in this area was drawn upon where key factors related to the decision making of Chinese international students had been identified. The questionnaire was designed to produce nominal and scale data from which quantitative analysis could be undertaken. Authors including Leon, Davis, & Kraemer (2011) argue that pilot studies enable researchers to make certain decisions regarding the study and to develop

an idea of the likely response rate. This facilitates understanding what the target sample size needs to be, considering the potential attrition level. For this study, the pilot revealed no issues related to the questionnaire, the sample size or composition. Moreover, no logistical challenges or ethical concerns surfaced.

3.8.12.5 The research methodology applied to this study

The selected research approach is derived from the deductive method. The deductive approach enables researchers to test the accuracy of their hypothetical assumptions (Hair, 2005). For this study, a set of variables (informed by a review of relevant literature) was developed. Following data collection, statistical tools were utilised to analyse the data, thus highlighting the statistical significance of the identified variables via regression and correlation (Privitera, 2013). The methodological approach was that of a quantitative survey design, capturing perceptions from Chinese international students who had either previously studied outside of their home country, or were considering doing so. The use of a survey enabled the systematic collection of comparable data across multiple constructs, allowing for the application of statistical techniques including reliability testing, descriptive analysis, chi-square, and regression modelling. Deploying a survey facilitated the swift collection of data from an appropriate number of respondents within the finite timeframe available for the study. The QuestionPro platform was used with links distributed through online social media networks.

Due to the nature of questions being asked and to comply with ethical standards as they relate to safeguarding the personal data and anonymity of respondents, the survey was deployed online so that no face-to-face contact took place with the respondents. Dillman, et al (2014) posit that online surveys enhance the quality of responses and promote honesty and openness.

This may be especially true where sensitive questions are asked, thus it follows that using surveys help in reducing social desirability bias (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007).

A survey was used for several reasons including speed, preservation of participant anonymity and that it facilitated the simultaneous study of multiple variables (Collis and Hussey 2013).

Undertaking primary data collection using an online survey was considered the most appropriate as it enabled me to engage with respondents from across the world. As the survey was completed online and with the option of viewing the questions in English or Mandarin, this reduced the opportunity for misinterpretation of questions and ensured that the questions were posed in a consistent manner. Moreover, this aided in minimising the risk of bias (Brinkmann, 2014). This having been said, using an online questionnaire meant that it was not possible to provide participants with an opportunity to elaborate further on answers provided or to receive clarification on any points of uncertainty (Palinkas et al 2015).

Whilst surveys are a valuable research tool, they are subject to several limitations. An obvious constraint of surveys is that participants may not have been completely honest, creating lower validity (Wright, 2005). Bearing this in mind, the questions were designed to allow respondents to express their perception without being influenced by others as a focus group or face-to-face surveys might have done. Face-to-face surveys would have allowed more connection however this would have led to significant logistical challenges. Online surveys on the other hand have an enhanced ability to reach a larger population and is more accessible (Szolnoki & Hoffman, 2013). There was a risk of reduced validity if participants did not fully understand the study however this did not eventuate. With the larger sample size focussed upon a wider range of Chinese participants, and by targeting through online media, the response rate was deemed

sufficient. According to Fisher, (2010) the intention of collecting data is to test the hypotheses as well as answering the main question of the research.

3.9 Pilot Testing Conclusions & Recommendations

The pilot testing was successful in that it identified issues that were present in the original research instrument and confirmed the applicability of the new design. In short, the pilot was considered an essential aspect of the research in that it provided confidence that the new research instrument was appropriate for the study. Thabane et al., (2010) state that pilot studies aid in uncovering difficulties with “data collection tools or unanticipated ethical dilemmas involving participant consent or confidentiality”. For this study, it was determined that the most appropriate data collection method was that of survey as this method can be effective for the collection of data for quantitative research. Moreover, deploying a survey would facilitate the collection of data from an appropriate number of respondents within the finite timeframe available for the study. Creswell, (2018) suggests that strengths of surveys include the ability to rapidly collect large quantities of data and surveys are also widely used by researchers across a range of disciplines including social sciences.

When researchers seek to uncover shortcomings within the research instrument prior to the main study, this enables them to make modifications prior to the launch of the main data collection, thus resulting in trouble – free implementation. This builds credibility and demonstrates due diligence through the application of rigour in the methodological process.

The recommendations that developed from the pilot studies were as follows;

- Whilst the perspectives of teaching staff provided some interesting insights, they did not contribute directly to answering the research questions and therefore should be excluded from the main study
- To address the research questions, statistical analysis should be undertaken and a quantitative tool developed with an appropriate data analysis strategy
- Student and Alumni questionnaires yielded good quality data however, the questionnaires required redesign for closer alignment to the research questions

The new combination of research elements for the study can be viewed below;

Philosophy	Positivist
Approach	Deductive
Strategies	Survey
Choices	Mono method: Quantitative
Time horizons	Cross - sectional
Techniques and procedures	Online Questionnaire, Regression Analysis

Table 9: Combination of research approaches adopted for main study

Determining the most appropriate research method can be a difficult task due to the complexity involved. Following the initial pilot test it quickly became apparent that a 2nd pilot study would have to be undertaken. Whilst this was time consuming it was considered that this would bring about the optimal result whilst protecting the main study. Baker (1994) states that “A pilot study can be the pre-testing or ‘trying out’ of a particular research instrument”.

3.9.1 Ethical Considerations of the Main Study

As with the pilot testing, careful attention was given to ethical principles ensuring that the activity complied wholly with Birmingham City University’s guidelines. Participation was

voluntary, with consent obtained from participants prior to them commencing. The nature of the research was made clear, as was their right to withdraw from the study at any time. As the questionnaire was deployed online with no personally identifying data collected, this ensured anonymity and confidentiality. The nature of the questionnaire and the way in which it was deployed safeguarded participants from the power dynamics that often exist between students and academic staff.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Preliminary Findings

In this chapter, collected data is analysed and interpreted. It presents and interprets the data gathered from a sample of 215 Chinese students who have either studied at a university outside of their home country or are planning to do so (Appendix H). Using descriptive data analysis, various characteristics of respondents are identified to provide validity and to support the research aims.

4.1 The Research Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of a range of items distributed across multiple constructs and subscales. Constructs were developed based on prior literature, with adaptation for cultural context. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The key constructs comprised of;

- Perceptions of Safety
- University Reputation and Academic Quality
- Employability and Career Prospects
- Role of Alumni and Word-of-Mouth Influence

- Use of Education Agents and Digital Platforms
- Perceptions of Value for Money

4.1.1 Statistical Analysis

The analysis was undertaken in four stages;

1. **Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct. Thresholds of ≥ 0.70 were considered acceptable, with values ≥ 0.80 considered good.
2. **Descriptive Statistics:** Means and standard deviations provided an overview of central tendencies.
3. **Chi-Square Tests:** Applied to examine associations between categorical variables (e.g., gender vs. perception of safety).
4. **Regression Analysis:** Conducted to explore predictors of overall perceptions. Independent variables included safety perceptions, employability, reputation, and alumni influence.

4.1.2 Type and size of Sampling used for the Study

For this study, Non-Probability Sampling, specifically the Voluntary Response Sampling method was employed. This enabled prospective respondents to self – select, giving them agency to decide whether to participate, rather than simply selecting them for the study.

Voluntary Response Sampling also has potential to reach a large group of respondents and whilst it is acknowledged that this can introduce bias, this sampling approach brings with it a host of benefits which include ease of data collection, the ability to target a specific group of individuals, attracting respondents who are more willing to participate and attracting those who are interested in the research and have made a conscious decision to contribute.

Determining the appropriate sample size can be a complex matter as there is no universally agreed method for doing so. The actual number required is largely dependent upon the type of research being undertaken and the analysis methods being used. As a rule of thumb, sample sizes of 150 – 200 are generally considered sufficient for most multivariate analyses in social science research. Moreso when the number of variables being examined is limited (Hair et al., 2020). Tabachnick and Fidell (2019) suggest that the following formula be used to determine the appropriate sample size where regression is being used.

$$N \geq 50 + 8m$$

(where m = number of independent variables)

For this research (consisting of 12 main predictors):

$$50 + (12 \times 4) = 98$$

Based upon this calculation, the sample size comfortably exceeded the threshold.

4.2 Research Constructs Specific to this Study

The study is largely built upon a set of research constructs which came from earlier research focused upon the determinants of choice amongst Chinese international students. Table 10 highlights a total of twelve themes that were explored within the questionnaire, each with a set of associated Likert scale questions.

Questionnaire theme	Related Likert Questions
University Marketing Communications	Q111R1, Q136R6, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q153R3, Q154R4, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10
Ranking	Q112R2, Q137R7, Q157R7, Q158R8, Q159R9,
Prior Awareness	Q1110R10, Q1315R15, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10,
Alumni	Q113R3, Q138R8, Q1511R11, Q1512R12,
Agents	Q114R4, Q139R9, Q1513R13,
Family / Friends	Q115R5, Q1310R10, Q164R4,

Perception of Safety	Q117R7, Q1312R12, Q1516R16, Q1517R17,
Proximity to Facilities	Q116R6, Q118R8, Q1311R11, Q1313R13, Q1518R18,
Employment Opportunities	Q1112R12, Q1317R17, Q1519R19,
Course Duration	Q131R1, Q1521R21,
Course Fees	Q132R2, Q1520R20,
Cost of Living	Q119R9, Q132R2, Q1314R14, Q1520R20

Table 10: Questionnaire themes and associated likert scale questions

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

The primary objective of this part of the work is a focus on presenting the dataset, using both graphical and numerical methods. Below, each of the constructs for this study is described along with the associated likert scale survey questions.

4.3.1 Agents Word of Mouth Construct

This construct is made up of three likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the recommendations of education agencies.

Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university

Table 11: Agent Word of Mouth construct

4.3.2 Alumni Word of Mouth Construct

This construct is made up of four likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the recommendations of those students who have previously studied abroad.

Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make a decision
Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences

Table 12: Alumni Word of Mouth construct

4.3.3 Awareness Construct

This construct is made up of seven likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on having prior knowledge of a university before applying to study there.

Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there

Table 13: Awareness construct

4.3.4 Cost of Living Construct

This construct is made up of four likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the affordability of costs associated with their study.

Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study

Table 14: Cost of Living construct

4.3.5 Course Duration Construct

This construct is made up of two likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the duration of their chosen course.

Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months

Table 15: Course duration construct

4.3.6 Course Fees Construct

This construct is made up of two likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the affordability of course fees

Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study

Table 16: Course fees construct

4.3.7 Employment Construct

This construct is made up of three likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on being able to access employment whilst in the UK.

Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying

Table 17: Employment construct

4.3.8 Family / Friends WOM Construct

This construct is made up of three likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the recommendations of family and / or friends in the choice.

Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents

Table 18: Family & Friends WOM construct

4.3.9 Marketing Communications Construct

This construct is made up of nine likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the marketing communications activity undertaken by universities.

Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language
Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there

Table 19: Marketing communications construct

4.3.10 Facilities Construct

This construct is made up of five likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on having access to facilities close to or on campus.

Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course

Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities

Table 20: Facilities construct

4.3.11 Ranking Construct

This construct is made up of five likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on the ranking of universities when making their choice.

Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university

Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course

Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study

Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education

Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities

Table 21: Rankings construct

4.3.12 Safety Construct

This construct is made up of four likert scale questions related to the importance that each respondent places on their perception of safety when making their decision.

Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university

Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course

Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me

Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area

Table 22: Safety construct

4.4 Frequency Analysis

Frequency Analysis has been invaluable in reducing the complexity inherent to the dataset and has facilitated revealing the underlying patterns.

4.4.1 Age

Respondents were grouped into three age categories: 18–21 years, 22–25 years, and over 25 years with the results showing that **the majority of participants were over 25** years of age ($n = 127, 59.1\%$). 71 respondents (33.0%) fell within the 22–25 category and 17 participants (7.9%) were aged 18–21. The modal category was therefore “over 25,” which indicates that the sample was largely comprised of older participants. Based upon this uneven distribution, I concluded that the findings of the wider study were influenced quite strongly by the perspectives of respondents aged over 25.

The distribution of age amongst the respondents indicates a clear skew towards older participants, with **almost 60% of the sample being over 25 years of age**. It is important to note that the demographic imbalance seen here may have implications for the interpretation of findings, as it could be argued that the perspectives from younger age groups (particularly those aged 18–21) were underrepresented within the study. Some earlier research has demonstrated that age can influence attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes suggesting that the dominance of older respondents may shape the outcomes of the study in ways that do not fully capture the diversity of the target population (Field, 2018; Twenge & Campbell, 2019). That having been said, the regression analysis undertaken did provide some meaningful insights having taken this into account. Moreover, the substantial representation

of participants in the over-25 category offers valuable insights into the views of the more experienced group, especially as many Chinese international students looking to study overseas do so for postgraduate level study (thus they are likely to be older than other student groups). This enables generalisability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) from the collected data.

Q4 - How old are you

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 21	17	7.9	7.9	7.9
	22 to 25	71	33.0	33.0	40.9
	Over 25	127	59.1	59.1	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Table 23: Frequency Analysis: Age of Respondents

4.4.2 Course Choice

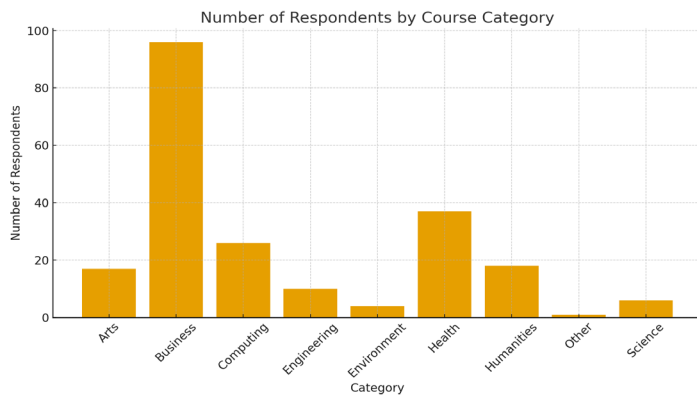
Q12, ‘Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?’ was used to capture data relating to choice of course. Overall, the participants reported a wide range of intended or current courses of study, including Arts, Business, Computing, Engineering, Health, Humanities, Sciences, and Technology. The most frequently selected subject area was **psychology (n = 20, 9.3%)**, followed by **business: marketing (n = 14, 6.5%)**, **business: finance (n = 10, 4.7%)**, **business: economics (n = 8, 3.7%)**, and **business: accounting (n = 8, 3.7%)**. Other

notable clusters included business management (n = 7, 3.3%), languages within the humanities (n = 5, 2.3%), and computing/IT courses (n = 8 across computer science and IT combined, 3.8%). In contrast, a very large number of courses (over 100 unique entries) were chosen by only one or two participants each. This highlights a fragmented distribution with a small number of courses attracting large proportions of respondents, and conversely, most programmes being represented by small numbers. For ease of analysis, courses were grouped into nine categories: Arts, Business, Computing, Engineering, Environment, Health, Humanities, Science, and Other. The distribution of respondents across these categories is shown below.

Category	Number of Respondents
Arts	17
Business	96
Computing	26
Engineering	10
Environment	4
Health	37
Humanities	18
Other	1
Science	6

Table 24: Frequency Analysis: Respondent distribution by course category

Bar Chart



Pie Chart

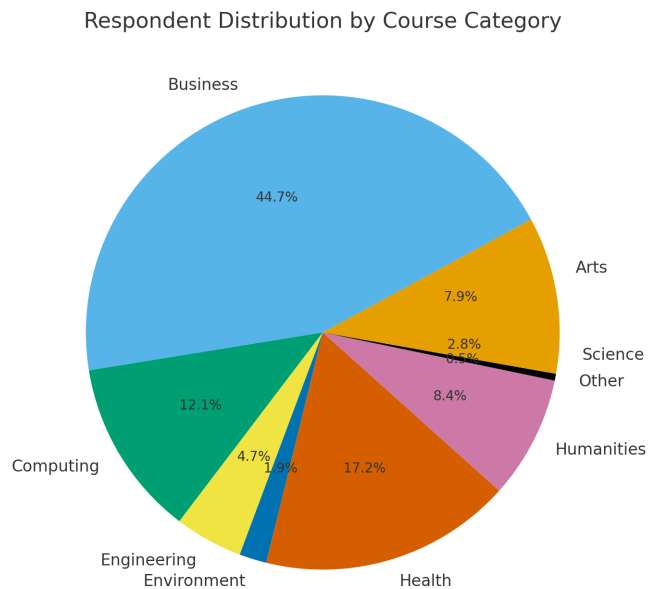


Figure 5: Illustrates respondent distribution by course category.

From the pie chart above, although students with a broad range of academic interests took part, a small number of disciplines dominated the sample, specifically **health and business-related subjects**. This concentration is consistent with international higher education trends, which highlight strong demand for psychology, management, and finance-related degrees

amongst students (British Council, 2018). Interestingly, HEPI (2025) reports that demand amongst Chinese students for Business – related degrees has been in steady decline in recent years with a corresponding increased demand for the arts, social sciences and humanities.

The significant representation of psychology (9.3%) was noteworthy. It could be argued that perspectives from students with interests in human behaviour and mental health would feature prominently in the overall dataset. Similarly, the large numbers related to business programmes suggests that managerial, financial, and marketing perspectives would also influence the results of the wider study. All things considered, the data point to high popularity of psychology and business disciplines within the sample. This aligns well with established enrolment trends in international education (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019).

4.4.3 Gender

The gender analysis was interesting. **The majority of respondents identified as female** (n = 132, 61.4%), while **male respondents accounted for just over a third of the sample** (n = 79, 36.7%). **A very small minority selected “other”** (n = 2, 0.9%) or “I prefer not to say” (n = 2, 0.9%). Overall, the sample was skewed towards female participants, with limited representation of other gender identities.

The gender profile of respondents demonstrated a strong female majority, which I concluded had important implications for the interpretation of the wider study. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) posit that gender can influence attitudes, preferences, and decision-making processes. This perspective is supported by Hyde et al (2019). On a practical level, the significantly

greater number of female respondents meant that the results could have disproportionately reflected female perspectives. This being the case, Crosstab analysis has also been used to better highlight the varied perspectives based upon gender.

Very few non - binary and those not wanting to disclose their gender participated in the study. This may have been simply due to low numbers of non - binary individuals within the general population or perhaps that many of these students simply decided not to participate. There may also have been cultural factors at play. In either case, this highlights the difficulties of inclusivity in survey-based research (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). Overall, their numbers are too small here to support subgroup analysis.

Despite the limitations outlined above, the respondents provide valuable insights into the perspectives of this student group. Moreover, where higher education institutions may wish to specifically target female students, the demographic skew observed within this study may be particularly useful.

Q3 - What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	79	36.7	36.7	36.7
	Female	132	61.4	61.4	98.1
	other	2	.9	.9	99.1
	I prefer not to say	2	.9	.9	100.0

Total	215	100.0	100.0
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Table 25: Frequency Analysis. Respondent distribution by gender.

4.4.4 Language Choice

The design of the survey was such that respondents could select either English or Chinese (simplified) versions. **Most respondents selected Chinese (Simplified)** (n = 140, 65.1%), while the remaining participants selected English (n = 75, 34.9%). This distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals that were most comfortable participating in simplified Chinese which was of note, especially as most students require IELTS scores of at least 6.0 (suggesting very good proficiency in English) in order to meet overseas university eligibility criteria. Those respondents selecting English represented just over one-third of the total sample.

The findings suggest a clear linguistic imbalance, with nearly two-thirds of participants selecting Chinese (Simplified) as their preferred language. This dominance suggested that the perspectives and experiences captured in the wider study were likely to be shaped strongly by those most at ease with undertaking the survey in Chinese. Previous research highlights that language background can influence educational experiences, identity, and integration processes (Duff, 2019; Norton, 2013). As such, the overrepresentation of students selecting Chinese (Simplified) could have meant that the findings were reflective of a narrower cultural-linguistic perspective than intended. That having been said, the smaller but significant representation of respondents selecting English (34.9%) meant that there was space for diversity of perspectives. Crosstabs were later used to determine whether or not the perspectives of both groups were aligned.

Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chinese (Simplified)	140	65.1	65.1	65.1
	English	75	34.9	34.9	34.9
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 26: Frequency Analysis. Respondent distribution by Language.

4.4.5 Country Selection

The responses were distributed across a wide range of destinations, however a small number of countries accounted for most choices. The **most popular destination was Canada** (n = 52, 24.2%), **followed by the United States** (n = 45, 20.9% plus 2 additional “USA” entries, 21.9% combined), then the United Kingdom (n = 38, 17.7%), and Australia (n = 24, 11.2%). Together, these **four English-speaking destinations accounted for almost 75% of all responses**. Other countries received far fewer selections, including Germany (n = 11, 5.1%), the Netherlands (n = 7, 3.3%), Japan (n = 6, 2.8%), and New Zealand (n = 6, 2.8%). A broad range of additional European, Asian, and Middle Eastern destinations were chosen by one or two students each, representing less than 1% of the sample per country.

What the findings clearly demonstrate is a strong preference for student mobility amongst this group, to a small number of English-speaking countries. This is consistent with global higher education trends (OECD, 2022; British Council, 2018). Canada, the UK, the USA, and Australia are the primary preferred destinations, likely due in part to their strong international reputations for high academic quality, English instruction and established international

student support systems (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). That these particular countries which geographically are quite distant feature so prominently, suggests that language accessibility and global rankings play a key role in shaping student decision-making.

With four English – Speaking countries comprising such a large percentage of student selection, it could be easy to overlook the preferences for enrolment at other host countries. The presence of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan suggests that there exists some demand amongst students to study at non-Anglophone locations. These countries are often associated with desirable elements such as strong reputations in specific fields, lower tuition fees and / or cultural opportunities (ICEF Monitor, 2021). All this having been said, it appears clear that minority destinations are less significant in shaping the overall host country patterns.

4.4.5 Overseas Study Preferences by Continent

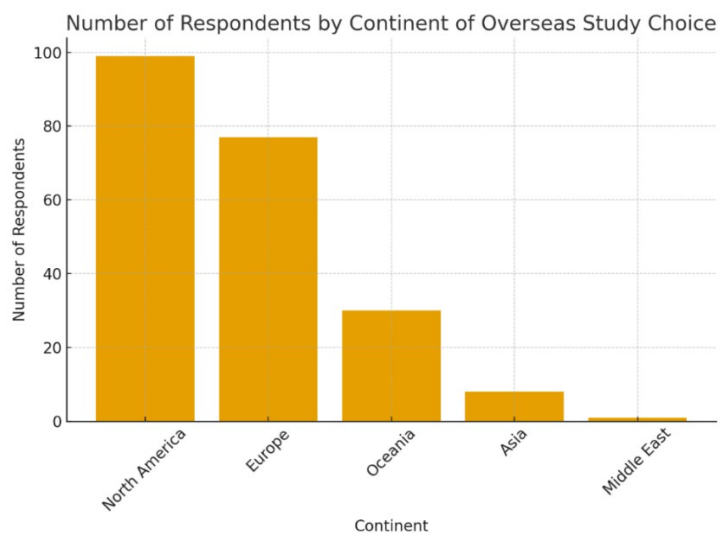
This analysis groups students’ preferred overseas study destinations by continent. The results indicate that North America is the leading choice (99 respondents), followed by Europe (77 respondents), Oceania (30 respondents), Asia (8 respondents), and the Middle East (1 respondent). The table and charts below provide a visual overview of these preferences;

Continent	Number of Respondents
North America	99

Europe	77
Oceania	30
Asia	8
Middle East	1

Table 27: Frequency Analysis. Respondent distribution by Continent

Bar Chart



Pie Chart

Distribution of Overseas Study Preferences by Continent

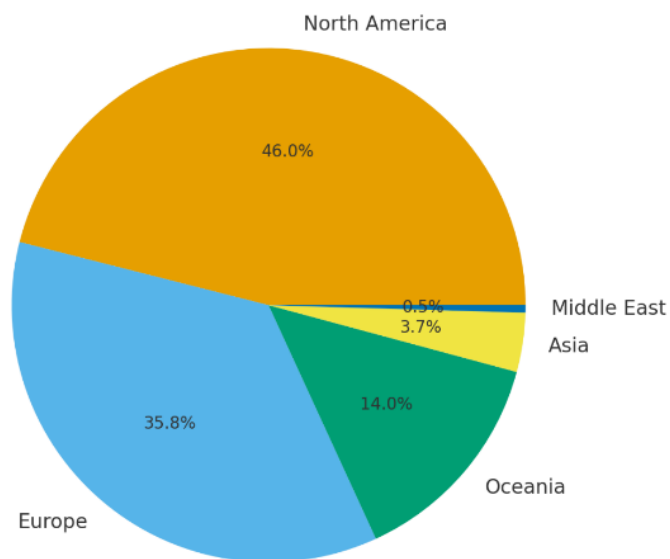


Figure 6: Illustrates respondent distribution by Continent

4.4.6 Where or what to study?

Most students ($n = 124$, 57.7%) reported that they decided what to study first, while a smaller but substantial group ($n = 91$, 42.3%) indicated that they decided where to study first. These findings suggest that for most participants, the choice of academic subject was the primary factor guiding their decision-making process, though location also played a critical role for a significant minority. The results here suggest that there exists a dual importance comprising of academic subject affinity and study destination. Both are instrumental in shaping international student choices. The fact that over half of respondents prioritised what to study first was expected and underscores the importance of academic subject interests and career aspirations in shaping mobility decisions (Beerkens et al., 2016). This aligns with earlier research showing that subject choice often reflects long-term goals such as employability and professional identity (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

The finding that more than two in five respondents decided where to study before deciding on a subject was surprising. This is likely due to the influence of place-based factors including host country reputation, quality of institutions, affordability, cultural appeal, and post-study migration opportunities (Chen, 2007; OECD, 2022). Amongst students, the destination appears to act as a gateway through which subject choices are made. This balance between the decisions of “what to study” and “where to study” is reflective of the complexity of international student decision-making. What is suggested here is that universities and policymakers need to consider not only the competitiveness of their offerings relative to local and national competitors within the sector, but also how attractive their location is as a host country, relative to competing countries (Soutar & Turner, 2002).

Q14 - Which decision did you make first?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	WHAT to study	124	57.7	57.7	57.7
	WHERE to study	91	42.3	42.3	42.3
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 28: Frequency Analysis. Respondent distribution by which decision made first

4.5 Reliability Testing

Reliability underpins the credibility of empirical research finding and having established the need for reliability, the question then turns which are the most appropriate methods of

undertaking reliability testing. There are many approaches to this and which is most suitable, largely depends upon the type of research being undertaken and the associated research strategy.

4.5.1 Cronbach's Alpha

For this research, internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. This was used to determine whether the items formed a consistent measure for each of the research constructs (Taber, 2018) and therefore, whether the results could be considered replicable.

The statistical analysis tool SPSS was utilised with the formula is represented as below.

$$\alpha = \frac{N\bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1)\bar{c}}$$

Number of items
 N
 \bar{c}

Average variance
 \bar{v}

Average inter-item covariance among the items
 $(N - 1)\bar{c}$

Figure 7: Cronbach's Alpha formula (DATAtab Team, 2025).

The above formula enabled me to assess the internal consistency amongst the items within each construct. Essentially, where a higher Cronbach's alpha value was present, this indicated greater internal consistency among the items within a construct whereas the presence of lower values suggested a lower level of internal consistency. A question that arose was that of which level of Cronbach's Alpha is considered acceptable and thus, which is considered unacceptable? George and Mallery (2010) suggest the following thresholds.

Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
> 0.90	Excellent

0.80 – 0.89	Good
0.70 – 0.79	Acceptable
0.60 – 0.69	Questionable
0.50 – 0.59	Poor
< 0.50	Unacceptable

Table 29: Cronbach’s Alpha thresholds employed for the study.

Whilst some constructs showed particularly strong reliability, some others did not meet generally accepted reliability thresholds and would be considered marginal. This having been said, the scale remains acceptable for exploratory studies such as this. Below is a narrative of the reliability testing using Cronbach’s Alpha for each of the items related to each of the constructs, commencing with a Construct – Level Reliability Summary. Each reliability item is discussed in more detail below.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardised Alpha
Awareness	.681	.703
Marketing communications	.725	.722
Ranking	.820	.820
Safety	.815	.820
Facilities	.759	.757
Cost of Living	.822	.825
Course Cost	.685	.690
Course Duration	.425	.429
Employment	.652	.640
Agent WOM	.859	.858
Alumni WOM	.677	.675
Family WOM	.608	.602

Table 30: Reliability Summary.

4.5.1.1 Agent WOM Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .859 (Standardised .858)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted

Q11 – Agent recommendations ... university	.750	.786
Q13 – Agent recommendations ... course	.705	.828
Q16 – Value agent recommendations	.750	.786

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of three items measuring the perceived importance of education agents word – of - mouth in students’ decision-making.

- All three items demonstrated **high internal consistency**, with a Cronbach’s alpha of **0.859**, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.705 to 0.750**, highlighting the strong correlation between each of the items with the overall scale
- The inter-item correlations were also consistently high, ranging between **0.648 and 0.707**, suggesting that the items appropriately measured the common underlying construct of ‘Agent WOM’
- Removing any individual item reduced Cronbach’s Alpha (range: 0.786–0.828) which confirms that all three items make a positive contribution to the reliability of the scale.

The Means across the three items ranged from **2.44 to 2.52** ($SD \approx 1.07$), suggesting that in the main, respondents disagreed with statements promoting the importance of agent recommendations in university and course choice.

- Q11 (Agent important for university choice): Mean = 2.52, SD = 1.06

- Q13 (Agent important for course choice): Mean = 2.47, SD = 1.08
- Q15 (Agent recommendations important for my choice of university): Mean = 2.44, SD = 1.07

The data suggest that students in this sample **perceived the recommendations of agents as relatively unimportant** in shaping their higher education choices. This result contrasts with some earlier research which emphasises the central role of agents in facilitating international student enrolment (Bodycott & Lai, 2012). There may be several different explanations for the results observed. One being that students in this sample may place greater trust in alternative sources of information, such as university websites, social media, or alumni recommendations, which are increasingly accessible and perceived as authentic (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014).

4.5.1.2 Alumni WOM Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .677 (Standardised .675)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Alumni recs ... university	.537	.668
Q13 – Alumni recs ... course	.558	.658
Q15 – Alumni experiences important	.381	.654
Q15 – Would avoid negative alumni reports	.372	.665

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of four items measuring the influence of alumni recommendations on students' university and course choices.

- The scale demonstrated **moderate internal consistency** with a Cronbach's alpha of .677. This falls slightly below the usual threshold of .70 for acceptable internal consistency
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.372 to 0.558**, highlighting the moderate correlation between each of the items with the overall scale
- The inter-item correlations ranging between **0.648 and 0.707**, suggested that the items appropriately measured the common underlying construct of 'Alumni WOM'
- Removing any individual item reduced Cronbach's Alpha (range: 0.654–0.668) which confirms that all four items make a positive contribution to scale reliability

The item means ranged from 3.20 to 3.79 (SD = .864), suggesting that respondents were generally in agreement that Alumni WOM influenced their decision making.

- Q11 (alumni recommendations important for choosing a university): M = **3.20**
- Q13 (alumni recommendations important for choosing a course): M = **3.26**
- Q15a (alumni experiences important to help me make decisions): M = **3.79** (highest)
- Q15b (I would not enrol where alumni had negative experiences): M = **3.22**

Inter-item correlations ranged from .240 to .552 and this highlighted modest to moderate associations among items. The strongest correlation was between perceptions of alumni importance in choosing a university and in choosing a course ($r = .552$).

Item-total statistics showed that the removal of Q11 or Q13 would increase alpha substantially (to .559 and .539 respectively), while removal of Q15 (experience-related items)

resulted in a higher alpha of .658 and .668, suggesting some heterogeneity among items. The overall scale mean was 13.47 (SD = 2.77).

The above suggests that respondents **generally leaned towards agreement**, especially with the idea that alumni experiences help inform their decision-making. This suggests a **strong overlap between alumni influence on university and course choice**, while negative alumni experiences are less strongly tied to the other items. These findings point towards **alumni recommendations playing a reasonably important role in influencing prospective students' higher education decisions**. The mean scores indicate that alumni experiences and word-of-mouth endorsements are valued amongst students yet to make their decisions, particularly in relation to the overall university experience. This suggests that **whilst positive endorsements are influential, negative word-of-mouth may exert a less of an effect** upon student decision making. This is broadly in alignment with existing literature on word-of-mouth communication.

4.5.1.3 Cost of living Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .822 (Standardised .825)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Cost of living ... university	.611	.774
Q13 – Course cost ... course	.611	.794
Q13 – Cost of living ... course	.665	.767
Q15 – Cost of attending university	.664	.769

Reliability testing was undertaken on four items relating to effects of financial considerations upon higher education decision-making, including cost of living, course costs, and overall university expenses.

- The scale showed **good internal consistency**, with Cronbach's Alpha = **.822** (standardised α = **.825**)
- Item means ranged from **3.65** (SD = .96) to **3.89** (SD = .83), suggesting that respondents generally agreed that **cost-related factors were important considerations** when deciding where and what to study.

Inter-item correlations ranged between **.448 and .620**, reflecting moderate to strong associations between the items. Removing any individual item reduced Cronbach's Alpha (range: 0.767–0.794) which confirms that all three items make a positive contribution to the reliability of the scale. Corrected item-total correlations were consistently above .60, suggesting that each item contributed meaningfully to the scale. Moreover, removal of any single item would have reduced the overall Cronbach's Alpha (range = .767 – .794). this confirms that all items supported the reliability of the construct. The overall scale mean was 15.02 (SD = 2.90).

The results show that the four survey items form a **reliable and coherent scale** which reflects the salience of financial considerations (cost of living, tuition/course cost, and university costs) in students' decision-making about higher education. Respondents consistently rated these factors as important, with relatively high agreement across items. Since Cronbach's Alpha is comfortably above 0.8, the measure was considered to be both **reliable and internally consistent**.

- Q11: Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university
- Q13R2: Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course
- Q13R14: Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course
- Q15R20: The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study.

The findings indicate that the four cost-related items form a reliable scale, providing evidence that **financial considerations are consistently viewed as an important determinant in students' higher education decision-making**. This is consistent with earlier studies suggesting that financial pressures significantly influence both course and institutional choices among students (Usher et al., 2010).

4.5.1.4 Course Cost Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .685 (Standardised .690)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q13 – Course cost ... course	.526	—
Q15 – Cost important to decision	.526	—

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of two items measuring the perceived importance of course costs in students' decision-making.

- Both items demonstrated **moderate internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.685**. This falls slightly below the usual threshold of .70 for acceptable internal consistency however, it is indicative of a moderate level of reliability

- Corrected item-total correlation for both items = 0.526 (acceptable).
- The inter-item correlation was 0.526. This indicates a moderate, positive relationship: students for whom course cost is important, tend to view overall university costs as important also
- With only two items, Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted could not be computed

The two-item scale measuring financial considerations around course and overall university cost shows **moderate internal consistency** ($\alpha = 0.685$). While slightly below the typical benchmark of 0.70, **this is expected with a very short scale**. While this value is slightly below the conventional .70 threshold, the limited number of items reduces the reliability coefficient (Cortina, 1993). The moderate inter-item correlation (.526) suggests the items are related. Respondents tended to agree with both statements: "Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course" ($M = 3.65, SD = .96$) and "The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study" ($M = 3.89, SD = .83$).

This analysis indicates that course cost and overall university cost are quite a reliable scale which capture the financial concerns related to student decision-making. Overall, the findings indicate that students perceive both **course costs and overall university costs as important factors** in their decision-making. The mean responses highlight that financial factors are regarded as important considerations by students and this supports current research that cost plays an important role in university and course selection (Usher et al., 2010).

4.5.1.5 Course Duration Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .425 (Standardised .429)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q13 – Course duration ... course	.273	—
Q15 – Prefer 12-month programme	.273	—

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of two items measuring the perceived importance of course duration in students' decision-making.

- Both items demonstrated **low internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.425**. This falls below the usual threshold of .70 for acceptable internal consistency
- Corrected item-total correlation = .273 for both items, highlighting a tenuous connection and that these items do not strongly measure the same construct.

The Means ranged from **2.79 to 3.44**, suggesting that in the main, students rated course duration as somewhat important however, they expressed lower agreement with preferring a 12-month degree programme.

The two items intended to measure attitudes toward course duration do not form a reliable scale ($\alpha = 0.425$). While students generally agree that course duration is an important factor (mean = 3.44), they are **less likely to prefer a fixed 12-month completion timeframe** (mean = 2.79).

Respondents generally agreed that course duration is an important factor when choosing a course (M = 3.44, SD = .94) but expressed lower agreement with the statement that they preferred to complete a degree within 12 months (M = 2.79, SD = 1.09).

The overall scale mean was **6.23** (SD = 1.62), with relatively high variance, suggesting diverse perspectives among respondents. Weak inter-item correlation (.273) indicates that while duration matters, the preference for a fast-track course may not align consistently with broader concerns about course length.

Previous research has shown that course duration is an important factor in student choice, but its impact may vary depending on personal circumstances, such as financial resources, career goals, or family commitments (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

4.5.1.6 Employment Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .652 (Standardised .640)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Employment opportunities ... university	.647	.281
Q13 – Employment opportunities ... course	.628	.302
Q15 – Work whilst studying	.182	.873

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of three items measuring the importance of employment opportunities in students' decision-making.

- All three items demonstrated **good internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.652**, just below the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.182 to 0.647**

- Q15 has a weak corrected item-total correlation (.182), suggesting it does not fit well with the other two items and if Q15 were deleted, Cronbach's Alpha would increase dramatically to .873, indicating that Q15 weakens the scale
- Q11 and Q13 show strong corrected item-total correlations (.647, .628).

The analysis reveals that **Q15 (working whilst studying)** does not align well with the other items, which focus on broader **employment opportunities in the country**. Removing Q15 improves reliability significantly ($\alpha = .873$), leaving a strong two-item scale around national employment opportunities. This suggests that students view post-study employment prospects (Q11 & Q13) as a related factor, but they see part-time employment while studying (Q15) as a separate consideration. The findings indicate that employment-related factors are important to students' higher education decision-making however, the items analysed reflect **two separate constructs** rather than a single coherent scale. Whilst students consistently linked the importance of employment opportunities in the country when choosing a university or course (Q11 and Q13), the item regarding opportunities to work whilst studying (Q15) weakened the overall reliability. This suggests that respondents conceptualise graduate employment opportunities and part-time work during study differently.

It could be argued that graduate employment reflects longer-term career prospects, whereas working during study relates more to financial support and short-term income. This aligns with earlier studies suggesting that students consider both immediate work options and post-graduation opportunities but treat them as separate considerations in their decision-making process (Wilkins et al., 2013).

4.5.1.7 Facilities Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .759 (Standardised .757)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Location ... university	.415	.739
Q11 – Proximity ... university	.559	.703
Q13 – Location ... course	.641	.686
Q13 – Proximity ... course	.575	.698
Q15 – Walkability	.369	.770

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of five items measuring the perceived importance of facilities in students' decision-making.

- All items demonstrated **acceptable internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.759**, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.369 to 0.641**, highlighting the moderate correlation between each of the items with the overall scale
- The inter-item correlations ranged between **.093 and .579**
- Strongest correlation: Q13 (location at course choice) with Q13 (proximity to facilities at course choice), $r = .579$. Weakest correlation: Q11 (location at university choice) with Q15 (walkable access to shops/amenities), $r = .093$. Q15 does not align as strongly with the other items.

Overall, the five items form a **reliable measure** of the importance of geographic location and access to facilities in higher education choice amongst this student group. Students generally rated these factors as important, particularly geographic location when selecting a university. This having been said, the item on walkability to shops and amenities (Q15) showed weaker correlations with other items and its inclusion slightly lowered overall internal consistency.

What this suggests is that **walkability** might be representative of a somewhat different dimension of ‘facilities access’ rather than that of general **location and proximity** considerations.

Students rated geographic location and proximity to facilities as consistently important factors in their decision-making. This finding aligns with previous research showing that location and access to resources are central to students’ university and course choices (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). The emphasis on location at the institutional level ($M = 3.92$) suggests that students prioritise macro-level geographic factors when making decisions, such as city, region, or country, while also considering more practical aspects of proximity to facilities.

The weaker performance of the item relating to walkability to shops and amenities (Q15) indicates that this factor may be conceptually distinct. Rather than representing institutional-level considerations, it may reflect a **lifestyle-oriented dimension**, emphasising everyday convenience and personal wellbeing. Similar distinctions have been noted in the literature, where institutional facilities (e.g., libraries, laboratories, proximity to campus services) are seen as separate from local amenities such as shops, entertainment, and housing options (Usher et al., 2010).

4.5.1.8 Family WOM Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha: .608 (Standardised .602)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
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Q11 – Family/friends recs ... university	.551	.301
Q13 – Family/friends recs ... course	.525	.336
Q16 – Course recognised by family	.211	.770

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of three items measuring the importance of family Word of mouth in students' decision-making.

- All three items demonstrated a **moderate internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.608**, falling slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.211 to 0.551**.
- The inter-item correlations were Q11–Q13 = .626 (strong), Q11–Q16 = .202 (weak), Q13–Q16 = .178 (weak)
- Removing Q16 significantly improved Cronbach's Alpha (.770) which suggests that here, two ideas may have been grouped together.

The importance of family and friends' recommendations (Q11 & Q13) align well ($r = .626$) and form a coherent WOM construct. When including **Perceived social recognition of the chosen course** (Q16) the reliability is diluted as there are weak links to Q11 and Q13.

This suggests that **students value recommendations** (especially at the university level) and also place some importance upon their chosen course being recognised by close others, but that these are **not the same construct**. The findings suggest that whilst students were consistent in linking the importance of recommendations from family and friends (Q11 and Q13), they responded differently to the recognition item (Q16). This suggests that two

distinct constructs are being measured. These being **word-of-mouth recommendations** and **social recognition**. This aligns with prior studies that identify word-of-mouth as a powerful driver of student choice, particularly in contexts where family expectations shape educational pathways (Briggs & Wilson, 2007).

4.5.1.9 Prior Awareness Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .681 (Standardised .703)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – University reputation ... university	.431	.646
Q13 – University reputation ... course	.463	.632
Q15 – Website information	.359	.657
Q15 – Social media information	.408	.641
Q15 – In-country open day	.391	.650
Q15 – Virtual open day	.407	.643
Q15 – Prior awareness	.363	.657

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of seven items measuring the perceived importance of prior awareness in students' decision-making.

- All seven items demonstrated **moderate internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.681**, slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .359–.463, confirming that all items contributed positively, though moderately, to the overall scale
- With inter-item correlations; Reputation pair (Q11–Q13) $r = .654$ (strong). Open day pair (in-country – virtual) $r = .525$ (moderate/strong). Website–social $r = .300$

(moderate). Prior awareness relates modestly to reputation ($r = .345, .290$) and digital info ($r \approx .24-.28$), but weakly to open days ($r = .170, .113$).

- Removing any item does not improve the alpha. Therefore, these items function well as a broad composite.

The 7 items broadly capture how students develop knowledge of and rate a university: a mix of **reputation salience**, **information/marketing touchpoints**, and **pre-application awareness**. Reliability is **moderate** ($\alpha \approx .68-.70$) but suggests some **multidimensionality**.

The correlation pattern implies **two to three themes**:

- **Reputation salience** (Q11, Q13) — a close coherent pair
- **Information channels / marketing touchpoints** (website, social, open days – with in-country & virtual hanging together)
- **Prior awareness** — related to reputation and digital info, less to events; may act as an **outcome** of exposure as much as a determinant

The response patterns show that website information emerged as the strongest factors, consistent with prior research demonstrating that institutional prestige and clear digital information are important determinants of student choice (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). By contrast, open day attendance, especially in-country events, was less valued, which could be reflective of possible geographic, logistical or infrastructure barriers.

4.5.1.10 Ranking Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: .820

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Ranking ... university	.606	.787
Q13 – Ranking ... course	.582	.795
Q15 – Ranking important to decision	.698	.759
Q15 – High ranking = high quality	.629	.780
Q15 – High ranking = better jobs	.552	.802

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of five items measuring the perceived importance of university rankings in students' decision-making.

- All items demonstrated **high internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.820**, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **.552 to .698**, highlighting the strong correlation between each of the items with the overall scale
- The inter-item correlations were also consistently high, ranging between **.377 and .575**, suggesting that the items moderately to strongly measured the underlying construct of 'Ranking'
- Removing any individual item would not markedly improve Cronbach's Alpha (α -if-deleted = .759 – .802)

These five items form a **highly reliable scale**, appropriately capturing students' perceptions of university rankings. Respondents rated **ranking factors as highly important**, with agreement that attending a high-ranking university improves graduate employment prospects being especially strong.

The item statistics suggest that this construct integrates two related but slightly distinct elements:

- **Ranking as a decision factor** (important when choosing a university or course)
- **Perceived outcomes of ranking** (quality of education, employment advantages)

Whilst both combine effectively into a single reliable construct, it could be argued that they better represent an input (**ranking importance**) and an outcome (**ranking consequences**).

4.5.1.11 Safety Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha: .815 (Standardised .820)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Safety ... university	.734	.724
Q13 – Safety ... course	.652	.764
Q15 – Safety whilst studying	.628	.774
Q15 – Would not apply to unsafe area	.553	.807

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of four items measuring the perceived importance of the perception of safety in students’ decision-making.

- All items demonstrated **high internal consistency**, with a Cronbach’s alpha of **0.815**, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability.
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.553 to 0.734**, highlighting the strong correlation between each of the items with the overall scale
- The inter-item correlations were also consistently high, ranging between **.400 and .736**. It is strongest between the two “importance” items (Q11–Q13 = **.736**); “unsafe area” shows moderate ties to others (.400–.553)

- Removing any individual item would **lower** the alpha (α -if-deleted = .724–.807). All four items contribute positively to the reliability of the scale.

Due to the inter-item correlations being uniformly positive and α does **not** improve by deleting any item, treating these as a **single Safety scale** was justified.

Earlier research related to student choice emphasising perceived security of study environments found that students place a **consistently strong emphasis on safety** in their decision-making (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). These findings agree, suggesting that **safety is a consistently important determinant** of students’ choices and that the four items together form a **robust** measure.

Although inter-item correlations suggest two closely related facets—(a) **general safety salience** at the decision stage (university and course) and (b) **personal safety stance/avoidance** (safety abroad, avoiding unsafe campuses)—the uniformly positive correlations and the lack of improvement in α when dropping any item support treating Safety as a **single coherent construct** for primary analyses.

4.5.1.12 University Marketing Communications Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha: .725 (Standardised .722)

Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 – Comms (university)	.274	.722
Q13 – Comms (course)	.400	.701
Q15 – Website info	.264	.721
Q15 – Social media info	.531	.677
Q15 – Native language communication	.345	.711
Q15 – Real-time chat	.521	.677

Q15 – In-country open day	.539	.673
Q15 – Virtual open day	.457	.690
Q15 – Prior awareness	.260	.727

Reliability testing was undertaken to assess the internal consistency of nine items measuring the perceived importance of university marketing communications in students' decision-making.

- All items demonstrated **high internal consistency**, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.725**, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 for acceptable reliability
- Corrected item-total correlations ranged from **0.260 to 0.531**, indicating that the items form a **broad, acceptable composite** of university marketing/communication influences ($\alpha \approx .73$).
- The inter-item correlations suggest some multidimensionality at three natural themes; **Communication salience** (Q11, Q13), **Digital information** (website, social), **Engagement events** (chat, in-country OD, virtual OD) plus two adjuncts: localisation (native-language) and prior awareness
- Removing any individual item does not markedly improve α (α -if-deleted .673–.727; only “prior awareness” would change α to .727) which confirms that all items make a positive contribution to the reliability of the scale.

The results indicate that university marketing/communications operate as a **broad, multi-faceted influence** on student choice. This having been said, the correlation patterns suggest some **multidimensionality**, with the three coherent themes and two adjunct elements discussed earlier. These findings align with literature emphasising that beyond static

information, **interactive touchpoints** and **social channels** shape perceptions and conversion in higher education markets (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

The table below shows a summary of the reliability testing for the constructs used within the study;

Research Construct	Related Survey Questions	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items
University Marketing Communication	Q111R1, Q136R6, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q153R3, Q154R4, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10	0.725	0.722	9
Ranking	Q112R2, Q137R7, Q157R7, Q158R8, Q159R9,	0.82	0.82	5
Prior Awareness	Q1110R10, Q1315R15, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10,	0.681	0.703	7
Alumni	Q113R3, Q138R8, Q1511R11, Q1512R12,	0.677	0.675	4
Agents	Q114R4, Q139R9, Q1513R13,	0.859	0.859	3
Family / Friends	Q115R5, Q1310R10, Q164R4,	0.608	0.602	3
Perception of Safety	Q117R7, Q1312R12, Q1516R16, Q1517R17,	0.815	0.82	4
Proximity to Facilities	Q116R6, Q118R8, Q1311R11, Q1313R13, Q1518R18,	0.759	0.757	5
Employment Opportunities	Q1112R12, Q1317R17, Q1519R19,	0.652	0.64	3
Course Duration	Q131R1, Q1521R21,	0.425	0.429	2
Course Fees	Q132R2, Q1520R20,	0.685	0.69	2

Cost of Living	Q119R9, Q132R2, Q1314R14, Q1520R20	0.822	0.825	4
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Table 31: Reliability testing of Constructs used within the study

4.6 Crosstabs

Here, the cross tabulation findings are discussed.

4.6.1 Gender / Age

Q3 – What is your gender? * Q4 – How old are you

Age Groups

18 to 21 years: 17 respondents (8%)

22 to 25 years: 71 respondents (33%)

Over 25 years: 127 respondents (59%)

Gender Distribution within Age Groups

Age Group	Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say
18-21	8 (47.1%)	9 (52.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
22-25	26 (36.6%)	43 (60.6%)	2 (2.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Over 25	45 (35.4%)	80 (63.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.6%)

Table 1: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Gender and Age Group

Key Insights

Female respondents are the majority across all age groups (overall 61%).

Male representation declines slightly with age:

47% in 18–21

37% in 22–25

35% in over 25

Non-binary/other responses are very rare (0.9%) and only appear in the 22–25 group.

“Prefer not to say” only appears in the over 25 group (1.6%)

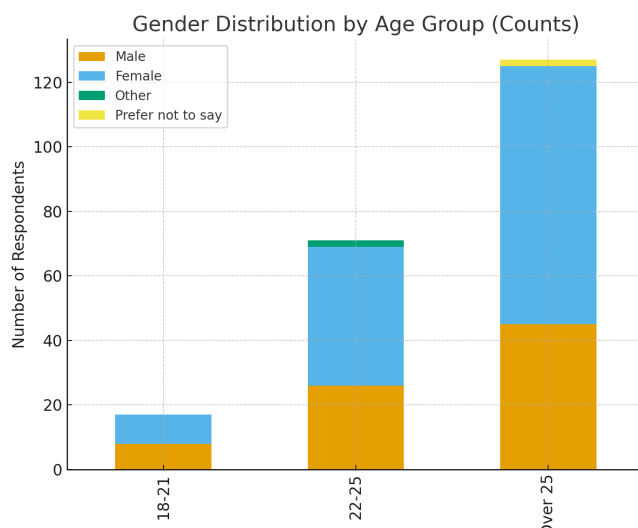
Chi-Square Test (Association between Gender and Age)

Pearson Chi-Square = 6.253, df = 6, p = .395

Since $p > 0.05$, the relationship between age group and gender is not statistically significant.

→ In other words, gender distribution does not differ across age groups in this dataset.

Summary: The dataset is female-majority across all age ranges, with males making up about one-third of respondents. Very few identified as “other” or chose not to disclose. While there are slight shifts in male/female ratios by age, statistical testing shows that age and gender are independent in this sample.



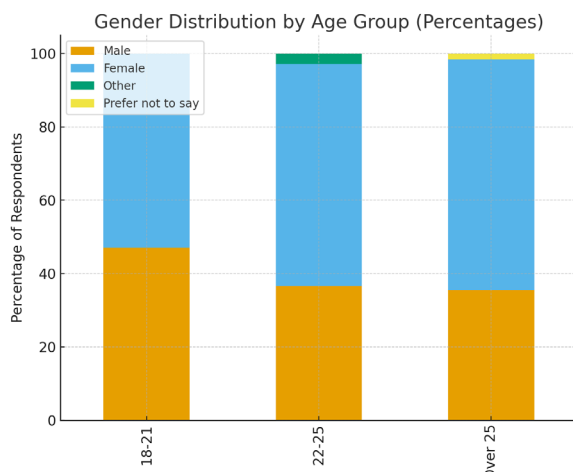


Figure 8: Illustrates gender distribution by age group (counts and percentages).

4.6.2 Which Decision made first * Q4 – How old are you Crosstabulation

Age–Decision Breakdown

Age Group	What to study	Where to study
18-21	8 (47.1%)	9 (52.9%)
22-25	47 (66.2%)	24 (33.8%)
Over 25	69 (54.3%)	58 (45.7%)

Table 32: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Age Group and First Decision

Key Insights

Overall, “What to study” is the more common first decision (58%).

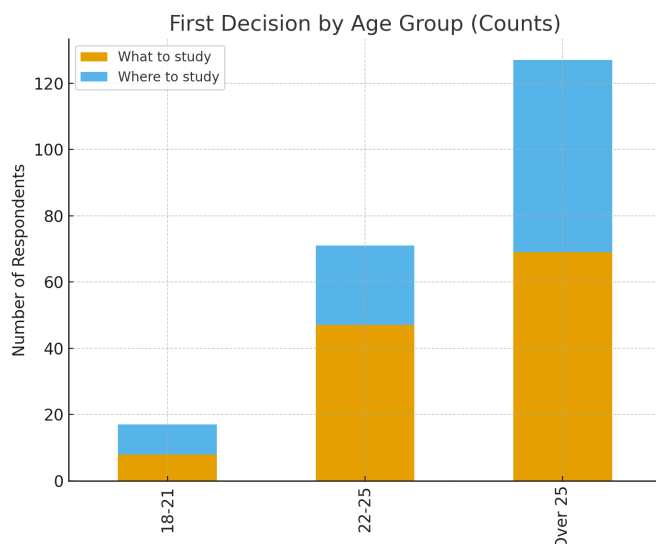
Younger students (18–21) lean slightly toward “Where to study” (53%) first, suggesting location may be more influential at this stage.

Mid-range (22–25) are the most focused on “What to study” (66%), prioritising subject choice strongly over location.

Older group (25+) are more balanced however they still lean toward “What to study” (54%).

Summary: Most respondents across all ages decide what subject to study before where to study, but there are interesting age differences:

- 18–21: location slightly more important
- 22–25: subject dominates.
- Over 25: more balanced, but still subject-first



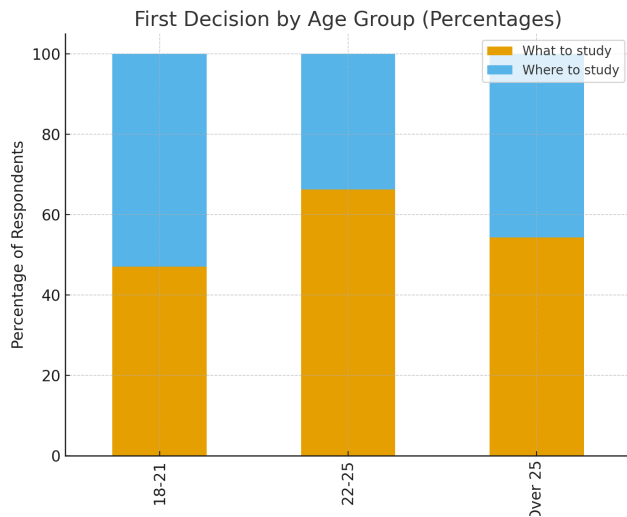


Figure 9: Illustrates first decision by age group (Counts and percentages).

4.6.3 Language choice * Q4 – How old are you Crosstabulation

Overall Language Split

Chinese (Simplified): 140 respondents (65.1%)

English: 75 respondents (34.9%)

Age–Language Breakdown

Age Group	Chinese (Simplified)	English
18-21	11 (64.7%)	6 (35.3%)
22-25	53 (74.6%)	18 (25.4%)
Over 25	76 (59.8%)	51 (40.2%)

Table 33: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Language and Age Group

Key Insights

- The 22–25 group is the most Chinese-dominant (almost three-quarters)
- The over-25 group has the highest proportion of English users (40%)
- The 18–21 group is balanced but still leans towards simplified Chinese (65%)

Overall trend: Younger and mid-range groups lean more toward Chinese, while the oldest group shows a relative shift toward English.

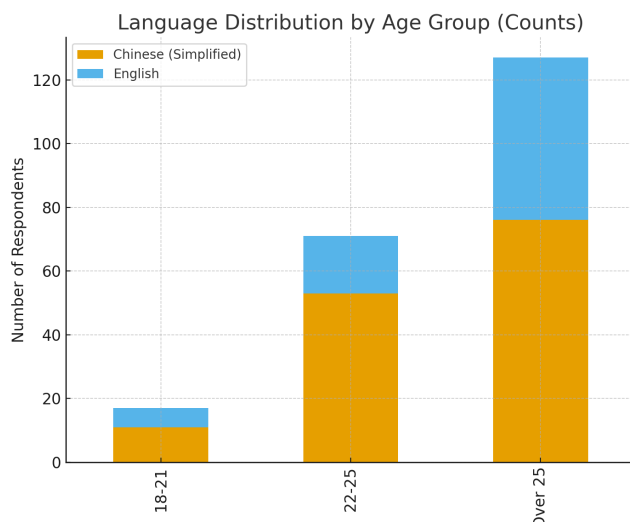
Chi-Square Test

Pearson Chi-Square = 4.396, df = 2, p = .111

Since $p > 0.05$, the association between age group and language is not statistically significant.

→ In other words, while proportions shift slightly, the differences could be due to chance.

Summary: Most respondents use Chinese across all age groups, but the over-25s show more English use (40%) compared to 22–25s (25%). However, statistical tests show no significant relationship between age and language in this dataset.



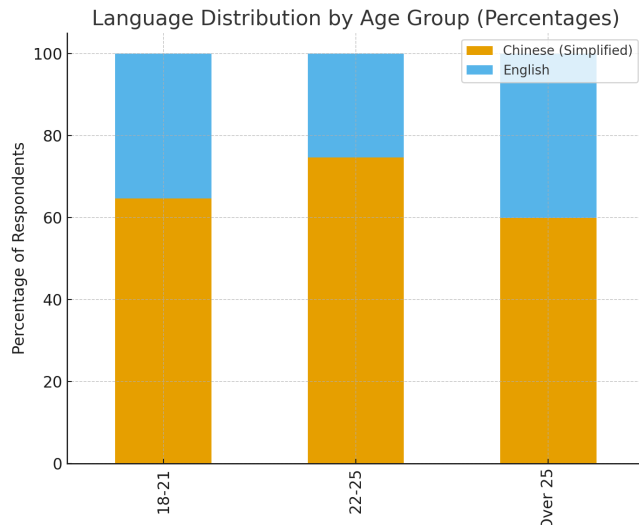


Figure 10: Illustrates language distribution by age group (Counts and percentages)

4.6.4 Gender * Q4 – Study Destination

Top Overseas Study Destinations (All Respondents)

Country	Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say
Canada	20 (38.5%)	32 (61.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
USA	16 (35.6%)	27 (60.0%)	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)
UK	16 (42.1%)	22 (57.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Australia	7 (29.2%)	16 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.2%)
Germany	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Netherlands	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Other countries	14 (36.8%)	23 (60.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.6%)
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Table 34: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Country and Gender

Gender Differences in Country Choice

- Canada: Almost equal across genders → 20 males (25%), 32 females (24%).
- USA: Similar balance → 16 males (20%), 27 females (21%), 2 “Other”.
- UK: Popular with both → 16 males (20%), 22 females (17%).
- Australia: More females (16 vs. 7 males).
- Germany: Balanced (5 males, 6 females).
- Netherlands: More females (6 females vs. 1 male).

Smaller European destinations (France, Spain, Austria, etc.): mixed but female-leaning.

Unique cases: “Other” gender → both respondents chose the US. “Prefer not to say” → 1 chose Australia, 1 chose Japan.

Key Insights

- North America dominates. Nearly half of all students intend to study in Canada or the USA
- UK is the leading European destination (18%), followed by Germany (6%).
- Australia is strong in the Asia-Pacific region (11%), but NZ, Japan, and Singapore are very minor.

Gender patterns are broadly consistent, with a small female lean toward Australia, The Netherlands, smaller EU countries, while male choices are spread more evenly. The “Other” gender category (2 respondents) chose only the US.

Summary: Most students, regardless of gender, expressed a preference for Canada, the USA, or the UK. These three destinations account for nearly two-thirds of all choices. Gender differences exist at the margins: females show a slightly higher preference for Australia and smaller European countries, while males are evenly distributed across major destinations.

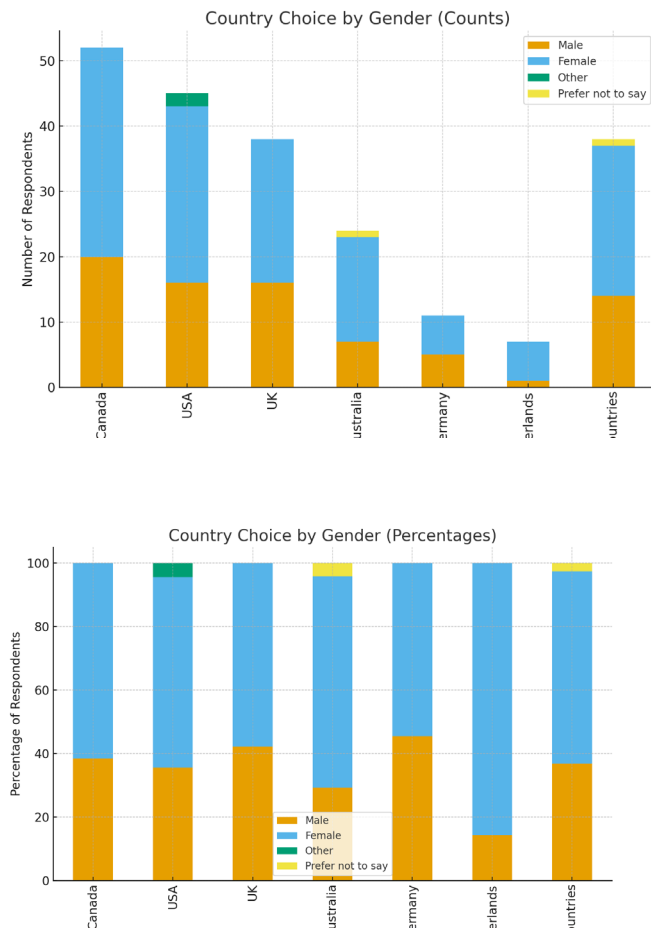


Figure 11: Country Choice by Gender (Counts and percentages)

4.6.5 Q14 – Which decision did you make first? * Q3 – What is your gender?

Overall Decisions

- What to study first: 124 respondents (57.7%)

- Where to study first: 91 respondents (42.3%)

Breakdown by Gender

Gender	What to study	Where to study
Male	47 (59.5%)	32 (40.5%)
Female	74 (56.1%)	58 (43.9%)
Other	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)

Table 35: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Gender and First Decision

Key Insights

- Both males and females show a similar pattern: a majority (around 56–60%) decided what to study before where
- Females are slightly more likely than males to prioritise where (44% vs. 41%), though the difference is small
- Non-binary/Other respondents all prioritised what to study.
- Prefer not to say responses were evenly split.

Overall, the decision sequence is consistent across genders, with only minor variations.

Summary: Across all genders, most students (58%) decide what subject to study first.

Gender differences are small: males lean marginally more toward subject-first, while females show a slightly higher tendency toward location-first.

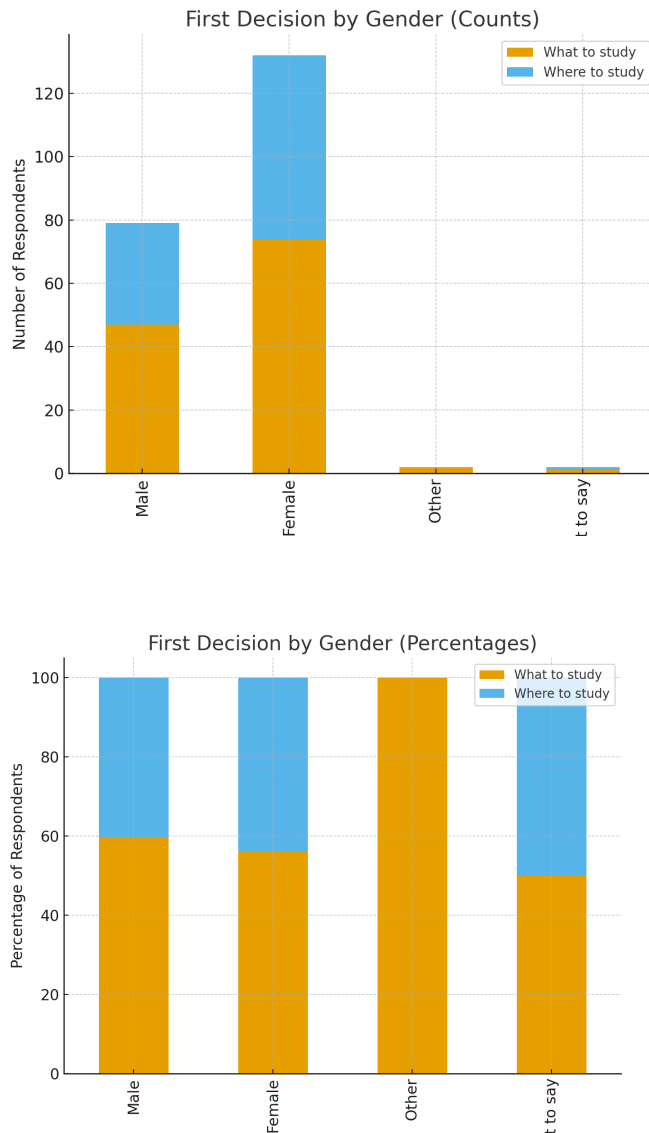


Figure 12: First Decision by Gender (Counts and percentages)

4.6.6 Language choice * Gender Crosstabulation

Overall Language Split

Chinese (Simplified): 140 respondents (65.1%)

English: 75 respondents (34.9%)

Language by Gender

Gender	Chinese	English
Male	53 (67.1%)	26 (32.9%)
Female	85 (64.4%)	47 (35.6%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Prefer not to say	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 36: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Gender and Language

Key Insights

- Both males and females follow the same pattern: about two-thirds Chinese, one-third English
- Non-binary/Other respondents (very small sample) chose only English
- Prefer not to say (n=2) chose only Chinese.

Overall gender differences are very small — males (67% Chinese) vs. females (64% Chinese).

Chi-Square Test

Pearson Chi-Square = 4.970, df = 3, p = .174

Since $p > 0.05$, the relationship between gender and language is not statistically significant.

→ This means language preference (Chinese vs. English) does not differ meaningfully by gender.

Summary: Most respondents, across genders, chose Chinese (65%) over English (35%).

Gender differences are minor, and statistical testing shows no significant association between gender and language choice.

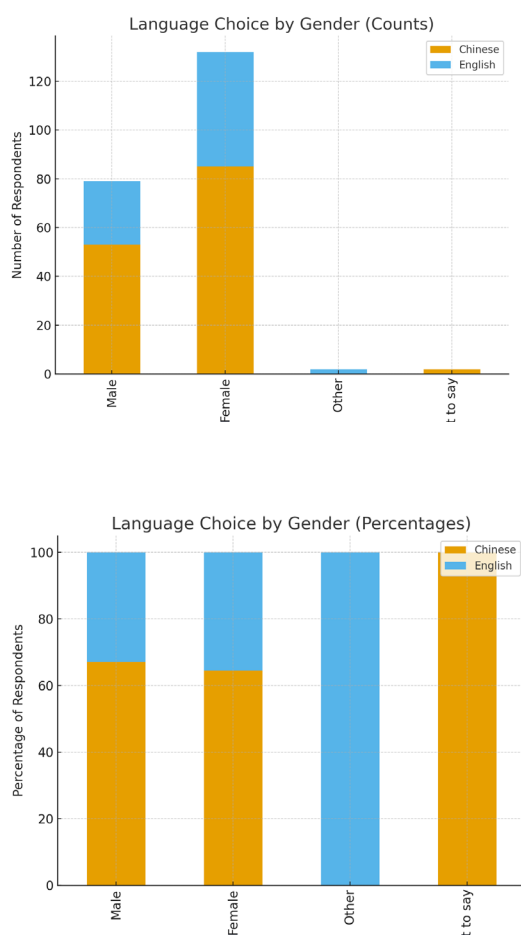


Figure 13: Illustrates language choice by gender (Counts and percentages)

4.6.7 Gender * Q14 – Perc of Safety Crosstabulation

Gender Statistics

Males: Mean = 4.03, SD = 0.74

Females: Mean = 4.13, SD = 0.68

T-Test Results

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: $F = 0.183$, $p = 0.670$ → variances are equal.

t-test (equal variances assumed): $t(209) = -1.005$ p (two-tailed) = 0.316

Mean difference = -0.10 (females higher)

Since $p > 0.05$, the difference between males and females is **not statistically significant**.

Effect Size: Cohen's $d = -0.143$ (95% CI = [-0.422, 0.136])

Key Insights

Both males and females report high and very similar safety perceptions. Females' mean (4.13) is a little higher than males (4.03), but the difference is small and not significant.

Summary: This analysis shows that gender has no meaningful impact on safety perception amongst the participants. Both males and females have a similar threshold as it relates to their perception of safety, with only a negligible difference in average scores.

Figure 1: Mean Perception of Safety by Gender

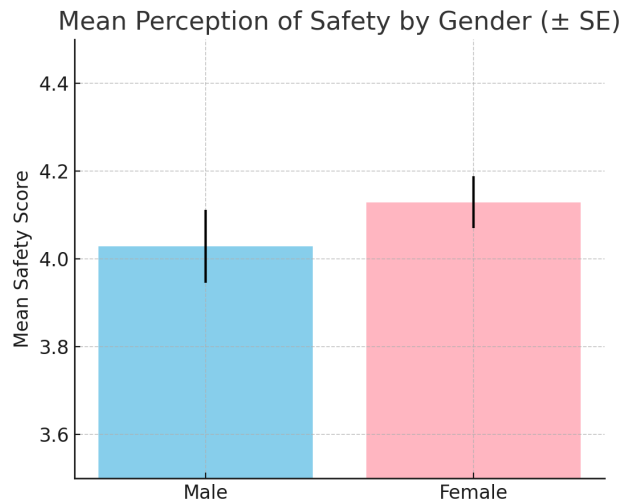


Figure 14: Perception of Safety by Gender

Conclusion: Gender does not have a meaningful effect on perception of safety in this dataset.

Both males and females report similarly high levels of safety perception.

4.6.10 Q6 – Overseas Country Choice? * Q4 – How old are you Crosstabulation

Age groups

- 18–21
- 22–25
- Over 25

Countries were grouped into regions (Asia Pacific, East Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America).

Crosstab Summary Table

Age Group	Sample Size (n)	Most Popular Destinations	Notable Counts	Additional Notes
18–21	17 (~8%)	Europe/UK and USA	UK: 5, USA: 6	Small group with scattered single responses (France, Spain, Canada, etc.)
22–25	71 (~33%)	Europe/UK, USA, Canada	UK: 21, USA: 14, Canada: 10	Broad spread across multiple destinations including France, Germany, Spain and Asia-Pacific
Over 25	127 (~59%)	North America and Europe/UK	Canada: 40, USA: 25, UK: 12, Germany: 8	Some presence in Netherlands (6), Ireland (2), and other destinations

Table 37: Counts and Percentages of Respondents by Gender and country choice

Chi-Square Test

Pearson Chi-Square = 58.852, df = 46, p = .097

Not statistically significant at the 5% level (but approaching significance). This suggests some patterns of association between age group and country choice, though not strong enough for firm conclusions.

Likelihood Ratio = 63.966, df = 46, p = .041

→ Significant at the 5% level, which provides *some evidence of association*.

Summary: The findings suggest that age influences international study destination choices, albeit in ways that should be interpreted cautiously given the statistical limitations. The preference of younger students (18–21) for the UK and USA may reflect the reputation of these destinations for undergraduate programmes, linguistic accessibility, and cultural familiarity (Chen, 2007). By contrast, older students (over 25) appear to gravitate toward Canada and the USA, which aligns with research highlighting these countries’ attractive immigration pathways and postgraduate opportunities (Beine, Noël & Ragot, 2014; Choudaha, 2017). Broadly: UK dominates for younger cohorts, while Canada/USA dominate for older students.

Summary Graph: Age and Overseas Study Destination Preferences

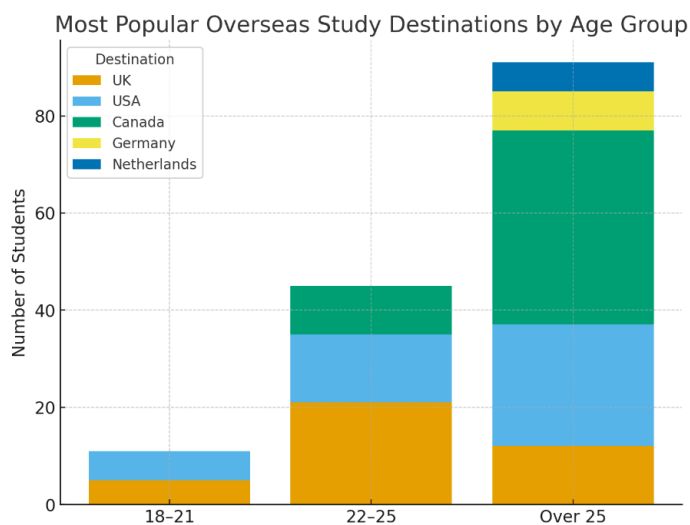


Figure 15: Illustrates study preferences by age.

4.7 Correlations

Within this section, I establish and discuss the relationship between items related to the factors influencing the decisions of Chinese international students.

4.7.1 Perception of Cost

The Perception of Cost construct contains the results of a correlation analysis (Pearson's r) between four cost-related and opportunity-related factors:

- Employment Opportunities
- Course Duration
- Course Fees
- Cost of Living

Key Correlation Results

Employment Opportunities

- Positively correlated with Course Duration ($r = .200, p = .003$) → weak but significant
- Positively correlated with Course Fees ($r = .326, p < .001$) → moderate
- Positively correlated with Cost of Living ($r = .331, p < .001$) → moderate.

Course Duration

- Moderately correlated with Course Fees ($r = .477, p < .001$)
- Moderately correlated with Cost of Living ($r = .512, p < .001$).

Course Fees

- Very strongly correlated with Cost of Living ($r = .918, p < .001$).

Interpretation

The strongest link is between Course Fees and Cost of Living ($r = .918$), showing these two are almost inseparable — higher living costs are strongly associated with higher course fees.

Course Duration also shows consistent positive links with both fees and cost of living, suggesting that longer courses tend to be more expensive overall. Employment Opportunities have weaker but still significant positive correlations with all three cost factors. This suggests that students may expect better employment prospects in locations where fees and living costs are higher (perhaps reflecting more prestigious universities or developed study destinations).

Summary: Perceptions of costs are strongly interrelated — fees, living costs, and duration rise together. Employment opportunities are positively but more weakly tied to costs, indicating that students associate higher costs with better prospects, but the relationship is not as strong. All correlations are statistically significant ($p < .01$), meaning these patterns are unlikely due to chance.

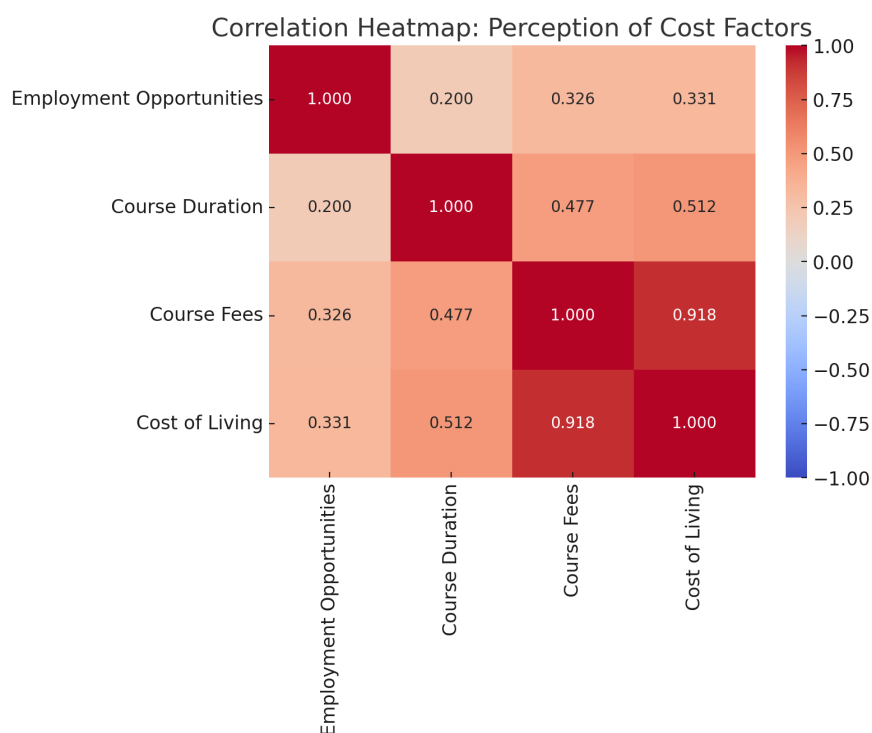


Figure 16: Illustrates correlation heatmap of cost factors

	Employment Opportunities	Course Duration	Course Fees	Cost of Living
Employment Opportunities	1.000	0.200	0.326	0.331
Course Duration	0.200	1.000	0.477	0.512
Course Fees	0.326	0.477	1.000	0.918
Cost of Living	0.331	0.512	0.918	1.000

Table 38: Correlation Coefficients for cost factors.

4.7.2 Perception of Quality

The Perception of Quality construct contains an SPSS correlation analysis of factors linked to perceived quality:

- Ranking
- Perception of Safety
- Proximity to Facilities
- Employment Opportunities

Key Correlation Results

Ranking

- Positively correlated with Safety ($r = .309, p < .001$)

- Positively correlated with Proximity to Facilities ($r = .313, p < .001$)
- Strongly correlated with Employment Opportunities ($r = .591, p < .001$)

Perception of Safety

- Strongly correlated with Proximity to Facilities ($r = .637, p < .001$)
- Positively correlated with Employment Opportunities ($r = .304, p < .001$)

Proximity to Facilities

- Positively correlated with Employment Opportunities ($r = .317, p < .001$)

Interpretation

University ranking is strongly tied to employment opportunities ($r = .591$), suggesting that higher-ranked institutions are perceived as offering better job prospects.

Safety and proximity to facilities are strongly interrelated ($r = .637$) — campuses seen as safer are also seen as having better access to facilities. All variables show positive, statistically significant correlations, indicating they move together: higher scores on one factor are associated with higher scores on the others. The weakest but still significant correlations (around $r = .30$) suggest moderate relationships, while values $> .60$ (safety ↔ facilities, ranking ↔ employment) show strong links.

Summary

Perceptions of quality are multidimensional but connected:

Ranking and employment opportunities form one key cluster

Safety and proximity to facilities form another

Together, these factors shape how students evaluate the overall quality of institutions.

Since all correlations are significant ($p < .001$), these patterns are unlikely to be due to chance.

Correlation Heatmap: Perception of Quality Factors



Figure 17: Illustrates correlation heatmap of quality factors.

	Ranking	Safety	Proximity	Employment
Ranking	1.000	0.309	0.313	0.591
Safety	0.309	1.000	0.637	0.304
Proximity	0.313	0.637	1.000	0.317
Employment	0.591	0.304	0.317	1.000

Table 39: Correlation Coefficients.

4.7.3 Perception of Reputation

The Perception of Reputation construct, contains a correlation analysis between three factors related to institutional reputation:

- Marketing Communications
- Awareness
- Ranking

Key Correlation Results

Marketing

Positively correlated with Awareness ($r = .863, p < .001$)

Positively correlated with Ranking ($r = .254, p < .001$)

Awareness

Positively correlated with Ranking ($r = .452, p < .001$)

Interpretation

Marketing communications and Awareness are almost inseparable ($r = .863$) → stronger marketing is strongly associated with greater institutional awareness.

Awareness and Ranking are moderately linked ($r = .452$) → institutions with higher awareness tend also to be higher ranked.

Marketing communications and Ranking are only weakly linked ($r = .254$) → marketing alone does not directly translate into higher rankings, though it contributes indirectly via awareness.

Summary

Reputation appears to be built through a chain effect:

- Marketing communications drive awareness (strong effect)
- Awareness influences ranking (moderate effect).

Direct link between marketing and ranking is weak, suggesting marketing communications works mainly by raising awareness, which in turn boosts reputation and rankings.

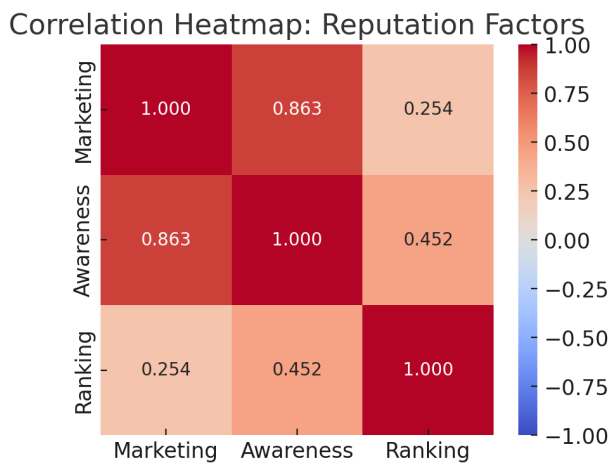


Figure 18: Illustrates correlation heatmap of reputation factors.

	Marketing	Awareness	Ranking
Marketing comms	1.000	0.863	0.254
Awareness	0.863	1.000	0.452
Ranking	0.254	0.452	1.000

Table 40: Correlation Coefficients for reputational factors.

4.7.4 Word of Mouth

The Word_of_Mouth construct contains a correlation analysis of three sources of word-of-mouth (WoM) influence on students' decisions:

- Alumni recommendations (Alumni_WoM)
- Agent recommendations (Agent_WoM)
- Family & Friends recommendations (Family_Friends_WoM)

Key Correlation Results

Alumni

Positively (moderate) correlated with Agent WoM ($r = .371, p < .001$)

Positively (moderately strong) correlated with Family & Friends WoM ($r = .511, p < .001$)

Agents WoM

Positively (moderate) correlated with Family & Friends WoM ($r = .411, p < .001$)

All three relationships are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Interpretation

Students influenced by alumni recommendations are also quite likely to be influenced by family & friends ($r = .511$). This is the strongest link.

Agents' recommendations are positively related to both alumni ($.371$) and family & friends ($.411$), but to a lesser degree.

This suggests that word-of-mouth influences reinforce each other: if a student values one source, they are more likely to consider others.

Summary

Family & friends and alumni appear to be the most connected sources of influence.

Agents are still relevant, but their influence is less strongly tied to the other two.

Overall, this analysis shows that multiple word-of-mouth sources work together, with alumni and family/friends forming the strongest pair.

Correlation Heatmap: Word of Mouth Factors

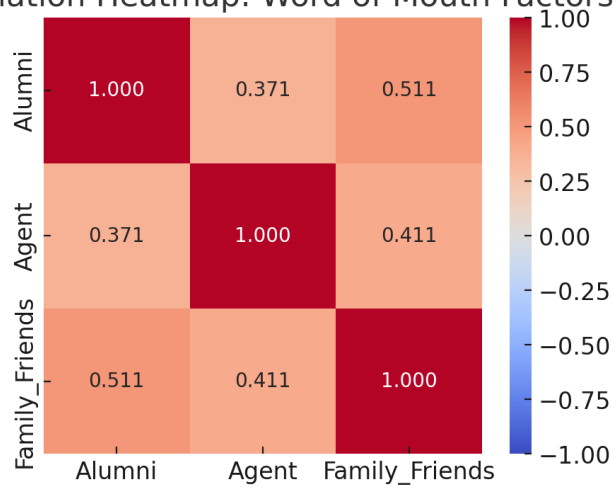


Figure 19: Illustrates Correlation heatmap of Word of Mouth factors.

	Alumni	Agent	Family & Friends
Alumni	1.000	0.371	0.511
Agent	0.371	1.000	0.411
Family_Friends	0.511	0.411	1.000

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients

4.8 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was undertaken to identify the items load onto each factor and the strength of each contributor relative to other items.

4.8.1 Perception of Cost

The Perception of Cost construct contains the results of a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis – PCA) on cost-related and opportunity-related factors:

- Employment Opportunities
- Course Duration
- Course Fees
- Cost of Living

Suitability for Factor Analysis

KMO = .655 → acceptable (above .6 is considered adequate for factor analysis).

Bartlett's Test: $\chi^2(6) = 481.55$, $p < .001$ → correlations are sufficient for factor analysis.

Communalities (Variance explained by the extracted factor)

- Employment Opportunities: .261 (low)
- Course Duration: .483 (moderate)
- Course Fees: .852 (high)
- Cost of Living: .873 (high)

This shows that the factor explains most of the variance in fees and living costs, moderately for duration, and poorly for employment opportunities.

Total Variance Explained

One factor extracted with eigenvalue > 1 .

This factor explains 61.7% of the total variance. Other components had eigenvalues < 1 and were discarded.

Factor Loadings (Component Matrix)

- Employment Opportunities: .510
- Course Duration: .695
- Course Fees: .923
- Cost of Living: .934

The extracted factor is dominated by course fees and cost of living, with some contribution from duration, but weak from employment opportunities.

Interpretation

The analysis suggests there is one underlying dimension linking these variables — a “Cost Factor”.

Course fees and cost of living are the strongest markers of this factor (both loadings $> .90$).

Course duration moderately relates to this cost factor, reflecting how longer courses tend to be more expensive.

Employment opportunities load only weakly (.510), suggesting that they are less connected to cost perceptions.

Summary

This factor analysis confirms that students' perceptions of course fees and cost of living form a strong single cost dimension, with course duration partly linked. Employment opportunities, while correlated with costs, do not align strongly with this underlying factor.

4.8.2 Perception of quality

The Perception of Quality construct contains a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis – PCA) of quality-related factors:

- Ranking
- Perception of Safety
- Proximity to Facilities
- Employment Opportunities

Suitability for Factor Analysis

KMO = .704 → acceptable sampling adequacy (above .7 = good).

Bartlett's Test: $\chi^2(6) = 265.1$, $p < .001$ → correlations are sufficient for factor analysis.

Communalities (Variance explained by the extracted factor)

- Ranking: .414 (moderate)
- Safety: .550 (moderate)
- Proximity: .552 (moderate)
- Employment: .653 (moderate-high)

All four items are moderately explained by the extracted factor.

Total Variance Explained

One factor extracted with eigenvalue > 1 .

This factor explains 54.2% of the total variance.

Factor Loadings (Component Matrix)

- Ranking: .643
- Safety: .742
- Proximity: .743
- Employment: .808

All items load positively on the single factor, with strongest contributions from employment opportunities and proximity/safety.

Interpretation

The analysis suggests that these four quality-related items cluster into one underlying dimension of perceived institutional quality.

Employment opportunities show the strongest association (.808), followed by proximity to facilities (.743) and safety (.742).

Ranking contributes, but less strongly (.643).

This indicates that students' concept of quality is multi-faceted but unified, where safety, facilities, and career opportunities weigh slightly more than ranking.

Summary

The factor analysis confirms a single latent "Quality Factor", explaining over half the

variance. All four indicators contribute, but employment prospects, safety, and facilities are more central to perceived quality than ranking alone.

4.8.3 Perception of Reputation

The Perception of Reputation construct contains a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis – PCA) of quality-related factors:

- Marketing communications
- Ranking
- Prior Awareness

Suitability for Factor Analysis

KMO = .487 → (below .6 → sampling adequacy is weak, factorability marginal).

Bartlett's Test: $\chi^2 = 357.629$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$ → correlations are significantly different from zero (suitable for factor analysis).

Communalities

- Marketing communications: .806 (strongly represented).
- Ranking: .367 (weakly represented).
- Awareness: .920 (very strongly represented).

Total variance explained:

Single factor accounts for 69.8% of total variance.

Factor Loadings

- Marketing communications = .898
- Ranking = .606
- Awareness = .959

All three load on a single factor, but Ranking is significantly weaker than Marketing and Awareness.

Interpretation

The analysis shows that Marketing reputation and Awareness form a strong unified construct, with Ranking only modestly aligned.

The factor likely represents an overarching “Reputation” dimension in which Awareness (visibility, recognition) and Marketing (promotional image) dominate, while Ranking contributes less reliably.

The weak KMO suggests that the three-variable structure is not ideal for factor analysis; however, the high variance explained by a single factor supports conceptual unidimensionality.

Summary

In measurement terms, Reputation can be considered a single latent construct, but Ranking may not be as strong an indicator compared with Marketing and Awareness. This aligns with prior literature where institutional reputation is shaped more by visibility and image than by formal rankings alone (Ivy, 2010).

4.8.4 Word of Mouth

The Word of Mouth construct reports a factor analysis (PCA) of three word-of-mouth (WoM) variables:

- Alumni recommendations (Alumni_WoM)
- Agent recommendations (Agent_WoM)
- Family & Friends recommendations (Family_Friends_WoM)

Suitability for Factor Analysis

KMO = .655 → acceptable sampling adequacy.

Bartlett's Test: $\chi^2(3) = 112.50$, $p < .001$ → correlations are sufficient for factor analysis.

Communalities (Variance explained by extracted factor)

- Alumni WoM: .644 (moderate-high)
- Agent WoM: .542 (moderate)
- Family & Friends WoM: .678 (moderate-high)

All three are reasonably well explained by the extracted factor.

Total Variance Explained

One factor extracted (eigenvalue = 1.865).

This factor explains 62.2% of the total variance.

Factor Loadings (Component Matrix)

- Alumni WoM: .803
- Agent WoM: .736

- Family & Friends WoM: .824

All three variables load strongly ($> .70$) on the same factor.

Interpretation

The analysis identifies a single underlying factor of “Word-of-Mouth Influence.”

Family & Friends (.824) and Alumni (.803) recommendations are the strongest indicators.

Agents (.736) also contribute meaningfully, though slightly less strongly.

This suggests that students perceive all three sources as part of one dimension of word-of-mouth influence, with family/friends and alumni slightly more central than agents.

Summary

The factor analysis confirms a unified WoM factor that explains 62% of variance across alumni, agent, and family/friends recommendations. This shows that while all sources contribute, students view family/friends and alumni recommendations as the most influential in shaping perceptions.

4.9 Regression Analysis

Regression is a technique used to understand the relationship of variables within a given data set and is frequently seen within quantitative research. For explanatory studies such as this, it is a central component. Essentially, regression enables researchers to test theoretical assumptions through an analytical structure to determine which predictors exert statistically significant effects and how strongly they contribute to an outcome.

Specifically, as it relates to this study, regression analysis was used to test the conceptual assumptions underpinning the research model and to identify which factors significantly informed the perceptions of students, related to the attractiveness of different universities. As an example, in one set of regressions, 'word of mouth' was treated as the dependent variable and regressed on three independent variables: 'alumni word of mouth', 'family and friends' word of mouth', and 'agent word of mouth'. A standard linear regression model was used which allowed each predictor to be entered simultaneously. SPSS outputs were reviewed to evaluate model fit, identify statistically significant predictors, and examine the strength and direction of influence through standardised beta coefficients. This particular analysis highlighted which source exerted the greatest explanatory effect on the formation of the broader word-of-mouth construct. This was repeated for the dependent variables 'Reputation', 'Perception of Quality' and 'Cost', regressing each against their connected independent variables.

In the second stage of analysis, the aggregated word-of-mouth measure was used as a dependent variable in three separate regression models predicting perceived quality, perceived reputation, and perceived cost. Each model assessed the extent to which word of mouth influenced students' evaluative judgments of higher educational institutions. SPSS outputs, including significance tests and effect sizes were used to determine whether word of mouth acted as a meaningful predictor of these perceptions. Taken together, these two stages of regression analysis provided empirical support for the conceptual model and demonstrated the explanatory pathways linking interpersonal influence to the formation of perceptions amongst prospective students.

4.10 Hypotheses related to this study

Hypotheses are an integral aspect of quantitative research. They provide a robust method of testing the predictions related to a study. Essentially in developing a hypothesis, researchers take an ‘educated guess’ of what the relationship is between a set of variables. Below are the hypotheses related to each of the identified factors influencing the choice of Chinese international students;

4.10.1 Reputational Factors

One of the central influences upon institutional choice amongst Chinese international students is reputation. Reputational factors such as university marketing, global rankings, and brand awareness are consistently identified as strong pull factors shaping perceptions of quality and employability. With several earlier studies suggesting that an institution’s reputation is a primary driver of higher education selection, it was necessary to test whether reputational variables were a significant determinant of university choice within this study.

H1	University selection is dependent upon positive reputational factors
H1a	University selection is dependent upon the university’s marketing communications
H1b	University selection is dependent upon the university’s ranking
H1c	University selection is dependent upon student’s prior awareness

4.10.2 Word – of – Mouth Factors

Word – of – Mouth has long been considered important to Chinese students in their decision making with three primary sources having been identified. As is the case with reputational factors (with which word – of – mouth is closely linked), it too exerts an influence upon Chinese international student choice. Earlier studies suggested that word – of – mouth of agents, family & friends and alumni all play a key role in higher education selection. Thus, it was decided that this should be tested to determine whether this remained the case post – COVID.

H2	University selection is dependent upon positive Word – of – Mouth
H2a	University selection is dependent upon Alumni Word – of – Mouth
H2b	University selection is dependent upon Agents Word – of – Mouth
H2c	University selection is dependent upon Friends / Family Word – of – Mouth

4.10.3 Perception of Quality Factors

The degree to which a university is considered of high quality is another important factor that influences Chinese international student choice. It is bound to perceptions related to employment opportunities, the availability of facilities on or near to campus and how safe students feel that the campus environment is. To develop an understanding of Quality factors and the part they play in student choice it was necessary to test this within the study.

H3	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Quality
H3a	University selection is dependent upon the student’s perception of safety
H3b	University selection is dependent upon the university’s proximity to facilities
H3c	University selection is dependent upon the availability of employment opportunities

4.10.4 Perception of Cost Factors

There is a growing middle – class within China and this has in part led to opportunities for a greater number of prospective students to explore their options overseas. This having been said, the cost of attending university overseas remains a significant consideration for Chinese students and their families. It is considered of the utmost importance that a positive return results from studying abroad. This is linked to employment opportunities both whilst overseas and upon return to China. Testing to understand whether cost variables are a significant determinant of university choice was undertaken.

H4	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Cost
H4a	University selection is dependent upon perceived course fees
H4b	University selection is dependent upon course duration
H4c	University selection is dependent upon perceived cost of living

4.10.5 Influence of Word – of – Mouth Upon decision making factors

Word of mouth is an important facet of Chinese consumer decision making. As such it was determined that testing of the influence of this upon each of the key factors related to student choice was carried out.

H5	Word – of – Mouth shapes perception of factors influencing student choice
H5a	Word of mouth shapes perception of university cost
H5b	Word of mouth shapes perception of university quality
H5c	Word of mouth shapes perception of university reputation

4.10.6 Hypothesis Testing

Here, I discuss the procedures undertaken to test his hypotheses and the preliminary findings related to this activity.

4.10.6.1 H1a: Reputation → University marketing

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .709$, $p < .001$

Decision: **H1a accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that university marketing is a very strong and statistically significant predictor of reputation, explaining over 70% of the variance in Reputation_D.

H1	University selection is dependent upon positive reputational factors	Result
H1a	University selection is dependent upon the university's marketing communications	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Reputation_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Marketing2

This model tests whether university marketing communications influences reputation.

Model Summary

- **R = .842** → Very strong positive relationship.
- **R² = .709** → About **71% of the variance in reputation** is explained by marketing.
- **Adjusted R² = .708** → Almost identical, showing model stability.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.780** → Predictions deviate less than one unit on average.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 518.97, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 4.065 (p < .001)**

Represents baseline reputation when marketing = 0 (theoretical)

- **Marketing2: B = 2.106 (SE = 0.092), β = .842, t = 22.781, p < .001**

Each **1-unit increase in marketing effectiveness** is associated with a **2.11-unit increase in reputation**.

The standardized beta (.842) shows a very strong effect.

Residuals

- **Residual range: -1.66 to +1.52**
- **Std. Residuals: -2.13 to +1.94** → well within acceptable limits.
- Assumptions of regression are well satisfied here.

The regression shows that **marketing communications is a very strong and significant predictor of university reputation**, explaining about 71% of the variance.

- This highlights the powerful influence of marketing strategies on how institutions are perceived.
- The strength of the relationship ($\beta = .842$) suggests that effective marketing campaigns may substantially shape reputation, alongside other quality and performance factors.
- Compared with prior predictors (e.g., safety, proximity, employment), marketing explains a larger share of variance in its outcome variable, reflecting its centrality in reputation building.

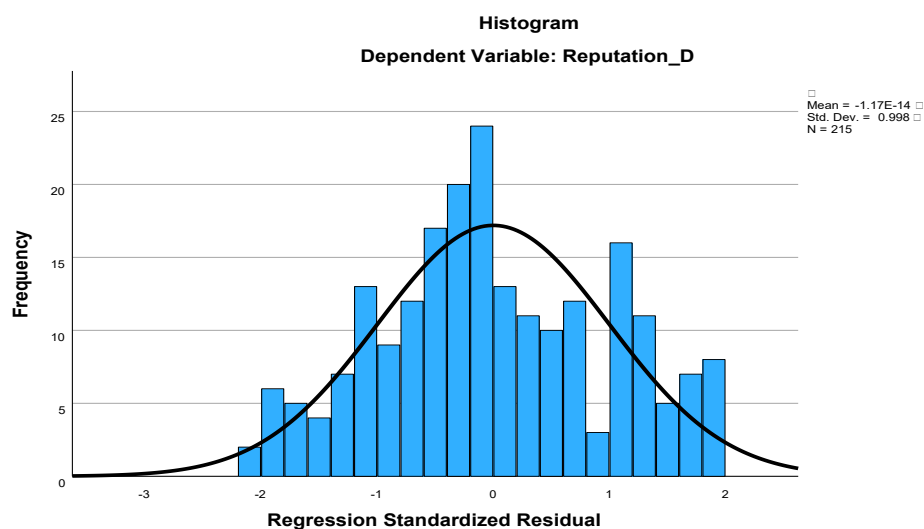


Figure 20: Illustrates Dependent Variable Reputation_D / Marketing Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 518.97$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 71.0% of the variance in Reputation_D ($R^2 = .709$, Adjusted $R^2 = .708$). This indicates a very strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $\text{Reputation_D} = 4.065 + 2.106 \times \text{Marketing}_2$.

The coefficient for marketing was $B = 2.106$ ($SE = 0.092$), suggesting that each additional unit of marketing effectiveness is associated with a 2.11-unit increase in Reputation_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .842$) indicates a very strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 4.065$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -2.13 and $+1.94$, all within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that university marketing is a very strong and statistically significant predictor of reputation, explaining over 70% of the variance in Reputation_D. This underscores the importance of strategic communication, branding, and promotional activities in shaping how institutions are perceived (Maringe, 2006; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .842$) highlights that marketing may be one of the most influential factors in driving reputation, potentially outweighing operational aspects such as proximity or employment. This aligns with previous research suggesting that marketing plays a crucial role in differentiating universities in competitive global markets (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Ivy, 2008). These results suggest that universities seeking to enhance their reputation should invest in sustained, authentic, and student-centered marketing strategies. However, caution is needed: while marketing can amplify reputation, long-term

credibility ultimately depends on alignment with quality of provision and student experience (Chapleo, 2010).

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.842	0.709	0.708	0.78

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	4.065	0.31	-	13.094	<.001
Marketing2	2.106	0.092	0.842	22.781	<.001

Table 41: Correlation matrix for reputational / marketing predictors

4.10.6.2 H1b: Reputation → University ranking

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .503$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H1b accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that university ranking is a significant predictor of reputation, explaining half of the variance in Reputation_D

H1	University selection is dependent upon positive reputational factors	Result
H1b	University selection is dependent upon the university's ranking	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Reputation_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Ranking2

This model examines whether university ranking predicts institutional reputation.

Model Fit

- **R = .709** → Moderate-to-strong correlation.
- **R² = .503** → About **50.3% of the variance in reputation** is explained by ranking.
- **Adjusted R² = .500** → Stable.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.020** → Average prediction error ~1 unit.

This is not as strong than university marketing (R² = .709), but still meaningful.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 215.24, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept):** 4.449 (p < .001)

Baseline reputation when ranking = 0 (theoretical).

- **Ranking2:** B = 1.636 (SE = 0.112), $\beta = .709$, t = 14.671, p < .001

Each **1-unit increase in ranking score** is associated with a **1.64-unit increase in reputation**.

The standardized beta (.709) indicates a moderate-to-strong effect, weaker than marketing ($\beta = .842$).

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -3.34 to $+3.29$
- **Std. Residuals:** -3.28 to $+3.23$ → acceptable, though with a few large outliers.
- Model assumptions broadly satisfied.

The regression shows that **university ranking significantly predicts reputation**, explaining about half the variance (50%).

- The effect on reputation is strong, but clearly not as strong as the impact of marketing
- This aligns with higher education research showing that rankings influence perceptions of quality and prestige, but reputation is shaped by multiple factors including marketing, student experience, and outcomes (Hazelkorn, 2015).
- Thus, while rankings contribute meaningfully, they do not fully determine institutional reputation.

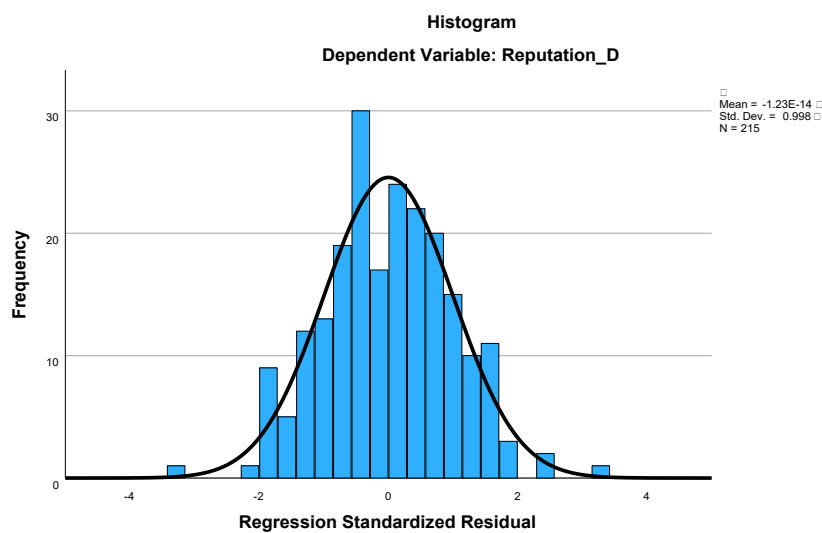


Figure 21: Illustrates Dependent Variable Reputation_D / Ranking Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 215.24$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 50.3% of the variance in Reputation_D ($R^2 = .503$, Adjusted $R^2 = .500$). This indicates a moderate-to-strong model fit, though weaker than the marketing model ($R^2 = .709$).

The regression equation was: $\text{Reputation_D} = 4.449 + 1.636 \times \text{Ranking2}$

The coefficient for ranking was $B = 1.636$ ($SE = 0.112$), suggesting that each additional unit of ranking is associated with a 1.64-unit increase in Reputation_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .709$) indicates a moderate-to-strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 4.449$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.28 and $+3.23$, which is within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that university ranking is a significant predictor of reputation, explaining half of the variance in Reputation_D. While the effect is substantial ($\beta = .709$), it is weaker than marketing ($\beta = .842$), suggesting that rankings alone do not fully shape institutional reputation. This aligns with higher education research showing that rankings influence perceptions of prestige and quality, but reputation is multifaceted and also shaped by communication, student experience, and graduate outcomes (Hazelkorn, 2015; Marginson, 2007). The reliance on rankings has been widely debated, as they may capture only partial dimensions of institutional performance and often emphasize research outputs over teaching

quality (Shin & Toutkoushian, 2011).

These results imply that while universities cannot ignore rankings, reputation management should also emphasize authentic engagement, marketing, and the lived student experience. A balanced strategy ensures that reputation is not solely dependent on volatile ranking positions but supported by sustainable quality improvements.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.709	0.503	0.5	1.02

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	4.449	0.454	-	9.798	<.001
Ranking2	1.636	0.112	0.709	14.671	<.001

Table 42: Correlation matrix for reputational / ranking predictors

4.10.6.3 H1c: Reputation → Prior awareness

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .857$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H1c accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that prior awareness is the single strongest predictor of reputation, explaining over 85% of the variance in Reputation_D.

H1	University selection is dependent upon positive reputational factors	Result
H1c	University selection is dependent upon student's prior awareness	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Reputation_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Prior_Awareness2

This model tests whether prior awareness of the institution predicts reputation.

Model Fit

- **R = .926** → Extremely strong correlation.
- **R² = .857** → About **85.7% of the variance in reputation** is explained by prior awareness.
- **Adjusted R² = .856** → Nearly identical, showing excellent stability.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.548** → Very small average error, indicating highly accurate predictions.

This was the **strongest model** for reputation predictors.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 1273.16, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 2.132 (p < .001)**

Baseline reputation when awareness = 0 (theoretical).

- **Prior_Awareness2:** $B = 2.405$ ($SE = 0.067$), $\beta = .926$, $t = 35.681$, $p < .001$

Each **1-unit increase in prior awareness** is associated with a **2.41-unit increase in reputation**.

The standardized beta (.926) indicates an **exceptionally strong effect**.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -1.55 to $+1.43$
- **Std. Residuals:** -2.83 to $+2.62$ → all well within acceptable thresholds.
- Regression assumptions clearly satisfied.

The regression shows that **prior awareness is the single strongest predictor of reputation**, explaining over **85% of the variance**.

- The effect size ($\beta = .926$) suggests that reputation is overwhelmingly shaped by pre-existing perceptions, branding, and familiarity with the institution.
- This aligns with branding and reputation research, which highlights the importance of prior knowledge and brand equity in shaping judgments (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2020).
- Compared with marketing ($R^2 = .709$) and ranking ($R^2 = .503$), prior awareness exerts a far stronger influence, suggesting that long-term brand presence and visibility may matter more than short-term promotional campaigns or league table positions.

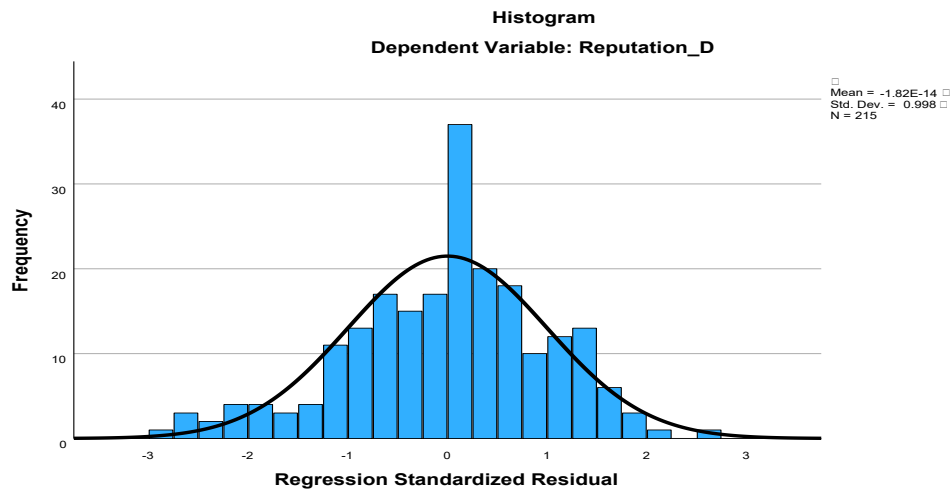


Figure 22: Illustrates Dependent Variable Reputation_D / Prior Awareness Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 1273.16, p < .001$, accounting for approximately 85.7% of the variance in Reputation_D ($R^2 = .857$, Adjusted $R^2 = .856$). This indicates an exceptionally strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $\text{Reputation_D} = 2.132 + 2.405 \times \text{Prior_Awareness}^2$.

The coefficient for prior awareness was $B = 2.405$ ($SE = 0.067$), suggesting that each additional unit of prior awareness is associated with a 2.41-unit increase in Reputation_D.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .926$) indicates an exceptionally strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 2.132, p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -2.83 and $+2.62$, all within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that prior awareness is the single strongest predictor of reputation, explaining over 85% of the variance in Reputation_D. The effect size ($\beta = .926$) suggests that reputation is overwhelmingly shaped by pre-existing perceptions, brand familiarity, and institutional visibility. This finding aligns with branding theory, which emphasizes the central role of brand equity and awareness in shaping consumer judgments (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2020).

Compared with marketing ($R^2 = .709$) and ranking ($R^2 = .503$), prior awareness exerts a far stronger influence, suggesting that long-term reputation is anchored more in established brand recognition than in short-term promotional efforts or league table performance. This is in alignment with earlier studies that highlight the importance of familiarity and word-of-mouth in shaping international student choices and institutional reputations (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

These results suggest that universities seeking to strengthen reputation should focus on building sustained brand awareness through consistent communication, alumni engagement, and visibility in global education markets. While rankings and marketing matter, they may play a secondary role to the deep-rooted impact of prior awareness on institutional reputation.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.926	0.857	0.856	0.548

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.132	0.252	-	8.45	<.001
Prior_Awareness2	2.405	0.067	0.926	35.681	<.001

Table 43: Correlation matrix for reputation / prior awareness predictors

4.10.6.4 H2a: WOM → Alumni

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .576$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H2a accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that alumni advocacy is a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining over half of the variance in WOM_D ($R^2 = .576$).

H2	University selection is dependent upon positive Word – of – Mouth	Result
H2a	University selection is dependent upon Alumni Word – of – Mouth	Accepted

- **Dependent variable (DV):** WOM_D (Word-of-Mouth—likely alumni WOM intention/behavior).
- **Independent variable (IV):** Alumni2 (some measure of alumni-related factor, possibly engagement, satisfaction, or loyalty).

Model Fit

- $R = .759$ → Strong positive correlation between *Alumni2* and *WOM_D*.
- $R^2 = .576$ → About **57.6% of the variance in WOM_D is explained** by Alumni2.

- **Adjusted $R^2 = .574$** → Almost identical, confirming stability and minimal overfitting.

This suggests a very good explanatory power for a single predictor model.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **$F(1, 213) = 289.508, p < .001$**

The model is statistically significant, meaning Alumni2 is a strong predictor of WOM_D.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 2.348 ($p < .001$)**

This is the predicted WOM_D score when Alumni2 = 0.

- **Alumni2 coefficient ($B = 2.055, \beta = .759, p < .001$)**
 - For each 1-unit increase in Alumni2, WOM_D increases by about **2.06 units**.
 - The standardized beta (.759) indicates a **very strong effect size**.

Residuals / Assumptions

- **Residual mean = 0**, standard deviation ≈ 1.22 .
- **Std. Residuals range:** -2.97 to +2.90 (within acceptable limits, no extreme outliers).
- Model assumptions appear reasonably met (normal distribution of residuals, no major issues).

The analysis shows that alumni-related factor (*Alumni2*) is a **very strong predictor** of positive word-of-mouth (WOM_D).

- The strength of the relationship suggests that alumni engagement or perception strongly drives whether alumni recommend or promote the institution.
- With nearly 58% of variance explained, this is a highly impactful relationship in a social/marketing context.

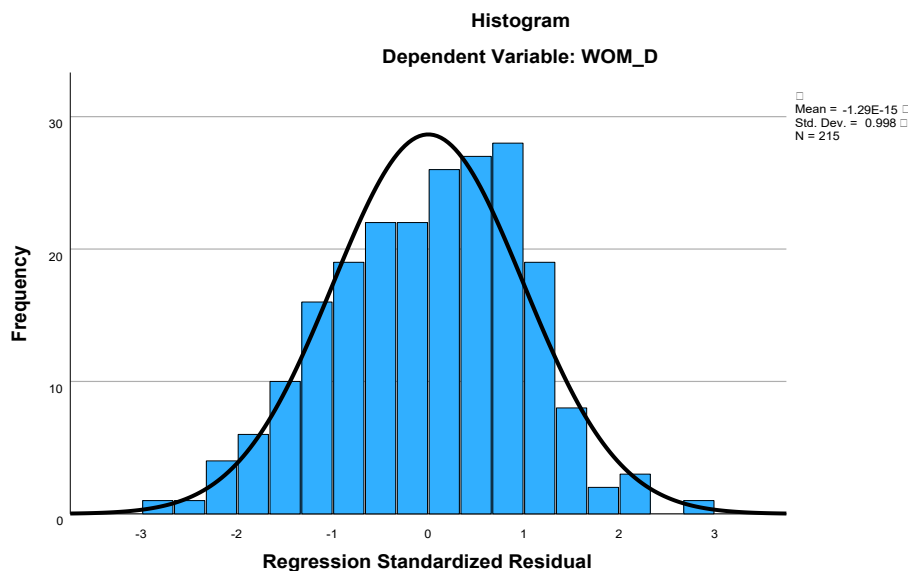


Figure 23: Illustrates Dependent Variable WOM_D / Alumni Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 289.51$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 57.6% of the variance in WOM_D ($R^2 = .576$, Adjusted $R^2 = .574$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $WOM_D = 2.348 + 2.055 \times Alumni2$.

The coefficient for alumni advocacy was $B = 2.055$ ($SE = 0.121$), suggesting that each additional unit of alumni advocacy is associated with a 2.06-unit increase in WOM_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .759$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 2.348$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -2.97 and $+2.90$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that alumni advocacy is a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining over half of the variance in WOM_D ($R^2 = .576$). The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .759$) underscores the role of engaged alumni as credible, high-impact advocates. This aligns with research showing that trusted, experienced voices drive WOM more powerfully than institutional messaging alone (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In higher education, alumni communities act as brand communities that co-create reputation and influence prospective students' choices (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Peruta & Helm, 2018).

Universities seeking to amplify WOM should invest in alumni relations—e.g., storytelling campaigns, ambassador programmes, mentoring, and referral initiatives—while making it easy for alumni to share authentic experiences across online and offline networks. These efforts complement family-and-friends influence and can sustain advocacy at scale.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.759	0.576	0.574	1.223

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.348	0.415	-	5.655	<.001
Alumni2	2.055	0.121	0.759	17.015	<.001

Table 44: Correlation matrix for Word of Mouth / Alumni predictors

4.10.6.5 H2b: WOM → Agents

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .648$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H2b accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that education agents are a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining nearly two-thirds of the variance in WOM_D.

H2	University selection is dependent upon positive Word – of – Mouth	Result
H2b	University selection is dependent upon Agents Word – of – Mouth	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** WOM_D (Word of Mouth)
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Agents2

This model examines whether education agents' influence predicts WOM outcomes.

Model Fit

- **R = .805** → Strong correlation.
- **R² = .648** → About **64.8% of the variance in WOM_D** is explained by agents.

- **Adjusted $R^2 = .646$** → Very close, showing stability.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.115** → Average prediction error ~1.12 units.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **$F(1, 213) = 391.36, p < .001$**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 5.325** ($p < .001$)

Baseline WOM when agent influence = 0.

- **Agents2: $B = 1.593$** ($SE = 0.081$), $\beta = .805$, $t = 19.78$, $p < .001$

Each **1-unit increase in agents' influence** predicts a **1.59-unit increase in WOM_D**.

The standardized beta (.805) indicates a strong effect size.

Residuals

- **Residual range: -3.42 to $+3.75$**
- **Std. Residuals: -3.06 to $+3.36$** → within acceptable limits, though some outliers exist.
- Assumptions of linear regression are reasonably satisfied.

The analysis shows that **agents are a strong and significant predictor of WOM**, explaining about 65% of the variance.

- This suggests that education agents, as intermediaries, exert substantial influence on how WOM is generated and spread.

- The strong effect ($\beta = .805$) is comparable to family/friends ($\beta = .792$), suggesting that both social networks and professional intermediaries shape WOM.

However, reliance on agents may introduce risks, such as over-commercialization or less authentic endorsements, which institutions must balance (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Yang, 2020).

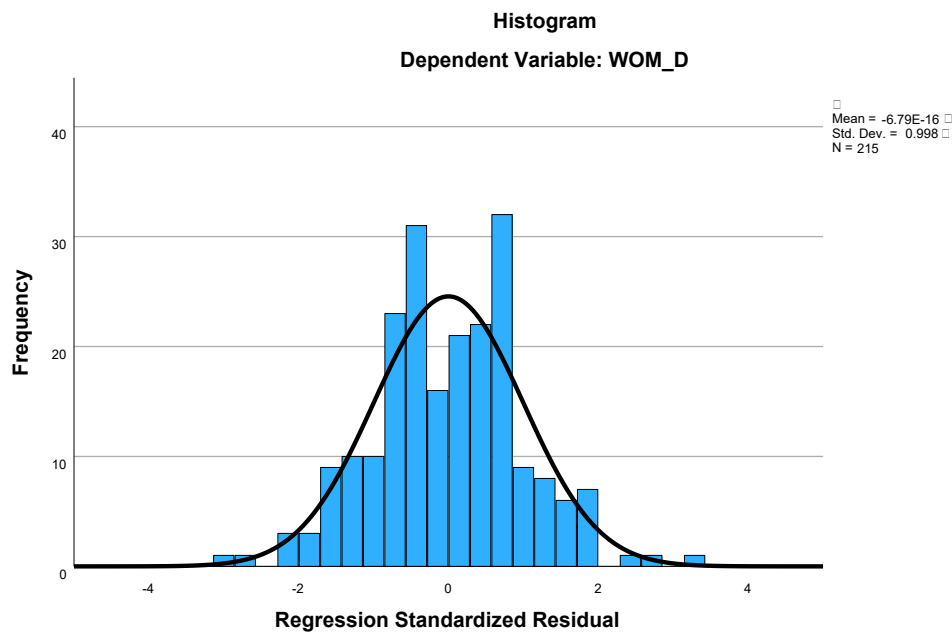


Figure 24: Illustrates Dependent Variable WOM_D / Agents Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 391.36$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 64.8% of the variance in WOM_D ($R^2 = .648$, Adjusted $R^2 = .646$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $WOM_D = 5.325 + 1.593 \times Agents2$.

The coefficient for agents' influence was $B = 1.593$ ($SE = 0.081$), suggesting that each additional unit of influence is associated with a 1.59-unit increase in WOM_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .805$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 5.325$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.06 and $+3.36$, which is within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that education agents are a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining nearly two-thirds of the variance in WOM_D. The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .805$) underscores the substantial role that agents play in shaping perceptions and referrals in international education markets.

This aligns with research highlighting the influence of education agents as key intermediaries in the recruitment process, often acting as trusted advisors to students and families (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Yang, 2020). The strength of their effect is comparable to family and friends ($\beta = .792$), suggesting that both informal networks and professional intermediaries play central roles in WOM.

However, reliance on agents carries risks. Over-commercialization and potential conflicts of interest can undermine the authenticity of WOM (ICEF Monitor, 2018). Institutions should therefore manage agent relationships carefully, ensuring transparency, training, and quality assurance to sustain credibility. While agents amplify WOM, universities should complement

this with alumni advocacy and peer recommendations to maintain balanced and authentic student recruitment strategies.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.805	0.648	0.646	1.115

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	5.325	0.213	-	24.965	<.001
Agents2	1.593	0.081	0.805	19.783	<.001

Table 45: Correlation matrix for Word of Mouth / Agents predictors

4.10.6.6 H2c: WOM → Friends / Family

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .627$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H2c accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that family and friends' influence is a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining over 60% of the variance in WOM_D.

H2	University selection is dependent upon positive Word – of – Mouth	Result
H2c	University selection is dependent upon Friends / Family Word – of – Mouth	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** WOM_D (Word of Mouth)
- **Independent Variable (IV):** FamilyFriends2

This model tests whether recommendations from family and friends predict word-of-mouth outcomes.

Model Fit

- **R = .792** → Strong correlation.
- **R² = .627** → About **62.7% of the variance in WOM_D** is explained by family & friends WOM.
- **Adjusted R² = .625** → Stable.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.148** → Average prediction error ~1.15 units.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 357.45, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept):** 2.413 (p < .001)

Baseline WOM when family/friends influence = 0 (theoretical).

- **FamilyFriends2:** B = 2.001 (SE = 0.106), $\beta = .792$, t = 18.91, p < .001

Each **1-unit increase in family & friends influence** corresponds to a **2.00-unit**

increase in WOM_D.

The standardized beta (.792) indicates a strong effect size.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -4.17 to +2.83
- **Std. Residuals:** -3.63 to +2.47 → within acceptable thresholds, though a few outliers exist.
- Regression assumptions are broadly satisfied.

The analysis shows that **family and friends' influence strongly predicts word-of-mouth outcomes**, explaining about 63% of the variance.

- This underscores the importance of **informal networks** and **personal recommendations** in shaping WOM.
- The strong effect ($\beta = .792$) highlights that social endorsement is a powerful driver of WOM, consistent with social influence theory and prior research on higher education marketing (Maringe, 2006; Peruta & Helm, 2018).
- Compared to other predictors, WOM appears particularly sensitive to interpersonal trust and advocacy.

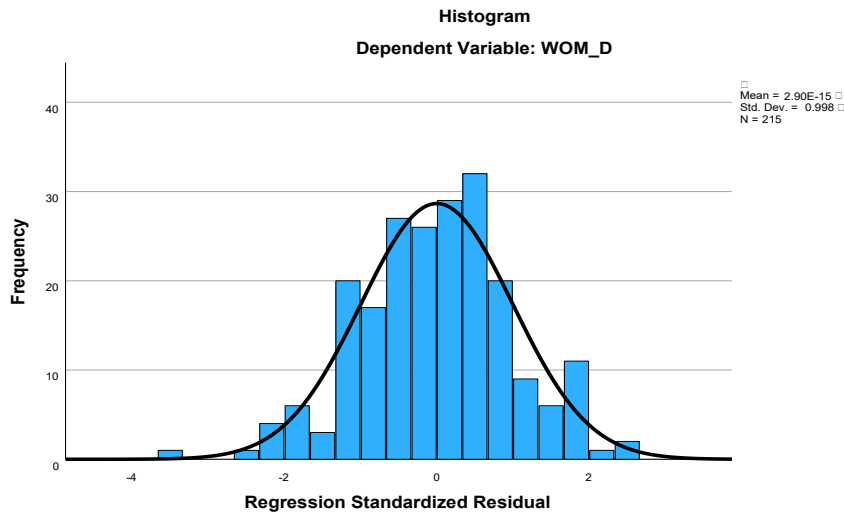


Figure 25: Illustrates Dependent Variable WOM_D / Family & Friends Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 357.45$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 62.7% of the variance in WOM_D ($R^2 = .627$, Adjusted $R^2 = .625$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $WOM_D = 2.413 + 2.001 \times \text{FamilyFriends2}$.

The coefficient for family and friends' influence was $B = 2.001$ ($SE = 0.106$), suggesting that each additional unit of influence is associated with a 2.00-unit increase in WOM_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .792$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 2.413$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.63 and $+2.47$, which is within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that family and friends' influence is a strong and statistically significant predictor of word-of-mouth, explaining over 60% of the variance in WOM_D. The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .792$) highlights the powerful role of interpersonal relationships and social networks in shaping students' willingness to recommend institutions.

This aligns with theories of social influence and higher education marketing research, which emphasize that personal recommendations often carry greater weight than institutional communications (Maringe, 2006; Peruta & Helm, 2018). Word-of-mouth is a trust-based process, and endorsements from close contacts enhance credibility and persuasiveness (Arndt, 1967; Brown et al., 2005).

The results suggest that universities aiming to boost positive WOM should actively engage alumni, parents, and peer networks. Creating opportunities for students and graduates to share authentic experiences can amplify WOM. While institutional marketing and rankings are important, the persuasive power of family and friends highlights the enduring influence of social connections in shaping higher education choices.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.792	0.627	0.625	1.148

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.413	0.371	-	6.507	<.001
FamilyFriends2	2.001	0.106	0.792	18.906	<.001

Table 46: Correlation matrix for Word of mouth / family & friends predictors

4.10.6.7 H3a: Perception of Quality → Safety

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .660$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H3a accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that safety is a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived quality.

H3	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Quality	Result
H3a	University selection is dependent upon the student's perception of safety	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Quality_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Safety2

The analysis examines whether perceptions of safety predict perceived quality.

Model Fit

- **R = .812** → Strong positive relationship.
- **R² = .660** → About **66% of the variance in Quality_D** is explained by safety.
- **Adjusted R² = .658** → Stable model.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.951** → Predictions deviate on average by ~0.95 units.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **$F(1, 213) = 412.92, p < .001$**

The model is highly statistically significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 3.837 ($p < .001$)**

Baseline quality when safety = 0 (theoretical).

- **Safety2: $B = 1.892$ ($SE = 0.093$), $\beta = .812$, $t = 20.32$, $p < .001$**

Each **1-unit increase in safety** is associated with a **1.892-unit increase in perceived quality**.

The standardized beta ($\beta = .812$) indicates a strong effect size.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -3.73 to $+2.44$
- **Std. Residuals:** -3.93 to $+2.57$ → acceptable, though a few large outliers exist.
- Model assumptions (normality, independence, homoscedasticity) appear broadly met.

The regression shows that **safety is a strong, significant predictor of perceived quality**.

- About **two-thirds of quality perceptions (66%)** can be explained by safety alone.
- This suggests that perceptions of safety are central to students' or stakeholders' evaluations of institutional quality.
- Compared with financial predictors (fees, duration, cost of living), this result highlights a **non-financial but highly influential factor** in shaping overall quality perceptions.

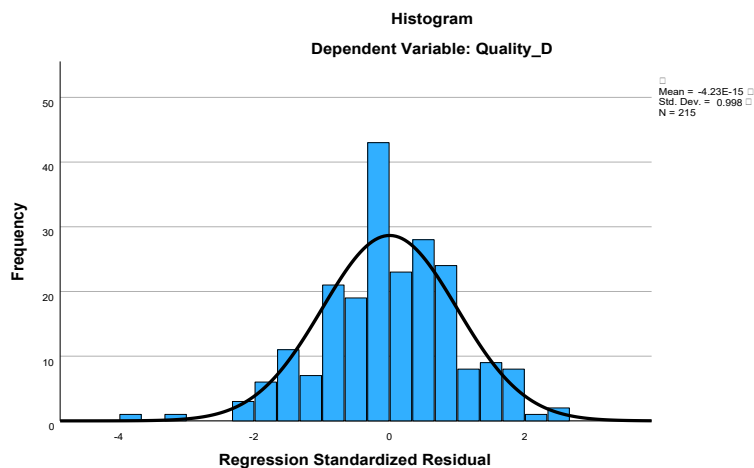


Figure 26: Illustrates Dependent Variable Quality_D / Safety Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 412.92$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 66.0% of the variance in Quality_D ($R^2 = .660$, Adjusted $R^2 = .658$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $Quality_D = 3.837 + 1.892 \times Safety2$

The coefficient for safety was $B = 1.892$ ($SE = 0.093$), suggesting that each additional unit of safety is associated with a 1.892-unit increase in Quality_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .812$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 3.837$, $p < .001$), though its practical interpretation is limited.

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.93 and $+2.57$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that safety is a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived quality. With $R^2 = .660$, the model suggests that two-thirds of the variation in Quality_D can be explained by safety perceptions. This underscores the importance of campus and environmental safety in shaping stakeholder evaluations of institutional quality (Lizzio et al., 2002; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .812$) highlights that perceptions of safety play a critical role in students' overall judgements of quality. This aligns with prior research showing that safety and security influence not only satisfaction but also retention, word-of-mouth, and institutional reputation (Ali et al., 2016; Elliott & Shin, 2002). In the international higher education context, safety concerns are often cited as a key factor in destination choice, with safe environments perceived as more attractive and higher quality (Chen, 2007). These findings suggest that universities aiming to improve perceived quality should invest in visible and effective safety measures, transparent communication, and student support systems. While financial predictors (such as fees or cost of living) directly influence affordability, non-financial predictors like safety may exert equally powerful effects on perceived quality.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.812	0.66	0.658	0.951

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.837	0.387	-	9.917	<.001
Safety2	1.892	0.093	0.812	20.32	<.001

Table 47: Correlation matrix for Quality / safety predictors

4.10.6.8 H3b: Perception of Quality → Proximity to facilities

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .639$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H3b accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that proximity is a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived quality.

H3	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Quality	Result
H3b	University selection is dependent upon the university's proximity to facilities	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Quality_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Prox2 (Proximity)

This analysis tests whether proximity influences perceived quality.

Model Fit

- **R = .801** → Strong positive relationship.
- **R² = .641** → About **64.1% of the variance in Quality_D** is explained by proximity.
- **Adjusted R² = .639** → Very close, indicating stability.

- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.977** → Predictions deviate on average by ~0.98 units.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 380.31, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 3.953 (p < .001)**

Represents baseline quality when proximity = 0 (theoretical).

- **Prox2: B = 2.040 (SE = 0.105), $\beta = .801$, t = 19.501, p < .001**

Each **1-unit increase in proximity** corresponds to a **2.04-unit increase in perceived quality**.

The standardized beta ($.801$) indicates a strong effect, though slightly weaker than safety ($\beta = .812$).

Residuals

- **Residual range: -3.61 to +2.30**
- **Std. Residuals: -3.70 to +2.36** → acceptable, with a few outliers.
- Regression assumptions appear broadly satisfied.

The analysis shows that **proximity is a strong and significant predictor of perceived quality**, explaining 64% of variance.

- The effect is very similar to safety, with both factors strongly shaping quality perceptions.

- Proximity likely reflects convenience, accessibility, and reduced logistical barriers, which contribute to students' evaluation of institutional quality.
- Compared with financial predictors (fees, cost of living), proximity is a **non-financial but influential driver of perceived quality**.

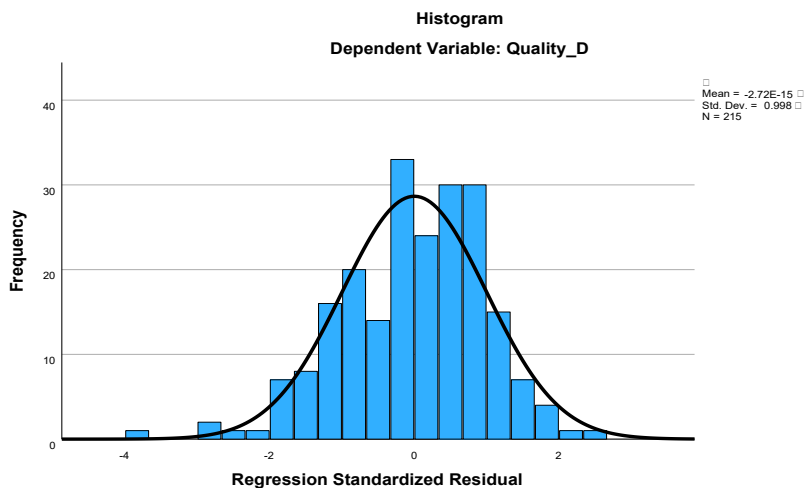


Figure 26: Illustrates Dependent Variable Quality_D / Proximity Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 380.31$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 64.1% of the variance in Quality_D ($R^2 = .641$, Adjusted $R^2 = .639$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $Quality_D = 3.953 + 2.040 \times Prox2$.

The coefficient for proximity was $B = 2.040$ ($SE = 0.105$), suggesting that each additional unit of proximity is associated with a 2.04-unit increase in Quality_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .801$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 3.953$, $p < .001$), though its practical interpretation is limited.

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.70 and $+2.36$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that proximity is a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived quality. With $R^2 = .641$, the model suggests that nearly two-thirds of the variation in Quality_D can be explained by proximity. This underscores the importance of accessibility and convenience in shaping stakeholder evaluations of institutional quality (Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

The strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = .801$) highlights that proximity has a 255ofstede255d on quality perceptions, though slightly weaker than safety ($\beta = .812$). This aligns with research showing that location, accessibility, and travel time are important factors influencing student satisfaction and institutional attractiveness (Soutar & Turner, 2002; Chen, 2007).

These findings suggest that universities aiming to enhance perceived quality should consider strategies related to accessibility—such as effective transport links, campus locations, and support for commuting students. While financial factors like fees or living costs affect affordability, non-financial predictors such as proximity contribute substantially to perceptions of quality and student experience.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.801	0.641	0.639	0.977

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.953	0.397	-	9.955	<.001
Prox2	2.04	0.105	0.801	19.501	<.001

Table 48: Correlation matrix for quality / proximity predictors

4.10.6.9 H3c: Perception of Quality → Employment opportunities

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .500$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H3c accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that employment opportunities are a significant predictor of perceived quality, explaining half of the variance in Quality_D.

H3	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Quality	Result
H3c	University selection is dependent upon the availability of employment opportunities	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Quality_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Employment2

The analysis tests whether employment opportunities predict perceived quality.

Model Fit

- **R = .707** → Moderate-to-strong correlation.
- **R² = .500** → About **50% of the variance in Quality_D** is explained by employment.
- **Adjusted R² = .497** → Stable model.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.153** → Predictions deviate on average by ~1.15 units.

This is a weaker model than Safety (R² = .660) or Proximity (R² = .641), but still substantial.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 212.68, p < .001**

The model is highly significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 6.032 (p < .001)**

Baseline quality when employment = 0 (theoretical).

- **Employment2: B = 1.483 (SE = 0.102), β = .707, t = 14.584, p < .001**

Each **1-unit increase in employment opportunities** is associated with a **1.48-unit increase in perceived quality**.

The standardized beta (.707) suggests a moderate-to-strong effect, weaker than safety (.812) or proximity (.801).

Residuals

- **Residual range: -4.45 to +3.32**

- **Std. Residuals:** -3.86 to $+2.88$ → within acceptable limits, though a few large outliers exist.
- Regression assumptions appear broadly satisfied.

The regression demonstrates that **employment opportunities significantly predict perceived quality**, explaining half the variance (50%).

- The effect is meaningful but weaker compared to safety and proximity.
- This suggests that while employability prospects are an important component of perceived quality, they may not be as immediate or tangible as personal safety or campus accessibility in shaping student evaluations.
- In line with higher education literature, employability outcomes are a central component of quality perceptions, but they interact with other dimensions of the student experience (Harvey, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017).

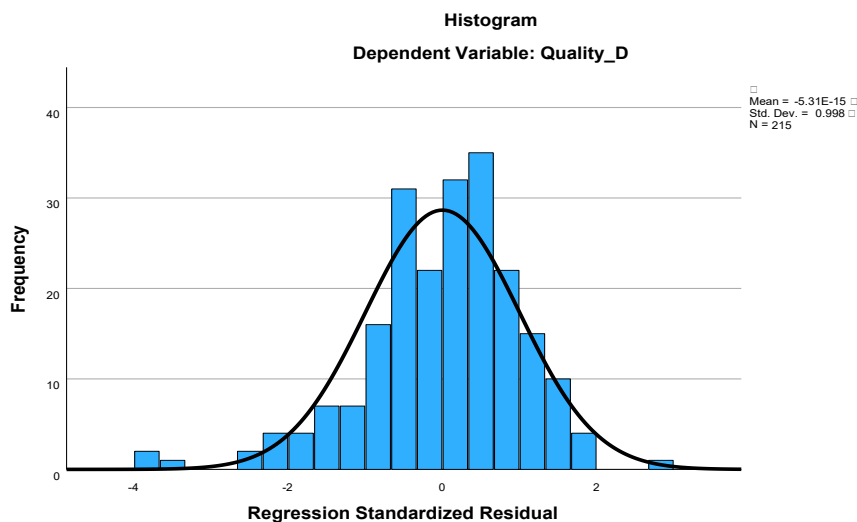


Figure 28: Illustrates Dependent Variable Quality_D / Safety Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 212.68, p < .001$, accounting for approximately 50.0% of the variance in Quality_D ($R^2 = .500$, Adjusted $R^2 = .497$). This indicates a moderate-to-strong model fit, though weaker than the models for safety ($R^2 = .660$) or proximity ($R^2 = .641$).

The regression equation was: $\text{Quality_D} = 6.032 + 1.483 \times \text{Employment2}$

The coefficient for employment was $B = 1.483$ ($SE = 0.102$), suggesting that each additional unit of employment opportunities is associated with a 1.48-unit increase in Quality_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .707$) indicates a moderate-to-strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 6.032, p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.86 and $+2.88$, which is within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that employment opportunities are a significant predictor of perceived quality, explaining half of the variance in Quality_D. While the effect is substantial ($\beta = .707$), it is weaker than safety ($\beta = .812$) or proximity ($\beta = .801$), suggesting that while employability is valued, it may be perceived as less immediate than personal safety or accessibility. This aligns with higher education research, where employability outcomes are widely recognized as an important component of quality perceptions (Harvey, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017). Students often view universities as pathways to future careers, but the strength of this perception may vary depending on how clearly institutions communicate

employment support and outcomes.

The results imply that universities aiming to enhance perceived quality should continue to invest in career services, internship opportunities, and employer partnerships. While these are critical for long-term student satisfaction and success, they should be combined with immediate experiential factors such as safety and accessibility to maximize perceptions of institutional quality.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.707	0.5	0.497	1.153

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	6.032	0.389	-	15.507	<.001
Employment2	1.483	0.102	0.707	14.584	<.001

Table 49: Correlation matrix for quality / employment predictors

4.10.6.10 H4a: Cost → Course fees

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .832$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H4a accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that course fees are a very strong and statistically significant predictor of the dependent variable (Cost_D).

H4	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Cost	Result
H4a	University selection is dependent upon perceived course fees	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Cost_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** Course_Fees

The analysis examines whether Course_Fees significantly predicts Cost_D.

Model Fit

- **R = .912** → Very strong positive correlation between Course_Fees and Cost_D.
- **R² = .832** → About **83.2% of the variance in Cost_D** is explained by Course_Fees.
- **Adjusted R² = .831** → Similar, showing the model is stable and not overfitted.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.825** → On average, predictions deviate from actual values by less than 1 unit.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 1056.904, p < .001**

The model is highly statistically significant. This confirms that Course_Fees contributes meaningfully to explaining variation in Cost_D.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept):** 1.798 ($p < .001$)

When $\text{Course_Fees} = 0$, the predicted Cost_D is ~ 1.80 (though practically, fees are unlikely to be 0).

- **Course_Fees:** $B = 1.172$, $\beta = .912$, $t = 32.510$, $p < .001$

For every **1-unit increase in Course_Fees**, Cost_D increases by **1.172 units**.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .912$) indicates a very strong effect size.

Residuals

- Residuals range: -2.60 to $+2.68$.
- Standardized residuals: mostly within -3.15 to $+3.25$ \rightarrow acceptable, though a few extreme values exist but not severe.
- Distribution appears roughly normal, suggesting assumptions of linear regression are reasonably met.

Interpretation

This regression shows a **very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship** between course fees and the dependent variable Cost_D .

- Higher course fees strongly predict higher values of Cost_D .
- The model explains more than 80% of the variance, which is unusually high in social science data, suggesting the two measures are very closely related (possibly overlapping or conceptually similar).

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 1056.90$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately **83.2% of the variance in Cost_D** ($R^2 = .832$, Adjusted $R^2 = .831$). This indicates a strong model fit.

The regression equation was: $Cost_D = 1.798 + 1.172 \times Course_Fees$

The unstandardized coefficient for *Course_Fees* was **$B = 1.172$ ($SE = 0.036$)**, indicating that for each one-unit increase in course fees, the predicted value of *Cost_D* increased by 1.172 units. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .912$) further suggested that course fees exerted a very strong influence on the dependent variable. The intercept was statistically significant (**$B = 1.798$, $p < .001$**), though its practical interpretation is limited since a fee value of zero is unrealistic in real-world settings.

Residual analysis showed that standardized residuals ranged between -3.15 and 3.25 , which falls within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that the assumptions of linear regression (normality, homoscedasticity, independence) were reasonably met.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that course fees are a **very strong and statistically significant predictor** of the dependent variable (*Cost_D*). The high explanatory power ($R^2 = .832$) suggests that the model captures a substantial proportion of the variance, which is unusually high in educational and social science research (Cohen et al., 2014). This implies a close conceptual or operational alignment between course fees and the measured dependent cost

variable. From a practical standpoint, this suggests that variations in fees are highly aligned with the reported costs — possibly because both indicators capture overlapping constructs of financial burden. Such results resonate with previous research on cost of student in higher education, where tuition fees have been identified as the primary determinant of students' perceived financial expenditure (Dandekar & Chauhan, 2019; Johnstone, 2004).

Nevertheless, the unusually high correlation warrants caution. It may indicate that the two constructs are not fully independent, and measurement overlap could be inflating the explained variance (Hair et al., 2020). Future analyses might incorporate additional predictors (e.g., living costs, scholarships, or hidden expenses) to provide a more comprehensive cost model and reduce potential redundancy.

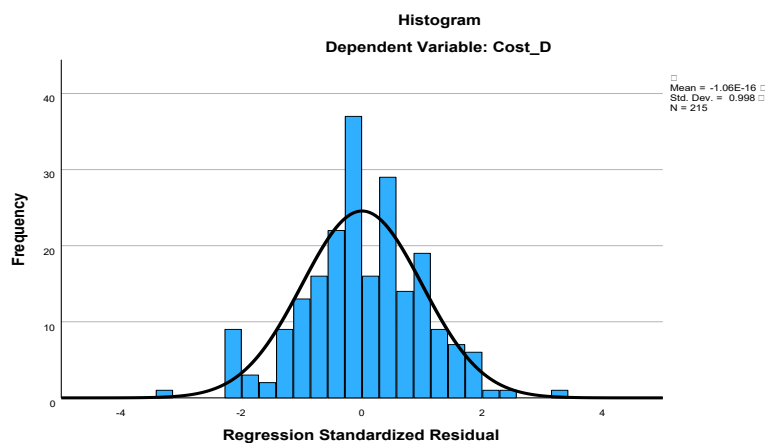


Figure 29: Illustrates Dependent Variable Cost_D / Course fees Histogram

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.912	0.832	0.831	0.825

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.798	0.278	-	6.476	<.001
Course_Fees	1.172	0.036	0.912	32.51	<.001

Table 50: Correlation matrix for cost / course fees predictors

4.10.6.11 H4b: Cost → Course duration

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .598$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H4b accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The analysis confirms that course duration is a significant predictor of cost outcomes, with longer courses being associated with higher total costs.

H4	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Cost	Result
H4b	University selection is dependent upon course duration	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Cost_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** CourseDuration2

The analysis tests whether the duration of a course significantly predicts the dependent measure Cost_D.

Model Fit

- **R = .773** → Strong positive correlation between course duration and Cost_D.
- **R² = .598** → About **59.8% of the variance in Cost_D** is explained by course duration.
- **Adjusted R² = .596** → Close to R², indicating a stable model.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.277** → On average, predicted values deviate by ~1.28 units from observed values.

This is a good fit, though weaker than the model run with Course_Fees (R² = .832).

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 316.887, p < .001**

The model is highly significant, confirming course duration contributes meaningfully to predicting Cost_D.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 4.664 (p < .001)**

When course duration = 0, the predicted cost is 4.664 (theoretically, but not practical since duration = 0 is unrealistic).

- **CourseDuration2: B = 1.919 (SE = 0.108), β = .773, t = 17.801, p < .001**

Each **1-unit increase in course duration** is associated with a **1.919-unit increase in Cost_D**.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .773$) indicates a strong, though not as dominant, predictor compared to course fees.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -4.34 to $+3.04$
- **Std. Residuals:** mostly within -3.40 to $+2.38$ → acceptable, with a few extreme values but no serious violation.
- Distribution suggests the assumptions of linear regression are broadly satisfied.

This regression shows that **course duration is a significant and strong predictor of Cost_D**, explaining ~60% of the variance.

- Longer courses are strongly associated with higher costs.
- However, compared with the earlier model using **course fees as the predictor ($R^2 = .832$)**, course duration explains less variance, suggesting fees are the more direct driver of cost outcomes.
- Still, course duration remains an important factor, and in real-world settings, both variables are likely interrelated — longer courses often come with higher tuition and associated living expenses.

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 316.89$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately **59.8% of the variance in Cost_D** ($R^2 = .598$, Adjusted $R^2 = .596$). This indicates a strong relationship, though notably weaker than the model with course fees as predictor ($R^2 = .832$).

The regression equation was: $Cost_D = 4.664 + 1.919 \times CourseDuration$

The coefficient for course duration was $B = 1.919$ ($SE = 0.108$), suggesting that each additional unit of course duration is associated with a 1.919-unit increase in $Cost_D$. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .773$) indicates a strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 4.664$, $p < .001$), although its practical interpretation is limited, as a duration of zero is unrealistic in real contexts.

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.40 and $+2.38$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The analysis confirms that **course duration is a significant predictor of cost outcomes**, with longer courses being associated with higher total costs. This is consistent with expectations, as extended study periods typically entail additional tuition charges, higher accommodation expenses, and greater living costs (Johnstone, 2004; Usher & Cervenak, 2005). The strong relationship ($\beta = .773$) suggests that duration is an important driver of perceived financial burden.

However, the variance explained ($R^2 = .598$) is considerably lower than that of the fees-based model ($R^2 = .832$). This indicates that while course duration is influential, **course fees**

provide a more direct and precise predictor of total costs. The two constructs are related but not interchangeable: fees represent an explicit financial outlay, while duration indirectly shapes costs through time-dependent expenses such as housing, food, and foregone earnings (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The results highlight the importance of considering both variables in cost modelling. Duration contributes meaningfully to financial outcomes, but institutions and policymakers may find fees a more immediate lever for influencing affordability perceptions. Future research could test models that incorporate **both fees and duration simultaneously**, potentially alongside variables such as scholarships, part-time employment opportunities, and living costs, to build a more holistic framework of student cost burden (Hair et al., 2020).

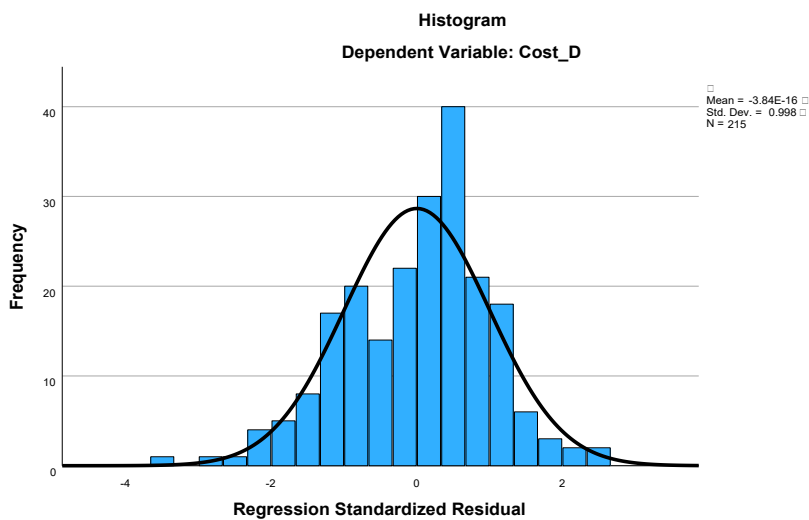


Figure 30: Illustrates Dependent Variable Cost_D / Course Duration Histogram

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate

1	0.773	0.598	0.596	1.277
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Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	4.664	0.347	-	13.451	<.001
CourseDuration2	1.919	0.108	0.773	17.801	<.001

Table 51: Correlation matrix for cost / course duration predictors

4.10.6.12 H4c: Cost → Cost of living

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .854$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H4c accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The analysis demonstrates that cost of living is the strongest predictor of cost outcomes among the tested models.

H4	University selection is dependent upon a positive perception of Cost	Result
H4c	University selection is dependent upon perceived cost of living	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Cost_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** CostOfLiving2

This model tests whether cost of living predicts the dependent measure Cost_D.

Model Fit

- **R = .924** → Very strong correlation.

- **$R^2 = .854$** → About **85.4% of the variance in Cost_D** is explained by cost of living.
- **Adjusted $R^2 = .854$** → Stable, no overfitting.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 0.769** → Predictions deviate by less than 1 unit on average.

This is the **strongest cost model**, outperforming both course fees ($R^2 = .832$) and course duration ($R^2 = .598$).

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **$F(1, 213) = 1247.98, p < .001$**

The model is highly statistically significant.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 1.018 ($p < .001$)**

Represents predicted cost when cost of living = 0 (theoretical, not practical).

- **CostOfLiving2: $B = 2.562$ ($SE = 0.073$), $\beta = .924$, $t = 35.327$, $p < .001$**

Each **1-unit increase in cost of living** leads to a **2.562-unit increase in Cost_D**.

The standardized beta (.924) indicates an exceptionally strong effect.

Residuals

- **Residual range: -2.55 to $+1.95$**
- **Std. Residuals: -3.31 to $+2.54$** → acceptable, with only minor extremes.
- Model assumptions (normality, homoscedasticity) are broadly satisfied.

This regression shows that **cost of living is the single strongest predictor of overall cost (Cost_D)**, explaining **85% of the variance**.

- The very high standardized coefficient ($\beta = .924$) indicates that cost of living almost entirely drives perceived financial costs.

Compared with fees and duration, cost of living exerts an even stronger predictive effect, highlighting the importance of accommodation, daily expenses, and locality-related costs in shaping student financial experiences.

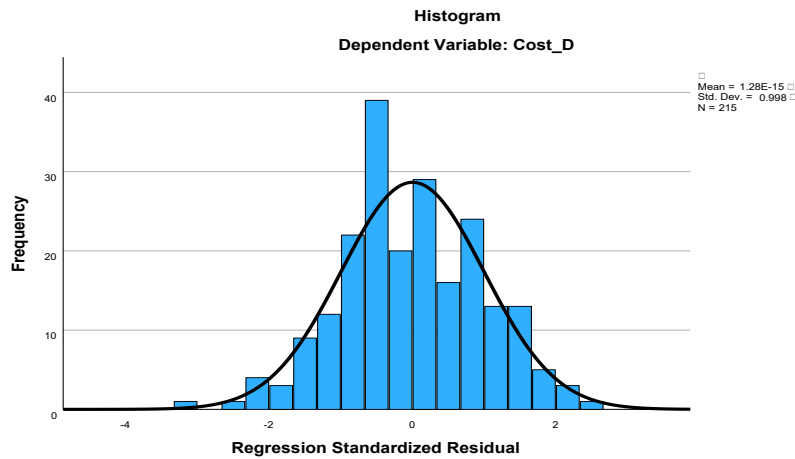


Figure 31: Illustrates Dependent Variable Cost_D / Cost of Living Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 1247.98$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 85.4% of the variance in Cost_D ($R^2 = .854$, Adjusted $R^2 = .854$). This indicates an exceptionally strong model fit, stronger than both course fees ($R^2 = .832$) and course duration ($R^2 = .598$).

The regression equation was: $Cost_D = 1.018 + 2.562 \times CostOfLiving2$

The coefficient for cost of living was $B = 2.562$ ($SE = 0.073$), suggesting that each additional unit of cost of living is associated with a 2.562-unit increase in Cost_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .924$) indicates an extremely strong effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 1.018$, $p < .001$), though its practical interpretation is limited, as a cost of

living score of zero is unrealistic.

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.31 and $+2.54$, which is within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that cost of living is the strongest predictor of cost outcomes among the tested models. With $R^2 = .854$, the model explains more variance in Cost_D than course fees ($R^2 = .832$) or course duration ($R^2 = .598$). This underscores the critical importance of daily living expenses, accommodation, and local price structures in shaping students' overall financial burdens (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Usher & Cervenak, 2005).

The high standardized coefficient ($\beta = .924$) suggests that cost of living almost fully determines perceived costs. This aligns with international student finance literature, which highlights the importance of housing, food, and subsistence costs as key contributors to affordability and decision-making (Johnstone, 2004; Chen & Zimitat, 2006). While tuition fees are more visible and often politically contested, living costs can have a stronger day-to-day impact on students' financial stress and accessibility to higher education (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Although the predictive power is very high, overlapping constructs may inflate variance explained. Nevertheless, the findings highlight that universities and policymakers aiming to support international students should not only consider tuition structures but also address living costs through housing support, subsidies, or guidance on cost-effective living strategies.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.924	0.854	0.854	0.769

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.018	0.277	-	3.671	<.001
CostOfLiving2	2.562	0.073	0.924	35.327	<.001

Table 52: Correlation matrix for cost / cost of living predictors

4.10.6.13 H5a WOM → University cost

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .239$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H5a accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that word-of-mouth (WOM_D) contributes modestly to students' cost perceptions, but most variance is explained by other factors.

H5	Word – of – Mouth shapes perception of factors influencing student choice	Result
H5a	Word of mouth shapes perception of university cost	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Cost_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** WOM_D

This model tests whether WOM predicts perceived costs.

Model Fit

- **R = .239** → Weak correlation.
- **R² = .057** → Only **5.7% of the variance in cost** is explained by WOM.
- **Adjusted R² = .053** → Stable, still very low.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.956** → Predictions deviate ~2 units on average.

This is one of the weakest models so far.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 12.88, p < .001**
Statistically significant, but effect size is very small.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept): 8.265 (p < .001)**
Baseline cost when WOM = 0.
- **WOM_D: B = 0.256 (SE = 0.071), β = .239, t = 3.589, p < .001**
Each **1-unit increase in WOM** predicts only a **0.26-unit increase in cost**.
The standardized beta (.239) indicates a weak effect.

Residuals

- **Residual range: -7.29 to +4.83**
- **Std. Residuals: -3.73 to +2.47** → within limits, but wide variability.
- Model assumptions broadly satisfied.

Interpretation

The regression shows that **WOM has only a weak effect on cost perceptions**, explaining less than 6% of variance.

- While statistically significant, WOM is not a meaningful driver of perceived costs.
- This contrasts sharply with **cost of living ($R^2 = .854$)** and **course fees ($R^2 = .832$)**, which are dominant predictors.
- WOM may instead reflect other factors (e.g., affordability discussions among peers) but does not substantially shape cost perceptions on its own.
- This aligns with literature suggesting WOM is more influential in reputation and satisfaction domains, rather than financial cost assessments (Maringe, 2006; Peruta & Helm, 2018).

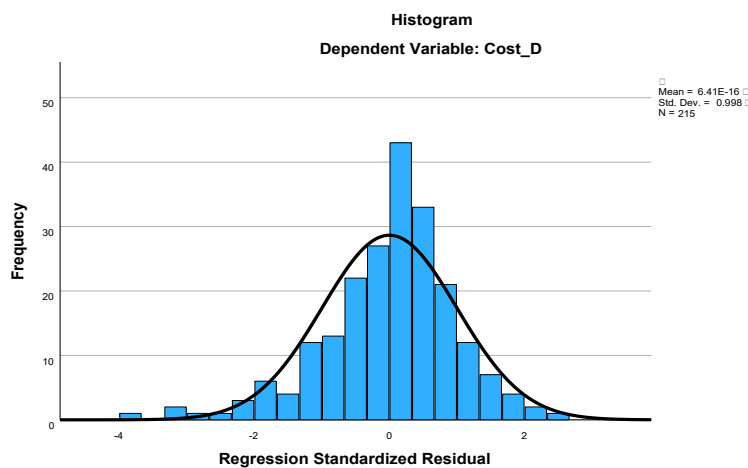


Figure 32: Illustrates Dependent Variable Cost_D / WOM Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 12.88$, $p < .001$, but accounted for only 5.7% of the variance in Cost_D ($R^2 = .057$, Adjusted $R^2 = .053$). This indicates a weak model

fit compared with stronger predictors such as cost of living ($R^2 = .854$) or course fees ($R^2 = .832$).

The regression equation was: $\text{Cost_D} = 8.265 + 0.256 \times \text{WOM_D}$

The coefficient for WOM was $B = 0.256$ ($SE = 0.071$), suggesting that each additional unit of WOM is associated with only a 0.26-unit increase in Cost_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .239$) indicates a weak effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 8.265$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.73 and $+2.47$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied, though predictive power was limited.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that WOM is a statistically significant but weak predictor of cost perceptions, explaining less than 6% of the variance. This suggests that WOM is not a meaningful driver of cost-related judgements, which are primarily shaped by direct financial factors such as tuition fees and living costs. This aligns with prior research, which shows that WOM is more influential in shaping perceptions of reputation, satisfaction, and overall experience, rather than concrete financial evaluations (Maringe, 2006; Peruta & Helm, 2018). Peer conversations may include affordability, but WOM appears to reinforce rather than shape cost perceptions. The results imply that universities should not rely on WOM to manage cost perceptions but should instead focus on transparent communication about fees,

scholarships, and cost of living. WOM may serve best as a supplementary communication channel to share affordability strategies, but it cannot replace institutional clarity on pricing and financial support.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.239	0.057	0.053	1.956

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	8.265	0.515	-	16.047	<.001
WOM_D	0.256	0.071	0.239	3.589	<.001

Table 53: Correlation matrix for word of Mouth / cost predictors

4.10.6.14 H5b: WOM → University quality

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .368, p < .001$.

Decision: H5b accepted. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that word-of-mouth (WOM_D) contributes meaningfully to how students evaluate the quality of a university. Compared with the WOM → Cost model, WOM has a noticeably stronger influence on quality perceptions.

H5	Word – of – Mouth shapes perception of factors influencing student choice	Result
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H5b	Word of mouth shapes perception of university quality	Accepted
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- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Quality_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** WOM_D

This model tests whether word-of-mouth (WOM) predicts perceived quality.

Model Fit

- **R = .368** → Weak-to-moderate correlation.
- **R² = .136** → Only **13.6% of the variance in quality** is explained by WOM.
- **Adjusted R² = .131** → Stable.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.515** → Predictions deviate ~1.5 units on average.

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 33.40, p < .001**

The model is statistically significant, but effect size is small.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept):** 8.629 (p < .001)

Baseline quality when WOM = 0.

- **WOM_D:** B = 0.319 (SE = 0.055), $\beta = .368$, t = 5.779, p < .001

Each **1-unit increase in WOM** predicts a **0.32-unit increase in quality**.

The standardized beta (.368) shows only a modest effect.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -5.30 to +3.72

- **Std. Residuals:** -3.50 to $+2.46$ → within acceptable limits, though wide.
- Model assumptions are broadly satisfied.

The regression shows that **WOM has a statistically significant but weak effect on quality**, explaining just $\sim 14\%$ of variance.

- WOM plays a role but is a much weaker predictor compared to safety ($R^2 = .660$) or proximity ($R^2 = .641$).
- WOM may act more as a supplementary influence, enhancing or reinforcing perceptions of quality rather than determining them outright.
- This finding aligns with prior research that WOM is impactful in trust-building and peer validation, but perceived quality depends more on direct experiential and environmental factors (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Ali et al., 2016).

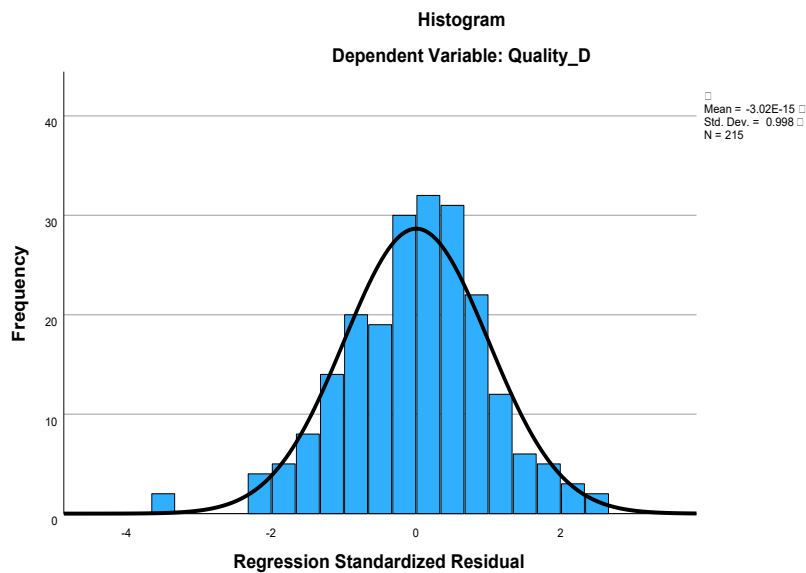


Figure 33: Illustrates Dependent Variable Quality_D / Course Duration Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 33.40$, $p < .001$, but accounted for only 13.6% of the variance in Quality_D ($R^2 = .136$, Adjusted $R^2 = .131$). This indicates a weak model fit compared with other predictors such as safety ($R^2 = .660$) or proximity ($R^2 = .641$).

The regression equation was: $\text{Quality_D} = 8.629 + 0.319 \times \text{WOM_D}$

The coefficient for WOM was $B = 0.319$ ($SE = 0.055$), suggesting that each additional unit of WOM is associated with only a 0.32-unit increase in Quality_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .368$) indicates a weak-to-moderate effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 8.629$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.50 and $+2.46$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied, though predictive power was limited.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that WOM is a statistically significant but weak predictor of perceived quality, explaining less than 15% of the variance. While WOM provides value through peer validation and credibility, it appears to act more as a supporting influence rather than a primary determinant of quality perceptions. This aligns with prior research, which highlights that WOM is impactful for trust-building and reinforcing decisions, but direct experiential and environmental factors—such as safety, accessibility, and employment prospects—play a more central role in shaping perceived quality (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Ali et al., 2016). Therefore, WOM may best be understood as amplifying existing perceptions of

quality rather than creating them independently. The results suggest that universities should integrate WOM into broader quality strategies by encouraging student testimonials, peer recommendations, and online reviews. However, to significantly improve quality perceptions, institutions should focus on tangible service and learning enhancements, with WOM functioning as a communication channel that amplifies these strengths.

Regression Summary Table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.368	0.136	0.131	1.515

Coefficients Table

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	8.629	0.489	-	17.631	<.001
WOM_D	0.319	0.055	0.368	5.779	<.001

Table 54: Correlation matrix for word of mouth / quality predictors

4.10.6.15 H5c: WOM → University reputation

Tested using Pearson correlation.

Result: $r = .315$, $p < .001$.

Decision: **H5c accepted**. H_0 rejected.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate that WOM_D reliably predicts Reputation_D. The likelihood of this relationship occurring by chance is extremely low.

H5	Word – of – Mouth shapes perception of factors influencing student choice	Result
H5c	Word of mouth shapes perception of university reputation	Accepted

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Reputation_D
- **Independent Variable (IV):** WOM_D

This model tests whether word-of-mouth (WOM) predicts institutional reputation.

Model Fit

- **R = .315** → Weak-to-moderate correlation.
- **R² = .099** → Only **9.9% of the variance in reputation** is explained by WOM.
- **Adjusted R² = .095** → Stable, still very low.
- **Std. Error of Estimate = 1.373** → Predictions deviate ~1.37 units on average.

This is a **weak model** compared with others (e.g., Prior Awareness R² = .857, Marketing R² = .709).

ANOVA (Model Significance)

- **F(1, 213) = 23.43, p < .001**

The model is statistically significant, though the effect is small.

Coefficients

- **Constant (Intercept):** 8.788 (p < .001)

Baseline reputation when WOM = 0.

- **WOM_D:** $B = 0.242$ ($SE = 0.050$), $\beta = .315$, $t = 4.841$, $p < .001$

Each **1-unit increase in WOM** predicts a **0.24-unit increase in reputation**.

The standardized beta (.315) shows only a modest effect.

Residuals

- **Residual range:** -4.89 to $+3.70$
- **Std. Residuals:** -3.56 to $+2.70$ → within acceptable limits, but with some larger outliers.
- Assumptions are reasonably met, but predictive strength is low.

The regression shows that **WOM has a weak but statistically significant effect on reputation**, explaining only ~10% of variance.

- While WOM matters, it is much less influential than **prior awareness ($R^2 = .857$)** or **marketing ($R^2 = .709$)**.
- This suggests that WOM alone does not strongly determine institutional reputation but may act as a **supporting influence** that amplifies other drivers.
- In higher education marketing, WOM often reinforces reputation rather than creating it (Brown et al., 2005; Peruta & Helm, 2018).

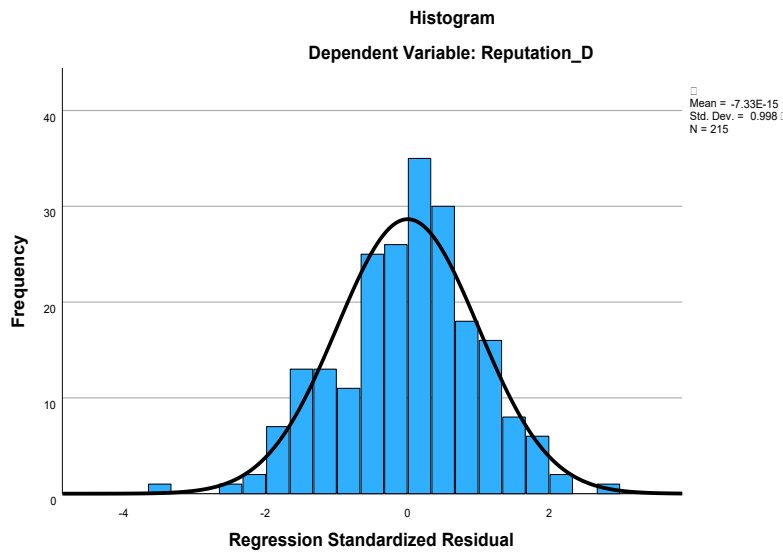


Figure 34: Illustrates Dependent Variable Cost_D / Course Duration Histogram

The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 213) = 23.43$, $p < .001$, but accounted for only 9.9% of the variance in Reputation_D ($R^2 = .099$, Adjusted $R^2 = .095$). This indicates a weak model fit compared with other predictors such as prior awareness ($R^2 = .857$) or marketing ($R^2 = .709$).

The regression equation was: $\text{Reputation_D} = 8.788 + 0.242 \times \text{WOM_D}$

The coefficient for WOM was $B = 0.242$ ($SE = 0.050$), suggesting that each additional unit of WOM is associated with only a 0.24-unit increase in Reputation_D. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .315$) indicates a weak-to-moderate effect size. The intercept was also significant ($B = 8.788$, $p < .001$).

Residual analysis showed standardized residuals ranging between -3.56 and $+2.70$, within acceptable thresholds (Field, 2018). This indicates that assumptions of normality,

independence, and homoscedasticity were reasonably satisfied, though predictive power was limited.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that WOM is a statistically significant but weak predictor of reputation, explaining less than 10% of the variance. While WOM plays an important role in communication and amplification, it appears to act more as a reinforcing influence than as a primary driver of institutional reputation. This aligns with prior research, which suggests that WOM is powerful for reinforcing perceptions and providing credibility, but reputation is typically built on deeper foundations such as brand equity, prior awareness, and marketing strategies (Aaker, 1996; Brown et al., 2005; Keller, 2020). In higher education, WOM tends to reflect existing reputations rather than create them independently. The results suggest that universities should not rely solely on WOM to shape reputation but rather integrate it into a broader strategy that includes consistent marketing, strong alumni networks, and long-term visibility. WOM may best serve as a multiplier that enhances the impact of other reputation drivers

4.11 Summary of Preliminary Findings

Here the key findings of the research and the implications for institutions and policymakers are summarised.

4.11.1 Findings Related to Word – of – Mouth

Below I discuss findings related to Word – of – Mouth

4.11.2 Word – of – Mouth: Agent WOM

The findings highlight **a limited reliance of prospective students upon agents in the decision-making process**. This contrasts with some earlier research which highlighted the crucial role of agents in supporting enrolment amongst Chinese international students (Chen, 2007; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). This then raises the question as to why these results differ?

There may be several different explanations for this finding. One being that for the students in this sample, a greater value may be placed upon the support provided by agents in securing a visa and / or in assisting with the university application process rather than in the specific university – related recommendations provided. Another possible explanation is that students in this sample may place greater trust in alternative information sources such as university websites, social media and alumni word of mouth. Each of these are becoming increasingly accessible and are perceived as highly authentic nowadays. Cultural and / or contextual factors may also influence these findings. In certain parts of China for example where agency use is less common, students may be more comfortable in making their own independent decisions related to host country and university choice. On the other hand, it could be the case that the students question the impartiality of Agents' advice due to the nature of the relationships they have with UK universities.

4.11.3 Word – of – Mouth: Alumni WOM

These findings suggest that **alumni recommendations play quite an important role in influencing prospective students' higher education decisions**. The mean scores indicated that alumni experiences and word-of-mouth endorsements are indeed valued amongst students who are yet to make their decisions. Word of mouth is particularly important in

relation to the overall university experience. Alumni input into university and course choice is closely linked, whereas attitudes toward avoiding institutions with negative alumni experiences are less strongly correlated. This suggests that whilst positive endorsements are highly influential, negative word-of-mouth may have less of a bearing upon student decision making. This is broadly in alignment with existing literature on word-of-mouth communication, which emphasizes the asymmetric influence of positive versus negative information.

4.11.4 Word – of – Mouth: Family / Friends WOM

These findings suggest that **family and friends’ advice form are important considerations in student decision-making**. They are in alignment with earlier studies highlighting the power of word-of-mouth as a factor influencing student choice, particularly in contexts where family expectations shape educational pathways. Prestige or social validation of the chosen course is important to prospective students and this finding is consistent with literature that differentiates between informational influences (advice, guidance) and normative influences (prestige, social approval) in decision-making.

4.12 Findings Related to Quality

Below findings related to student perception of quality are presented.

4.12.1 Quality: Employment Opportunities

The findings indicate that **employment-related factors are important to students' higher education decision-making**. Students consistently linked the importance of employment opportunities in the country when choosing a university or course (Q11 and Q13), and these items demonstrated strong internal consistency. The findings go on to suggest that respondents conceptualise graduate employment opportunities and part-time work during study as separate domains. Graduate employment reflects longer-term career prospects and labour market conditions, whereas working during study relates more to financial support, lifestyle, and short-term income. Prior studies have similarly noted that students weigh both immediate work options and post-graduation opportunities, however they often treat them as distinct considerations in their decision-making process (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

4.12.2 Quality: Proximity (of campus) to facilities

The results suggest that the Facilities construct is a moderately reliable measure of students' concern with institutional location and access to facilities. **Students rated geographic location and proximity to facilities as consistently important factors in their decision-making**. This finding aligns with previous research showing that location and access to resources are central to students' university and course choices (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). The emphasis on location at the institutional level suggests that students prioritise macro-level geographic factors when making decisions, such as city, region, or country, while also considering more practical aspects of proximity to facilities.

4.12.3 Quality: Perception of Safety

The findings are clear in that **safety is a consistently important determinant of students' choices** and that the four items together formed a robust measure. Although inter-item correlations suggest the existence of two closely related facets; (a) general safety salience at the decision stage (university and course) and (b) personal safety stance/avoidance (safety abroad, avoiding unsafe campuses), the uniformly positive correlations and the lack of improvement in α when dropping any item support treating Safety as a single coherent construct for primary analyses.

These results are in alignment with previous literature related to student choice emphasising non-academic risk considerations—particularly perceived security of study environments (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

4.13 Findings Related to Reputation

Below findings related to university reputation are presented.

4.13.1 Reputation: Prior Awareness

These findings highlight clear differences in the relative importance of specific influences. **Reputation and website information emerged as the strongest factors**, consistent with prior research demonstrating that institutional prestige and clear digital information are important determinants of student choice (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). By contrast, open day attendance, especially in-country events, was less valued, possibly reflecting geographic, logistical or infrastructure issues. Prior awareness

appears to link moderately with both reputation and digital information, suggesting it may operate more as an outcome of these influences rather than as a standalone determinant.

4.13.2 Reputation: Ranking

The findings confirm that **university ranking is a highly reliable construct in students' higher education decision making**. Moreover, the elevated item means demonstrate that respondents consistently view ranking as an important determinant of choice. These results emphasise the growing influence of international and national rankings in shaping institutional competitiveness and student perceptions (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2015). The implications are that rankings appear to serve as both an informational shortcut and a sign of institutional quality which shapes student choice in ways beyond cost or location. The strong endorsement of rankings as a determinant of employability highlights how deeply students associate institutional prestige with attaining a competitive advantage in the job market. This reinforces the importance of reputation management for universities in competitive global markets.

4.13.3 Reputation: University Marketing Communications

The results indicate that university marketing/communications operate as a broad, multi-faceted influence on student choice and is consistent with a construct combining communication salience, digital information, interactive engagement, and localisation. Two measurement observations were particularly interesting;

- The website item showed a high mean but a low item–total correlation. Prior awareness shows a similar profile, adding little to internal consistency despite moderate correlations with digital information
- The events/engagement cluster (open days and real-time chat) provides the core of the scale, differentiating respondents’ experiences and perceived importance more strongly than the website item itself. These findings align with literature emphasising that beyond static information, interactive touchpoints and social channels shape perceptions and conversion in higher education markets.

4.14 Findings Related to Cost

Below, the findings related to the costs associated with study are discussed.

4.14.1 Cost: Cost of Living

The findings indicate that the four cost-related items form an appropriate and reliable scale, providing evidence that **financial considerations are consistently viewed as an important determinant in students’ higher education decision-making**. The relatively high mean scores (3.65–3.89) suggest that respondents attach significant importance to cost factors, particularly the overall cost of attending university. These results highlight the importance of affordability in higher education choice amongst students.

4.14.2 Cost: Course Cost

In short, this analysis indicates that course cost and overall university cost are quite a reliable scale which capture the financial concerns related to student decision-making. The mean

responses highlight that **financial factors (related to course cost) are regarded as important considerations by students**. This supports current research that cost plays an important role in university and course selection. The moderate correlation between the two items suggests that students may distinguish between course-specific fees and broader university costs however, view both as interrelated financial pressures.

4.14.3 Cost: Course Duration

Previous research has shown that course duration is an important factor in student choice, but its impact may vary depending on personal circumstances, such as financial resources, career goals, or family commitments (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Some students may prioritise shorter degrees to minimise costs or enter the labour market quickly, while others may prefer longer programmes for depth of study and a more traditional academic experience.

4.15 Factors ranked by overall importance

These findings highlight how important the perception of safety is amongst prospective students and their families. Moreover, it indicates that institutional prestige, and financial considerations are also primary elements shaping international student choices. They also point towards evolving trends in the influence of social and intermediary factors, which will have implications for universities in their crafting of future international student recruitment strategies.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Safety	1.75	5.00	4.0977	.69821
Ranking	2.40	5.00	4.0233	.62504
Course Fees	1.00	5.00	3.7698	.78196
Cost Of Living	1.00	5.00	3.7547	.72504
Employment	1.00	5.00	3.7473	.77521
Proximity	2.00	5.00	3.7433	.63829
Prior Awareness	1.57	5.00	3.7017	.55529
Family, Friends WOM	1.00	5.00	3.4248	.74145
Alumni WOM	1.25	5.00	3.3674	.69241
University Marketing	1.44	4.78	3.3085	.57681
Course Duration	1.00	5.00	3.1140	.81015
Agents WOM	1.00	5.00	2.4744	.94679

Table 55: Ranking of factors in terms of importance.

The relatively low rating of education agents is notable. These findings suggest a reduction in the reliance of students upon agents as a source of recommendations. This is possibly due to greater access to online information and direct communication channels to universities. The high variability also indicates that agents remain important for some students but are less universally trusted or valued than in the past.

4.16 Summary of Preliminary Findings

The preliminary findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of international student decision making. Whilst receiving a high quality education and institutional reputation remain highly important considerations, interpersonal communication networks and broader economic factors are playing an increasing role in shaping perceptions of value for money and opportunity. The latter part of this chapter has sought to interpret the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. It supports existing literature and demonstrates the significant influence of institutional reputation, perceived quality, financial considerations and word-of-mouth communication upon student choice.

Chapter 5: Challenges & Strategic Recommendations

This chapter discusses the wider implications of the findings upon the UK Higher Education sector. It explores the current challenges faced by UK universities and addresses the shortcomings of current marketing approaches. Finally, it provides a set of strategic recommendations, laying out a case for a more sustainable marketing approach.

5.1 Challenges facing UK Universities

While Chinese students have fuelled the growth of UK international education over the past twenty years, universities now face challenges that threaten their financial stability. The issues are both structural (e.g., an over reliance upon China) and perceptual (e.g., safety, political rhetoric), intersecting with external pressures such as intensifying global competition

and shifting student priorities. This section outlines the most pressing challenges facing the sector, setting the stage for the strategic recommendations in chapter 6.

5.1.1 Over-Reliance on China as a Single Market

The most pressing challenge is perhaps the over-concentration of international student recruitment in China. According to HESA (2024), Chinese students make up almost a third of all non-UK domiciled students enrolled at UK universities. At some institutions, the proportion is even higher — exceeding 40% of the international cohort. Moreover, prior to 2020, it would not be uncommon for Chinese students to make up 65% or more of a cohort. It is no surprise then that this reliance creates financial and reputational vulnerabilities associated with risks in three key areas;

- **Financial Risks:** Sudden downturns in Chinese enrolments, caused by political tensions, economic downturns, or pandemic disruptions has created funding shortfalls
- **Reputational Risks:** Heavy dependence upon a single market undermines the perception of diversity and inclusivity, particularly when compared to competitor countries that cultivate a broader portfolio of source markets
- **Policy Risks:** Shifts in UK government policies (e.g., tighter UK visa restrictions) has significantly curtailed demand amongst overseas students

5.1.2 Increasing Competition

The UK's dominance in the Chinese market has evaporated. Australia, Canada, and the United States are competing aggressively for students, while EU destinations (Germany, the

Netherlands, France) are capturing interest with lower tuition and strong employment pathways.

- Australia has recovered strongly post-pandemic, marketing itself as safe, multicultural, and closely aligned with Asian markets
- Canada promotes immigration-friendly policies, offering clear pathways from study to permanent residency — highly appealing to Chinese families
- United States maintains global prestige despite political tensions; elite institutions remain aspirational
- EU Countries are increasingly offering English-taught programmes with lower costs and access to the Schengen labour market

Without differentiation, the UK risks losing more market share. Competitors are not only matching the UK's strengths but also outpacing it in areas such as affordability and immigration opportunities.

5.1.3 Negative Perceptions of Safety and Welcome

Perceptions of safety, racism, and political hostility have become significant deterrents and during the COVID 19 pandemic, incidents of anti-Asian racism in western countries were widely reported by Chinese media. Political rhetoric around immigration in the UK has continued to damage perceptions, with policy debates often portraying international students as burdens rather than assets. This is highly problematic because amongst Chinese families, safety is not simply related to physical wellbeing but also to cultural acceptance. Narratives related to racist attitudes undermine confidence and can have the potential to make international students feel less welcome in the UK relative to competing host countries.

5.1.4 Visa and Immigration Barriers

The UK's student visa process presents a challenge. Although the reintroduction of the Graduate Route has improved post-study opportunities, some significant issues exist;

- **Complexity and Cost:** Visa fees and health surcharges make the UK more expensive than competitors
- **Processing Delays:** Students frequently face long waits and inconsistent communication
- **Political Volatility:** Policy changes such as restrictions on dependants being able to accompany international students create uncertainty and discourage applications

Conversely, some competing nations emphasise clarity and stability in their immigration pathways, making them more attractive. The UK risks undermining its brand strength by projecting an image of hostility or unpredictability to international students.

5.1.5 Financial Barriers: Cost of Tuition and Living

UK tuition fees for international students are among the highest across the globe and range from £15,000 to £35,000 per year dependent upon course and institution. When combined with rising living costs, especially in major cities, the total investment in a UK education can exceed £50,000 annually.

The decision to invest in UK education increasingly requires reassurance that the long-term returns justify the financial outlay. The UK as a destination is somewhat vulnerable to

currency fluctuations, especially those in which the Chinese yuan weakens against the pound as this results in an increase in overall costs for prospective students considering studying in the UK. For Chinese families, this raises questions of value for money.

5.1.6 Weaknesses in Employability Support

Employability is the single most important pull factor for Chinese students, yet UK universities often underperform relative to competitors. Key weaknesses include;

- Limited availability of internships and work placements
- Weak links with Chinese employers, reducing the perceived value of UK degrees
- Insufficient career counselling tailored to international students, leaving many unsure how to leverage their degrees after graduation

Some universities such as those in Australia & Canada actively promote strong employer connections, offering international students work-integrated learning opportunities. This provides these institutions with a competitive advantage over UK universities.

5.1.7 Dependence on Education Agents

UK universities remain heavily reliant on education agents in China acting as intermediaries and stimulating demand. While agents provide access to local networks and simplify application processes, over-reliance brings several challenges;

- **High Commission Costs:** Fees of 10–15% per student reduces net revenue

- **Limited Differentiation:** Agents often promote whichever institution offers the best commission, not the best student fit
- **Reputational Risk:** Misrepresentation of programmes by unscrupulous agents can damage trust in UK institutions

As Chinese students increasingly turn to digital platforms and alumni networks, the traditional agent model risks becoming both expensive and outdated. Universities that fail to modernise recruitment channels may struggle to remain competitive.

5.1.8 Reputational Challenges and Political Tensions

China – UK political relations have become somewhat strained in recent times, with issues such as trade disputes, differing positions on developments in Ukraine and Palestine & concerns about academic freedom and security. These tensions have adversely impacted the education sector, with Chinese media occasionally portraying the UK as unfriendly or unstable. This creates reputational challenges;

- Families may question whether UK qualifications will continue to be recognised in China
- Negative diplomatic narratives can reduce student confidence
- Partnerships with Chinese institutions may be disrupted by political sensitivities

5.1.9 Internal Capacity and Student Experience

Significant, ongoing demand for Chinese student enrolments have not always been matched by appropriate investment in accommodation, academic support, and pastoral services. This

is evidenced by reports of overcrowding, overstretched career services, and insufficient tailored support. For Chinese students, who place a premium on structured guidance and wellbeing services, these shortcomings may negatively impact word of mouth. Over the long term, this has the potential to undermine recruitment efforts.

5.1.10 Global Landscape of Chinese Student Mobility

Over the past two decades, China has consistently been the largest source of outbound international students. According to UNESCO (2023), more than 700,000 Chinese students study abroad each year, representing nearly 20% of the global mobile student population. The most sought after host country has historically been the US however, its market share has gradually declined in recent years due to political tensions, visa restrictions, and rising competition from other English-speaking destinations. At present, the UK continues to be a strong competitor in the globalised education market. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2024) indicates that Chinese students currently account for around 31% of all non-UK domiciled students, with over 150,000 enrolled across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Australia and Canada also maintain significant market shares, with emerging destinations such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands showing significant potential for growth.

5.1.11 The UK's Market Position

The UK has several enduring advantages in attracting Chinese students:

- **Reputation:** Institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, UCL, and the LSE enjoy strong brand recognition in China

- **Language:** English is the dominant global language of business which enhances the appeal of UK qualifications
- **Cultural Affinity:** Historical ties and the presence of large Chinese student communities position the UK as an accessible destination
- **Post-Study Work Visa (Graduate Route):** Reintroduced in 2021, this visa allows graduates to stay for two years post-study (three for PhD holders), thus enhancing employability appeal

Despite these advantages, the UK's competitiveness is tenuous. Increasingly difficult visa stipulations, processing delays, rising costs, and negative perceptions of safety undermine its appeal relative to competitors such as Australia, which actively markets itself as a safe and welcoming host nation. Interestingly, postgraduate enrolments dominate, with over 65% of Chinese students in the UK enrolled at master's level. This reflects a cultural preference amongst these students for international postgraduate qualifications as a means of enhancing career prospects, rather than undergraduate study abroad.

5.1.12 Trends in Enrolment Numbers

HESA (2024) statistics highlight three key trends:

- **Sustained Growth Pre-COVID:** Between 2010 and 2019, Chinese student numbers in the UK grew by approximately 80%, reflecting strong demand for postgraduate taught programmes, particularly in business and management
- **COVID-19 Disruption:** In 2020–2021, enrolments fell due to travel restrictions, health concerns, and uncertainties over the introduction of online learning.

- **Partial Recovery:** By 2023–24, enrolments began to stabilise, though growth rates slowed. The UK’s reliance on China is such that even modest downturns have significant financial implications for institutions

5.1.13 Regional Dynamics within China

UK recruitment has traditionally been concentrated in Tier-1 cities such as Beijing & Shanghai. There is however, recent evidence to suggest a saturation within these regions. Conversely, opportunities in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities such as Chengdu, Wuhan, and Nanjing are emerging. These regions benefit from expanding middle-class populations and rising disposable incomes yet are not targeted by many UK institutions. Focussing upon these areas presents a significant growth opportunity but requires tailored digital marketing strategies and local partnerships. Universities that rely solely on major city markets risk missing this lucrative opportunity.

5.1.14 Competitive Pressures

The UK’s key competitors are adopting increasingly aggressive recruitment strategies:

- **Australia:** Positions itself as safe, multicultural, and offering post study work pathways. Universities have established extensive partnerships with Chinese institutions and are investing heavily in digital recruitment
- **Canada:** Promotes immigration friendly policies and long-term settlement opportunities. This holds significant appeal to students seeking permanent residency
- **United States:** Is positioned as a very high quality provider, drawing upon the reputational value of its elite universities. This has helped keep demand strong despite ongoing political challenges

- **European Union:** Germany, the Netherlands, and France are gaining traction by offering lower tuition fees and degrees in English, combined with mobility opportunities unmatched by the UK

For the UK, this competitive environment underscores the need for differentiation, particularly in areas such as employability outcomes, alumni networks, and cultural support.

5.1.15 Post-Pandemic Shifts in Student Priorities

Research by QS (2023) and IDP Connect (2024) shows that Chinese students are now placing greater emphasis on:

- **Safety and Wellbeing:** Concerns about racism, discrimination, and healthcare access influence destination choice
- **Employability:** Post-study work opportunities and employer recognition of degrees are top decision-making factors
- **Flexibility:** Hybrid and online pathways remain attractive to some segments, though most still prefer face-to-face delivery
- **Return on Investment:** Families increasingly weigh tuition and living costs against career prospects and salary premiums

These shifts demand that UK universities rethink their marketing narratives, placing greater emphasis on employability support, pastoral care, and value for money.

5.1.16 The Role of Agents and Digital Platforms

Education agents remain influential in China, but their dominance appears to be declining due to the increasing availability of digital platforms. Studies indicate that more than 70% of Chinese students consult social media platforms prior to making study decisions (British Council, 2023). Word-of-mouth from alumni, peer networks, and influencers plays a growing role in shaping perceptions. This is telling because in the future, those universities that continue to rely heavily on agents face high commission costs and weaker direct engagement with prospective students.

5.1.17 The Chinese Student Decision-Making Journey

Deciding where to study abroad is a complex, multi-stage process shaped by personal, cultural, and structural factors. For Chinese students, the choice to study in the UK is rarely an individual decision made in isolation; rather, it is a collective family decision influenced by aspirations for social mobility, prestige, and career outcomes.

Push factors in China include rising competition for domestic university places, concerns about graduate employability, and the desire for international experience. Pull factors in the UK include world-renowned institutions, English-language instruction, and access to global career opportunities. This having been said, these factors interact with cultural and social influences that make the Chinese decision making process distinct from some other markets.

Amongst Chinese students and their families, studying abroad is considered a comprehensive life experience, rather than merely an educational opportunity (Yang, 2024). Whilst UK universities benefit from strong brand equity, their strategies need to evolve to reflect

changing expectations. The decision making process is nonlinear and no longer dominated by agents. It is highly digital, networked, and value-driven.

5.1.18 Cultural Dimensions of Decision-Making

Cultural frameworks such as Hofstede’s dimensions and the GLOBE study provide insight into how Chinese values shape education choices:

- **Collectivism and Family Influence:** Decisions are often made jointly with parents and sometimes extended family, reflecting high collectivism. Parents may prioritise prestige and reputation over personal student preferences
- **High Power Distance:** Families show strong deference to perceived “experts,” including agents, teachers, and alumni networks, making these intermediaries influential
- **Long-Term Orientation:** Chinese families emphasise future employability and social status, valuing degrees that carry long-term prestige
- **Uncertainty Avoidance:** Concerns about safety, stability, and reliable information mean families prefer established universities with clear reputations, rather than experimental or lesser-known institutions

5.1.19 The Importance of Reputation and Rankings

Chinese families place substantial weight on university reputation and global rankings. QS, Times Higher Education, and Shanghai Rankings are widely consulted by prospective students and their families prior to making firm decisions. In many cases, families set a minimum threshold such as a top 200 global ranking with any universities not meeting the

threshold not being deemed worthy of consideration. UK universities outside the elite tier should;

- Differentiate through niche strengths (e.g., industry partnerships, specialist programmes)
- Demonstrate a strong return on investment through graduate employability data
- Build their reputation inside China through alumni success stories rather than relying solely on global rankings.

5.1.20 Employability as a Key Driver

Employability consistently emerges as the key pull factor for Chinese students and their families (QS, 2023; IDP, 2024). Overseas study is widely viewed as an investment that must bring about a positive return by way of clear career benefits. Specific concerns include:

- Access to post-study work opportunities
- Strength of careers services and university–employer partnerships
- International recognition of UK degrees by Chinese employers
- Pathways to professional networks and internships during study

UK universities that fail to communicate the presence of strong employability support mechanisms risk losing students to Australia or Canada, which actively market career pathways.

5.1.21 Financial Considerations and Value for Money

While many middle – class Chinese families are wealthy enough to afford international tuition, cost remains a significant factor in decision-making. Rising UK tuition and living expenses make affordability increasingly important. Families evaluate:

- Tuition fees relative to global peers
- Cost of living in UK cities
- Availability of scholarships or financial aid
- Perceived return on investment

This presents as a challenge for UK universities that have traditionally not shaped their marketing messaging around these important considerations.

5.1.22 The Role of Intermediaries: Agents, Teachers, Alumni

Intermediaries play a disproportionately large role in shaping Chinese students' choices;

- **Education Agents:** Historically the most influential, agents guide families through applications, visas, and university selection. However, reliance on agents has drawbacks: high commissions, limited differentiation between universities, and the potential for misrepresentation
- **Teachers and Counsellors:** Particularly in international high schools in China, counsellors act as trusted advisers
- **Alumni and Peer Networks:** Word-of-mouth is increasingly powerful, particularly via digital platforms. Alumni success stories strongly influence family confidence

5.1.23 Digital Influence and Social Media

The digital ecosystem in China profoundly shapes decision-making. Platforms such as WeChat and TikTok are the key sources of information for students and parents. Chinese students readily select content posted by their peers such as, short videos. Key trends include;

- Growth of student influencers who share authentic study abroad experiences
- Use of WeChat groups for Q&A and peer-to-peer advice
- Preference for video content over text-heavy information

This development has significant implications for UK universities and those that do not invest in China specific digital strategies are unlikely to improve factors that drive demand.

5.1.24 Safety and Wellbeing Concerns

Safety is a critical determinant of study abroad choices. Concerns include:

- Racism and discrimination
- Political tensions between the UK and China
- Cost of healthcare and access to student support services

High-profile media stories about anti-Asian racism during the COVID pandemic did significant damage to the UK's reputation within China. For families, perceptions of safety are such at the forefront of their considerations that this can override other factors.

5.1.25 Decision-Making Timeline

The Chinese student journey is typically long, often beginning 18–24 months before application. Stages include;

- **Awareness:** Exposure to universities via rankings, fairs, or digital content
- **Consideration:** Shortlisting based on family preferences, rankings, and cost
- **Application:** Often guided by agents or counsellors
- **Decision:** Influenced by offers, scholarships, and peer/alumni recommendations
- **Confirmation:** Families finalise choice based on visas, finances, and perceived safety

5.1.26 Summary of Challenges

In summary, UK universities face a complex web of challenges in maintaining Chinese enrolments;

- Over-reliance on China, creating financial vulnerability
- Intensifying global competition, particularly from Australia, Canada, and EU nations
- Negative perceptions of safety and welcome, amplified by media and politics
- Visa and immigration barriers, including cost, complexity, and instability
- High financial burden, raising questions of value for money
- Weak employability support, limiting perceived career returns
- Overdependence on agents, with rising costs and reputational risks
- Geopolitical tensions, undermining trust and partnerships
- Capacity issues, reducing student satisfaction and alumni advocacy

The UK remains a leading destination for Chinese international students however, its market position is increasingly precarious. Enrolments are stabilising rather than growing, competition is intensifying, and student priorities are shifting towards safety, employability, and value. While the UK's higher education brand remains strong, universities should not in the future rely upon reputation alone. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted strategy that balances short-term recruitment imperatives with long-term sustainability.

5.2 Strategic Recommendations for UK Universities

The earlier analysis highlighted the strengths and vulnerabilities of the UK's position in the Chinese international student market. The findings have implications for both marketing and recruitment strategies within higher education institutions. To sustain and grow enrolments, universities must adopt a strategic, multi-dimensional approach that addresses both the demand-side drivers of Chinese student mobility and the supply-side weaknesses in the UK offer. This section sets out strategic recommendations; each fully justified with reference to market evidence and academic frameworks. The recommendations are grouped into three broad themes;

- Enhancing Recruitment Effectiveness (Recommendations 1–4)
- Strengthening Student Value Proposition (Recommendations 5–7)
- Ensuring Long-Term Market Sustainability (Recommendations 8–10)

Recommendations 1, 5, 6 & 7 are primarily related to strategic marketing activities whereas the remaining activities focus upon strategic recruitment.

5.3 Enhancing Recruitment Effectiveness

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Alumni Engagement thus driving Word of Mouth

Marketing. Word of mouth (WOM) is one of the most powerful influences in Chinese student decision-making. Research shows that alumni networks and peer recommendations often outweigh institutional marketing claims (Chen, 2022). In a collectivist culture, trusted social networks are central to decision-making.

Actions:

- Establish alumni ambassador programmes inside China, incentivising graduates to share experiences on popular platforms such as WeChat
- Develop case studies and video testimonials of successful alumni, particularly those with high-profile careers in China and the UK
- Utilise alumni in recruitment events and webinars, offering authentic peer perspectives

Impact: This strategy will enhance trust, build authenticity, and improve the UK's reputation at relatively low cost compared to agent commissions.

Recommendation 2: Build Targeted Digital Recruitment Campaigns in China. Chinese students increasingly rely on digital platforms rather than traditional agents. Increasingly, Chinese social media platforms are becoming essential touchpoints (British Council, 2023).

Actions:

- Develop China-specific digital campaigns, creating localised content tailored to Chinese platforms
- Persuade Mandarin-speaking staff or alumni to manage WeChat accounts and group engagement
- Partner with influencers to amplify reach

Impact: Direct digital engagement improves brand visibility, reduces reliance on agents, and connects universities with students and parents earlier in the decision-making funnel.

Recommendation 3: Diversify Recruitment Beyond Tier-1 Cities. Most UK universities recruit heavily in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Demand is however, growing rapidly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities such as Chengdu, Wuhan, and Xi'an, where rising middle-class families increasingly aspire to overseas education.

Actions:

- Partner with regional high schools and universities in emerging Chinese cities
- Run regional recruitment fairs beyond major hubs
- Create regional scholarship schemes to attract talent outside saturated markets

Impact: Diversifying within China increases resilience and opens access to untapped student populations.

Recommendation 4: Reduce Over-Reliance on Education Agents. Whilst agents remain highly valuable, over reliance upon them creates cost inefficiencies and reputational risks.

Universities paying high commissions see reduced net revenue, whilst agent remuneration models being used may not best align wholly with student interests.

Actions:

- Transition away from agent dominated models towards a more diversified model incorporating direct applications, digital platforms, and alumni referrals
- Develop student application portals in both English and Mandarin languages
- Improve visa application support mechanisms
- Better manage agent partnerships through the introduction of a quality assurance framework, which rewards performance and ethical practices.

Impact: Reducing the dependence upon agents increases control, improves transparency, and strengthens long-term institutional branding.

5.4 Strengthening Student Value Proposition

Recommendation 5: Enhance Employability Support for Chinese Students. Employability is the single strongest driver of overseas study (QS, 2023). Chinese families are persuaded by evidence that degrees conferred by UK universities result in superior career outcomes.

Actions:

- Establish China specific careers services, with workshops on CV writing for Chinese employers, alumni mentoring, and sector-specific advice
- Develop UK–China employer partnerships offering internships, placements, and networking events
- Monitor and publish graduate outcomes data for Chinese students

Impact: This strengthens the perceived ROI of a UK education, directly addressing family concerns about career prospects.

Recommendation 6: Improve Safety, Wellbeing, and Inclusivity Messaging. Safety is a critical factor in destination choice. Negative perceptions of racism and instability can nullify academic strengths. Universities should counter negative narratives.

Actions:

- Proactively market student support service, related to mental health provision, and anti-discrimination initiatives
- Highlight Chinese student societies and cultural events in promotional material
- Share positive intercultural stories from current Chinese students to reassure families

Impact: Improving perceptions of safety and inclusivity strengthens parental trust which is a decisive factor in family-led decision-making.

Recommendation 7: Communicate Value for Money Through ROI messaging. Rising tuition and living costs are problematic with Chinese families increasingly demanding value for money. Universities should place a strong focus upon delivering outcomes based messaging as part of future marketing campaigns targeting Chinese students.

Actions:

- Showcase alumni salary uplift and career progression statistics
- Highlight scholarship opportunities and financial planning support

- Contrast UK education’s intensity (three-year undergraduate degrees and one-year postgraduate programmes) with longer programmes in some competitor countries, thus emphasising efficiency

Impact: Reframing the UK as a high-return investment could strengthen enrolments despite rising costs.

5.5 Ensuring Long-Term Market Sustainability

Recommendation 8: Develop Joint UK–China Educational Programmes. Partnerships with Chinese universities have the potential to provide recruitment pipelines and reputational benefits. This is due to foreign joint programmes and campuses becoming increasingly commonplace.

Actions:

- Expand dual-degree partnerships and articulation agreements
- Co-develop curricula with Chinese institutions, embedding mobility pathways
- Leverage government-to-government initiatives to strengthen recognition

Impact: These initiatives build brand presence in China, create diverse pipeline pathways, and reduce exposure to political volatility.

Recommendation 9: Lobby for Streamlined Visa and Immigration Pathways. Visa uncertainty is a significant barrier for Chinese students. Moreover, these barriers result in greater dependence of students upon education agents. Many competing countries offer more

lucrative immigration policies, making them more attractive. To compete effectively, UK universities will need to collaborate on influencing UK government policy as it relates to overseas students.

Actions:

- Lobby UK government for simplified visa processes and reduced costs
- Advocate for stability in policy, minimising political fluctuations
- When lobbying, highlight the cultural and economic contribution of Chinese students

Impact: Reducing visa friction enhances competitiveness and demonstrates a welcoming national stance.

Recommendation 10: Embed Market Diversification into Strategy. Whilst China will no doubt remain an important source of students over the longer term, the over reliance upon this student group carries with it several risks. Diversification across other markets is critical for long-term sustainability. That having been said, it is important to note that within China, there exists the opportunity to diversify based upon region and subject area.

Actions:

- Develop recruitment strategies which aim to balance Chinese student recruitment with that of other markets such as India, Nigeria and Vietnam without enabling any single market to dominate
- Diversify into emerging provinces within China

- Model the risks associated with a reduction in Chinese demand and ensure that no one student group accounts for greater than 20% of total number of students enrolled

Impact: Diversification reduces dependency, safeguards institutional finances, and creates a balanced internationalisation strategy.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This study set out to understand the determinants influencing the decision-making processes of Chinese international students when selecting a UK university. It examined the extent to which reputation, quality, cost, word-of-mouth, and post-study opportunities shaped student choices. Quantitative analysis, supported by reliability testing, correlation analysis, and regression modelling, enabled the research to identify statistically meaningful relationships between key variables and student decision patterns. This, combined with a review of relevant literature provided a robust theoretical foundation, allowing the findings to be contextualised within existing international student mobility research. The study also fulfilled the objective of generating practical and sustainable recommendations for UK universities, translating statistical outcomes into actionable marketing and recruitment strategies. Whilst certain demographic effects were different than expected, the result contributes to insights into an evolving area of international student behaviour. This study has provided new empirical insights into Chinese student decision making and offers a framework that supports both theoretical advancement and professional practice. All things considered, the study has met the aims and objectives established at the outset.

The strategic recommendations above, provide a sustainable marketing roadmap for UK universities to strengthen recruitment, improve value propositions, and secure long-term sustainability within the Chinese market. Whilst a host of challenges including increased competition, political tensions and rising costs remain, the UK still holds competitive advantages related to reputation, academic quality, and alumni networks which form a sound foundation for the future.

6.1 Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

While existing literature has highlighted constructs such as safety, employability, reputation, cost, and word of mouth (WOM), few studies have quantified their comparative influence within a single framework. This thesis advances theoretical understanding by statistically testing these variables and demonstrating how they interact within the decision making context. The results show that certain factors, most notably perceptions of safety and employability exert a stronger influence than has historically been reported. This signals a shift in priorities away from purely academic prestige towards a more pragmatic outcome driven rationale. In doing so, the study contributes new empirical evidence that builds on and extends established student choice models, demonstrating how external pressures, policy environments, and global uncertainty continue to reshape the hierarchies of influence in international higher education decision-making.

In terms of practice, the research provides actionable insights for UK universities seeking to refine their recruitment strategies for the Chinese market. Crucially, the findings indicate that decision making is no longer predominantly agent led. Students are now increasingly reliant

upon multiple channels, including peers, alumni, and online communities to complement their own independent digital research.

By quantitatively establishing word of mouth as both a significant influence and a mediating variable across other decision factors, the study highlights the need for institutions to strategically cultivate authentic student driven advocacy rather than relying solely on traditional recruitment intermediaries. Equally, the prominence of safety and employability suggests that marketing messaging centred exclusively on rankings or academic branding are no longer sufficient. Instead, universities need to demonstrate tangible post-study outcomes, transparent support structures, and credible student experiences. Through this evidence based prioritisation of key drivers, the research supports both theoretical knowledge and practical application, introducing a framework that enables universities to align their strategies more effectively with the expectations and behaviours of a rapidly evolving student demographic.

6.1.1 Theoretical Implications

The results reinforce the push–pull model, with strong pull factors (reputation, employability) interacting with push factors (competition in China’s domestic graduate market). The findings also support Hofstede’s collectivism dimension, as alumni and family networks shape decision-making.

6.1.2 Practical Implications for UK Universities

- **Safety Messaging:** Institutions must foreground inclusivity and wellbeing
- **Employability Support:** Stronger career services, employer partnerships, and outcome reporting are needed

- **Alumni Engagement:** Universities should leverage alumni more systematically in recruitment campaigns
- **Digital Transformation:** Greater use of Chinese platforms is essential to reach students directly
- **Market Diversification:** Reducing over-reliance on Tier-1 cities is key to resilience

This research demonstrates that Chinese students' decisions to study in the UK are shaped by a combination of safety, employability, reputation, and alumni influence. While UK universities retain strong brand equity, their future competitiveness depends on addressing perceptions of safety, demonstrating value for money, and reducing dependence on traditional recruitment channels. The institutions that succeed will be those that move beyond transactional recruitment and build authentic, culturally informed, and future-oriented strategies.

6.2 Research Limitations

Whilst the study was undertaken with rigour, it is important to highlight the limitations inherent to the study. First, the study focused exclusively on Chinese international students as its target population. While this aligns with the scope and purpose of the research, it inherently restricts the generalisability of the findings to wider international student groups. Students from other cultural backgrounds may place different levels of importance on factors such as cost, safety, rankings, or word-of-mouth when selecting a host country or institution, and therefore future studies may benefit from comparative or multi-national samples to assess whether the patterns identified in this research are consistent across cultures or unique to Chinese student decision-making.

A further limitation relates to the method of online questionnaire distribution, which may introduce sampling and response bias. Online recruitment methods rely on digital access and voluntary participation, meaning respondents are likely to be individuals already engaged with higher education systems, digital platforms, and international study networks. This may exclude potential participants who are earlier in the decision-making process or those without established institutional connections, resulting in a sample that may reflect more informed, confident, or experienced decision-makers. Additionally, the distribution channels may have reached respondents with positive experiences or established links to UK higher education, potentially skewing responses toward more favourable perceptions.

The exclusive use of a quantitative methodology represents another limitation. While the statistical analysis enabled relationships between variables to be tested and patterns identified, the absence of qualitative inquiry means the study cannot explore deeper motivations, cultural nuances, or emotional influences behind reported behaviours. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating interviews or focus groups, may have provided richer insight into the reasoning underpinning specific choices, especially in an area as complex and personal as cross-border educational decision-making.

Finally, the study measured perceptions of respondents rather than objectively observed behaviours. What students believe influences their choices may differ from what actually drives their behaviour in practice, particularly when financial pressures, visa policies, parental expectations, or real-time uncertainties intervene. Perceptions are nonetheless valuable as they shape intention and expectation; however, they may not fully reflect the

lived decision journey. Taken together, these limitations should not be viewed as weaknesses of the research design, but rather as boundaries that provide opportunities for refinement, expansion, and future research development.

6.3 The case for future research in this area

There exists some scope for future research in this area and in part, these are related to the limitations uncovered in this study. Whilst this work extends current theory having empirically quantified the relative influence of the key determinants of Chinese students, opportunities to make further contributions remain. The focus of this study was exclusively upon Chinese international students and as such it solely reflects the perceptions and decision-making processes of this single group. A follow up study could potentially broaden the current body of knowledge by examining whether the relative influence of factors supported within this study differs amongst respondents from other international recruitment markets. A comparative study may help to identify whether these determinants operate differently across cultural and regional contexts.

This study adopted a quantitative research design that enabled the statistical examination of relationships between key constructs. While this approach provides useful insights into the relative influence of these determinants, qualitative research methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide deeper understanding of the motivations and experiences that underpin student decision-making. A mixed-methods approach could potentially identify the deeper motivations behind the behaviours observed and in doing so, result in a deeper understanding of the factors shaping international student mobility. Undertaking a longitudinal study could also be useful as this could be used to understand the perceptions

related to the four key determinants of decision making may shift over time. In doing so, the development of new recruitment strategies could provide a positive contribution to practice.

6.4 Closing Statements

This thesis explores the factors influencing the decisions of Chinese international students in their selection of host country and university. It explores the relative influence of four key determinants within the decision-making process. Employing a quantitative research strategy, the study provides evidence that university choice is shaped by combining institutional perceptions, economic considerations, and information from trusted sources. The thesis provides a contribution to contemporary literature by empirically quantifying the relative influence of these determinants and in so doing, extends existing models of Chinese international student choice.

Key findings demonstrate that whilst cost remains a central factor in student decision making, it is now interpreted more broadly than previously. Chinese international students and their families are now placing greater emphasis upon the total financial investment in obtaining a degree conferred by an overseas university. The opportunity to secure paid employment has emerged as an important contributor in reducing the financial outlay whilst studying abroad.

Perceptions of university reputation and quality influence decision-making, with word-of-mouth communication playing a key role in shaping how prospective students view different institutional attributes. Earlier studies demonstrated the significant influence of education agents in student decision making. This study however, suggests that whilst the level of influence of education agents remains important, family and friends as well as alumni

networks are now key influencers of perceptions of value, employability opportunities, and institutional quality.

In addition to a theoretical contribution, this thesis also provides practical insights for universities in what is an increasingly competitive global market. It advocates for the adoption of more sustainable marketing practices. These should include actively building institutional reputation, amplifying positive student voices, fostering strong alumni networks and evidencing a return on the investment students make in their education. Universities that adopt a more holistic marketing approach will be best placed to attract Chinese international students and in so doing will strengthen their competitive position whilst supporting the future sustainability of their international programmes.

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Appendices

Appendix A1: Aston University research report request

Email request from Elijah James (Aston University) for copy of International Student Recruitment Report.

From: Elijah James <e.james5@aston.ac.uk>
Sent: 05 September 2025 18:02
To: Andrew Salmon <a.salmon3@aston.ac.uk>
Subject: Demand for UK HE from China

Dear Andy,

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I would be interested in reading your research on demand for UK higher education from China and would be keen to discuss your findings.

Best wishes

Elijah

Elijah James
Director of International Recruitment and Development



Appendix A2: Birmingham City University research report request

Email request from Prof David Mba (Birmingham City University) for copy of International Student Recruitment Report.

From: David Mba <David.Mba@bcu.ac.uk>
Sent: 04 November 2024 09:00
To: Peter Samuels <Peter.Samuels@bcu.ac.uk>
Cc: Andrew Salmon <a.salmon3@aston.ac.uk>; Bruce Philp <Bruce.Philp@bcu.ac.uk>; Alexander Erdlenbruch <Alexander.Erdlenbruch@bcu.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: International masters students marketing strategy

You don't often get email from david.mba@bcu.ac.uk. [Learn why this is important](#)
CAUTION: This email has originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links, open attachments or scan QR codes in this email unless you have verified the sender and content is safe.

Hi Peter

Thanks for your email and your comment at the meeting. I would like to see the report from Andy that outlines this strategy. Would it be possible to share.

Regards
David

Professor David Mba FREng PFHEA
Vice Chancellor

Executive Personal Assistants
Angela McGrath Angela.McGrath@bcu.ac.uk
Wendy Ross Wendy.Ross@bcu.ac.uk



Appendix B: SPSS Outputs. Descriptive Statistics

B1: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Agent WOM Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	2.52	1.063
Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	2.47	1.084
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university	215	1	5	2.44	1.070
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B2: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Alumni WOM Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.20	.953
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.26	1.065
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	215	1	5	3.79	.864

Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences	215	1	5	3.22	.994
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B3: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Awareness Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	2	5	4.33	.631
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	4.16	.777
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	215	1	5	4.34	.706
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	215	1	5	3.49	1.013
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	215	1	5	2.69	1.160
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	215	1	5	3.16	1.097
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	215	1	5	3.74	1.101
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B4: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Cost of living Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.78	.834
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.65	.959
Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.70	.960
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	215	1	5	3.89	.830
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B5: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Course availability Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q13 - Course availability is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	4.01	.800
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B6: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Course duration Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
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Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.44	.935
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months	215	1	5	2.79	1.093
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B7: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Course fees Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.65	.959
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	215	1	5	3.89	.830
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B8: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Employment Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.71	1.024
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.71	1.059

Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying	215	1	5	3.82	.940
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B9: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Family / Friends Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.46	.989
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.15	1.032
Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents	215	1	5	3.66	.948
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B10: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Marketing Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.64	.971

Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.59	.937
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	215	1	5	4.34	.706
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	215	1	5	3.49	1.013
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	215	1	5	2.13	1.094
Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	215	1	5	3.00	1.129
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	215	1	5	2.69	1.160
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	215	1	5	3.16	1.097
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	215	1	5	3.74	1.101
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B11: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Proximity Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.92	.802

Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	3.82	.879
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.66	.963
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.75	.908
Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	215	1	5	3.57	.914
Valid N (listwise)	215				

B12: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Proximity Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	215	1	5	4.07	.820
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.97	.861
Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	215	1	5	3.95	.838
Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	215	2	5	3.96	.839
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	215	2	5	4.17	.732

Valid N (listwise)	215			
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B13: Descriptive Statistics SPSS output – Safety Construct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university	215	1	5	4.17	.820
Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course	215	1	5	3.96	.987
Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	215	1	5	4.19	.763
Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area	215	1	5	4.08	.896
Valid N (listwise)	215				

Appendix C: SPSS Outputs. Frequencies

C1: Frequency SPSS output – Age

Statistics

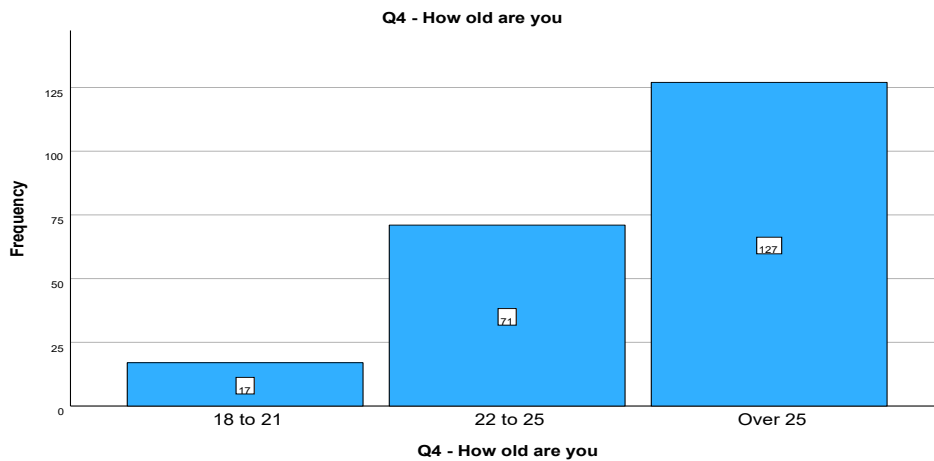
Q4 - How old are you

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0
Mode		3

Minimum	1
Maximum	3

Q4 - How old are you

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 21	17	7.9	7.9	7.9
	22 to 25	71	33.0	33.0	40.9
	Over 25	127	59.1	59.1	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	



C2: Frequency SPSS output – Course of study

Statistics

Q12 - Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0

Q12 - Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Arts. Art	1	.5	.5	.5
	Arts. Art history	1	.5	.5	.9
	Arts. Bachelor of arts and science (honours)	1	.5	.5	1.4
	Arts. Broadcast and Journalism	1	.5	.5	1.9
	Arts. computer art	1	.5	.5	2.3
	Arts. Creative industries	1	.5	.5	2.8
	Arts. Fashion design	1	.5	.5	3.3
	Arts. Games Design	1	.5	.5	3.7
	Arts. Graphic Design	1	.5	.5	4.2
	Arts. Landscape Architecture	1	.5	.5	4.7
	Arts. Landscape Design	1	.5	.5	5.1
	Arts. MA in design	1	.5	.5	5.6
	Arts. Media and Communication	1	.5	.5	6.0
	Arts. Music	1	.5	.5	6.5
	Arts. Physical Planning & Design Fundamentals	1	.5	.5	7.0
	Busines. MBA	1	.5	.5	7.4
	Business. Accounting	8	3.7	3.7	11.2
	Business. Actuarial Science	1	.5	.5	11.6
	Business. Bachelor of Arts business	1	.5	.5	12.1
	Business. Behavioral Economics	2	.9	.9	13.0
	Business. Business	1	.5	.5	13.5
	Business. Business management	1	.5	.5	14.0
	Business. Business Mgt	4	1.9	1.9	15.8
	Business. Communication	2	.9	.9	16.7
	Business. Communication Management	1	.5	.5	17.2
	Business. Consumer Behaviors	1	.5	.5	17.7
	Business. Corporate law	1	.5	.5	18.1
	Business. Data Analysis	1	.5	.5	18.6

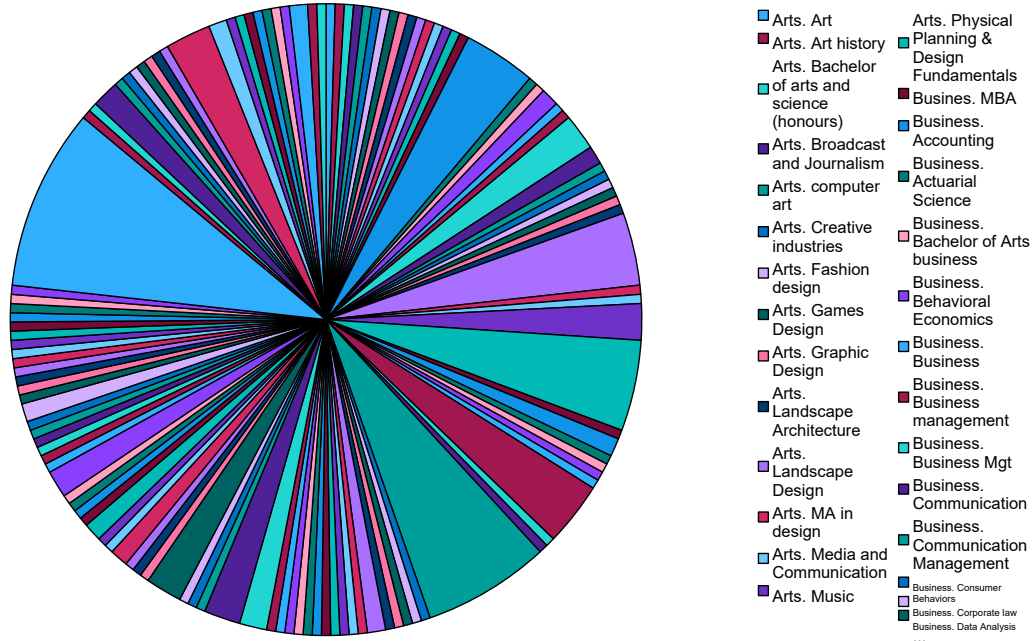
Business. Digital marketing	1	.5	.5	19.1
Business. Economic Statistics	1	.5	.5	19.5
Business. Economics	8	3.7	3.7	23.3
Business. Education	1	.5	.5	23.7
Business. Environment and sustainability	1	.5	.5	24.2
Business. finance	4	1.9	1.9	26.0
Business. Finance	10	4.7	4.7	30.7
Business. Hospitality	1	.5	.5	31.2
Business. Hospitality Management	2	.9	.9	32.1
Business. International	1	.5	.5	32.6
Business. International Studies	1	.5	.5	33.0
Business. International Trade	1	.5	.5	33.5
Business. Macroeconomics	1	.5	.5	34.0
Business. Management	7	3.3	3.3	37.2
Business. management science	1	.5	.5	37.7
Business. Management Science	1	.5	.5	38.1
Business. Marketing	14	6.5	6.5	44.7
Business. marketing and management	1	.5	.5	45.1
Business. Math review	1	.5	.5	45.6
Business. Mathematics Economics	1	.5	.5	46.0
Business. MBA	1	.5	.5	46.5
Business. Msc Management	1	.5	.5	47.0
Business. MSc Management	2	.9	.9	47.9
Business. MSc marketing	1	.5	.5	48.4
Business. MSCl	1	.5	.5	48.8
Business. Music Management	1	.5	.5	49.3
Business. Product Design	1	.5	.5	49.8
Business. Retail	1	.5	.5	50.2
Business. Supply chain mgt	1	.5	.5	50.7
Business. Tourism Mgt	1	.5	.5	51.2
Business. UX Design	1	.5	.5	51.6

Computer science	1	.5	.5	52.1
Computing software	1	.5	.5	52.6
Computing. AI related	1	.5	.5	53.0
Computing. Computer science	3	1.4	1.4	54.4
Computing. Computer Science	4	1.9	1.9	56.3
Computing. Data Mining	1	.5	.5	56.7
Computing. Information Systems	1	.5	.5	57.2
Computing. Information systems management	1	.5	.5	57.7
Computing. IT	4	1.9	1.9	59.5
Computing. Machine learning	1	.5	.5	60.0
Computing. Master of Computing	1	.5	.5	60.5
Computing. Math and Computer Science	1	.5	.5	60.9
Computing. Mathematics	2	.9	.9	61.9
Computing. Microelectronics	1	.5	.5	62.3
Computing. PhD in IT (AI)	1	.5	.5	62.8
Computing. Programming	2	.9	.9	63.7
Design. Architecture	1	.5	.5	64.2
Design. New Media	1	.5	.5	64.7
Engineering. civil engineering	1	.5	.5	65.1
Engineering. Electrical Eng	1	.5	.5	65.6
Engineering. Engineering	3	1.4	1.4	67.0
Engineering. HVAC	1	.5	.5	67.4
Engineering. materials	1	.5	.5	67.9
Engineering. Mechanical Eng	1	.5	.5	68.4
Engineering. Mechanical engineering	1	.5	.5	68.8
Engineering. Mechanical Engineering	1	.5	.5	69.3
Environment. Env Studies	1	.5	.5	69.8
Environment. Env Science	2	.9	.9	70.7
Environment. Meteorology	1	.5	.5	71.2
Health. Biophysics	1	.5	.5	71.6
Health. BSc Psychology	1	.5	.5	72.1

Health. Child Development	1	.5	.5	72.6
Health. Epidemiology	1	.5	.5	73.0
Health. Humanbiology	1	.5	.5	73.5
Health. Maternity study	1	.5	.5	74.0
Health. Medicine	1	.5	.5	74.4
Health. Microbiology	1	.5	.5	74.9
Health. Nursing	1	.5	.5	75.3
Health. Population Health Sciences	1	.5	.5	75.8
Health. Psych	1	.5	.5	76.3
Health. psychology	1	.5	.5	76.7
Health. Psychology	20	9.3	9.3	86.0
Health. Psychology (MA)	1	.5	.5	86.5
Health. psychology, statistics	1	.5	.5	87.0
Health. Sociology	3	1.4	1.4	88.4
Humanities. Applied linguistics	1	.5	.5	88.8
Humanities. Education	1	.5	.5	89.3
Humanities. Evolution of language and cognition	1	.5	.5	89.8
Humanities. Food science	1	.5	.5	90.2
Humanities. French	1	.5	.5	90.7
Humanities. German Language	1	.5	.5	91.2
Humanities. language	1	.5	.5	91.6
Humanities. Languages	5	2.3	2.3	94.0
Humanities. Linguistics	2	.9	.9	94.9
Humanities. Literature	1	.5	.5	95.3
Humanities. PhD program in Translation and Language Sciences	1	.5	.5	95.8
Humanities. Social Science	1	.5	.5	96.3
Humanities. Teaching	1	.5	.5	96.7
Science. Anthropology	1	.5	.5	97.2
Science. Biotechnology	1	.5	.5	97.7
Science. Chemical biology	1	.5	.5	98.1
Science. Chemistry	2	.9	.9	99.1

Science. Physics	1	.5	.5	99.5
Technology. HV Technology	1	.5	.5	100.0
Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Q12 - Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?



C3: Frequency SPSS output – Gender

Statistics

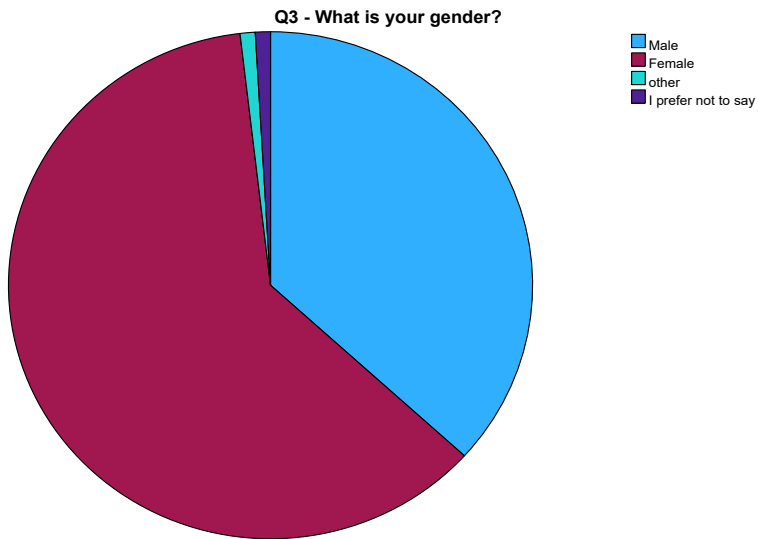
Q3 - What is your gender?

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0
Mean		1.66

Q3 - What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	79	36.7	36.7	36.7
	Female	132	61.4	61.4	98.1

other	2	.9	.9	99.1
I prefer not to say	2	.9	.9	100.0
Total	215	100.0	100.0	



C4: Frequency SPSS output – Language

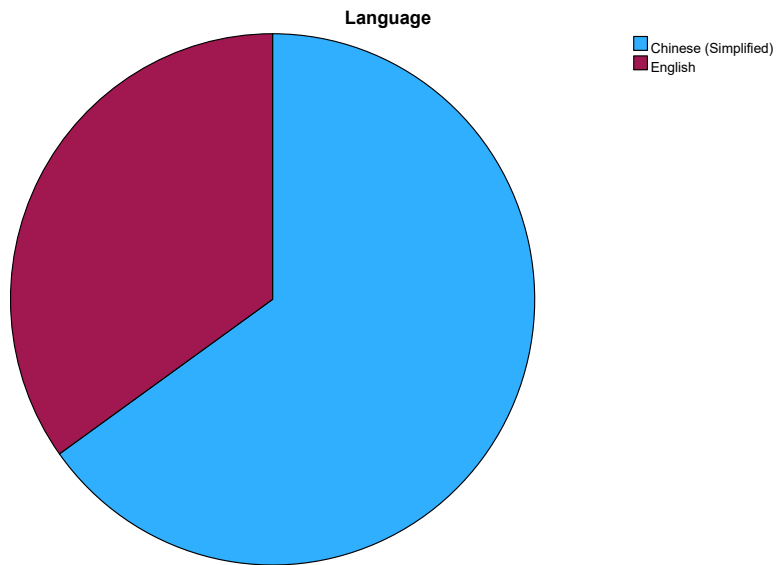
Statistics

Language

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0

Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chinese (Simplified)	140	65.1	65.1	65.1
	English	75	34.9	34.9	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	



C5: Frequency SPSS output – Country choice

Statistics

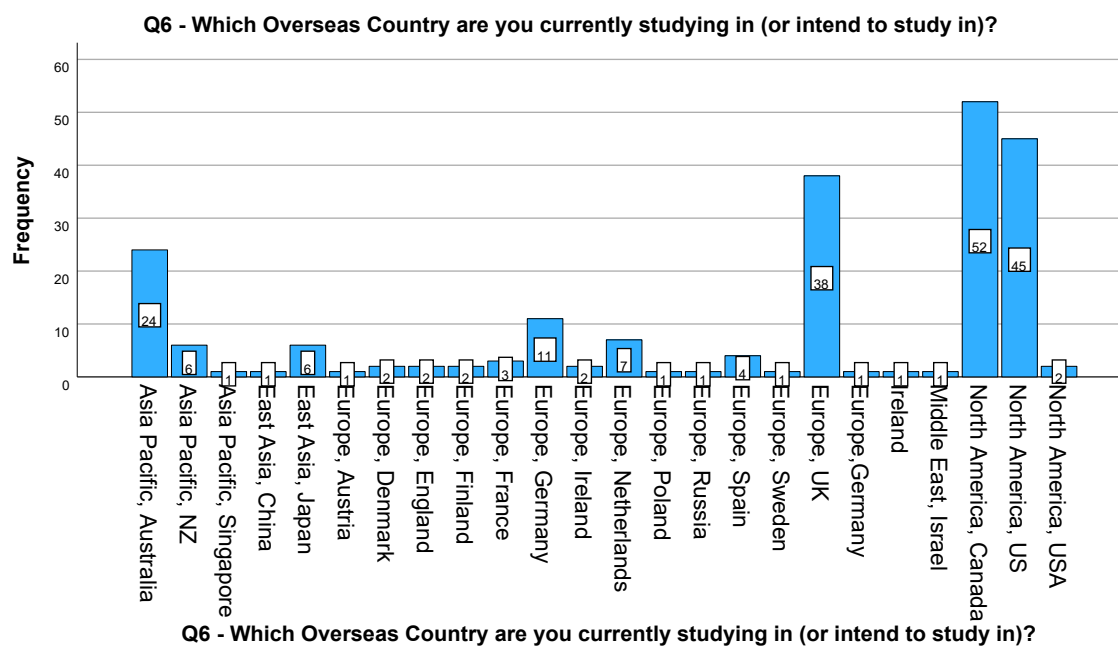
Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0

Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asia Pacific, Australia	24	11.2	11.2	11.2
	Asia Pacific, NZ	6	2.8	2.8	14.0
	Asia Pacific, Singapore	1	.5	.5	14.4
	East Asia, China	1	.5	.5	14.9
	East Asia, Japan	6	2.8	2.8	17.7
	Europe, Austria	1	.5	.5	18.1
	Europe, Denmark	2	.9	.9	19.1

Europe, England	2	.9	.9	20.0
Europe, Finland	2	.9	.9	20.9
Europe, France	3	1.4	1.4	22.3
Europe, Germany	11	5.1	5.1	27.4
Europe, Ireland	2	.9	.9	28.4
Europe, Netherlands	7	3.3	3.3	31.6
Europe, Poland	1	.5	.5	32.1
Europe, Russia	1	.5	.5	32.6
Europe, Spain	4	1.9	1.9	34.4
Europe, Sweden	1	.5	.5	34.9
Europe, UK	38	17.7	17.7	52.6
Europe,Germany	1	.5	.5	53.0
Ireland	1	.5	.5	53.5
Middle East, Israel	1	.5	.5	54.0
North America, Canada	52	24.2	24.2	78.1
North America, US	45	20.9	20.9	99.1
North America, USA	2	.9	.9	100.0
Total	215	100.0	100.0	



C6: Frequency SPSS output – Decision made first (Where or What to study)

Statistics

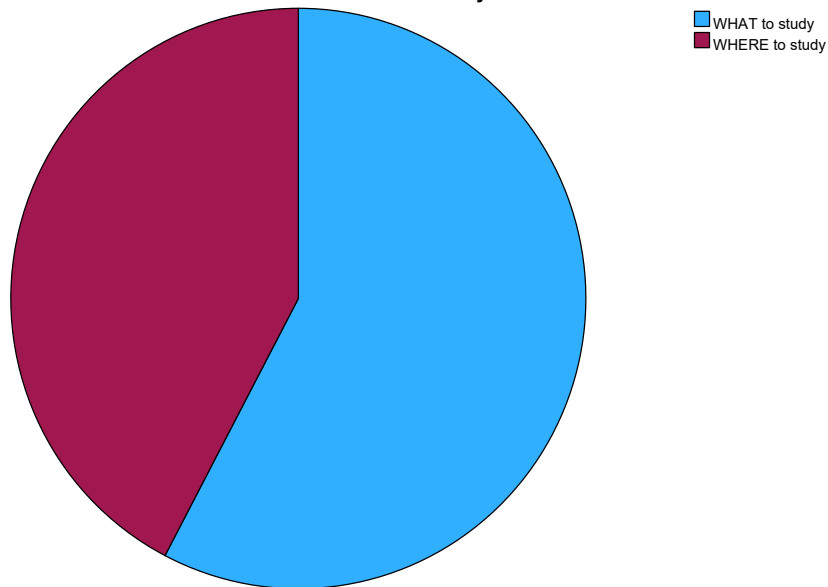
Q14 - Which decision did you make first?
first?

N	Valid	215
	Missing	0
Mean		1.42

Q14 - Which decision did you make first?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	WHAT to study	124	57.7	57.7	57.7
	WHERE to study	91	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Q14 - Which decision did you make first?



Appendix D: SPSS Outputs. Correlations

D1: Correlation SPSS output – Perception of cost

		Employment_	Course_Durati	Course_Fee	Cost_of_Livin
		Opps	on	s	g
Employment_Opps	Pearson Correlation	1	.200**	.326**	.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Course_Duration	Pearson Correlation	.200**	1	.477**	.512**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Course_Fees	Pearson Correlation	.326**	.477**	1	.918**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Cost_of_Living	Pearson Correlation	.331**	.512**	.918**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	215	215	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

D2: Correlation SPSS output – Perception of quality

		Ranking	Perc_of_Safet	Prox_to_Facili	Employment_
			y	ties	Opps
Ranking	Pearson Correlation	1	.309**	.313**	.591**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Perc_of_Safety	Pearson Correlation	.309**	1	.637**	.304**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Prox_to_Facilities	Pearson Correlation	.313**	.637**	1	.317**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	215	215	215	215
Employment_Opps	Pearson Correlation	.591**	.304**	.317**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	215	215	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

D3: Correlation SPSS output – Reputation

Correlations

		Marketing	Awareness	Ranking
Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.863**	.254**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.863**	1	.452**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	215	215	215
Ranking	Pearson Correlation	.254**	.452**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	215	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

D4: Correlation SPSS output – Word of Mouth

Correlations

		Alumni_WoM	Agent_WoM	Family_Friends_WoM
Alumni_WoM	Pearson Correlation	1	.371**	.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	215	215	215
Agent_WoM	Pearson Correlation	.371**	1	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	215	215	215
Family_Friends_WoM	Pearson Correlation	.511**	.411**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	215	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix E: SPSS Outputs. Reliability

E1: Reliability SPSS output – Agent Word of Mouth

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.859	.859	3

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	2.52	1.063	215
Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	2.47	1.084	215
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university	2.44	1.070	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university
Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.655	.707
Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	.655	1.000	.648
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university	.707	.648	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	2.474	2.442	2.516	.074	1.030	.001
Inter-Item Correlations	.670	.648	.707	.059	1.091	.001

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	3
Inter-Item Correlations	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	4.91	3.823	.750	.566
Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	4.96	3.881	.705	.497
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university	4.98	3.813	.744	.559

Item-Total Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university	.786

Q13 - Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course	.828
Q15 - The recommendations of agents are very important in my choice of university	.791

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
7.42	8.068	2.840	3

E2: Reliability SPSS output – Alumni Word of Mouth

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.677	.675	4

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	3.20	.953	215
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.26	1.065	215
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	3.79	.864	215
Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences	3.22	.994	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences
Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.552	.273	.328
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	.552	1.000	.363	.295
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	.273	.363	1.000	.240

Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences	.328	.295	.240	1.000
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Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.367	3.200	3.791	.591	1.185	.080
Inter-Item Correlations	.342	.240	.552	.312	2.302	.011

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	4
Inter-Item Correlations	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	10.27	4.572	.537	.337
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	10.21	4.122	.558	.361
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	9.68	5.397	.381	.155
Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences	10.25	5.028	.372	.141

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's
Alpha if Item
Deleted

Q11 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a university	.559
Q13 - Recommendations by alumni is a very important factor when choosing a course	.539
Q15 - What students who have studied at a university say about their experience is very important in helping me to make	.658
Q15 - I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences	.668

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
13.47	7.671	2.770	4

E3: Reliability SPSS output – Cost of Living

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0

Total	215	100.0
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a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.822	.825	4

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	3.78	.834	215
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.65	.959	215
Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.70	.960	215
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	3.89	.830	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study

Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.448	.571	.620
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	.448	1.000	.565	.526
Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	.571	.565	1.000	.515
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	.620	.526	.515	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.755	3.651	3.888	.237	1.065	.011
Inter-Item Correlations	.541	.448	.620	.172	1.384	.003

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	4
Inter-Item Correlations	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	11.24	5.229	.652	.471
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	11.37	4.897	.611	.395

Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	11.32	4.714	.665	.453
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	11.13	5.207	.664	.469

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if
Item Deleted

Q11 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university	.774
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	.794
Q13 - Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course	.767
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	.769

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
15.02	8.411	2.900	4

E4: Reliability SPSS output – Course cost

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.685	.690	2

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.65	.959	215
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	3.89	.830	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	1.000	.526

Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	.526	1.000
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Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.770	3.651	3.888	.237	1.065	.028
Inter-Item Correlations	.526	.526	.526	.000	1.000	.000

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	2
Inter-Item Correlations	2

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.89	.688	.526	.277
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	3.65	.920	.526	.277

Item-Total Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q13 - Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	.
Q15 - The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to study	.

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
7.54	2.446	1.564	2

E5: Reliability SPSS output – Course duration

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.425	.429	2

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.44	.935	215
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months	2.79	1.093	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months
Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	1.000	.273
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months	.273	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.114	2.791	3.437	.647	1.232	.209
Inter-Item Correlations	.273	.273	.273	.000	1.000	.000

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	2
Inter-Item Correlations	2

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	2.79	1.194	.273	.075
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months	3.44	.873	.273	.075

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if
Item Deleted

Q13 - Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	.
Q15 - I prefer to study at a university where I can complete my degree in 12 months	.

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
6.23	2.625	1.620	2

E6: Reliability SPSS output – Employment

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.652	.640	3

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	3.71	1.024	215
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.71	1.059	215
Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying	3.82	.940	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying
Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.774	.179
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	.774	1.000	.164
Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying	.179	.164	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.747	3.707	3.823	.116	1.031	.004
Inter-Item Correlations	.373	.164	.774	.610	4.712	.097

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	3
Inter-Item Correlations	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	7.53	2.334	.647	.603
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	7.53	2.278	.628	.601
Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying	7.42	3.852	.182	.034

Item-Total Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university	.281
Q13 - Employment opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course	.302
Q15 - It is important to me to choose a university where I have opportunities to work whilst studying	.873

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
11.24	5.409	2.326	3

E7: Reliability SPSS output – Facilities

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.759	.757	5

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	3.92	.802	215
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	3.82	.879	215

Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.66	.963	215
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.75	.908	215
Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	3.57	.914	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course
Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.312	.521	.319
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	.312	1.000	.485	.495
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	.521	.485	1.000	.579
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	.319	.495	.579	1.000
Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	.093	.428	.244	.358

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Q15 - It is important
for me to study at a
university where I can
easily walk to shops
and other amenities

Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	.093
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	.428
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	.244
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	.358
Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.743	3.567	3.921	.353	1.099	.019
Inter-Item Correlations	.383	.093	.579	.486	6.204	.021

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	5
Inter-Item Correlations	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	14.80	7.696	.415	.280
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	14.89	6.675	.603	.376
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	15.06	6.188	.641	.489
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	14.97	6.499	.618	.416
Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	15.15	7.501	.369	.218

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

Q11 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a university	.751
Q11 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university	.688
Q13 - Geographic location is a very important factor when choosing a course	.671
Q13 - Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a course	.681

Q15 - It is important for me to study at a university where I can easily walk to shops and other amenities	.770
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Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
18.72	10.185	3.191	5

E8: Reliability SPSS output – Family WOM

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.608	.602	3

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very	3.46	.989	215

important factor when choosing a university			
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.15	1.032	215
Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents	3.66	.948	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents
Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.626	.202
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	.626	1.000	.178
Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents	.202	.178	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.425	3.153	3.660	.507	1.161	.065
Inter-Item Correlations	.335	.178	.626	.448	3.523	.051

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	3
Inter-Item Correlations	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university	6.81	2.311	.551	.401
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	7.12	2.256	.525	.395
Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents	6.61	3.322	.211	.045

Item-Total Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q11 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university	.301
Q13 - Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a course	.336

Q16 - The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents	.770
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Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
10.27	4.948	2.224	3

E9: Reliability SPSS output – Prior Awareness

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.681	.703	7

Item Statistics

Mean	Std. Deviation	N
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Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	4.33	.631	215
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	4.16	.777	215
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	4.34	.706	215
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	3.49	1.013	215
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	2.69	1.160	215
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	3.16	1.097	215
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	3.74	1.101	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media
Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.654	.356	.167
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	.654	1.000	.349	.171
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.356	.349	1.000	.300

Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.167	.171	.300	1.000
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.043	.160	.046	.333
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.166	.243	.151	.210
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.345	.290	.242	.278

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there
Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	.043	.166	.345
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	.160	.243	.290
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.046	.151	.242
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.333	.210	.278
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	1.000	.525	.170
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.525	1.000	.113
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.170	.113	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.702	2.688	4.344	1.656	1.616	.396
Inter-Item Correlations	.253	.043	.654	.610	15.029	.021

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	7
Inter-Item Correlations	7

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	21.59	12.767	.431	.474
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	21.75	12.011	.463	.465
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	21.57	12.798	.359	.220
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	22.42	11.301	.408	.218
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	23.22	10.782	.391	.353
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	22.75	10.955	.407	.310
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	22.17	11.218	.363	.186

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if
Item Deleted

Q11 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a university	.646
Q13 - University reputation is a very important factor when choosing a course	.632
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.657
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.641
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.650
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.643
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.657

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
25.91	15.109	3.887	7

E10: Reliability SPSS output – Ranking

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.820	.820	5

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	4.07	.820	215
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	3.97	.861	215
Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	3.95	.838	215
Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	3.96	.839	215
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	4.17	.732	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education
Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	1.000	.506	.549	.452
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	.506	1.000	.528	.412
Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	.549	.528	1.000	.575
Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	.452	.412	.575	1.000
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	.377	.380	.471	.522

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities

Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	.377
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	.380

Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	.471
Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	.522
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	4.023	3.949	4.172	.223	1.057	.009
Inter-Item Correlations	.477	.377	.575	.198	1.525	.005

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	5
Inter-Item Correlations	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	16.05	6.549	.606	.385
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	16.15	6.473	.582	.360
Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	16.17	6.159	.698	.492

Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	16.16	6.395	.629	.428
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	15.94	7.081	.552	.330

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

Q11 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university	.787
Q13 - University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course	.795
Q15 - The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study	.759
Q15 - High ranking universities deliver high quality education	.780
Q15 - Graduates from highly ranked universities have better job opportunities	.802

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
20.12	9.767	3.125	5

E11: Reliability SPSS output – Safety

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.815	.820	4

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university	4.17	.820	215
Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course	3.96	.987	215
Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	4.19	.763	215
Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area	4.08	.896	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors	Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors	Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area

	when choosing a university	when choosing a course		where the campus was in an unsafe area
Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university	1.000	.736	.532	.484
Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course	.736	1.000	.488	.400
Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	.532	.488	1.000	.553
Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area	.484	.400	.553	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	4.098	3.958	4.186	.228	1.058	.011
Inter-Item Correlations	.532	.400	.736	.336	1.839	.012

Summary Item Statistics

N of Items

Item Means	4
Inter-Item Correlations	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university	12.22	4.557	.734	.598

Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course	12.43	4.191	.652	.554
Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	12.20	5.061	.628	.411
Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area	12.31	4.823	.553	.356

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if
Item Deleted

Q11 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university	.724
Q13 - Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a course	.764
Q15 - Safety whilst studying abroad is very important to me	.774
Q15 - I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area	.807

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
16.39	7.800	2.793	4

E12: Reliability SPSS output – University Marketing

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	215	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	215	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.725	.722	9

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	3.64	.971	215
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	3.59	.937	215
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	4.34	.706	215
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	3.49	1.013	215
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	2.13	1.094	215

Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	3.00	1.129	215
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	2.69	1.160	215
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	3.16	1.097	215
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	3.74	1.101	215

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media
Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	1.000	.499	.217	.300
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	.499	1.000	.214	.349
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.217	.214	1.000	.300
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.300	.349	.300	1.000
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	.075	.102	-.034	.174

Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	.071	.197	.131	.435
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.053	.166	.046	.333
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.060	.202	.151	.210
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.104	.145	.242	.278

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days
Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	.075	.071	.053	.060
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	.102	.197	.166	.202
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	-.034	.131	.046	.151
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.174	.435	.333	.210
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	1.000	.326	.444	.282

Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	.326	1.000	.519	.438
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.444	.519	1.000	.525
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.282	.438	.525	1.000
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.102	.112	.170	.113

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there

Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	.104
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	.145
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.242
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.278
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	.102
Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	.112

Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.170
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.113
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	1.000

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance
Item Means	3.309	2.130	4.344	2.214	2.039	.421
Inter-Item Correlations	.224	-.034	.525	.559	-15.386	.021

Summary Item Statistics

	N of Items
Item Means	9
Inter-Item Correlations	9

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	26.14	23.429	.274	.286
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	26.19	22.517	.400	.314
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	25.43	24.602	.264	.166

Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	26.29	20.991	.531	.357
Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	27.65	22.192	.345	.222
Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	26.78	20.368	.521	.394
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	27.09	20.006	.539	.456
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	26.61	21.135	.457	.337
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	26.04	22.989	.260	.120

Item-Total Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha if
Item Deleted

Q11 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a university	.722
Q13 - Online and / or offline communication from the university are very important factors when choosing a course	.701
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website	.721
Q15 - The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media	.677

Q15 - The university that I selected communicated using my native language	.711
Q15 - The university that I selected enabled me to ask questions online using real - time chat	.677
Q15 - The university that I selected held open days in my country	.673
Q15 - The university that I selected held virtual open days	.690
Q15 - I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there	.727

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
29.78	26.950	5.191	9

Appendix F: SPSS Outputs. Regression

F1: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Cost / Cost of Living

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CostOfLiving2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
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Change Statistics

				Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.924 ^a	.854	.854	.76927	.854	1247.976	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), CostOfLiving2

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	738.523	1	738.523	1247.976	<.001 ^b
	Residual	126.048	213	.592		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), CostOfLiving2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.018	.277		3.671	<.001
	CostOfLiving2	2.562	.073	.924	35.327	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	3.5804	13.8292	10.6384	1.85770	215
Residual	-2.54811	1.95189	.00000	.76747	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.799	1.718	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.312	2.537	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

F2: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Cost / Course duration

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CourseDuration2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.773 ^a	.598	.596	1.27735	.598	316.887	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), CourseDuration2

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	517.037	1	517.037	316.887	<.001 ^b
	Residual	347.534	213	1.632		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), CourseDuration2

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
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		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.664	.347		13.451	<.001
	CourseDuration2	1.919	.108	.773	17.801	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	6.5825	14.2570	10.6384	1.55437	215
Residual	-4.33835	3.03957	.00000	1.27436	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.609	2.328	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.396	2.380	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

F3: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Cost / Course fees

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Course_Fees ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Change Statistics	df1
1	.912 ^a	.832	.831	.82512	.832	1056.904		1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Course_Fees

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	719.557	1	719.557	1056.904	<.001 ^b
	Residual	145.014	213	.681		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Course_Fees

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.798	.278		6.476	<.001
	Course_Fees	1.172	.036	.912	32.510	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	4.1433	13.5232	10.6384	1.83369	215
Residual	-2.60076	2.68420	.00000	.82319	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.542	1.573	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.152	3.253	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

F4: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Quality / Employment

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Employment2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.707 ^a	.500	.497	1.15294	.500	212.683	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employment2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	282.712	1	282.712	212.683	<.001 ^b
	Residual	283.133	213	1.329		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employment2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.032	.389		15.507	<.001
	Employment2	1.483	.102	.707	14.584	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.5149	13.4456	11.5882	1.14938	215
Residual	-4.44559	3.32424	.00000	1.15024	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.544	1.616	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.856	2.883	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

F5: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Quality / Proximity

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Prox2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.801 ^a	.641	.639	.97658	.641	380.308	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prox2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	362.704	1	362.704	380.308	<.001 ^b
	Residual	203.141	213	.954		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Prox2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.953	.397		9.955	<.001
	Prox2	2.040	.105	.801	19.501	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.0326	14.1515	11.5882	1.30188	215
Residual	-3.61024	2.30397	.00000	.97430	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.731	1.969	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.697	2.359	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

F6: Regression SPSS output – Perception of Quality / Safety

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Safety2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1

1	.812 ^a	.660	.658	.95080	.660	412.915	1
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a. Predictors: (Constant), Safety2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	373.287	1	373.287	412.915	<.001 ^b
	Residual	192.558	213	.904		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Safety2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
		Beta				
1	(Constant)	3.837	.387		9.917	<.001
	Safety2	1.892	.093	.812	20.320	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.1474	13.2951	11.5882	1.32073	215
Residual	-3.73476	2.44234	.00000	.94858	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.362	1.292	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.928	2.569	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

F7: Regression SPSS output – Reputation / Prior Awareness

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Prior_Awareness2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.926 ^a	.857	.856	.54749	.857	1273.159	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prior_Awareness2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	381.618	1	381.618	1273.159	<.001 ^b
	Residual	63.845	213	.300		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Prior_Awareness2

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	2.132	.252		8.450	<.001
	Prior_Awareness2	2.405	.067	.926	35.681	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	5.9106	14.1558	11.0334	1.33539	215
Residual	-1.54813	1.43172	.00000	.54621	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.836	2.338	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-2.828	2.615	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

F8: Regression SPSS output – Reputation / Ranking

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Ranking2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.709 ^a	.503	.500	1.01991	.503	215.243	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ranking2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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1	Regression	223.898	1	223.898	215.243	<.001 ^b
	Residual	221.564	213	1.040		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Ranking2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.449	.454		9.798	<.001
	Ranking2	1.636	.112	.709	14.671	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.3770	12.6319	11.0334	1.02286	215
Residual	-3.34303	3.29158	.00000	1.01752	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.597	1.563	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.278	3.227	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

F9: Regression SPSS output – Reputation / Marketing

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Marketing2 ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Change Statistics df1
1	.842 ^a	.709	.708	.78011	.709	518.973	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), Marketing2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	315.835	1	315.835	518.973	<.001 ^b
	Residual	129.627	213	.609		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Marketing2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.065	.310		13.094	<.001
	Marketing2	2.106	.092	.842	22.781	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.1074	14.1279	11.0334	1.21485	215
Residual	-1.65802	1.51659	.00000	.77829	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.232	2.547	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-2.125	1.944	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

F10: Regression SPSS output – Word of Mouth / Perception of cost

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.239 ^a	.057	.053	1.95640	.057	12.883	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	49.311	1	49.311	12.883	<.001 ^b
	Residual	815.260	213	3.828		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.265	.675		12.254	<.001
	WOM_D	.256	.071	.239	3.589	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.1615	12.0213	10.6384	.48003	215
Residual	-7.29264	4.83238	.00000	1.95183	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.728	2.470	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

F11: Regression SPSS output – Word of Mouth / Perception of quality

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.368 ^a	.136	.131	1.51541	.136	33.396	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	76.694	1	76.694	33.396	<.001 ^b
	Residual	489.151	213	2.296		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.629	.522		16.515	<.001
	WOM_D	.319	.055	.368	5.779	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.7464	13.3129	11.5882	.59865	215
Residual	-5.30083	3.72281	.00000	1.51187	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215

Std. Residual	-3.498	2.457	.000	.998	215
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a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

F12: Regression SPSS output – Word of Mouth / Reputation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.315 ^a	.099	.095	1.37263	.099	23.432	1

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	44.149	1	44.149	23.432	<.001 ^b
	Residual	401.313	213	1.884		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.788	.473		18.570	<.001
	WOM_D	.242	.050	.315	4.841	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.6360	12.3420	11.0334	.45421	215
Residual	-4.89237	3.70480	.00000	1.36941	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.564	2.699	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Appendix G: SPSS Outputs. Crosstabulation

G1: 4.6.2 Language * Q4 - How old are you Crosstabulation

			Q4 - How old are you			
			18 to 21	22 to 25	Over 25	Total
Language	Chinese (Simplified)	Count	11	53	76	140
		% within Q4 - How old are you	64.7%	74.6%	59.8%	65.1%
	English	Count	6	18	51	75
		% within Q4 - How old are you	35.3%	25.4%	40.2%	34.9%
Total	Count	17	71	127	215	
	% within Q4 - How old are you	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
4.396 ^a	2	.111
4.515	2	.105
215		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.93.

G2: Q14 - Which decision did you make first? * Q4 - How old are you Crosstabulation

			Q4 - How old are you			
			18 to 21	22 to 25	Over 25	Total
Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	WHAT to study	Count	8	47	69	124
		% within Q4 - How old are you	47.1%	66.2%	54.3%	57.7%
	WHERE to study	Count	9	24	58	91
		% within Q4 - How old are you	52.9%	33.8%	45.7%	42.3%
Total		Count	17	71	127	215
		% within Q4 - How old are you	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

G3: 4.6.4 Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)? * Q3 - What is your gender? Crosstabulation

			Q3 - What is your gender?				
			Male	Female	other	I prefer not to say	Total
Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?	Asia Pacific, Australia	Count	7	16	0	1	24
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	8.9%	12.1%	0.0%	50.0%	11.2%
	Asia Pacific, NZ	Count	0	6	0	0	6
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%

Asia Pacific, Singapore	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
East Asia, China	Count	1	0	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
East Asia, Japan	Count	4	1	0	1	6
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	5.1%	0.8%	0.0%	50.0%	2.8%
Europe, Austria	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Europe, Denmark	Count	1	1	0	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Europe, England	Count	1	1	0	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Europe, Finland	Count	0	2	0	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Europe, France	Count	1	2	0	0	3
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
Europe, Germany	Count	5	6	0	0	11
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	6.3%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%
Europe, Ireland	Count	2	0	0	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Europe, Netherlands	Count	1	6	0	0	7
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%
Europe, Poland	Count	0	1	0	0	1

	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Europe, Russia	Count	1	0	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Europe, Spain	Count	2	2	0	0	4
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	2.5%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Europe, Sweden	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Europe, UK	Count	16	22	0	0	38
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	20.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	17.7%
Europe,Germany	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Ireland	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Middle East, Israel	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
North America, Canada	Count	20	32	0	0	52
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	25.3%	24.2%	0.0%	0.0%	24.2%
North America, US	Count	16	27	2	0	45
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	20.3%	20.5%	100.0%	0.0%	20.9%
North America, USA	Count	1	1	0	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	1.3%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Total	Count	79	132	2	2	215

% within Q3 - What is your gender?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
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G4: 4.6.5 Q14 - Which decision did you make first? * Q3 - What is your gender?

Crosstabulation

			Q3 - What is your gender?			
			Male	Female	Other	I prefer not to say
Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	WHAT to study	Count	47	74	2	1
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	59.5%	56.1%	100.0%	50.0%
	WHERE to study	Count	32	58	0	1
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	40.5%	43.9%	0.0%	50.0%
Total		Count	79	132	2	2
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

G5: 4.6.6 Language * Q3 - What is your gender? Crosstabulation

			Q3 - What is your gender?				Total
			Male	Female	other	I prefer not to say	
Language	Chinese (Simplified)	Count	53	85	0	2	140
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	67.1%	64.4%	0.0%	100.0%	65.1%
	English	Count	26	47	2	0	75

	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	32.9%	35.6%	100.0%	0.0%	34.9%
Total	Count	79	132	2	2	215
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.970 ^a	3	.174
Likelihood Ratio	6.095	3	.107
N of Valid Cases	215		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .70.

G6: 4.6.7 Q4 - How old are you * Q14 - Which decision did you make first?

Crosstabulation

			Q14 - Which decision did you make first?		Total
			WHAT to study	WHERE to study	
Q4 - How old are you	18 to 21	Count	8	9	17
		% within Q4 - How old are you	47.1%	52.9%	100.0%
		% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	6.5%	9.9%	7.9%
	22 to 25	Count	47	24	71
		% within Q4 - How old are you	66.2%	33.8%	100.0%
		% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	37.9%	26.4%	33.0%
	Over 25	Count	69	58	127
		% within Q4 - How old are you	54.3%	45.7%	100.0%
		% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	55.6%	63.7%	59.1%
Total	Count	124	91	215	
	% within Q4 - How old are you	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%	
	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.479 ^a	2	.176
Likelihood Ratio	3.514	2	.173
Linear-by-Linear Association	.277	1	.599
N of Valid Cases	215		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.20.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.036	.069	.526	.600 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.059	.069	.869	.386 ^c
N of Valid Cases		215			

- a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
- b. Using the asymptomatic standard error assuming the null hypothesis
- c. Based on normal approximation

G7: 4.6.8 Q3 - What is your gender? * Q14 - Which decision did you make first?

Crosstabulation

			Q14 - Which decision did you make first?		Total
			WHAT to study	WHERE to study	
Q3 - What is your gender?	Male	Count	47	32	79
		% within Q3 - What is your gender?	59.5%	40.5%	100.0%

	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	37.9%	35.2%	36.7%
Female	Count	74	58	132
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	56.1%	43.9%	100.0%
	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	59.7%	63.7%	61.4%
other	Count	2	0	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	1.6%	0.0%	0.9%
I prefer not to say	Count	1	1	2
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	0.8%	1.1%	0.9%
Total	Count	124	91	215
	% within Q3 - What is your gender?	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%
	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.764 ^a	3	.623
Likelihood Ratio	2.497	3	.476
Linear-by-Linear Association	.051	1	.821
N of Valid Cases	215		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .85

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.015	.068	.226	.822 ^c

Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.019	.068	.275	.783 ^c
N of Valid Cases		215			

- a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
- b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
- c. Based on normal approximation

G8: 4.6.9 Language * Q14 - Which decision did you make first? Crosstabulation

		Q14 - Which decision did you make first?			
		WHAT to study	WHERE to study	Total	
Language	Chinese	Count	80	60	140
	(Simplified)	% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	64.5%	65.9%	65.1%
	English	Count	44	31	75
		% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	35.5%	34.1%	34.9%
Total		Count	124	91	215
		% within Q14 - Which decision did you make first?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.046 ^a	1	.829		
Continuity Correction ^b	.005	1	.944		
Likelihood Ratio	.047	1	.829		
Fisher's Exact Test				.885	.473
N of Valid Cases	215				

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.74.
- b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

G9: Group Statistics Gender / Safety Crosstabulation

Group Statistics (Gender / Safety)

Q3 - What is your gender?		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Safety2	Male	79	4.0285	.73705	.08293
	Female	132	4.1288	.67922	.05912

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
						One- Sided p	Two- Sided p				
Safety2	Equal variances assumed	.183	.670	-1.005	209	.158	.316	-.10031	.09977	-.29698	.09637
	Equal variances not assumed			-.985	153.783	.163	.326	-.10031	.10184	-.30149	.10088

G10: 4.6.10 Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)? * Q4 - How old are you Crosstabulation

		Q4 - How old are you			Total
		18 to 21	22 to 25	Over 25	
Q6 - Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?	Asia Pacific, Australia	1	4	19	24
	Asia Pacific, NZ	0	1	5	6
	Asia Pacific, Singapore	0	1	0	1
	East Asia, China	0	0	1	1
	East Asia, Japan	1	3	2	6
	Europe, Austria	0	1	0	1
	Europe, Denmark	0	1	1	2
	Europe, England	0	2	0	2
	Europe, Finland	0	1	1	2
	Europe, France	0	2	1	3
	Europe, Germany	1	2	8	11
	Europe, Ireland	0	0	2	2
	Europe, Netherlands	0	1	6	7
	Europe, Poland	0	1	0	1
	Europe, Russia	0	1	0	1
	Europe, Spain	1	1	2	4
	Europe, Sweden	0	0	1	1
	Europe, UK	5	21	12	38
	Europe, Germany	0	0	1	1
	Ireland	0	1	0	1
	Middle East, Israel	0	1	0	1
	North America, Canada	2	10	40	52
	North America, US	6	14	25	45
	North America, USA	0	2	0	2
Total	17	71	127	215	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	58.852 ^a	46	.097
Likelihood Ratio	63.966	46	.041
N of Valid Cases	215		

a. 63 cells (87.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .08.

G11: 4.10.1 Perception of Cost / Cost of living Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CostOfLiving2 ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.924 ^a	.854	.854	.76927	.854	1247.976	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), CostOfLiving2

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	738.523	1	738.523	1247.976	<.001 ^b

Residual	126.048	213	.592		
Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), CostOfLiving2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.018	.277		3.671	<.001
	CostOfLiving2	2.562	.073	.924	35.327	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	3.5804	13.8292	10.6384	1.85770	215
Residual	-2.54811	1.95189	.00000	.76747	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.799	1.718	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.312	2.537	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

G12: 4.10.2 Perception of Cost / Course Duration Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CourseDuration2 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.773 ^a	.598	.596	1.27735	.598	316.887	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), CourseDuration2

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	517.037	1	517.037	316.887	<.001 ^b
	Residual	347.534	213	1.632		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), CourseDuration2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.664	.347		13.451	<.001
	CourseDuration2	1.919	.108	.773	17.801	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	6.5825	14.2570	10.6384	1.55437	215

Residual	-4.33835	3.03957	.00000	1.27436	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.609	2.328	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.396	2.380	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

G13: 4.10.3 Perception of Cost / Course Fees Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Course_Fees ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.912 ^a	.832	.831	.82512	.832	1056.904	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Course_Fees

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	719.557	1	719.557	1056.904	<.001 ^b
	Residual	145.014	213	.681		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Course_Fees

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.798	.278		6.476	<.001
	Course_Fees	1.172	.036	.912	32.510	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	4.1433	13.5232	10.6384	1.83369	215
Residual	-2.60076	2.68420	.00000	.82319	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.542	1.573	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.152	3.253	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

G14: 4.10.4 Perception of Quality / Employment Opportunities Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Employment2 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Change Statistics		
-------	---	----------	-------------------	--	--

		Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.707 ^a	.500	.497	1.15294	.500	212.683	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employment2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	282.712	1	282.712	212.683	<.001 ^b
	Residual	283.133	213	1.329		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employment2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.032	.389		15.507	<.001
	Employment2	1.483	.102	.707	14.584	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.5149	13.4456	11.5882	1.14938	215
Residual	-4.44559	3.32424	.00000	1.15024	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.544	1.616	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.856	2.883	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

G15: 4.10.5 Perception of Quality / Proximity to Facilities Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Prox2 ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.801 ^a	.641	.639	.97658	.641	380.308	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prox2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	362.704	1	362.704	380.308	<.001 ^b
	Residual	203.141	213	.954		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Prox2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.953	.397		9.955	<.001
	Prox2	2.040	.105	.801	19.501	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.0326	14.1515	11.5882	1.30188	215
Residual	-3.61024	2.30397	.00000	.97430	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.731	1.969	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.697	2.359	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

G16: 4.10.6 Perception of Quality / Safety Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Safety2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.812 ^a	.660	.658	.95080	.660	412.915	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Safety2

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	373.287	1	373.287	412.915	<.001 ^b
	Residual	192.558	213	.904		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Safety2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	3.837	.387		9.917	<.001
	Safety2	1.892	.093	.812	20.320	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.1474	13.2951	11.5882	1.32073	215
Residual	-3.73476	2.44234	.00000	.94858	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.362	1.292	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.928	2.569	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

G17: 4.10.7 Reputation / Prior Awareness Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Prior_Awareness2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.926 ^a	.857	.856	.54749	.857	1273.159	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prior_Awareness2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	381.618	1	381.618	1273.159	<.001 ^b
	Residual	63.845	213	.300		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Prior_Awareness2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.132	.252		8.450	<.001
	Prior_Awareness2	2.405	.067	.926	35.681	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	5.9106	14.1558	11.0334	1.33539	215
Residual	-1.54813	1.43172	.00000	.54621	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.836	2.338	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-2.828	2.615	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

G18: 4.10.8 Reputation / Ranking Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Ranking2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Change Statistics		
-------	---	----------	-------------------	--	--

			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.709 ^a	.503	.500	1.01991	.503	215.243	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ranking2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	223.898	1	223.898	215.243	<.001 ^b
	Residual	221.564	213	1.040		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Ranking2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.449	.454		9.798	<.001
	Ranking2	1.636	.112	.709	14.671	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.3770	12.6319	11.0334	1.02286	215
Residual	-3.34303	3.29158	.00000	1.01752	215
Std. Predicted Value	-2.597	1.563	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.278	3.227	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

G19: 4.10.9 Reputation / University Marketing Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Marketing2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.842 ^a	.709	.708	.78011	.709	518.973	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Marketing2

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	315.835	1	315.835	518.973	<.001 ^b
	Residual	129.627	213	.609		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Marketing2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.065	.310		13.094	<.001
	Marketing2	2.106	.092	.842	22.781	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.1074	14.1279	11.0334	1.21485	215
Residual	-1.65802	1.51659	.00000	.77829	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.232	2.547	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-2.125	1.944	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

G20: 4.10.10 WOM as a Dependent Variable of Agents Voice Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Agents2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.805 ^a	.648	.646	1.11536	.648	391.356	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Agents2

b. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	486.858	1	486.858	391.356	<.001 ^b
	Residual	264.978	213	1.244		
	Total	751.836	214			

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Agents2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	5.325	.213		24.965	<.001
	Agents2	1.593	.081	.805	19.783	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	6.9178	13.2902	9.2667	1.50832	215
Residual	-3.41778	3.74889	.00000	1.11275	215
Std. Predicted Value	-1.557	2.668	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.064	3.361	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

G21: 4.10.11 WOM as a Dependent Variable of Alumni Voice Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Alumni2 ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.759 ^a	.576	.574	1.22318	.576	289.508	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Alumni2

b. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	433.152	1	433.152	289.508	<.001 ^b
	Residual	318.684	213	1.496		
	Total	751.836	214			

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), Alumni2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.348	.415		5.655	<.001
	Alumni2	2.055	.121	.759	17.015	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	4.9159	12.6211	9.2667	1.42270	215
Residual	-3.63605	3.54304	.00000	1.22032	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.058	2.358	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-2.973	2.897	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

G22: 4.10.12 WOM as a Dependent Variable of Family / Friends Voice Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	FamilyFriends2 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.792 ^a	.627	.625	1.14803	.627	357.447	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), FamilyFriends2

b. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	471.107	1	471.107	357.447	<.001 ^b
	Residual	280.729	213	1.318		

Total	751.836	214			
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a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), FamilyFriends2

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	2.413	.371		6.507	<.001
	FamilyFriends2	2.001	.106	.792	18.906	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	4.4143	12.4188	9.2667	1.48372	215
Residual	-4.16770	2.83342	.00000	1.14535	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.270	2.124	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.630	2.468	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: WOM_D

G23: 4.10.13 WOM as an Independent Variable of Perception of Cost Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.239 ^a	.057	.053	1.95640	.057	12.883	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	49.311	1	49.311	12.883	<.001 ^b
	Residual	815.260	213	3.828		
	Total	864.571	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.265	.675		12.254	<.001
	WOM_D	.256	.071	.239	3.589	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.1615	12.0213	10.6384	.48003	215
Residual	-7.29264	4.83238	.00000	1.95183	215

Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.728	2.470	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Cost_D

G24: 4.10.14 WOM as an Independent Variable of Perception of Quality

Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.368 ^a	.136	.131	1.51541	.136	33.396	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	76.694	1	76.694	33.396	<.001 ^b
	Residual	489.151	213	2.296		
	Total	565.845	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	8.629	.522		16.515	<.001
	WOM_D	.319	.055	.368	5.779	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.7464	13.3129	11.5882	.59865	215
Residual	-5.30083	3.72281	.00000	1.51187	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.498	2.457	.000	.998	215

a. Dependent Variable: Quality_D

G25: 4.10.15 WOM as an Independent Variable of Perception of Reputation

Crosstabulation

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WOM_D ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square		Change Statistics
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			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.315 ^a	.099	.095	1.37263	.099	23.432	1	213	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	44.149	1	44.149	23.432	<.001 ^b
	Residual	401.313	213	1.884		
	Total	445.462	214			

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

b. Predictors: (Constant), WOM_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.788	.473		18.570	<.001
	WOM_D	.242	.050	.315	4.841	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_D

Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	9.6360	12.3420	11.0334	.45421	215
Residual	-4.89237	3.70480	.00000	1.36941	215
Std. Predicted Value	-3.077	2.881	.000	1.000	215
Std. Residual	-3.564	2.699	.000	.998	215

Appendix H: Survey Questionnaire

Factors Influencing Student Choice of HE Institution

Block 1

Q1 Hello and thank you for responding,

You are invited to participate in our survey to better understand why Chinese international students select certain Universities for their studies. In this survey, approximately two hundred people will be asked to complete a questionnaire that asks questions about what things you consider when deciding upon which University to enrol at. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and there are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is however, very important for us to learn your opinions and as such, we really appreciate your participation.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. The data provided by all respondents will be coded and as a result, it will not be possible to identify any of the participants, from the questions answered. No

individual will be identifiable in the final write-up and if you would like to see the final product of the research please feel free to ask and I will send you a copy at no charge.

In the interests of security, I will keep all data stored on my password protected laptop where the data is encrypted. I will not share any non-anonymized results with anyone and after the project is completed the data will be destroyed by December 2034.

Whether or not you wish to take part in this data collection is entirely up to you. If you agree to take part but later change your mind that is fine and upon request, I will immediately remove any non anonymized data. The questionnaire has been designed to ensure that the data collection method is quick and easy to complete. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Andrew Salmon on 0121 204 3722 or by email at the address specified below; andrew.salmon3@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your time and support. If you are happy to proceed, please read below and click the 'next' button to confirm your consent;

- a) I have read and understand the information above
- b) I have had the opportunity to ask questions
- c) I understand that participation is entirely voluntary
- d) I agree to take part in the survey
- e) I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any stage of the study without prejudice
- f) I understand my right to anonymity / confidentiality

Please start with the survey now by clicking on the Next button below.

Page Break

Q2 Are you a Chinese student

- Yes
- No

Validation

Force Response

Skip Logic

No If Selected, jump to Terminate Survey

Automatic Logic Break

Q3 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- other
- I prefer not to say

Validation

Force

Response

Q4 How old are you

18 to 21

22 to 25

Over 25

Validation

Force Response

Block 2

Q5 Why did you decide to study overseas (select all that apply)?

Low cost of living overseas

Safety / Security overseas

Easy to acquire a VISA

Recommendation by alumni

Recommendation by agent

Recommendation of family, friends or parents

High quality of education provided overseas

Opportunity to experience different cultures

Opportunity to improve English language skills

Employment opportunities overseas after graduating

Employment opportunities in China after graduating

Other (if applicable)

Validation

Force Response Select At Least 1 of 12

Dynamic Text/Comments

Other (if applicable) Dynamic textbox enabled - label name Please specify

Q6 Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?

Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)?

Answer text

.....

Validation

Which Overseas Country are you currently studying in (or intend to study in)? Force Response

Q7 Thinking about your choice of **country**, please read below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements;

Left Anchor

Right Anchor

Strongly

Strongly

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

disagree

agree

disagree

agree

Low cost of living is very important factor in making my decision

Safety / Security is very important factor in making my decision

Ease of acquiring a VISA is very
important factor in making my
decision

Recommendation by alumni is very important factor in making my decision

Recommendation by an agent is
very important factor in making
my decision

Recommendation by family, friends or parents is very important factor in making
my decision

Quality of education is very important factor in making my decision

Opportunities to experience
different cultures is very important factor in making my
decision Opportunities to

improve my English language skills is very important factor in making my decision

Employment

opportunities in the country is a very important factor in making my decision

Opportunities to remain in the country after graduation is a very important factor in making my
decision

Closeness of the country other
interesting countries is a very important factor in making my decision

Validation

Force Response type Rows

Q8 Other than the UK, did you consider studying in any other
English - speaking countries?

USA

Australia

Canada

No

Other (Please specify)

Validation

Force Response Select At Least 1 of 5

Dynamic Text/Comments

Other (Please specify) Dynamic textbox enabled - label name Please specify

Block 3

Q9 At which university did (or will) you enrol?

At which university did (or will) you enrol?

Answer text

.....

Validation

At which university did (or will) you enrol? Force Response

Q10 How did you find out about the university that you enrolled in (or intend to enrol in)?

- Internet
- website
- Social media
- email
- Family, friends or parents
-
- Alumni
-

Agent

Other (please specify)

Validation

Force Response Select At Least 1 of 7

Dynamic Text/Comments

Other (please specify) Dynamic textbox enabled - label name Please specify

Q11 Thinking about your choice of **university**, please read below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements;

Left Anchor		Right Anchor	
Strongly			Strongly
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
disagree			agree

Online and / or of ine communication from the university are ○○○○○ very important factors when choosing a university

University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a university

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Recommendations by

alumni is a very

important factor when choosing a university

Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a university

Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a university

Geographic location is a very
important factor when choosing
a university

Safety and security are very important factors when choosing a university

Proximity of the campus to
facilities is a very important factor when choosing a university

Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a university

University reputation is a very
important factor when choosing
a university

Opportunities to remain in the country after graduation is a very important factor
when choosing a university

Employment

opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a university

Quality of education is a very
important factor when choosing
a university

Opportunities to experience different cultures is a very important factor when choosing a university

Opportunities to improve my
English language skills is a very important factor when choosing a university

Validation

Block 4

Q12 Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?

Which course did (or might) you enrol upon?

Answer text

.....

Validation

Which course did (or might) you enrol upon? Force Response

Q13 Thinking about your choice of **course**, please read below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements;

	Left Anchor			Right Anchor	
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Course duration is a very important factor when choosing a course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course cost is a very important factor when choosing a course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course availability is a very important factor when choosing a course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Popularity of the course amongst other Chinese students is a very <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> important factor when choosing a course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course delivery method (for example online or block taught) is a very <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

important

factor when

choosing a course

Online and / or of ine communication from the university are very important factors

when choosing a course

University ranking is a very important factor when choosing a course

Recommendations by alumni is a

very important factor when choosing a course

Recommendations by agent is a very important factor when choosing a course

Recommendations by family, friends and parents is a very important factor when choosing a

course

Geographic location is a very

important factor when choosing

a course

Safety and security are very

important factors when choosing a course

Proximity of the campus to facilities is a very important factor when choosing a

course

Cost of living is a very important factor when choosing a course

University reputation is a very

important factor when choosing

a course

Opportunities to remain in the country after graduation is a very important factor

when choosing a course

Employment

opportunities in the country is a very important factor when choosing a course

Quality of education is a very

important factor when choosing

a course

Opportunities to experience different cultures is a very

important factor when choosing a course

Opportunities to improve my English language skills is a very important factor when choosing a course

Validation

Force Response type Rows

Q14 Which decision did you make first?

- WHAT to study
- WHERE to study

Validation

Force Response

Block 5

Q15 Please read below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements;

Left Anchor

Right Anchor

Strongly

Strongly

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

disagree

agree

The university that I selected had information about their courses on their website

The university that I selected had information about their courses on social media

The university that I selected communicated using my native language

The university that I selected
enabled me to ask questions online using real time chat

The university that I selected held open days in my country

The university that I selected held virtual open days

The university ranking was very important to me in deciding where to study

High ranking universities deliver high quality education

Graduates from highly ranked
universities have better job opportunities

I was aware of the university before I decided to apply there

What students who
have studied at a
university say about
university say about
their experience is

very

important in helping
me to make my
decision

I would not enrol in a university where alumni had negative experiences

The recommendations of agents
are very important in my choice of university

The recommendations of my parents are very important in my choice of university

Students should discuss their choice of university with their friends before making their
decision

Safety whilst studying abroad is
 very important to me

I would not apply to a university where the campus was in an unsafe area

It is important for me to study at
a university where I can easily walk to shops and other shops and other amenities

It is important to me to choose a
university where I

have opportunities to work
whilst studying

The cost of attending university is very important to me when deciding where to
study

I prefer to study at a university where I

can complete my degree in 12
months

Validation

Force Response type Rows

Block 6

Q16 Please read below and indicate your level of agreement or
disagreement with each of the following statements;

Left Anchor

Right Anchor

Strongly

Strongly

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

disagree

agree

I am very interested in the course that I enrolled (or plan to enrol) upon

The course that I have chosen
(or will choose) is well recognised by employers in

China The course that I

The course that I have chosen (or will choose) is well recognised by employers in the UK

The course that I have chosen is well recognised by my friends, family and parents

The course that I have chosen (or will choose) is popular amongst Chinese students

The course that I

have chosen (or will choose) provides opportunities for further study

Validation

Force Response type Rows

Block 7

Q17 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

University marketing is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to apply

Validation

Force Response

Q18

University ranking is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to apply

Validation

Force Response

Q19 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

Being aware of a university is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to a... [?](#)

Validation

Force Response

Q20 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

Alumni word of mouth is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to apply [?](#)

Validation

Force Response

Q21 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

The recommendation of an agent is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or n... [?](#)

Validation

Force Response

Q22 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

The opinion of parents is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to apply

Validation

Force Response

Q23

My personal safety is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not to apply

Validation

Force Response

Q24 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

Having facilities near to the campus is very important to me in making my decision as to whether o...

Validation

Force Response

Q25 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

Employment opportunities whilst studying are very important to me in making my decision as to wh...

Validation

Force Response

Q26 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

The availability of my chosen course is very important to me in making my decision as to whether ...

Validation

Force Response

Q27 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

The duration of my chosen course is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or ...

Validation

Force Response

Q28

The cost of my chosen course is very important to me in making my decision as to whether or not t...

Validation

Force Response

Q29 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

The cost of living during my chosen course is very important to me in making my decision as to whe... ?

Validation

Force Response

Q30 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

I will be paying the course fees myself

?

Validation

Force Response

Dynamic Text/Comments

Other (please specify) Dynamic textbox enabled - label name Please specify

Q31 For the question below, please select the ONE statement that most closely matches your perspective;

I will be paying my living expenses myself

?

Validation

Force Response

Dynamic Text/Comments

Other (please specify) Dynamic textbox enabled - label name Please specify

Beyond Admissions: Market Insights into the Chinese Student Journey into UK Higher Education



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Senior Teaching Fellow
Aston University
October 2025

The UK hosts many thousands of international students each year and students from China have traditionally been the largest group of non-EU international students in Britain. These students significantly influence the cultural diversity, commercial sustainability and internationalisation strategies of UK universities. The presence of these students has brought many economic benefits to communities located around university campuses, however, in recent times the numbers of these students enrolling in UK HE institutions has been in decline. This report investigates enrolment trends among Chinese international students at UK universities over the past 7 years. The research explores this phenomenon, identifying the antecedents impacting student choice, uncovering key patterns in enrolment numbers, exploring the shifting socio-political and economic landscapes influencing these trends, assessing the implications for UK universities and discusses sustainable recruitment strategies.

Using a quantitative approach, the study collected and analysed data from an online questionnaire undertaken by Chinese international students for which there were 215 respondents. This is combined with longitudinal enrolment data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The findings reveal a year – on – year increase in enrolments until 2019, followed by a period of stagnation due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts in UK immigration policy, and geopolitical tensions between China and the West.

Key drivers of enrolment have in the past included the perceived prestige of UK degrees, post-study work opportunities, and targeted marketing strategies by UK institutions. However, emerging challenges such as increased competition from other Anglophone destinations, concerns over student welfare, and policy unpredictability are reshaping the landscape.

This research contributes to the understanding of Chinese international student decision making and informs higher education policy and strategic planning. It advocates for the development of sustainable student recruitment strategies, enhanced student support systems, and continued engagement with government to increase demand amongst Chinese students for places at UK universities. In short, it investigates enrolment trends amongst Chinese international students at UK universities, evaluates the challenges and opportunities facing the sector, and provides strategic recommendations for increasing demand using sustainable marketing approaches. It is written with a **practitioner focus**, the emphasis being upon the provision of **actionable insights**, evidence-based strategies, and sector-wide recommendations that can guide Vice-Chancellors, International Directors, and recruitment teams. While academic frameworks provide theoretical grounding, the objective is to deliver market intelligence that supports decision-making and strategic planning. The findings reveal five core insights:

1. **Intensifying Competition:** The UK Higher Education sector is now facing increased competition from nations such as Australia, Canada and the US. Moreover, with increasing numbers of European destinations now offering simplified study visa options and post-study work options, they are now emerging as new competitors
2. **Perception Challenges:** Word – of – Mouth is a very powerful factor amongst Chinese consumers. Current negative media narratives relating to racism and the UK being unwelcoming of foreigners fuel safety concerns amongst Chinese students and impact willingness to apply to UK universities
3. **Over-Reliance upon China:** Whilst in recent years there has been an increasing trend amongst students from India, UK universities remain overly dependent upon Chinese students, making them particularly financially vulnerable to fluctuations in demand amongst these students
4. **Decision-Making Drivers:** The decisions made by Chinese students relating to host country, University and course choice are strongly influenced by family expectations, employability

outcomes, and institutional reputation. These perceptions are often shaped by trusted networks, alumni recommendations, and digital platforms

5. **Changing Recruitment Landscape:** Traditionally UK universities have been highly reliant upon education agents as a source of Chinese international students. This approach is expensive, especially at a time when university finances are under pressure. Those universities that are taking more sustainable and innovative approaches such as investing in digital marketing, alumni networks, and partnerships within China are likely to reap the rewards of their efforts

In response to the challenges faced by UK universities, this report establishes a set of **strategic recommendations** aimed at increasing demand from amongst these students. They have a sustainable marketing focus and include strengthening alumni engagement to generate positive word-of-mouth, enhancing digital recruitment strategies tailored to Chinese cultural values, lobbying for streamlined visa processes, reinforcing safety messaging, diversifying recruitment into emerging Chinese regions, and building stronger UK–China partnerships.

The financial challenges faced by UK universities are very real and for many HE institutions the future looks bleak over the short to medium term. For UK universities to once again attract Chinese students in numbers approaching those of the recent past, they will need to adopt more sustainable, culturally informed, and diversified strategies. The approaches taken in the past are now, in the face of contemporary threats no longer sustainable and those universities that make news headlines for all the right reasons will be those that readily adapt their marketing approach to meet, head on, the challenge of changing mobility dynamics amongst Chinese international students.

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Introduction

1.1 Context and Purpose

In the global higher education market, significant changes are currently taking place. One such change has seen a rapid expansion of the globalisation of education resulting in the expansion of student mobility. Since the early 2,000's China has emerged as being responsible for the single largest outflows of international students worldwide. UNESCO and OECD data states that more than 700,000 Chinese students study abroad annually, with nations such as the US, UK, Australia and Canada being the largest recipients of this student group (OECD, 2023).

South Asian students have a strong orientation towards furthering their education and sustained economic growth across the region has led to a growing middle class who are increasingly upwardly mobile and financially stable. Nowadays and largely due to the increasing globalisation of education, barriers that have previously made obtaining an overseas degree impossible, have largely disappeared. As a result, in ever increasing numbers, young well - educated South Asian students are choosing to leave their home countries and to immerse themselves in the western culture that is widely epitomised across digital media. Chinese students account for around a third of non-UK domiciled students (HESA, 2024) and these students make a positive contribution not only financially but also culturally to the universities they enrol in but also to the local communities within which university campuses are situated. There is no doubt that these students make a direct significant financial contribution, especially given the higher tuition fees international students pay. Beyond

tuition revenue, estimated at over £2 billion annually these students also contribute to the Global reputation of UK universities and the UK as a good host country.

It has been argued that over a prolonged period, UK universities treated this group of students as cash cows and failed to develop contingency planning to address any future shifts in mobility patterns. It is argued by Zhai, (2024) that viewing students solely as consumers is over-simplistic. Political tensions between China and Western nations, domestic pressures to diversify international student recruitment, and increased competition from alternative destinations have made the UK sector's position somewhat tenuous. Current trends have shone a spotlight upon the over reliance that the sector has had on this student group and upon education agents as a route to market.

China's outbound student mobility is in a state of flux. Universities in China are continuing to improve their global rankings. Moreover, the Chinese government has continued to invest in initiatives to improve demand for places domestically. Over the mid to long term, shifting demographics are predicted to result in reduced levels amongst the college-age population with the likely result being a downward trend in demand for overseas study. This has significant implications for the UK higher education sector and underscores the imperative for UK universities to adopt long – term sustainable marketing strategies.

The purpose of this report is to analyse the varying dynamics associated with the recruitment of Chinese international students and to provide sustainable marketing recommendations for UK universities. It is envisaged that these recommendations will strengthen Chinese international student demand and in so doing will help to support the longer term sustainability of university programmes targeting this particular student group.

Research Strategy

2.1 Scope of Study

The primary aim of this study was to **investigate enrolment trends amongst Chinese international students**, with a view to understanding the key factors that influence their choice of host country, university and course. The specific objectives were to:

- Analyse the cultural, social, and economic drivers of Chinese student mobility
- Evaluate the reliability and validity of constructs in measuring student perceptions
- Examine how factors such as safety, employability, reputation, and alumni influence interact to shape enrolment decisions
- Assess the implications of the findings for UK universities' recruitment strategies

This research focuses specifically upon Chinese undergraduate and postgraduate enrolment at UK universities with the primary emphasis being on developing strategies to strengthen UK competitiveness in attracting Chinese students.

In this part of the report, the researcher describes the primary data collection strategy along with the rationale, the sample and discusses the analyses and interpretation of said data. It presents and interprets the data gathered from a sample of 215 Chinese students who have either studied at a university outside of their home country or are thinking of doing so. Using descriptive data analysis, the researcher aims to identify various characteristics of respondents to provide validity and to support the research aims.

2.2 The Research Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of a range of items distributed across multiple constructs and subscales. Constructs were developed based on prior literature, with adaptation for cultural context. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The major constructs comprised of;

- Perceptions of Safety
- University Reputation and Academic Quality
- Employability and Career Prospects
- Role of Alumni and Word-of-Mouth Influence
- Use of Education Agents and Digital Platforms
- Perceptions of Value for Money

Statistical Analysis

The analysis was undertaken in four stages;

5. **Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct. Thresholds of ≥ 0.70 were considered acceptable, with values ≥ 0.80 considered good.
6. **Descriptive Statistics:** Means and standard deviations provided an overview of central tendencies.
7. **Chi-Square Tests:** Applied to examine associations between categorical variables (e.g., gender vs. perception of safety).
8. **Regression Analysis:** Conducted to explore predictors of overall perceptions. Independent variables included safety perceptions, employability, reputation, and alumni influence.

The methodological approach was that of a **quantitative survey design**, capturing perceptions from Chinese international students who had either previously studied outside of their home country, or were considering doing so. The use of a survey enabled the systematic collection of comparable data across multiple constructs, allowing for the application of statistical techniques including reliability testing, descriptive analysis, chi-square, and regression modelling. Deploying a survey facilitated the swift collection of data from an appropriate number of respondents within the finite timeframe available for the study. In developing the questionnaire, the researcher developed a set of questions, drawing upon previous research in this area where key factors related to the decision making of Chinese international students had been identified. This was then designed to produce nominal and scale data from which quantitative analysis could be undertaken. The QuestionPro platform was used with links distributed through online social media networks.

2.3 Surveys and supporting data reliability

When using surveys, data reliability is supported because all participants are required to answer the same questions, presented to them in a consistent manner. This is particularly apt where quantitative research is being undertaken and where the researcher, as per this study, plans to undertake statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships that exist. Doing this makes it possible for the sample to be considered representative and the results, generalisable (Nikolopolou, 2023).

Another reason for survey use was that it was possible for the researcher to allow respondents to participate either in English (the language spoken by the researcher) or in Mandarin (all respondents were Chinese). Confusing terms and / or being asked questions in an unfamiliar language can affect the validity of the data collected. As such, it was felt that by deploying the survey using both English and Mandarin languages, respondents could undertake the survey using whichever language they felt most proficient in. It was considered that this would enhance the quality of responses as it would minimise the possibility of misunderstanding the questions posed.

2.4 Type of Sampling used for the Study

For this study, the researcher employed Non-Probability Sampling, specifically the Voluntary Response Sampling method. This enabled prospective respondents to self – select, giving them agency to decide whether to participate, rather than simply selecting them for the study. Voluntary Response Sampling also has potential to reach a large group of respondents and whilst the researcher acknowledges that this can introduce bias, this sampling approach brings with it a host of benefits which include ease of data collection, the ability to target a specific group of individuals, attracting participants who are more willing to participate and attracting those who are interested in the research and have made a conscious decision to participate.

2.5 Survey Limitations

Whilst surveys are an excellent data collection tool, they too like other data collection methods are imperfect as they rely upon the respondents providing honest, open answers. With the survey having been deployed online, there was the potential for some of the limitations of surveys to be amplified as there was no way to determine whether respondents answered truthfully, were able to recall their motivations for decisions previously made, or if any respondents intended to mislead the researcher through their responses. Moreover, as the Voluntary Response Sampling method was deployed, it could be argued that the results are less generalisable due to common traits amongst the respondents. It is also true that some individuals are less inclined to respond to surveys than others, resulting in under representation of some groups which can lead to skewed data. An appropriate survey design was of critical importance. Moreover, the correct balance between the number and type of questions, and the need for collecting meaningful data needed to be struck. Questionnaires which take a long time to complete can result in ‘survey fatigue’ amongst participants where respondents may stop providing honest answers, may disengage altogether or may provide inaccurate responses. To reduce the potential for survey fatigue, the questionnaire was designed to enable completion by most respondents, within 10 minutes.

2.6 Questionnaire Design Pilot

Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the researcher undertook a pilot study. A pilot study effectively enables researchers to test their research instrument. This included testing the participant recruitment strategy and the data collection tool, for example identifying any ambiguous or poorly worded questions prior to the full-scale study. This was undertaken to potentially save time and other resources ahead of the main data collection. The pilot study was designed to test the proposed research instrument so that any issues with the questionnaire could be identified and thus enable the researcher to modify and / or refine questions as necessary.

Undertaking a pilot study prior to distributing the questionnaire for the main study supported the validity and reliability of the main study as proceeding without testing could have meant that an inappropriate research instrument was deployed. Kim (2011), recommends undertaking pilot studies, suggesting that they “enhance the transparency and replicability of research findings”. It

was important to have a clear indication of the likely response and completion rates prior to launching the main questionnaire. For this study, the pilot revealed no issues related to the questionnaire, the sample size or composition. Moreover, no logistical challenges or ethical concerns surfaced. The Cronbach's Alpha statistical technique was used to assess internal consistency and validity.

2.7 Research Constructs

A research construct is essentially an idea based upon observations. Within this research, constructs have been developed to best make use of the variables. In this particular study, the constructs were transformed using SPSS into measurable variables and doing so has enabled the researcher to specify how each construct was identified in preparation for more in - depth analysis. The researcher developed a set of 12 constructs, each of which is made up of a number of variables which have been derived from earlier literature on this subject.

2.8 Research Constructs Specific to this Study

The study is largely built upon a set of twelve research themes which were derived largely from earlier research focused upon the determinants of choice amongst Chinese international students. Figure 1 highlights the conceptual framework developed by the researcher as an output of secondary data analysis and the pilot study;

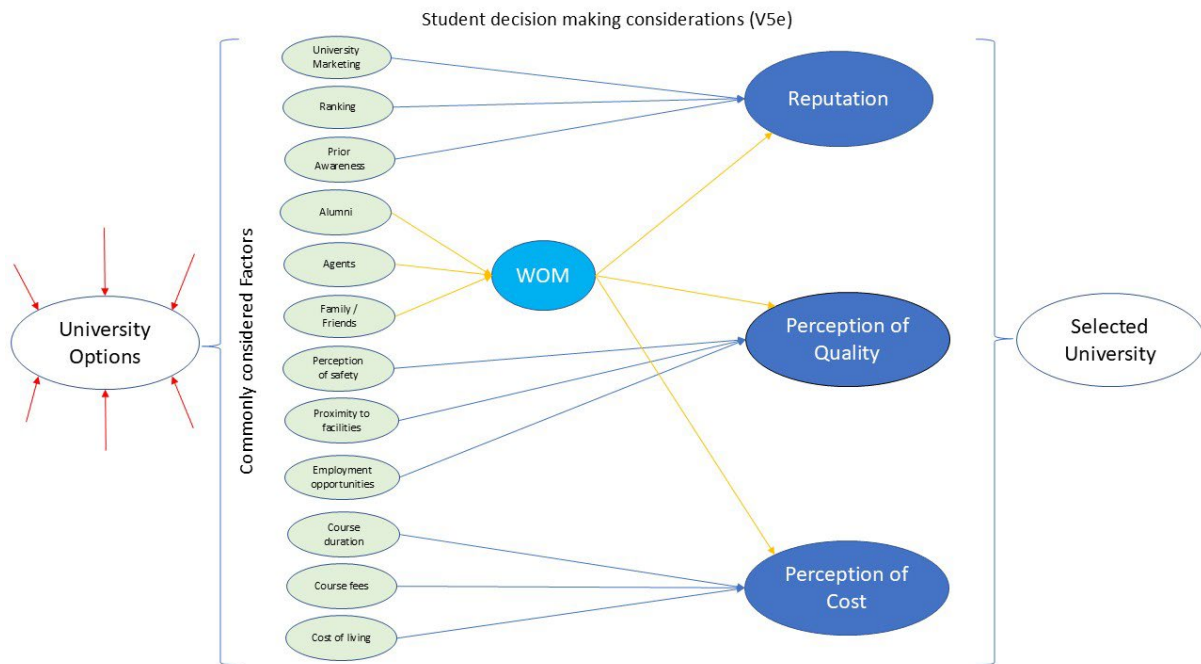


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework developed by the researcher.

From the conceptual framework (Figure 1) above, the twelve research themes can be seen on the left hand side. From those a set of research constructs were developed. These are;

Word of mouth – related to: **Agents / Alumni / Family & Friends**

Quality related to: **Perception of safety / Proximity to facilities / Employment opportunities**

Reputation related to: **University Marketing / Ranking / Prior Awareness**

Cost related to: **Course Duration / Course Fees / Cost of Living**

Table 1 highlights a total of the twelve themes that were explored within the questionnaire, each with a set of associated Likert scale questions;

Questionnaire theme	Related Likert Questions
University Marketing	Q111R1, Q136R6, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q153R3, Q154R4, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10
Ranking	Q112R2, Q137R7, Q157R7, Q158R8, Q159R9,
Prior Awareness	Q1110R10, Q1315R15, Q151R1, Q152R2, Q155R5, Q156R6, Q1510R10,
Alumni	Q113R3, Q138R8, Q1511R11, Q1512R12,
Agents	Q114R4, Q139R9, Q1513R13,
Family / Friends	Q115R5, Q1310R10, Q164R4,
Perception of Safety	Q117R7, Q1312R12, Q1516R16, Q1517R17,
Proximity to Facilities	Q116R6, Q118R8, Q1311R11, Q1313R13, Q1518R18,
Employment Opportunities	Q1112R12, Q1317R17, Q1519R19,
Course Duration	Q131R1, Q1521R21,
Course Fees	Q132R2, Q1520R20,
Cost of Living	Q119R9, Q132R2, Q1314R14, Q1520R20

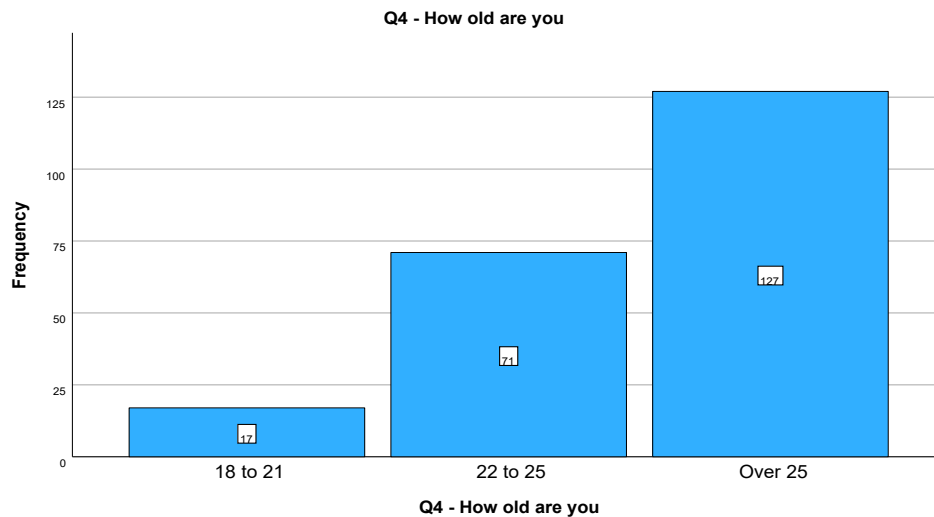
Table 1: Research themes & associated questions
Reliability Testing & Frequency Analysis

3.1.1 Reliability

Reliability underpins the credibility of empirical research findings. It enables researchers to demonstrate rigour. Arguably, reliability can be considered an essential element of research methodology due to researchers and stakeholders relying upon the results being repeatable and able to withstand scrutiny. Without building - in reliability the results may be difficult to defend, thus undermining the validity of the research. As such, the question shouldn't be whether to include reliability testing as an integral part of the research methodology but instead how it may be best undertaken to ensure that the opportunities for error in interpreting the results are minimized and that the findings are due to genuine relationships or phenomena.

Having established the need for reliability, the question then turns which are the most appropriate methods of undertaking reliability testing. There are many approaches to this and which is most suitable, largely depends upon the type of research being undertaken and the associated research strategy. For this research, internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. This was used to determine whether the items within the scales used, were a consistent measure within each of the research constructs and, whether the results could be considered replicable. This was deemed important by the researcher to create robust, generalizable findings.

3.2 Frequency Analysis - Age



Respondents were grouped into three age categories: 18–21 years, 22–25 years, and over 25 years with the results showing that **the majority of participants were over 25** years of age (n = 127, 59.1%). 71 respondents (33.0%) fell within the 22–25 category and 17 participants (7.9%) were aged 18–21. The modal category was therefore “over 25,” which indicates that the sample was largely comprised of older participants. Based upon this uneven distribution, the researcher concluded that the findings of the wider study were influenced quite strongly by the perspectives of respondents aged over 25.

The distribution of age amongst the respondents indicates a clear skew towards older participants, with almost 60% of the sample being over 25 years of age. It is important to note that the demographic imbalance seen here may have implications for the interpretation of findings, as it could be argued that the perspectives from younger age groups (particularly those aged 18–21) were underrepresented within the study.

Some earlier research has demonstrated that age can influence attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes suggesting that the dominance of older respondents may shape the outcomes of the study in ways that do not fully capture the diversity of the target population. That having been said, the regression analysis undertaken did provide some meaningful insights having taken this into account. Moreover, the substantial representation of participants in the over-25 category offers valuable insights into the views of the more experienced group, especially as the majority of Chinese international students looking to study overseas do so for postgraduate level study (thus they are likely to be older than other student groups).

3.1.2 Frequency Analysis - Gender

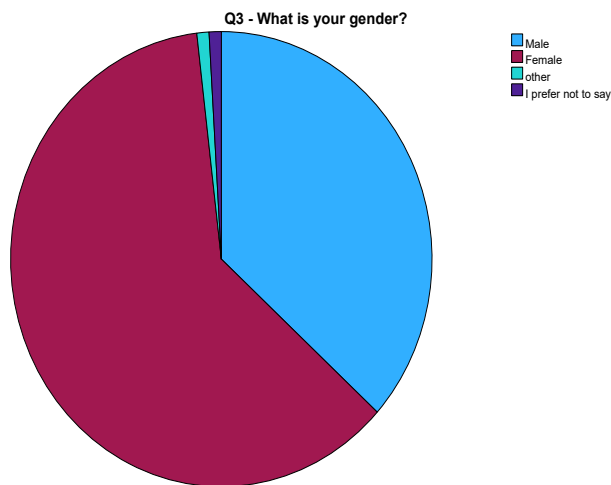
The gender analysis was interesting. **The majority of respondents identified as female** (n = 132, 61.4%), while **male respondents accounted for just over a third of the sample** (n = 79, 36.7%). A very small minority selected “other” (n = 2, 0.9%) or “I prefer not to say” (n = 2, 0.9%). Overall, the sample was skewed towards female participants, with limited representation of other gender identities.

The gender profile of respondents demonstrated a strong female majority, which the researcher concluded had important implications for the interpretation of the wider study. On a practical level and noted by the researcher, the significantly greater number of female respondents meant that the

results could have disproportionately reflected female perspectives. This being the case, Crosstab analysis has also been used to better highlight the varied perspectives based upon gender.

Very few non-binary and those not wanting to disclose their gender participated in the study. This may have been simply due to low numbers of non-binary individuals within the general population or perhaps that many of these students simply decided not to participate. There may also have been cultural factors at play. Overall, their numbers are too small here to support subgroup analysis.

Despite the limitations outlined above, the respondents provide valuable insights into the perspectives of this student group. Moreover, where an HE institution may wish to specifically target female students, this demographic skew observed within this study may be particularly useful.



3.1.3 Frequency Analysis – Course Choice

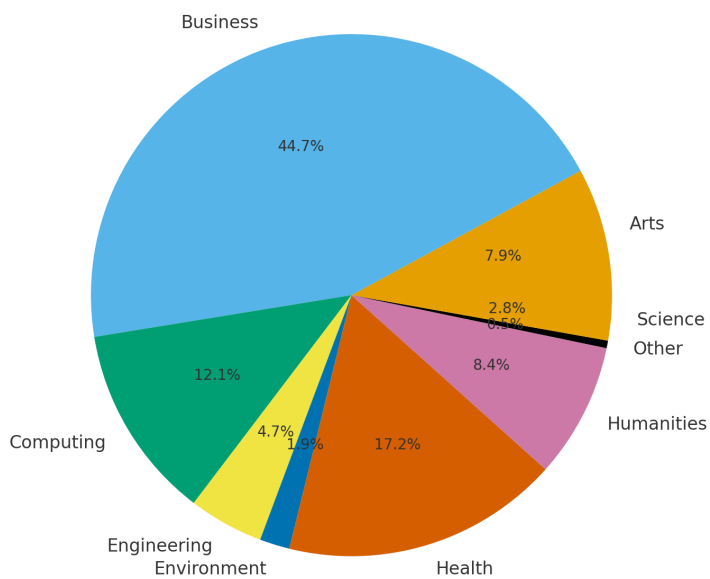
Overall, the participants reported a wide range of intended or current courses of study, including Arts, Business, Computing, Engineering, Health, Humanities, Sciences, and Technology. The most frequently selected subject area was **psychology (n = 20, 9.3%)**, followed by **business: marketing (n = 14, 6.5%)**, **business: finance (n = 10, 4.7%)**, **business: economics (n = 8, 3.7%)**, and **business: accounting (n = 8, 3.7%)**. Other notable clusters included business management (n = 7, 3.3%), languages within the humanities (n = 5, 2.3%), and computing/IT courses (n = 8 across computer science and IT combined, 3.8%). In contrast, a very large number of courses (over 100 unique entries) were chosen by only one or two participants each. This highlights a fragmented distribution with a small number of courses attracting large proportions of respondents, and conversely, most programmes being represented by small numbers.

For ease of analysis, the researcher grouped courses into nine categories: Arts, Business, Computing, Engineering, Environment, Health, Humanities, Science, and Other. The distribution of respondents across these categories is shown below;

Category	Number of Respondents
----------	-----------------------

Arts	17
Business	96
Computing	26
Engineering	10
Environment	4
Health	37
Humanities	18
Other	1
Science	6

Respondent Distribution by Course Category



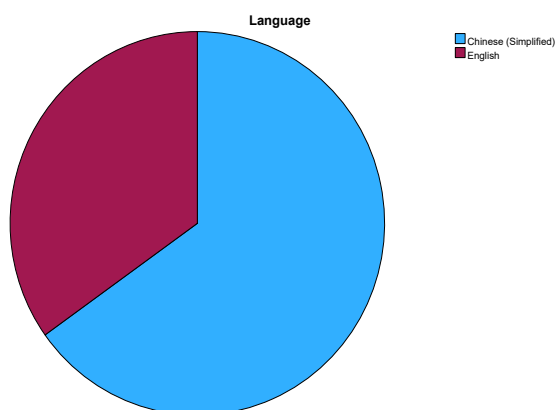
From the pie chart above, it can be seen that although students with a broad range of academic interests took part, a small number of disciplines dominated the sample, specifically **health and business-related subjects**. This concentration is consistent with international higher education trends, which highlight strong demand for psychology, management, and finance-related degrees amongst students (British Council, 2018; OECD, 2022). Interestingly, HEPI (2025) reports that demand amongst Chinese students for Business – related degrees has been in steady decline in recent years with a corresponding increased demand for the arts, social sciences and humanities.

The significant representation of psychology (9.3%) was noteworthy. It could be argued that perspectives from students with interests in human behaviour and mental health would feature prominently in the overall dataset. Similarly, the large numbers related to business programmes suggests that managerial, financial, and marketing perspectives would also influence the results of the wider study. All things considered, the data point to high popularity of psychology and business disciplines within the sample. This aligns well with established enrolment trends in international education.

3.1.4 Frequency Analysis - Language

The design of the survey was such that respondents could select either English or Chinese (simplified) versions. **Most respondents selected Chinese (Simplified)** (n = 140, 65.1%), while the remaining participants selected English (n = 75, 34.9%). This distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals that were most comfortable participating in Chinese which was of note, especially as most universities require IELTS scores of at least 6.0 (suggesting very good proficiency in English). The respondents selecting English represented just over one-third of the total sample.

The findings suggest a clear linguistic imbalance, with nearly two-thirds of participants selecting Chinese (Simplified) as their preferred language. This dominance suggested that the perspectives and experiences captured in the wider study were likely to be shaped strongly by those most at ease with undertaking the survey in Chinese. Previous research highlights that language background can influence educational experiences, identity, and integration processes (Duff, 2019; Norton, 2013). As such, the overrepresentation of students selecting Chinese (Simplified) could have meant that the findings were reflective of a narrower cultural-linguistic perspective than intended. That having been said, the smaller but significant representation of respondents selecting English (34.9%) meant that there was space for diversity of perspectives. Crosstab analysis was later used to determine whether or not the perspectives of both groups were aligned.



3.1.5 Frequency Analysis – Country Selection

The responses were distributed across a wide range of destinations, however a small number of countries accounted for most choices. The **most popular destination was Canada** (n = 52, 24.2%), **followed by the United States** (n = 45, 20.9% plus 2 additional “USA” entries, 21.9% combined), then the United Kingdom (n = 38, 17.7%), and Australia (n = 24, 11.2%). Together, these **four English-speaking destinations accounted for almost 75% of all responses**. Other countries received far

fewer selections, including Germany (n = 11, 5.1%), the Netherlands (n = 7, 3.3%), Japan (n = 6, 2.8%), and New Zealand (n = 6, 2.8%). A broad range of additional European, Asian, and Middle Eastern destinations were chosen by one or two students each, representing less than 1% of the sample per country.

What the findings clearly demonstrate is a strong preference for student mobility amongst this group, to a small number of English-speaking countries. This is consistent with global higher education trends (OECD, 2022; British Council, 2018). Canada, the UK, the USA, and Australia are the primary preferred destinations, likely due in part to their strong international reputations for high academic quality, English instruction and established international student support systems. That these particular countries which geographically are quite distant feature so prominently, suggests that language accessibility and global rankings play a key role in shaping student decision-making.

With four English – Speaking countries comprising such a large percentage of student selection, it could be easy to overlook the preferences for enrolment at other host countries. The presence of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan suggests that there exists some demand amongst students to study at non-Anglophone locations. These countries are often associated with desirable elements such as strong reputations in specific fields, lower tuition fees and / or cultural opportunities (ICEF Monitor, 2021). All this having been said, it appears clear that minority destinations are less significant in shaping the overall host country patterns.

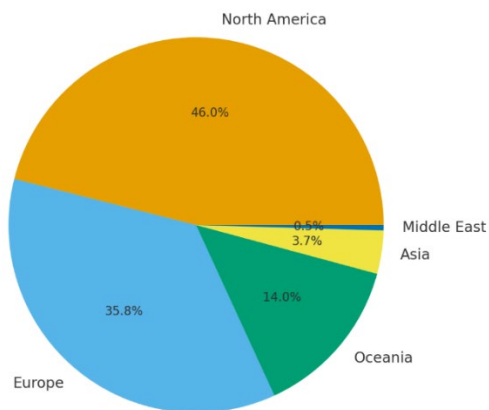
Overseas Study Preferences by Continent

This analysis groups students’ preferred overseas study destinations by continent. The results indicate that North America is the leading choice (99 respondents), followed by Europe (77 respondents), Oceania (30 respondents), Asia (8 respondents), and the Middle East (1 respondent).

The charts below provide a visual overview of these preferences.

Continent	Number of Respondents
North America	99
Europe	77
Oceania	30
Asia	8
Middle East	1

Distribution of Overseas Study Preferences by Continent

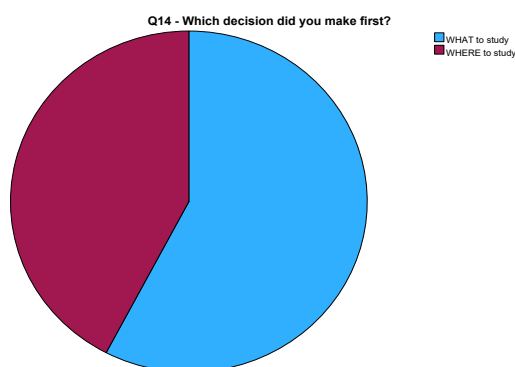


3.1.6 Frequency Analysis – Which decision made first: Where or What to Study?

Most students (n = 124, 57.7%) reported that they decided what to study first, while a smaller but substantial group (n = 91, 42.3%) indicated that they decided where to study first. These findings suggest that for most participants, the choice of academic subject was the primary factor guiding their decision-making process, though location also played a critical role for a sizeable minority. The results here suggest that there exists a dual importance comprising of academic subject affinity and study destination. Both are instrumental in shaping international student choices. The fact that over half of respondents prioritised what to study first was unsurprising and underscores the importance of academic subject interests and career aspirations in shaping mobility decisions. This aligns with earlier research showing that subject choice often reflects long-term goals such as employability and professional identity (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

The finding that more than two in five respondents decided where to study before deciding on a subject was surprising. This is likely due to the influence of place-based factors including host country reputation, quality of institutions, affordability, cultural appeal, and post-study migration opportunities. Amongst this group, the destination appears to act as a gateway through which subject choices are subsequently made.

This balance between the decisions of “what to study” and “where to study” is reflective of the complexity of international student decision-making.



Frequency Analysis Summary

Circa 300 respondents

215 completed responses (after data cleansed)

Three age categories: 18–21 years, 22–25 years, and over 25 years

Majority of participants over 25 years of age (n = 127, 59.1%). 71 respondents (33.0%) fell within the 22–25 category and 17 participants (7.9%) were aged 18–21.

The most frequently selected subject area was **psychology (n = 20, 9.3%)**, followed by **business: marketing (n = 14, 6.5%)**, **business: finance (n = 10, 4.7%)**, **business: economics (n = 8, 3.7%)**, and **business: accounting (n = 8, 3.7%)**.

The majority of respondents identified as female (n = 132, 61.4%), while **male respondents accounted for just over a third of the sample** (n = 79, 36.7%).

Most respondents selected Chinese (Simplified) (n = 140, 65.1%), while the remaining participants selected English (n = 75, 34.9%).

The **most popular destination was Canada** (n = 52, 24.2%), **followed by the United States** (n = 45, 20.9% plus 2 additional “USA” entries, 21.9% combined), then the United Kingdom (n = 38, 17.7%), and Australia (n = 24, 11.2%). Together, these **four English-speaking destinations accounted for almost 75% of all responses**.

Most students (n = 124, 57.7%) reported that they decided what to study first, while a smaller but substantial group (n = 91, 42.3%) indicated that they decided where to study first.

Findings Related to Word – of – Mouth

Below the researcher discusses findings related to Word – of - Mouth

3.2.1 Word – of – Mouth: Agent WOM

The findings highlight a **limited reliance of prospective students upon agents in the decision-making process**. This result contrasts with some earlier which emphasise the central role of agents in facilitating international student enrolment (Chen, 2007; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). There may be several different explanations for the results observed. One being that the students in this sample may place greater value on the support provided by agents in securing a visa and / or in assisting with the university application process than in the recommendations provided. Another possible explanation is that students in this sample may place greater trust in alternative sources of information, such as university websites, social media, or alumni recommendations, which are increasingly accessible and perceived as more authentic. Cultural and / or contextual factors may also influence these findings. In certain parts of China for example where agency use is less common, students may be more comfortable in making their own independent decisions related to host country and university choice. On the other hand, it could be the case that the students question the impartiality of Agents’ advice due to the nature of the relationships they have with UK universities.

3.2.2 Word – of – Mouth: Alumni WOM

These findings point towards **alumni recommendations playing a reasonably important role in influencing prospective students’ higher education decisions**. The mean scores indicated that **alumni experiences and word-of-mouth endorsements are valued** amongst students yet to make

their decisions, particularly in relation to the overall university experience. Respondents view alumni input on university and course selection as closely linked, whereas attitudes toward avoiding institutions with negative alumni experiences are less strongly correlated.

This suggests that **whilst positive endorsements are influential, negative word-of-mouth may exert a less of an effect** upon student decision making. This is broadly in alignment with existing literature on word-of-mouth communication, which emphasizes the asymmetric influence of positive versus negative information.

3.2.3 Word – of – Mouth: Family / Friends WOM

The findings suggest that **family and friends' advice form a coherent influence** on student decision-making. This aligns with prior studies that identify word-of-mouth as a powerful driver of student choice, particularly in contexts where family expectations shape educational pathways. **Prestige or social validation** of the chosen course is important to prospective students and this finding is consistent with literature that differentiates between informational influences (advice, guidance) and normative influences (prestige, social approval) in decision-making.

Findings Related to Quality

Below the researcher discusses findings related to student perception of quality

3.3.1 Quality: Employment Opportunities

The findings indicate that **employment-related factors are important to students' higher education decision-making**. Students consistently linked the importance of employment opportunities in the country when choosing a university or course (Q11 and Q13), and these items demonstrated strong internal consistency. The findings go on to suggest that **respondents conceptualise graduate employment opportunities and part-time work during study as separate domains**. Graduate employment reflects longer-term career prospects and labour market conditions, whereas working during study relates more to financial support, lifestyle, and short-term income. Prior studies have similarly noted that students weigh both immediate work options and post-graduation opportunities however, often treat them as distinct considerations in their decision-making process (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

3.3.2 Quality: Proximity (of campus) to facilities

The results suggest that the Facilities construct is a moderately reliable measure of students' concern with institutional location and access to facilities. **Students rated geographic location and proximity to facilities as consistently important factors in their decision-making**. This finding aligns with previous research showing that location and access to resources are central to students' university and course choices (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). The emphasis on location at the institutional level suggests that students prioritise macro-level geographic factors when making decisions, such as city, region, or country, while also considering more practical aspects of proximity to facilities.

3.3.3 Quality: Perception of Safety

The findings speak clearly in that **safety is a consistently important determinant** of students' choices and that the four items together form a **psychometrically robust** measure. Although inter-item correlations suggest two closely related facets—(a) **general safety salience** at the decision stage (university and course) and (b) **personal safety stance/avoidance** (safety abroad, avoiding unsafe campuses)—the uniformly positive correlations and the lack of improvement in α when dropping any item support treating Safety as a **single coherent construct** for primary analyses. These results are in alignment with previous literature related to student choice emphasising non-

academic risk considerations—particularly perceived security of study environments (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

Findings Related to Reputation

Below the researcher discusses findings related to university reputation

3.4.1 Reputation: Prior Awareness

These findings highlight clear differences in the relative importance of specific influences.

Reputation and website information emerged as the strongest factors, consistent with prior research demonstrating that institutional prestige and clear digital information are important determinants of student choice (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). By contrast, **open day attendance, especially in-country events, was less valued**, possibly reflecting possible geographic, logistical or infrastructure barriers. Prior awareness appears to link moderately with both reputation and digital information, suggesting it may operate more as an outcome of these influences rather than as a standalone determinant.

3.4.2 Reputation: Ranking

The findings confirm that university ranking is a **highly reliable construct** in students' higher education decision-making and the elevated item means demonstrate that respondents consistently view ranking as an important determinant of choice. These results emphasise the growing influence of international and national rankings in shaping institutional competitiveness and student perceptions (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2015).

The implications are that rankings appear to serve as both an informational shortcut and a sign of institutional quality which shapes student choice in ways beyond cost or location. Moreover, the strong endorsement of rankings as a determinant of employability highlights how deeply students associate institutional prestige with labour market advantage. This reinforces the importance of reputation management for universities in competitive global markets.

3.4.3 Reputation: University Marketing

The results indicate that university marketing/communications operate as a **broad, multi-faceted influence** on student choice and is consistent with a construct combining **communication salience, digital information, interactive engagement, and localisation**.

Two measurement observations were particularly interesting;

The **website** item showed a high mean but a low item–total correlation, consistent with a **ceiling/ubiquity effect** (most respondents report website information, so it discriminates weakly).

Prior awareness shows a similar profile, adding little to internal consistency despite moderate correlations with digital information

The **events/engagement** cluster (open days and real-time chat) alongside **social media** provides the **psychometric core** of the scale, differentiating respondents' experiences and perceived importance more strongly than the website item. These findings align with literature emphasising that beyond static information, **interactive touchpoints** and **social channels** shape perceptions and conversion in higher education markets.

Findings Related to Cost

Below I discuss findings related to the costs associated with study

3.5.1 Cost: Cost of Living

The findings indicate that the four cost-related items form an appropriate and reliable scale, providing evidence that **financial considerations are consistently viewed as an important determinant in students' higher education decision-making**. The relatively high mean scores (3.65–3.89) suggest that **respondents attach significant importance to cost factors**, particularly the overall expense of attending university. These results highlight the importance of affordability in higher education choice amongst students.

3.5.2 Cost: Course Cost

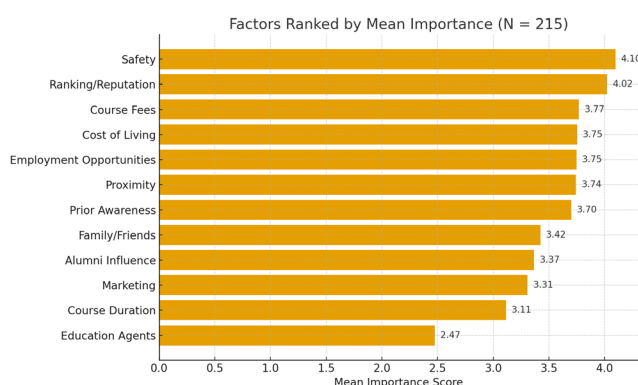
In short, this analysis indicates that course cost and overall university cost are quite a reliable scale which capture the financial concerns related to student decision-making. The mean responses highlight that financial factors are regarded as important considerations by students. This supports current research that cost plays an important role in university and course selection. The moderate correlation between the two items suggests that students may distinguish between course-specific fees and broader university costs however, view both as interrelated financial pressures.

3.5.3 Cost: Course Duration

Previous research has shown that course duration is an important factor in student choice, but its impact may vary depending on personal circumstances, such as financial resources, career goals, or family commitments (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Some students may prioritise shorter degrees to minimise costs or enter the labour market quickly, while others may prefer longer programmes for depth of study and a more traditional academic experience.

Factors ranked by overall importance

The findings below underscore the continuing dominance of the perception of safety, institutional prestige, and financial considerations as primary elements shaping international student choices. They also point towards evolving trends in the influence of social and intermediary factors, with implications for how universities design recruitment strategies. The relatively low rating of education agents is notable. These findings suggest a reduction in the reliance of students on them, possibly due to greater access to online information and direct communication channels with universities. The high variability also indicates that agents remain important for some students but are less universally trusted or valued than in the past.



Market Context & Trends

4.1 Global Landscape of Chinese Student Mobility

Over the past two decades, China has consistently been the largest source of outbound international students. According to UNESCO (2023), more than 700,000 Chinese students study abroad each year, representing nearly 20% of the global mobile student population. The United States historically dominated as the preferred destination; however, its market share has gradually declined in recent years due to political tensions, visa restrictions, and rising competition from other English-speaking destinations.

The UK remains a strong competitor. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2024) indicates that Chinese students currently account for around 31% of all non-UK domiciled students, with over 150,000 enrolled across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Australia and Canada also maintain significant market shares, whilst emerging destinations such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands are increasingly attractive due to lower tuition costs and graduate opportunities within the EU labour market.

4.2 The UK's Market Position

The UK has several enduring advantages in attracting Chinese students:

Reputation: Institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, UCL, and the LSE enjoy strong brand recognition in China

Language: English is the dominant global language of business which enhances the appeal of UK qualifications

Cultural Affinity: Historical ties and the presence of large Chinese student communities position the UK as an accessible destination

Post-Study Work Visa (Graduate Route): Reintroduced in 2021, this visa allows graduates to stay for two years post-study (three for PhD holders), thus enhancing employability appeal

Despite these advantages, the UK's competitiveness is fragile. Visa processing delays, rising tuition and living costs, and negative perceptions of safety (exacerbated by high-profile incidents and political debates on immigration) undermine its appeal relative to competitors such as Australia, which actively markets itself as safe and welcoming.

4.3 Trends in Enrolment Numbers

HESA (2024) statistics highlight three key trends:

Sustained Growth Pre-COVID: Between 2010 and 2019, Chinese student numbers in the UK grew by approximately 80%, reflecting strong demand for postgraduate taught programmes, particularly in business and management

COVID-19 Disruption: In 2020–2021, enrolments fell due to travel restrictions, health concerns, and uncertainties over blended learning. Many Chinese students deferred offers or shifted to destinations perceived as more accessible

Partial Recovery: By 2023–24, enrolments began to stabilise, though growth rates slowed. The UK's reliance on China is such that even modest downturns have significant financial implications for institutions

Interestingly, postgraduate enrolments dominate, with over 65% of Chinese students in the UK enrolled at master's level. This reflects a cultural preference for international postgraduate qualifications as a means of enhancing career prospects, rather than undergraduate study abroad.

4.4 Regional Dynamics within China

UK recruitment has traditionally been concentrated in Tier-1 cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. However, recent evidence suggests saturation in these regions, with growing opportunities in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities such as Chengdu, Wuhan, and Nanjing. These regions benefit from expanding middle-class populations and rising disposable incomes yet remain under-targeted by many UK institutions.

Recruitment diversification into these areas presents a significant growth opportunity but requires tailored digital marketing strategies and local partnerships. Universities that rely solely on major city markets risk missing emerging demand.

4.5 Competitive Pressures

The UK's competitors are adopting increasingly aggressive recruitment strategies:

Australia: Positions itself as safe, multicultural, and offering clear post-study work pathways. Universities have established extensive partnerships with Chinese institutions and are investing heavily in digital recruitment

Canada: Promotes immigration-friendly policies and long-term settlement opportunities, appealing to students seeking permanent residency

United States: Despite political challenges, remains attractive due to its elite universities and extensive scholarship opportunities

European Union: Germany, the Netherlands, and France are gaining traction by offering lower tuition fees and degrees in English, combined with EU-wide mobility opportunities

For the UK, this competitive environment underscores the need for differentiation, particularly in areas such as employability outcomes, alumni networks, and cultural support.

4.6 Post-Pandemic Shifts in Student Priorities

Research by QS (2023) and IDP Connect (2024) shows that Chinese students are now placing greater emphasis on:

Safety and Wellbeing: Concerns about racism, discrimination, and healthcare access influence destination choice

Employability: Post-study work opportunities and employer recognition of degrees are top decision-making factors

Flexibility: Hybrid and online pathways remain attractive to some segments, though most still prefer face-to-face delivery

Return on Investment: Families increasingly weigh tuition and living costs against career prospects and salary premiums

These shifts demand that UK universities rethink their marketing narratives, placing greater emphasis on employability support, pastoral care, and value for money.

4.7 The Role of Agents and Digital Platforms

Education agents remain influential in China, but their dominance appears to be declining due to the ubiquity of digital platforms. Surveys indicate that more than 70% of Chinese students consult social media such as WeChat and TikTok before making study decisions (British Council, 2023). Word-of-mouth from alumni, peer networks, and influencers plays a growing role in shaping perceptions.

Universities that continue to rely heavily on agents risk high commission costs and weaker direct engagement with prospective students. Those that invest in digital marketing and alumni storytelling strategies are more likely to build brand awareness, loyalty and attract highly - motivated applicants.

4.8 Summary of Market Context

The UK remains a leading destination for Chinese international students, but its market position is increasingly precarious. Enrolments are stabilising rather than growing, competition is intensifying, and student priorities are shifting towards safety, employability, and value. While the UK's brand remains strong, universities cannot rely on reputation alone. Three critical implications emerge:

Diversification – beyond Tier-1 cities and beyond postgraduate taught programmes

Digital Transformation – moving from agent-heavy models to alumni- and platform-driven engagement

Value Proposition – reinforcing employability, safety, and return on investment.

These themes will underpin the analysis in the next section, which examines how Chinese students make their enrolment decisions and the cultural, social, and economic drivers that shape demand for UK higher education.

5. The Chinese Student Decision-Making Process

5.1 Understanding the Choice Journey

Deciding where to study abroad is a complex, multi-stage process shaped by personal, cultural, and structural factors. For Chinese students, the choice to study in the UK is rarely an individual decision made in isolation; rather, it is a **collective family decision** influenced by aspirations for social mobility, prestige, and career outcomes.

Push factors in China include rising competition for domestic university places, concerns about graduate employability, and the desire for international experience. Pull factors in the UK include world-renowned institutions, English-language instruction, and access to global career opportunities. However, these factors interact with cultural and social influences that make the Chinese decision-making process distinct from other markets.

5.2 Cultural Dimensions of Decision-Making

Cultural frameworks such as **Hofstede's dimensions** and the **GLOBE study** provide insight into how Chinese values shape education choices:

Collectivism and Family Influence: Decisions are often made jointly with parents and sometimes extended family, reflecting high collectivism. Parents may prioritise prestige and reputation over personal student preferences

High Power Distance: Families show strong deference to perceived “experts,” including agents, teachers, and alumni networks, making these intermediaries influential

Long-Term Orientation: Chinese families emphasise future employability and social status, valuing degrees that carry long-term prestige

Uncertainty Avoidance: Concerns about safety, stability, and reliable information mean families prefer established universities with clear reputations, rather than experimental or lesser-known institutions

For UK universities, this implies that marketing narratives must not only target prospective students but also actively **engage parents and family decision-makers**, reassuring them on prestige, safety, and outcomes.

5.3 The Importance of Reputation and Rankings

Chinese families place substantial weight on **university reputation and global rankings**. QS, Times Higher Education, and Shanghai Rankings are widely consulted by prospective students and their families prior to making firm decisions. In many cases, families set a minimum threshold such as a top 200 global ranking with any universities not meeting the threshold not being deemed worthy of consideration.

UK universities outside the elite tier should:

Differentiate through **niche strengths** (e.g., industry partnerships, specialist programmes)

Demonstrate a **strong return on investment** through graduate employability data

Build their **reputation inside China** through alumni success stories rather than relying solely on global rankings.

5.4 Employability as a Key Driver

Employability consistently emerges as the **key pull factor** for Chinese students and their families (QS, 2023; IDP, 2024). Overseas study is widely viewed as an investment that must bring about a positive return by way of clear career benefits. Specific concerns include:

Access to **post-study work opportunities** (Graduate Route in the UK)

Strength of **careers services** and university–employer partnerships

International recognition of UK degrees by Chinese employers

Pathways to **professional networks** and internships during study

UK universities that fail to communicate the presence of strong employability support mechanisms risk losing students to Australia or Canada, which actively market career pathways. UK institutions must integrate **career outcomes messaging** into recruitment campaigns and provide **China-specific labour market insights** for prospective applicants.

5.5 Financial Considerations and Value for Money

While many Chinese families are wealthy enough to afford international tuition, cost remains a significant factor in decision-making. Rising UK tuition and living expenses make affordability increasingly important. Families evaluate:

Tuition fees relative to global peers

Cost of living in UK cities (London vs regional towns)

Availability of scholarships or financial aid

Perceived **return on investment** (salary uplift, employability, long-term career progression etc)

UK universities should emphasise **value for money** rather than low cost. Demonstrating how degrees conferred by them develop into tangible career advantages and social mobility is likely more persuasive than price discounting.

5.6 The Role of Intermediaries: Agents, Teachers, Alumni

Intermediaries play a disproportionately large role in shaping Chinese students' choices:

Education Agents: Historically the most influential, agents guide families through applications, visas, and university selection. However, reliance on agents has drawbacks: high commissions, limited differentiation between universities, and their potential for misrepresentation

Teachers and Counsellors: Particularly in international high schools in China, counsellors act as trusted advisers, shaping shortlists

Alumni and Peer Networks: Word-of-mouth is increasingly powerful, particularly via digital platforms. Alumni success stories strongly influence family confidence

UK universities should **balance agent relationships** with direct engagement strategies, strengthening alumni networks and school partnerships while reducing overdependence on third-party intermediaries.

5.7 Digital Influence and Social Media

The digital ecosystem in China profoundly shapes decision-making. Platforms such as **WeChat and TikTok** are the primary sources of information for students and parents. Unlike in Western markets, Chinese students rarely rely on university websites alone; instead, they seek peer-generated content, short videos, and interactive experiences.

Key trends include:

Growth of **student influencers** who share authentic study abroad experiences

Use of **WeChat groups** for Q&A and peer-to-peer advice

Preference for **video content** over text-heavy information

UK universities should invest in **China-specific digital strategies**, creating Mandarin-language content, leveraging alumni as digital ambassadors, and tailoring campaigns to Chinese platforms rather than relying on global channels such as Facebook or Instagram (which are blocked in China).

5.8 Safety and Wellbeing Concerns

Safety is a critical determinant of study abroad choices. Concerns include:

Racism and discrimination

Political tensions between the UK and China

Cost of healthcare and access to student support services

High-profile media stories about anti-Asian racism during COVID-19 did significant damage to the UK's reputation in China. For families, perceptions of safety can override other considerations. Universities need to integrate safety and wellbeing messaging into marketing campaigns, highlighting inclusive policies, student support and anti-discrimination measures.

5.9 Decision-Making Timeline

The Chinese student journey is typically long, often beginning 18–24 months before application. Stages include:

Awareness – exposure to universities via rankings, fairs, or digital content

Consideration – shortlisting based on family preferences, rankings, and cost

Application – often guided by agents or counsellors

Decision – influenced by offers, scholarships, and peer/alumni recommendations

Confirmation – families finalise choice based on visas, finances, and perceived safety

At each stage, UK universities should provide tailored information, recognising that the **real decision-makers are often parents as much as students**. Communications should be designed to convey key messages to both students and their parents (who are often the ones funding the study).

5.10 Implications for UK Universities

Five key strategic implications have emerged:

Engage Families: Recruitment strategies must address parents directly, emphasising safety, prestige, and long-term value

Leverage Alumni: Positive word-of-mouth from successful alumni is more persuasive than institutional claims

Reframe Employability: Highlighting UK–China employer recognition, internships, and career pathways is critical

Invest in Digital: Universities must operate actively within China’s digital ecosystem, adapting to platform norms

Balance Intermediaries: While agents remain important, overreliance is risky; universities should build direct pipelines through schools, digital channels, and alumni

5.11 Summary

Chinese student decision-making is multi-layered, family-driven, and deeply influenced by reputation, employability, and safety. While UK universities benefit from strong brand equity, their strategies must evolve to reflect changing expectations. The decision-making process is not linear and is no longer agent-dominated; it is increasingly digital, networked, and value-driven. To compete effectively in an increasingly competitive global market, UK institutions must **embed cultural awareness into marketing and recruitment**, adapt communications to both students and families, and align their offerings with the long-term aspirations of Chinese households.

6. Challenges Facing UK Universities

6.1 Introduction

While Chinese students have fuelled the growth of UK international education over the past twenty years, universities now face contemporary challenges that threaten the stability of this pipeline. The issues are both **structural** (e.g., over-reliance on China, financial exposure) and **perceptual** (e.g., safety, political rhetoric), intersecting with external pressures such as intensifying global competition and shifting student priorities. This section outlines the most pressing challenges facing the sector, setting the stage for the strategic recommendations in Section 7.

6.2 Over-Reliance on China as a Single Market

Perhaps the most critical challenge is the **over-concentration of international student recruitment in China**. According to HESA (2024), Chinese nationals account for nearly one-third of all non-UK

domiciled students in British universities. At some institutions, the proportion is even higher — exceeding 40% of the international cohort. This reliance creates financial and reputational vulnerabilities:

Financial Risk: Sudden downturns in Chinese enrolments, caused by political tensions, economic downturns, or pandemic disruptions — would create immediate funding shortfalls

Reputational Risk: Heavy dependence upon a single market undermines the perception of diversity and inclusivity, particularly when compared to competitor countries that cultivate a broader portfolio of source markets

Policy Risk: Shifts in Chinese government policies (e.g., restrictions on overseas study, recognition of certain foreign qualifications) could significantly curtail demand

Universities should urgently **diversify their recruitment mix**, reducing vulnerability while still maintaining a strong presence in China.

6.3 Rising Competition

The UK's dominance in the Chinese market has evaporated. Australia, Canada, and the United States are competing aggressively for students, while EU destinations (Germany, the Netherlands, France) are capturing interest with lower tuition and strong employment pathways.

Australia has recovered strongly post-pandemic, marketing itself as safe, multicultural, and closely aligned with Asian markets

Canada promotes immigration-friendly policies, offering clear pathways from study to permanent residency — highly appealing to Chinese families

United States maintains global prestige despite political tensions; elite institutions remain aspirational

EU Countries are increasingly offering English-taught programmes with lower costs and access to the Schengen labour market

Without differentiation, the UK risks **losing more market share**. Competitors are not only matching the UK's strengths but also outpacing it in areas such as affordability and immigration opportunities.

6.4 Negative Perceptions of Safety and Welcome

Perceptions of **safety, racism, and political hostility** have become significant deterrents. During COVID-19, incidents of anti-Asian racism in Western countries were widely reported in Chinese media. Political rhetoric around immigration in the UK has further damaged perceptions, with policy debates often portraying international students as burdens rather than assets. This is problematic.

For Chinese families, safety is not just about physical wellbeing but also about **cultural acceptance** and whether their children will feel secure, respected, and supported. Narratives related to racist attitudes undermine confidence.

Universities should proactively **manage perceptions of safety** by highlighting inclusivity initiatives, support services, and alumni testimonials that demonstrate positive student experiences.

6.5 Visa and Immigration Barriers

The UK's student **visa process** presents another challenge. Although the reintroduction of the Graduate Route has improved post-study opportunities, issues remain:

Complexity and Cost: Visa fees and health surcharges make the UK more expensive than competitors

Processing Delays: Students frequently face long waits and inconsistent communication

Political Volatility: Policy changes such as restrictions on dependants being able to accompany international students create uncertainty and discourage applications

By contrast, some competing nations emphasise **clarity and stability** in their immigration pathways, making them more attractive. The UK risks undermining its brand strength by projecting an image of hostility or unpredictability to international students.

6.6 Financial Barriers: Cost of Tuition and Living

UK tuition fees for international students are among the highest across the globe and range from £15,000 to £35,000 per year. When combined with rising living costs, especially in London and other major cities, the total expenses can exceed £50,000 annually. For Chinese families, this raises obvious questions of **value for money**

The decision to invest in UK education increasingly requires reassurance that the long-term returns (employability, social mobility, global networks) justify the financial outlay. The UK as a destination is somewhat vulnerable to currency fluctuations, especially those in which the Chinese yuan weakens against the pound as this results in an increase in overall costs for prospective students considering studying in the UK.

Universities should prioritise **competing on value**, demonstrating how UK degrees deliver tangible career and life outcomes.

6.7 Weaknesses in Employability Support

Employability is the single most important pull factor for Chinese students, yet UK universities often underperform in this area relative to competitors. Key weaknesses include:

Limited availability of **internships and work placements**, particularly for international students

Weak **links with Chinese employers**, reducing the perceived value of UK degrees back in China

Insufficient **career counselling tailored to international students**, leaving many unsure how to leverage their degrees after graduation

In contrast, Australian and Canadian universities actively promote strong employer connections, offering international students robust work-integrated learning opportunities. Without stronger employability outcomes, the UK risks being seen as an expensive but less practical choice.

6.8 Dependence on Education Agents

UK universities remain heavily reliant on **education agents** in China to generate applications. While agents provide access to local networks and simplify application processes, over-reliance brings several challenges:

High Commission Costs: Fees of 10–15% per student reduces net revenue.

Limited Differentiation: Agents often promote whichever institution offers the best commission, not the best student fit.

Reputational Risk: Misrepresentation of programmes by unscrupulous agents can damage trust in UK institutions.

As Chinese students increasingly turn to digital platforms and alumni networks, the traditional agent model risks becoming both expensive and outdated. **Universities that fail to modernise recruitment channels may struggle to remain competitive.**

6.9 Reputational Challenges and Political Tensions

China – UK political relations have become strained in recent times, with issues ranging from trade disputes to concerns about academic freedom and security. These tensions have adversely impacted the education sector, with Chinese media occasionally portraying the UK as unfriendly or unstable.

For universities, this creates reputational challenges:

Families may question whether UK qualifications will continue to be recognised in China

Negative diplomatic narratives can reduce student confidence

Partnerships with Chinese institutions may be disrupted by political sensitivities

Whilst universities cannot control geopolitics, they can **mitigate risks through strong institutional partnerships, alumni advocacy, and careful messaging.**

6.10 Internal Capacity and Student Experience

Finally, the **internal capacity** of UK universities poses a challenge. Rapid growth in international enrolments has not always been matched by investment in housing, academic support, and pastoral services. Students often report overcrowded accommodation, overstretched career services, and insufficient tailored support.

For Chinese students, who place a premium on structured guidance and wellbeing services, these shortcomings damage satisfaction and word-of-mouth reputation. In the long term, weak student experience translates into weaker alumni advocacy, undermining recruitment efforts.

6.11 Summary of Challenges

In summary, UK universities face a complex web of challenges in maintaining Chinese enrolments:

Over-reliance on China, creating financial vulnerability

Intensifying global competition, particularly from Australia, Canada, and EU nations

Negative perceptions of safety and welcome, amplified by media and politics

Visa and immigration barriers, including cost, complexity, and instability

High financial burden, raising questions of value for money

Weak employability support, limiting perceived career returns

Overdependence on agents, with rising costs and reputational risks

Geopolitical tensions, undermining trust and partnerships

Capacity issues, reducing student satisfaction and alumni advocacy

Addressing these challenges requires a **multi-faceted strategy** that balances short-term recruitment imperatives with long-term sustainability. Section 7 sets out **strategic recommendations**, offering actionable steps for UK universities to strengthen their competitiveness and resilience in the Chinese market.

7. Strategic Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The earlier analysis highlighted the strengths and vulnerabilities of the UK's position in the Chinese international student market. To sustain and grow enrolments, universities must adopt a strategic, multi-dimensional approach that addresses both the demand-side drivers of Chinese student mobility and the supply-side weaknesses in the UK offer. This section sets out strategic recommendations, each fully justified with reference to market evidence and academic frameworks.

The recommendations are grouped into three broad themes:

Enhancing Recruitment Effectiveness (Recommendations 1–4)

Strengthening Student Value Proposition (Recommendations 5–7)

Ensuring Long-Term Market Sustainability (Recommendations 8–10)

Enhancing Recruitment Effectiveness

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Alumni Engagement to Drive Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is one of the most powerful influences in Chinese student decision-making. Research shows that alumni networks and peer recommendations often outweigh institutional marketing claims (Chen, 2022). In a collectivist culture, trusted social networks are central to decision-making.

Actions:

Establish alumni ambassador programmes inside China, incentivising graduates to share experiences on popular platforms such as WeChat

Develop case studies and video testimonials of successful alumni, particularly those with high-profile careers in China and the UK

Utilise alumni in recruitment events and webinars, offering authentic peer perspectives

Impact:

This strategy will enhance trust, build authenticity, and improve the UK's reputation at relatively low cost compared to agent commissions.

Recommendation 2: Build Targeted Digital Recruitment Campaigns in China

Chinese students increasingly rely on digital platforms rather than traditional agents. Increasingly, Chinese social media platforms are becoming essential touchpoints (British Council, 2023).

Actions:

Develop China-specific digital campaigns, creating localised content tailored to Chinese platforms

Persuade Mandarin-speaking staff or alumni to manage WeChat accounts and group engagement

Partner with influencers to amplify reach

Impact:

Direct digital engagement improves brand visibility, reduces reliance on agents, and connects universities with students and parents earlier in the decision-making funnel.

Recommendation 3: Diversify Recruitment Beyond Tier-1 Cities

Most UK universities recruit heavily in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Yet demand is growing rapidly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities such as Chengdu, Wuhan, and Xi'an, where rising middle-class families increasingly aspire to overseas education.

Actions:

Partner with regional high schools and universities in emerging Chinese cities

Run regional recruitment fairs beyond major hubs

Create regional scholarship schemes to attract talent outside saturated markets

Impact:

Diversifying within China increases resilience and opens access to untapped student populations.

Recommendation 4: Reduce Over-Reliance on Education Agents

While agents remain valuable, over-reliance creates cost inefficiencies and reputational risks.

Universities paying high commissions see reduced net revenue, whilst agent remuneration models being used may not best align with student best interests.

Actions:

Shift from agent-dominated pipelines towards a more diversified model incorporating direct applications, digital platforms, and alumni referrals

Build mandarin - language student application portals

Improve visa application support mechanisms

Better manage agent partnerships through the introduction of quality assurance framework, which not only reward performance, but also demonstrable ethical practices.

Impact:

Reducing the dependence upon agents increases control, improves transparency, and strengthens long-term institutional branding.

*Strengthening Student Value Proposition***Recommendation 5: Enhance Employability Support for Chinese Students**

Employability is the top driver of overseas study (QS, 2023). Chinese families are swayed by evidence that degrees conferred by UK universities lead to superior career outcomes. UK institutions currently underperform compared to Australian and Canadian competitors.

Actions:

Establish China-specific careers services, with workshops on CV writing for Chinese employers, alumni mentoring, and sector-specific advice

Develop UK–China employer partnerships offering internships, placements, and networking events

Monitor and publish graduate outcomes data for Chinese students

Impact:

This strengthens the perceived ROI of a UK education, directly addressing family concerns about career prospects.

Recommendation 6: Improve Safety, Wellbeing, and Inclusivity Messaging

Safety is a critical factor in destination choice. Negative perceptions of racism and instability can nullify academic strengths. Universities should counter negative narratives.

Actions:

Proactively market student support service, related to mental health provision, and anti-discrimination initiatives

Highlight Chinese student societies and cultural events in promotional material

Share positive intercultural stories from current Chinese students to reassure families

Impact:

Improving perceptions of safety and inclusivity strengthens parental trust which is a decisive factor in family-led decision-making.

Recommendation 7: Communicate Value for Money Through ROI Narratives

Rising tuition and living costs are problematic and Chinese families are increasingly demanding value for money. It isn't recommended to compete on price. Universities should place a strong focus upon delivering outcomes-based messaging as part of future marketing campaigns targeting Chinese students.

Actions:

Showcase alumni salary uplift and career progression statistics

Highlight scholarship opportunities and financial planning support

Contrast UK education's intensity (three-year undergraduate degrees and one-year postgraduate programmes) with longer programmes in some competitor countries, thus emphasising efficiency

Impact:

Reframing the UK as a high-return investment could strengthen enrolments despite rising costs.

Ensuring Long-Term Market Sustainability

Recommendation 8: Develop Joint UK–China Educational Programmes

Partnerships with Chinese universities have the potential to provide recruitment pipelines and reputational benefits. This is due to foreign joint programmes and campuses becoming increasingly commonplace.

Actions:

Expand dual-degree partnerships and articulation agreements

Co-develop curricula with Chinese institutions, embedding mobility pathways

Leverage government-to-government initiatives to strengthen recognition

Impact:

These initiatives build brand presence in China, create diverse pipeline pathways, and reduce exposure to political volatility.

Recommendation 9: Lobby for Streamlined Visa and Immigration Pathways Visa uncertainty is a major hurdle for Chinese students. Many competing countries offer more lucrative immigration policies, making them more attractive. In order to compete effectively, UK universities will need to collaborate on influencing UK government policy as it relates to overseas students.

Actions:

Lobby UK government for simplified visa processes and reduced costs

Advocate for stability in policy, minimising political fluctuations

Highlight the economic contribution of Chinese students in sector lobbying campaigns

Impact:

Reducing visa friction enhances competitiveness and demonstrates a welcoming national stance.

Recommendation 10: Embed Market Diversification into Strategy

Whilst China will no doubt remain an important source of students over the longer term, the over reliance upon this student group carries with it several risks. Diversification across other markets is critical for long-term sustainability. That having been said, it is important to note that within China, there exists the opportunity to diversify based upon region and subject area.

Actions:

Develop recruitment strategies which aim to balance Chinese student recruitment with that of other markets such as India, Nigeria and Vietnam

Within China, diversify into emerging provinces and underrepresented subject areas

Use scenario planning to model risks of declining Chinese demand and ensure that no single student group accounts for greater than 20% of total number of international students enrolled.

Impact:

Diversification reduces dependency, safeguards institutional finances, and creates a balanced internationalisation strategy.

7.2 Conclusion

The above recommendations collectively provide a roadmap for UK universities to strengthen recruitment, improve value propositions, and secure long-term sustainability within the Chinese market. Whilst a host of challenges including increased competition, political tensions and rising costs remain, the UK still holds competitive advantages related to reputation, academic quality, and alumni networks.

7.3 Theoretical Implications

The results reinforce the push–pull model, with strong pull factors (reputation, employability) interacting with push factors (competition in China’s domestic graduate market). The findings also support Hofstede’s collectivism dimension, as alumni and family networks shape decision-making.

Practical Implications for UK Universities

Safety Messaging: Institutions must foreground inclusivity and wellbeing

Employability Support: Stronger career services, employer partnerships, and outcome reporting are needed

Alumni Engagement: Universities should leverage alumni more systematically in recruitment campaigns

Digital Transformation: Greater use of Chinese platforms is essential to reach students directly

Market Diversification: Reducing over-reliance on Tier-1 cities is key to resilience

This research demonstrates that Chinese students' decisions to study in the UK are shaped by a combination of safety, employability, reputation, and alumni influence. While UK universities retain strong brand equity, their future competitiveness depends on addressing perceptions of safety, demonstrating value for money, and reducing dependence on traditional recruitment channels. The institutions that succeed will be those that move beyond transactional recruitment and build authentic, culturally informed, and future-oriented strategies.

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