

# Satisfaction and Needs Analysis of International Students Regarding the Educational Administration Service in Korean Universities

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze the satisfaction and needs of undergraduate international students regarding the educational service and to suggest future measures for service improvement. The primary requirement for the academic adjustment of international students is to reveal how satisfied they are with the current educational administration service and what their needs are. To investigate the satisfaction and needs of undergraduate international students regarding the educational administration service, a survey was administered to 395 international students at 12 local undergraduate institutes. Results of the survey showed that the satisfaction of the learners in Chungcheong Province and Gangwon Province tended to be lower than that of the learners in the capital area, Gyeongsang Province, and Jeolla Province. Moreover, a lower level of satisfaction was shown from groups with smaller numbers of undergraduate international students. With regard to language group, dissatisfaction with the administrative service among learners from Vietnam and other Asian locales was higher than learners from other regions. The study results therefore suggest the need for universities to provide customized administrative support for international students.

**Keywords:** *Korean language for academic purpose, international students, learner's needs, University Education Administration Service*

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# 대학 교육행정서비스에 대한 학부 유학생의 만족도 및 요구 분석 연구

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## 국문요약

본 연구는 대학 교육행정서비스에 대한 학부 유학생들의 만족도 및 요구를 분석하여 향후 서비스 향상 방안을 제시하는 데에 목적이 있다. 유학생들의 학업 적응을 위한 가장 필요한 것은 교육행정서비스에 대한 유학생의 만족도가 어떠한지, 요구 사항이 어떠한지를 밝히는 것이다. 본 연구에서는 학부 유학생의 교육행정서비스에 대한 만족도 및 요구를 조사하기 위해 지역별 대학 기관 12곳에 재학 중인 외국인 유학생 395명을 대상으로 설문조사를 실시하였다. 설문조사 결과 만족도는 지역별로 충청도, 강원도 학습자들의 만족도가 수도권, 경상도, 전라도 지역 학습자들에 비해 낮은 경향을 나타냈다. 또한 학부 유학생의 수가 많은 집단보다 적은 집단에서 만족도가 낮게 나왔다. 언어권별로 베트남, 기타 아시아 지역 학습자들의 행정 서비스에 대한 불만이 다른 지역 학습자들보다 높았다. 이를 위해 대학에서는 유학생들을 위한 맞춤형 행정 지원이 이루어져야 할 필요가 있다. 대학 교육행정서비스의 질을 개선하는 방안으로 학습자 모국어에 능통한 행정 직원 고용 방안과 학습자들의 언어권에 따른 행정 직원의 차별적인 태도를 개선시키는 방안이 필요하다고 판단된다. 또한 유학생을 위한 안내 정보를 본인들의 모국어로 자세히 제공하는 방법과 정부 지원 서비스에 대한 전달이 효과적으로 이루어질 수 있도록 세부 방안이 필요하고, 학생들의 상담 결과에 대한 내용이 학교 교육서비스 개선에 즉각적으로 반영될 수 있는 체제 개선이 요구된다. 정부는 유학생들의 현재 교육행정서비스에 대한 인식과 요구를 파악하여 지역별, 언어권별로 외국인 학생들의 요구를 해결해줄 수 있는 방안을 마련해야 할 것이다.

**주제어:** 학문 목적 한국어, 외국인 유학생, 학습자 요구, 대학교육행정서비스

## I. Introduction

The purpose of the study is to analyze the satisfaction and needs of undergraduate international students regarding the educational service and to suggest the future measures for service improvement. Higher education of South Korea has been required to possess international competence through the promotion of various globalization strategies. In an age of unlimited competition for rapid development, universities in Korea have been facing the threat of falling behind on the global stage without innovating to meet global standards. To meet with such changes, the Korean government has established and promoted the attraction and management policy for international students, with the achievement of the globalization of higher education through the secure of excellent overseas human resources as the goal. The government-led policy of attracting international students began its full-scale development in 2001. After that, the government carried out diverse attraction and management policies of international students, including Study Korea Project (2004), Study Korea Project Development Measures (2008), Global Education Service Activation Measures (2010), and so forth.

Attraction and management of international students refers to the entire process of recruiting the candidates for educational institutes and supporting the enrolled international students for their proper education. The reason for the competitive efforts paid not only by the governments of various nations but also by diverse educational institutes for providing high-quality education to a bigger number of international students, is because the attraction of international students can become a catalyst for promoting globalization. In the age of globalization, the attraction of international students can heighten the global reputation of a university and its global competitiveness by improving the present educational system.

Governmental level policies of the attraction and management of international students have enormously affected South Korea's human resources exchange in higher education. The number of international students studying in Korea grew rapidly along with full-scale promotion of the government-led attraction policy of international students. In 2019, the overall enrollment of international students was 160,165, a 13% increase from 142,205 the previous year, and the learner groups have been more diversified by languages and majors.

However, alongside the increase of international students their dropout rates have also been on the rise, which shows the urgency of the need for the measures for the academic adjustment of international students. According to a study of international students, 2,341 four-year undergraduate international students out of 64,331 dropped out in 2015, while 3,593 international students out of the total of 89,541 in 2017 gave up on their studies. More than 60 universities showed a dropout rate for international students in excess of 10%. What is especially necessary for their academic adjustment is to define how satisfied they are with the educational administrative service and what their needs are.

Universities have been facing the peril of falling behind in their attraction of international students, if unable to actively cope with the problems in the educational environment for international students. For this reason, although not having been taken into much consideration in the past, interest has been growing towards the educational service for the students who are prospective consumers of education, and student-oriented educational administration has been settling itself in the field of educational administration as well. This indicates that university administrations are shifting from being school-

centered to becoming more student- and customer-centered. Students would in this scenario become for all practical purposes masters of the educational administrative service.

So far, many universities in Korea have been allowed partial autonomy within an extremely limited range, unable to break out from the regulations and interference of educational authorities. Even under such undesirable educational conditions, most universities have concentrated on quantitative expansion only, while bearing the qualitative problem in the management of international students. As such, the quality of educational administrative service for international students naturally fell, which resulted in lower level of service. However, due to student departures and the change of educational conditions, the problem of qualitative improvement of educational service for students who are educational consumers has become a challenge that can no longer be neglected.

In the study of Korean college-level international education, although much research has been done on educational courses, teaching methods, material development, learning motivation, and so on, less has taken place on the administrative service. This study intends to meet this need through a survey of the satisfaction and needs of the current international students regarding the educational administrative service in Korean universities.

## **II. Notion and Significance of Educational Administrative Service**

The term “service quality” has been recognized of its importance and widely used among the academics as well as hands-on workers. As service quality is rather relative than absolute, it is hard to be defined into a single notion. Not only that, it is even more difficult to understand the quality of service, due to its unique characteristics of intangibility, inseparability, extinction, publicness, and exclusiveness (Carman 1990).

There exists almost no tangible evidence for measuring service quality, as it is not tangible as actual products. In most cases, the tangible clues for service quality are limited to the material capability or human element of the service provider. Consequently, service quality is mostly defined as the quality of service perceived by consumer, which is subjective rather than objective.

In addition, service quality is also defined as the result of comparative evaluation between the perceived service and the service expected by consumer; there also exists the point of view that service quality exists as the functional relation across various factors, such as consumer expectation, technological quality, functional quality, and image (Grönroos 1984, 39). Bitner (1990,72-74) defines service quality with the overall attitude and evaluation of service. Here, “evaluation” refers to the evaluation of various processes during the experience of a service, and means the overall excellence and superiority.

The meaning of “university” used as the conventional notion of the Korean society is a non-profit organization with the emphasis on research, service, and education. However, as weaker universities fall by the wayside, either entirely or through mergers across departments and schools, and as structural reform evaluations are implemented, the university community has been transforming itself into the university market. Due to a number of overall problems among universities in Korea, as well as lowering birth rates and hence reduction in the supply of students, universities find themselves in a struggle for existence, which is directed for student attraction, rather than student selection. Such environmental change of universities led their interest towards the educational service for students, and as such, the research regarding this matter has been continuously published.

Service, despite the diverse shades of meaning given its definition by researchers, has a set of common characteristics of action, procedure, and consequence that are intangible and consumed at the moment of production. Here, university educational service refers to a series of actions through which the school body of universities, professors, and faculty as the providers of education materializes students' physical and spiritual satisfaction through the achievement of the educational objectives by providing tangible and intangible services to the students, who are the receivers of education (Zeithami, Barry, and Parasuraman 1996). As the service provided by universities include both the general characteristics of service from the economic point of view and the special characteristics as universities, students may perceive different levels of satisfaction towards the same course taught by the same instructor. Likewise, educational service may be perceived differently by each student. In this aspect, educational service is considered possible to be applied with the general characteristics of service (Shank, Walker, and Hayes 1995).

Based on various researchers' notional definition of service quality, the study intends to define the quality of undergraduate educational administration service as: "Every activity that materializes material/spiritual satisfaction for learners by providing them with tangible or intangible services in relation to the university's achievement of educational purposes."

### **III. Methods of Study**

To investigate the satisfaction and needs of undergraduate international students regarding educational administration service, the study conducted a survey with 395 international students currently studying at 12 undergraduate institutes located in the capital area, Chungcheong Province, Gyeongsang Province, Jeolla Province, and Gangwon Province. A preliminary survey was carried out with 30 international students as participants, and after making adjustments, mostly additions, to the question items, the actual survey was conducted during September and October 2019. The questionnaire consisted of items regarding demographics, campus facility, administration system and so forth, most of which were multiple-choice. In addition, the questionnaire was written in the learners' mother tongue. To be more specific, the questionnaire items were composed of the questions about "campus facility, satisfaction with administration service, course sign-up, school web site and informational leaflets, guidance for document preparation, satisfaction with counseling" and others, and open questions were given for the "needs investigation" part.

### **IV. Results of the Study**

In terms of demographics, 39% of the survey participants were male, whereas 61% were female; with regard to region, 31% of participants were studying in the capital area, 23% in Chungcheong Province, 21% in Gyeongsang Province, 17% in Jeolla Province, and 8% in Gangwon Province. As to nationality, the percentage of learners from China was largest, at 31%, followed by Vietnam (24%), Japan (13%), Europe (10%), the United States (7%), other Asian regions (6%), and the biggest with 31%, with learners from Vietnam being 24%, Japan 13%, Europe 10%, US 7%, other East Asian regions 6%, and all others 9% (Mexico, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kenya). The survey result with the entire body of learners revealed the response of "above average overall", while there were factors that showed difference according to the learners' language group and school region. As such, the study intends to analyze the results of satisfaction needs investigation regarding the

educational administration service by each school region and language group.

#### **IV-a. Satisfaction Investigation Results Regarding Educational Administration Service**

The response from the overall students showed their satisfaction level to be higher than average regarding the educational administration service. However, the satisfaction level of the learners in Chungcheong and Gangwon Province tended to be lower than that of learners in the capital area, Gyeongsang Province, and Jeolla Province. According to the results of detailed investigation, the ratio of students living in the school dormitories was higher in Chungcheong and Gangwon regions compared to the students in larger cities, and it seems that they showed raised various complaints about the administrative system as they were living within the school campus. The satisfaction level with the school cafeteria was significantly low. The dietary life in Korea can be considered as the most important factor for international students. International students showed difficulty with their dietary life, as most of the dormitories are not set up for cooking in the rooms and they have to use the school cafeteria. Much of the food is not suited for their taste; there are also not many diners around the campus that sell the food of their home country.

In terms of the learners' nationality, the students from Vietnam, Europe, and other regions showed more difficulty in their dietary life than students from China and Japan. The satisfaction level of international students with school cafeteria was low in the study of Joe, Jeong, and Yoo (2016) as well, which showed especially higher level of requirement for food service improvement from the students from the regions other than China and Japan. In our study students from these regions tended to complain about having no choice but to order at the school cafeteria, with no place to cook the food of their home country and difficulty in procuring ingredients. At University A, the school provided a common space for students to cook their own meals; University B built the entire dormitory building for international students to be available for cooking to resolve their hardships. The survey results revealed the highest level of satisfaction at these two universities. As such, it can be judged that the improvement of the administration system in the dietary life of the students, which is the most basic part of their lives, is considered to be the utmost importance.

Next, international students responded that they were confused at the event of course sign-up, because they were not given any guidance about how many credits, what courses they should complete, and other details. While many universities were providing the students using the English, Chinese, and Japanese language with the service in their mother tongue, the students in other language groups especially expressed difficulty, in that they were not able to sign up for necessary courses or complete the essential courses for graduation. Such difficulties led to low satisfaction level in the groups with lower number of international students. Universities with a bigger number of international students provide them with systematic support to apply for courses and to use the overall school system smoothly, whereas those with smaller number of international students provide only the same amount of support as that for Korean students, which led to higher levels of dissatisfaction from groups of smaller scale in the survey.

In addition, the dissatisfaction level of learners from Vietnam and other Asian regions regarding the administration service was higher than that of the learners from other regions. They especially responded that they felt the employees at International Exchange Center or

Korean Language Academy are less kind to them than when dealing with students from China, Japan, US, or Europe. Such response was also shown in the study of Yoon & Jang (2016). According to their study, Vietnamese students said there were big differences in the Korean students regarding how they treat international students from diverse countries, and expressed a feeling that they felt they were being discriminated against compared with students from the West, China, and Japan. Vietnamese students complained that the same employees who kindly listened to and solved the problems of Japanese students treated them differently, even though they were also Asian. Moreover, some Vietnamese students were envious of the Chinese students or Vietnamese students living in China with regard to language and a larger environment, and expressed hurt at what they considered media stereotypes and prejudice. Even taking the problem of subjective viewpoints into account, it is worth noting that more than 100 students participating in this survey felt discomfort due to the attitude of administrative personnel. Some of them also felt discrimination on the part of the professors in charge or Korean students.

In terms of international student counseling, most students showed satisfaction over average. Most universities are equipped with the counseling center for international students to hear their difficulties. While the students were mostly satisfied with the counseling system and especially the counselor, they expressed that the effect of counseling was not continuous, as the improvement for their request was not actively carried out.

#### **IV-b. Results of Needs Investigation Regarding the Educational Administration Service**

Although most learners responded that they were satisfied above average with the educational administration service of the university, the details of their needs were different according to language group and region. In regards of the campus facility, the needs for the dietary problem within the dormitory was highest among the students in Gangwon Province and Chungcheong Province in terms of region, and among the students from Vietnam and Europe in terms of nationality. They reported difficulties having to buy pre-made or instant food from convenience stores or gathering around at a friend in a rented room to cook, as the food from the school cafeteria were not suited for their taste. Accordingly, there exists the need for customized administrative support for them.

In addition, there were many cases in which students from Vietnam or Southeast Asia were discriminated by the school administrative personnel compared to the students from other regions. Many commented that their requests were ignored due to poor communication, which suggests the need for administrative personnel with fluency in their language, in addition to improvement of the employees' discriminatory attitude.

Next, there needs to be the guidance improvement in the universities with smaller number of international students. Students of universities with smaller number of international students responded that they were not provided with enough information about school life. Moreover, they expressed difficulty in the process of acquiring information, such as having to translate the English notification as it was not provided in their mother tongue, and they also mentioned the problems of being unable to receive scholarship or governmental support because of the lack of chances for guidance. As such, it is judged that there needs to be the detailed measures for providing the guidance for international students in their mother tongue in detail, and for effectively informing them of the governmental

support services.

The difficulties facing international students underscore the need for counseling services. The survey found that the satisfaction level of international students regarding the counseling center was higher than average. However, the administrative system too often did not follow through. The contents of counseling need to be immediately reflected in the improvement of the school educational service.

For undergraduate international students, universities should improve and expand the school cafeteria, and provide the information leaflets for the students speaking minority languages in their mother tongue. In addition, a more systematic service without discrimination should take place centered around the International Exchange Center and Korean Language Academy. Universities should provide precise information about the overall school administration, and there also exists the need for system enhancement for providing fast and kind administrative service for students and their school life. Above all, management measures are required for frequent satisfaction investigations to take place about the conditions of students' dietary life for the improvement of service.

The provision of educational administration service for international students may not be the problem for universities only; various requirements about the management and support for international students should ultimately be carried out systematically through the connection with governmental organization, rather than being handed over for individual management by each institute or university. The support in the level of governmental policies should take place for the achievement of safe life and purpose of studying overseas of international students, and for the utilization of potential global human resources. The Korean government would need to understand the recognition and needs of international students regarding the present educational administration service to provide the solutions for their needs by each region and language group.

## **V. Conclusion and Suggestions**

The study attempted to define its significance by carrying out the satisfaction and needs investigation regarding the educational administration service, with the current international students as participants. Based on the notional definitions of various researchers, the study intended to define the quality of undergraduate educational administration service as, "Every activity that materializes material/spiritual satisfaction for learners by providing them with tangible or intangible services in relation to the university's achievement of educational purposes." To determine whether Korean universities were meeting that level of service, we conducted a survey with 395 international students currently attending 12 undergraduate institutes in the capital area, Chungcheong Province, Gyeongsang Province, Jeolla Province, and Gangwon Province.

The survey results revealed the tendency of the satisfaction level of the students in the regions of Chungcheong and Gangwon Province being lower than the students in the capital area, Gyeongsang Province, and Jeolla Province. The satisfaction level towards the school cafeteria was significantly low. Moreover, the level of satisfaction was lower in the smaller groups of international students. The students of smaller groups expressed more complaints, as the universities with a bigger number of international students provide systematic support for them to apply for courses and use the overall school system, whereas the universities with a smaller number of international students provide only the same amount of support as the

Korean students.

In terms of language groups, the level of dissatisfaction of the students from Vietnam and other Asian regions was higher than that of the students of other regions. They especially responded that the employees at the International Exchange Center or Korean Language Academy were less kind when dealing with them than when treating the students from China, Japan or Europe. Also, although the students were mostly satisfied regarding the counseling system, especially the counselor, they expressed the discontinuity of the counseling effect, as improvement to meet their requests too often lagged.

To tackle such problems, universities need to carry out customized administrative support for international students. For the enhancement of educational administration service, it is judged that there exists the need for the measure of hiring administrative personnel with fluency in the students' language and improving the discriminating attitude of the personnel according to language groups. Moreover, there need to be specific solutions for providing detailed guidance for international students in their mother tongue and for effectively conveying the governmental support services. The systematic improvement for the contents of student counseling results to become immediately reflected in the enhancement of educational services is also required. Universities should provide accurate information about the overall school administration, and should also improve the system to provide fast and kind administrative service during the students' school life. Last but not least, the government should understand the awareness and requirements of the international students regarding the present educational administration service to come up with measures for solving their needs by each region and language group.

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