

Academic Satisfaction of International Students at Irish Higher Education Institutions:

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• Background and Rationale

- Overall, 20,7992 full-time enrolment in 2016/2017 (Higher Education Authority) . Also: In Ireland increase 26 per cent between 2016 and 2019, climbing to 14,412 non-EEA in 2019 (Irish Survey of Student Engagement, 2019).
- 2013 to 2018: highest numbers from China, with Malaysia, America, Canada, India, and Saudi Arabia also among the most common countries of origin (Groarke and Durst, 2019).
- Growing international literature on the experiences of IS in host HEIs. Highlights challenges in settling in for some students (see Hunter 2015).
- Fewer studies in the Irish context, especially regarding student experience by region of origin; yet highly policy relevant in understanding how best to support international students
- Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2015; Hunter, 2015; Misra and Castillo, 2004. Moore and Constandine, 2005.



Research Questions

- We examine
 - the profile of domestic and international students
 - whether region of origin predicts academic satisfaction among international students when holding academic and material context constant
 - the effect of cultural distance on academic satisfaction.



Culture and Cultural Distance



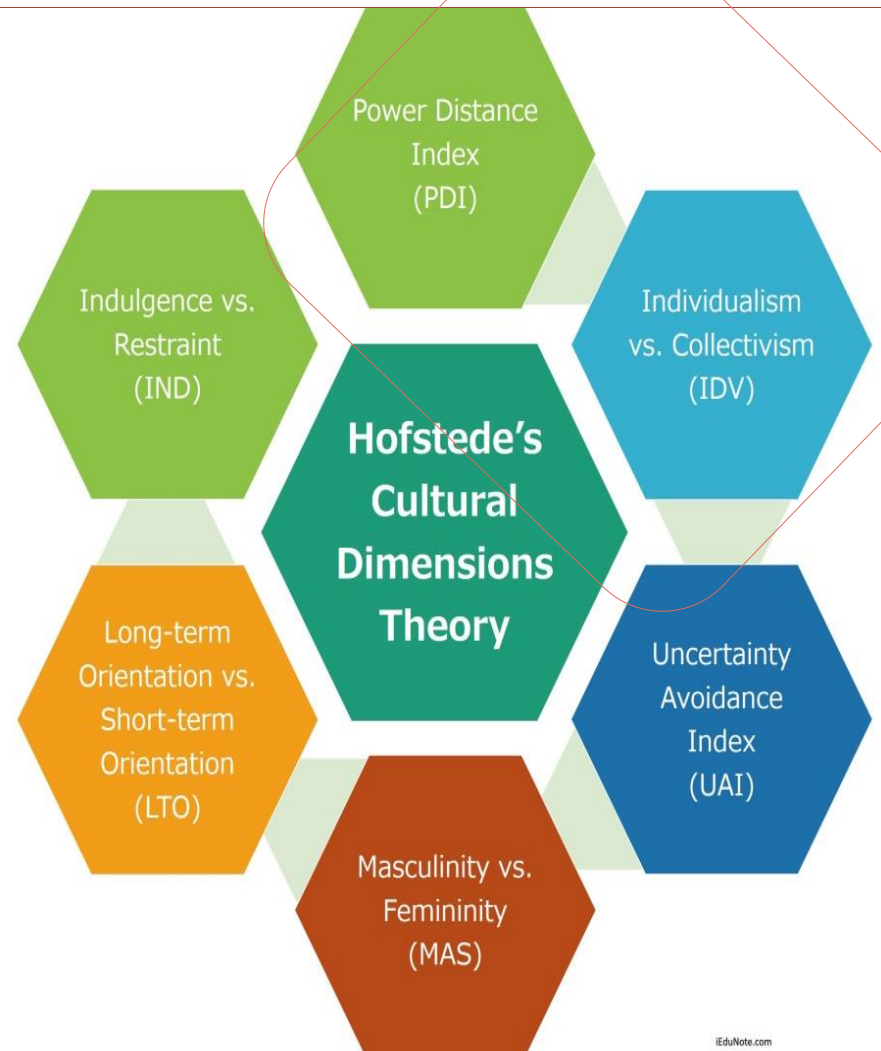
- Culture is defined by [Menipaz and Menipaz \(2011\)](#) as the set of values, symbols, beliefs, languages, and norms that guide human behavior within a workplace, region, or country.
- Cultural distance is a function of differences in values and communication styles—created when individuals or groups perceive that their values and communication styles differ from others—and thus can contribute to understandings of diversity ([Triandis, 1998](#)).
- Cultural distance theories postulate that country of origin may have a direct influence on students' satisfaction due to differences between education systems, in teaching and learning styles, and facilities and resources available.

Theorising Cultural Distance

Hofstede 1984, 1986

Power distance–individualism dimension

- Small power distance, high individualism
- Small power distance, low individualism
- Large power distance, high individualism
- Large power distance, low individualism



Student-as-Customer Paradigm

- As the paradigm of students-as-customers increases, national culture may not be as salient ([Clayson & Haley, 2005](#)).
- Educational consumerism ([Tomlinson, 2017](#)),
- Differences between international and domestic students in how they perceive the value of their experience at HE institutions? ([Woodall et al., 2014](#)).
- The explanatory power of Hofstede's model endures but should be interpreted in recognition of these limitations, critiques, and evolving contexts.



Definition of academic satisfaction

- Broadly defined as “enjoyment of one’s role or experience as a student” ([Lent et al., 2007](#) p. 87)
- The concept was first operationalized in seminal work by [Vallerand and Bissonnette \(1990\)](#), with [Diener \(1995\)](#) further developing understandings related to well-being and cross-cultural differences
- A common concept in exploring how students settle into college life ([Neto, 2019](#)).

Measuring Academic Satisfaction in Eurostudent VI

Outcome variable of *academic satisfaction* ($M = 3.698$, $SD = 0.778$) comprised six Likert-type scale items from Eurostudent VI:

- (a) my lecturer inspires me;
- (b) I would recommend my current (main) study program to other students;
- (c) it was clear from the beginning what is expected from me in my current (main) program;
- (d) (satisfaction with) quality of teaching;
- (e) (satisfaction with) organization of studies and timetable; and
- (f) (satisfaction with) study facilities (e.g., library, computers, building, classrooms).

SELECTED DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

* Greater differences visible **between** groups of students from different regions of origin than between Irish and international students as a whole.

* Irish and international students were **comparable** in relation to

- sex;
- the extent to which they reported currently experiencing economic difficulty;
- type of HE institution attended.

* Differences evident **between** groups of international students from different regions of origin.

- **Female** students underrepresented among South Asian (33.1%) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA; 29.5%) populations and overrepresented among North Americans (66.5%).
- Students from South Asia (47.8%) and sub-Saharan Africa (59.1%) experienced higher levels of **financial difficulties** than both other international students and Irish students.
- Students from MENA region (28%) were less likely to attend a **university** than overall international students (51.7%), and students from Latin America and the Caribbean (55.4%) and sub-Saharan Africa (55.9%) were most likely to attend an **institute of technology**.

* In other areas, international students as a group were **distinct** from Irish students.

- Generally higher **socioeconomic grouping** and more likely to have mothers who completed HE (43.1%) than Irish students (29.8%).
- Overrepresented in pursuing **diplomas** (9.5%) and **postgraduate** degrees (28.5%) compared with Irish students (5.6% and 13.2%, respectively).
- Notably, across all regions, international students (28.2%) were less likely than Irish students (38.3%) to see themselves treated as **detached customers** in education.

SELECTED INFERENTIAL FINDINGS

- * Students who experience **financial difficulties** have lower levels of academic satisfaction
- * Students from **EEA**, including the UK ,and students from **North America**, have statistically significant lower levels of academic satisfaction than students from Ireland.
- * Students from **South Asia** and **Sub-Saharan Africa** have statistically significantly higher levels of academic satisfaction than students from Ireland.
- * Students with lower levels of satisfaction with their **accommodation** have statistically significantly lower levels of academic satisfaction
- * After controlling for sex, mother's education, and having experienced financial difficulties, students from countries with **small power distance, regardless of levels of individualism** (including Ireland and North America) are statistically significantly likely to have lower levels of satisfaction. This indicates that cultural distance may explain levels of academic satisfaction, but only for students from countries with documented small levels of power distance and high individualism.
- * The detached customer variable continued to be the strongest predictor of academic satisfaction, explaining 15% of variability in the outcome variable. Both domestic and international students who perceive themselves as being treated as detached customers in the education process were statistically significantly more likely to be less satisfied with their academic experience.

TABLE 1 EFFECT OF STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, CONTEXT CHARACTERISTICS, AND CULTURAL DISTANCE ON ACADEMIC CONTENTEDNESS

	Academic Contentedness
Constant	3.451
Female (reference Male)	0.350**
Mother completed higher education or above (reference Less than higher education)	-0.068***
Geographic region of birth (reference Ireland)	
East Asia and Pacific	0.001
European Economic Area, including UK	0.082**
Latin America and the Caribbean	-0.168*
Middle East and North Africa	-0.058
North America	-0.130**
South Asia	0.228**
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.172*
Europe and Central Asia, excluding EEA	-0.012
Experiencing financial difficulties	-0.028***
HEI type (reference University)	
Institute of Technology	-0.140***
Other HEI type	-0.196***
Satisfaction with accommodation	0.098***
Cultural distance (reference Small power distance, high individualism)	
Small power distance, low individualism	0.674**
Large power distance, high individualism	0.124**
Large power distance, low individualism	0.161***
N	12,624

*Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$*

Table 1. Distribution of Eurostudent VI Respondents by Region of Origin and Cultural Distance.

Region of origin and cultural distance	N	% International students
Geographic region of origin for international students and Ireland		
East Asia and Pacific	409	19.5
Europe and Central Asia	961	45.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	120	5.7
Middle East and North Africa	92	4.4
North America	232	11.1
South Asia	148	7.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	138	6.6
Ireland	13,621	N/A
Cultural distance		
Small power distance, high individualism (including Ireland)	14,286	N/A
Small power distance, high individualism (excluding Ireland)	764	38.0
Large power distance, high individualism	413	20.6
Large power distance, low individualism	834	41.5

Source. Eurostudent VI for Ireland.

Table 2. Comparison Between International Students and Irish Students on Key Characteristics.

Key characteristics	International students		Irish students	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Female	1,087	51.8	6,820	50.1
Mother completed higher education	840	43.1	3,716	29.8
Experiencing serious or very serious financial difficulties	676	34.5	4,563	36.0
Degree type: diploma	198	9.5	768	5.6
Degree type: undergraduate	1,301	62.0	11,052	81.1
Degree type: postgraduate	599	28.5	1,801	13.2
Institution type: university	1,084	51.7	7,219	53.0
Institution type: institute of technology	868	41.4	5,401	39.7
Institution type: other higher education type	146	7.0	1,002	7.4
Being treated as a customer	591	28.2	5,211	38.3

Table 3. The Association Between Region of Origin and Cultural Distance with Academic Satisfaction.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	3.684	3.727	3.377	3.376	3.713
East Asia and Pacific (ref. Ireland)	0.086*	0.084*	0.126**	0.003	-0.001
Europe and Central Asia (ref. Ireland)	0.125***	0.126***	0.146***	0.080*	0.064
Latin America and the Caribbean (ref. Ireland)	-0.134	-0.14	-0.075	-0.236*	-0.163
Middle East and North Africa (ref. Ireland)	0.042	0.053	0.125	-0.034	-0.036
North America (ref. Ireland)	-0.219***	-0.217***	-0.225***	-0.225***	-0.251***
South Asia (ref. Ireland)	0.473***	0.501***	0.465***	0.304**	0.244**
Sub-Saharan Africa (ref. Ireland)	0.443***	0.473***	0.49***	0.34**	0.295**
Female (ref. male)		0.037**	0.034*	0.034*	0.009
Mother completed higher education or above (ref. less than higher education)		-0.046**	-0.048**	-0.048**	-0.046**
Experiencing financial difficulties (ref. low and no financial difficulties)		-0.132***	-0.073***	-0.073***	-0.032*
Institute of technology (ref. university)			-0.128***	-0.129***	-0.188***
Other higher education institution (ref. university)			-0.194***	-0.195***	-0.229***
Satisfaction with accommodation			0.096***	0.097***	0.078***
Diploma (ref. undergraduate)			0.178***	0.177***	0.137***
Postgraduate (ref. undergraduate)			0.119***	0.117***	0.090***
Large power distance, high individualism (ref. small power distance, high individualism)				0.110*	0.048
Large power distance, low individualism (ref. small power distance, high individualism)				0.162**	0.085
Detached consumer (ref. partner or other)					-0.610***
Observations	12,640	12,640	12,640	12,640	12,640
R ²	.009	.016	.049	.049	.194
Adjusted R ²	.008	.016	.048	.048	.193

Source. Eurostudent survey VI for Ireland.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.