

# 169 Exploring the Multidimensionality of Student Experience in Australian Higher Education: A Comparison between Domestic and International Students

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## Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

## Abstract

This paper investigates the key factors impacting the student experience in Australian higher education (HE) institutions, for international and domestic students. Drawing on data from the 2019 Student Experience Survey (SES) with a sample of 208,734 undergraduate and postgraduate students (54,613 being international students) from 39 institutions, this research provides empirical insights into the impact of various factors on the student experience. Results reveal that international students' experiences vary based on their region of origin. Being an international student moderates the effects of each aspect on the overall educational experience. Teaching quality, student support, and skills development have weaker effects on international students' overall experience compared to domestic students, while learner engagement and learning resources have stronger effects. These findings have significant implications for research, practice, and policy in HE, emphasizing the need to invest in the international student experience for improved university performance and an equitable education system.

## Full paper

### Introduction

The student experience in higher education (HE) is increasingly recognized as a crucial aspect, with its impact on the quality of education delivery being widely acknowledged [1, 2]. Although the term 'student experience' is often used, its definition is still unclear [3]. The concept has evolved to include not only teaching and learning, but also student's engagement with administrative and support services [1, 2, 4, 5, 6].

Furthermore, the larger cohort of international students in HE reinforces that the concept of a unidimensional student experience is no longer valid and a thorough assessment of the HE experience is required [4, 7, 8]. Most studies, however, focus on specific aspects of the HE experience and specific set of student demographics, failing to capture the multidimensionality of the HE student experience and the interactions between the various aspects of the student experience. This paper aims to address the gaps in the literature by offering a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensionality of the HE student experience in Australia.

### Analytic approach

The study utilizes data from the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) surveys [9], more specifically from the 2019 Student Experience Survey (SES) dataset (n=208,734 undergraduate and postgraduate students from 39 HE institutions in Australia; with n=54,613, or 26.16%, being international students). The SES provides insights into five focus areas, including skills development (SD), learner engagement (LE), learning resources (LR), student support (SS), and teaching quality (TQ); as well as the overall educational experience (OE).

Firstly, we investigate the key factors impacting student experience and compare the experiences of domestic and international students by fitting multiple linear regression models of the following form:

$$E = \alpha + \beta_1 \times Int + \beta_2 \times C + e$$

Where E denotes a measure capturing one of the aspects of student experience or the overall educational experience (OE),  $\alpha$  is the model's intercept; Int denotes the binary variable capturing the international status of the student, C is a set of control variables including student factors;  $\beta$  are coefficients (or vectors of coefficients) to be estimated; and e is the regression error.

The models are then used to examine how experiences vary for international students from different regions of origin.

We also investigate how international and domestic students differ in terms of the drivers of their overall educational experiences. The models include interaction terms between measures of various aspects of student experience (Exp) and international student status (Int). The models are of the following form:

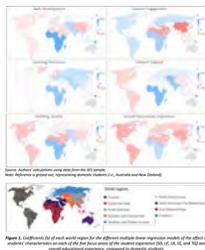
$$OE = \alpha + \beta_1 \times Int + \beta_2 \cdot (Int \times Exp) + \beta_3 \times Exp + \beta_4 \times C + e$$

## Findings

The findings indicate that international students report a worse OE than domestic students. However, international students tend to report more positive experiences than domestic students with SD, LR, SS, and TQ, while they report worse experience with LE. The patterns for student citizenship/residence status and English-speaking background were comparable to international student status. The results also indicate that having positive experiences in all five focus areas is associated with a better OE. Furthermore, this relationship was more pronounced for TQ, which is in line with trends observed in the literature.

Compared to domestic students, international students from Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southern and Central Asia tend to have better OE and better experiences in all five focus areas (Figure 1). International students from other regions tend to have an inferior OE than domestic students, with students from North-East Asia reporting the worst experience. International students from North-East Asia also report the worst experience with SD and LE, while international students from North Africa and the Middle East report the worst experience with TQ. While international students from most regions have a better experience than domestic students with LR and SS, international students from North-West Europe have marginally inferior experiences with LR, and international students from the Americas and North-East Asia have slightly inferior experiences with SS.

Furthermore, this study found that being an international student moderates the effects of each of the aspects of student experience on the OE. The effect of LE and LR on the OE is stronger among international students than among domestic students. While the effect of SD, SS, and TQ on the OE is weaker among international students than among domestic students.



## Implications

This research offers valuable insights for theory, policy, and practice in HE, contributing to the goal of transformative education for an interconnected and equitable world. The results suggest that policy initiatives aimed at improving international student experience across multiple dimensions can enhance overall educational experience, emphasizing the importance of investing in the international student experience as it is linked to university performance.

## References

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