RICHTMANN
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Research Article

International Student Mobility: Pushing-Pulling Factors for International Students

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Abstract

International student mobility (ISM) has been considered as a key factor for many higher education institutions (HEIs) in terms of benefits that it generates. Recent literature highlights the influence of ISM in the reconfiguration of the form of educational system making it more competitive and attractive for international students. In this regard, students are paying attention to the opportunities and benefits that an international student mobility programme, such as the Erasmus programme offers. Nevertheless, it is important to take in consideration challenges and barriers that international students have to cope during their study experience abroad. The aim of this study is to analyse which are the pushing and pulling factors for international students when choosing a country as the abroad study destination. An online survey is used to Albanian international students that has previously experienced ISM programme and are currently experiencing ISM programme abroad. Findings offer important insights on understanding factors that impact international students' decision when choosing a foreign country as a study destination. This study offers contribution in enriching the existent literature on ISM and in particular on the decision-making of international students from a developing country perspective. The study's implications suggest that higher education institutions can boost their global attractiveness and competitiveness by addressing the key factors influencing international students' decisions, as identified in this study.

Keywords: International student mobility, Pushing factor, Pulling factor, Higher education, Albania

1. Introduction

International student mobility (ISM) has emerged as a transformative force in higher education,

reshaping academic landscapes and fostering cross-cultural exchange on a global scale (Knight, 2007). With the increasing interconnectedness of the world, students are increasingly seeking opportunities to study abroad as a means of broadening their horizons, gaining new perspectives, and acquiring valuable skills for personal and professional growth (Marginson, 2014). For Albanian students, participating in ISM programs such as Erasmus represents a gateway to international education, offering access to world-class institutions and diverse learning environments.

The push-pull framework is a well-established concept in the study of International Student Mobility (ISM). It categorizes the reasons that influence students' decisions to pursue education abroad, distinguishing between factors that push them away from their home countries and those that pull them toward their destination countries. This framework provides valuable insights into the motivations behind the complex decision-making processes of international students.

Push factors refer to the adverse conditions or limitations in a student's home country that compel them to seek educational opportunities elsewhere. These factors are typically negative aspects that "push" students to look beyond their borders for better prospects (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Császár et al., 2023; Glass & Cruz, 2023). Moreover, they mostly refer to economic conditions, limited educational opportunities, political instability and social pressures. Students from countries with poor economic conditions often face limited job prospects and high unemployment rates, which push them to seek education in countries with better economic environments. For instance, many students from developing countries look to study abroad to escape economic stagnation at home (Glass & Cruz, 2023). The lack of advanced educational infrastructure or specialized academic programs in the home country can be a significant push factor. Students may be driven to study abroad to access higher-quality education or programs not available in their home countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Political unrest, conflict, and issues related to personal safety in the home country can also push students to seek safer and more stable environments for their studies. This is particularly relevant in countries facing ongoing conflict or governance challenges (Császár et al., 2023). In some cultures, there is significant social pressure to obtain an international degree, which is often seen as a status symbol or a means to secure better marriage prospects or social mobility (Császár et al., 2023).

Pull factors are the positive attributes of the host country or institution that attract international students. These factors often represent the advantages or opportunities offered by the destination country that "pull" students towards it and mostly are linked to the quality of education, cultural appeal, language opportunities, career prospects and financial incentives (Choudaha, 2017; Glass & Cruz, 2023; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Xu, 2023; Yin & Zong, 2022). The academic reputation, quality of faculty, research opportunities, and advanced facilities of educational institutions in the host country are significant pull factors. Students are drawn to institutions that are highly ranked or renowned for excellence in specific fields (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Xu, 2023). The opportunity to experience a different culture, gain international exposure, and live in a culturally diverse environment is another strong pull factor. This is particularly appealing to students from countries with less cultural diversity (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). For many students, the chance to learn or improve proficiency in a global language, such as English, is a key reason for studying abroad. Language proficiency is often seen as a critical skill for global employability (Yin & Zong, 2022). The potential for better career opportunities, internships, and connections with global job markets post-graduation is a compelling reason for choosing certain host countries. Students often select destinations that are known for strong industry links and employability rates (Choudaha, 2017). Availability of scholarships, grants, and lower tuition fees can also be powerful pull factors, making education abroad more accessible to students from diverse economic backgrounds (Glass & Cruz, 2023).

The significance of ISM extends beyond individual students, as it also holds immense value for higher education institutions (HEIs) and host countries alike. HEIs benefit from the cultural diversity and intellectual exchange brought by international students, enriching the academic community and enhancing global competitiveness (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Similarly, host countries stand to gain from the influx of international students, both economically and culturally, as they contribute to local

economies and promote intercultural understanding (Bowman & Weaver, 2023).

While the benefits of ISM are well-documented, the decision to study abroad is a complex process influenced by various factors and considerations. Academic reputation, quality of education, cultural fit, language proficiency, and financial considerations all play a role in shaping students' choices when selecting a study destination abroad (Curaj et al., 2015). Furthermore, the experience of studying abroad is not without its challenges, as students must navigate unfamiliar academic systems, cultural norms, and social dynamics (Brooks, 2023).

Despite the growing interest in ISM among Albanian students, there remains a gap in the literature regarding their specific motivations, preferences, and experiences (Mizikaci & Arslan, 2019). Understanding the factors driving Albanian students' decisions to study abroad, as well as the challenges they encounter during their study experiences, is essential for informing policies and practices that support their academic and personal success. Therefore, this study aims to explore the pushing and pulling factors influencing Albanian students' choice of study destination abroad through ISM programs, with a focus on the Erasmus program.

By shedding light on the unique perspectives of Albanian students participating in ISM, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on internationalization in higher education (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016). By identifying key drivers, barriers, and areas for improvement, HEIs and policymakers can better tailor their support services and initiatives to meet the needs of Albanian students pursuing international education opportunities (Teichler, 2004, 2017). Ultimately, this research endeavors to promote inclusivity, diversity, and excellence in higher education, fostering a more interconnected and globally engaged academic community.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the primary motivating factors influencing Albanian students' decisions to participate in international student mobility (ISM) programs, particularly the Erasmus program?
2. What challenges and barriers do Albanian students encounter during their study experiences abroad, and how do these factors impact their overall academic and personal success?
3. How can higher education institutions (HEIs) and policymakers in Albania enhance support services and initiatives to better meet the needs of Albanian students participating in ISM programs and promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for international education?

This study is structured as follows. Section 2 explores existing literature on ISM, focusing on factors influencing study destination choices, challenges faced by international students, and the context of ISM in Albania. It discusses relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies and identifies gaps in the literature and rationale for the current study. Section 3 describes the research design, including the mixed-methods approach combining quantitative survey data collection with qualitative analysis. It explains the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Section 4 presents findings from the quantitative survey data analysis, addressing research questions related to motivating factors, challenges, and barriers. It provides quantitative insights into the experiences and perspectives of Albanian students participating in ISM programs. Section 5 analyzes and interprets the results in relation to the research questions and existing literature and explores implications of the findings for higher education institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders in Albania. Moreover, it identifies opportunities for improving support services and initiatives to enhance the ISM experience for Albanian students. Finally, Section 6 summarizes key findings and contributions of the study. It highlights the significance of understanding Albanian students' perspectives on ISM and offers recommendations for future research and practice in the field of international education.

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

Journal of Educational and Social Research
www.richtmann.org

Vol 14 No 6
November 2024

2. Literature Review

International student mobility (ISM) has garnered increasing attention in the field of higher education as a catalyst for globalization, knowledge exchange, and cultural enrichment (Knight, 2007). A vast body of literature has explored the multifaceted nature of ISM, examining its implications for students, institutions, and host countries alike. This section provides an overview of key themes and findings in the literature, focusing on factors influencing students' decisions to study abroad and the challenges they face during their international study experiences.

Moreover, ISM has gained significant attention in recent years, not only among students from developed nations but also from those in developing countries. The motivations, challenges, and impacts of ISM on students from developing countries present unique aspects that merit closer examination.

One prominent study by Glass and Cruz (2023) highlights the shift towards multipolarity in ISM, where emerging educational hubs in developing countries, such as Malaysia, India, and the Gulf States, are increasingly influencing the global network of student mobility. This shift challenges the traditional dominance of Western nations as the primary destinations for international students, thus diversifying the options available for students from developing regions (Glass & Cruz, 2023).

Similarly, Xu (2023) emphasizes the need to reconceptualize ISM by focusing on non-traditional areas like South Korea, Malaysia, India, and China. These regions are emerging as significant education hubs, thereby offering new opportunities for students from developing countries to access world-class education while staying within relatively similar socio-economic and cultural environments (Xu, 2023).

China's role in the global ISM landscape has also been noteworthy. Yin and Zong (2022) discuss how ISM contributes to scientific research and knowledge exchange, particularly in the context of Chinese universities hosting a large number of international students from developing countries. This has fostered greater cross-country research collaborations, enriching the academic and cultural experiences of students (Yin & Zong, 2022).

Moreover, the economic impact of ISM is not confined to educational institutions alone. As Császár et al. (2023) demonstrate in their study of Hungary, inbound international student mobility can have significant economic effects on the wider macro-environment, revealing new aspects of global governmental initiatives aimed at economic development in developing countries. This is particularly relevant for countries looking to attract international students as a means to boost their higher education sector and broader economy (Császár et al., 2023).

The experiences of students in developing countries are also shaped by global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Yang et al. (2022) analyze how China responded to the pandemic to mitigate its impact on ISM, providing insights into the long-term strategies that developing countries might adopt to sustain student mobility amid global uncertainties (Yang et al., 2022).

These studies underscore the complex and evolving nature of ISM in developing countries. They highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations, challenges, and impacts of ISM on students from these regions. By expanding the literature to include perspectives from non-traditional educational hubs and examining the economic and geopolitical factors influencing ISM, researchers can provide a more comprehensive view of how ISM is shaping the educational and economic landscapes of developing countries.

2.1 Factors influencing study destination choice

One of the primary considerations for students when selecting a study destination abroad is the academic reputation and quality of education offered by institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Research suggests that students are drawn to prestigious universities known for their excellence in specific fields of study. Rankings and accreditation status often serve as indicators of academic quality and influence students' perceptions of potential study destinations.

Educational transformation in the digital era has also become a significant factor, particularly in developing countries. Lipipun and Angasinha (2023) discuss how digital tools and strategies are reshaping higher education, offering new opportunities and challenges.

Cultural enrichment and exposure to new experiences are significant motivators for students participating in ISM programs (Marginson, 2014). Studies have shown that students value the opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultures, languages, and societal norms, as it contributes to their personal and professional development. Cultural fit and compatibility with the host country's lifestyle and values also play a crucial role in students' decision-making processes.

A study into the image of the accountant by Georgiou et al. (Georgiou et2024) explores how undergraduate students perceive the accounting profession and the factors that influence these perceptions. The study found that students' views are shaped significantly by their educational experiences and the information provided during their studies. Understanding these perceptions can help in tailoring educational strategies to better align with students' career expectations and motivations (Georgiou et al., 2024).

Language proficiency and the opportunity to enhance language skills are key factors influencing students' choice of study destination abroad (Curaj et al., 2015). Many students view studying in a foreign country as an opportunity to immerse themselves in a language-rich environment and improve their language fluency. Institutions offering language courses, language exchange programs, and other language support services are often preferred by international students.

The impact of the English language as a crucial element in higher education development strategies cannot be understated. Naka and Spahija (2022) explore how English proficiency contributes to the competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education institutions

The integration of social media in higher education has transformed how knowledge is shared and social capital is built among students and educators. Sidhu et al. (2023) explore the implications of these changes for governance in higher education institutions.

Financial factors, including tuition fees, cost of living, and availability of scholarships or financial aid, significantly impact students' decisions to study abroad (Bowman & Weaver, 2023). Research indicates that students from developing countries, such as Albania, may face financial barriers that limit their access to international education opportunities. Scholarships and funding opportunities offered by institutions, governments, or international organizations can alleviate financial burdens and make studying abroad more accessible.

2.2 Challenges and barriers in international study experiences

One of the most commonly cited challenges faced by international students is language barriers and communication difficulties (Brooks, 2023). Non-native English speakers, in particular, may encounter challenges in understanding lectures, participating in discussions, and completing academic assignments. Limited language proficiency can hinder academic performance and social integration, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

Adapting to a new academic environment and learning culture can pose significant challenges for international students (Mizikaci & Arslan, 2019). Differences in teaching methods, assessment formats, and academic expectations may require students to adjust their study habits and learning strategies. Moreover, navigating academic resources, such as libraries, laboratories, and online platforms, can be daunting for students unfamiliar with the host institution's systems.

Cultural adjustment and social integration are integral aspects of the international study experience, yet they can present considerable challenges for students (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016). Adjusting to new social norms, customs, and social interactions may require time and effort, leading to feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and cultural shock. Establishing social networks and forming meaningful connections with peers and local communities are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, introducing new

complexities in the academic and social lives of students. Agba et al. (2022) discuss the lessons learned and policy options for higher educational institutions in developing economies during the pandemic, highlighting the emerging new normal in educational practices.

Financial constraints often exacerbate the challenges faced by international students, particularly those from developing countries (Teichler, 2004, 2017). High tuition fees, living expenses, and currency exchange rates can strain students' budgets and impact their ability to fully engage in academic and extracurricular activities. Moreover, limited access to part-time employment opportunities and restrictions on work permits may further exacerbate financial hardships for international students.

Academic reputation, cultural exposure, language learning opportunities, and financial considerations are among the key determinants shaping students' choice of study destination abroad. However, students also encounter a myriad of challenges and barriers, including language barriers, academic adjustment, cultural adaptation, and financial constraints, which can impact their academic success and overall well-being.

Understanding the motivations, preferences, and challenges of international students, particularly those from developing countries like Albania, is essential for informing policies, programs, and support services that promote inclusivity, diversity, and student success in higher education. By addressing the needs and concerns of international students, institutions can create more welcoming and supportive environments that enhance the overall quality of the international study experience and contribute to the global mobility of students.

2.3   Albanian context

In the context of Albania, ISM represents a relatively recent phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in the academic and policy spheres (Teichler, 2004). As Albania continues its journey towards integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and seeks to enhance its global engagement, ISM has emerged as a strategic priority for the country's higher education sector (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This section provides an overview of the literature on ISM in the Albanian context, focusing on key themes, trends, and challenges unique to the country.

The landscape of ISM in Albania has evolved significantly in recent years, driven by both internal and external factors (Marginson, 2014). Internally, efforts to reform and modernize the higher education system have placed greater emphasis on internationalization, mobility, and quality assurance. Externally, Albania's aspirations for European integration and alignment with the EHEA have spurred initiatives to enhance international cooperation and mobility within the higher education sector (Bowman & Weaver, 2023).

Government policies and initiatives play a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of ISM in Albania (Curaj et al., 2015). The Albanian government has taken proactive measures to promote internationalization and mobility through initiatives such as the National Strategy for Higher Education and Research, which emphasizes the importance of international cooperation, student mobility, and academic exchange. Additionally, Albania's participation in programs such as Erasmus+ has provided opportunities for students, academics, and institutions to engage in cross-border collaboration and mobility (Mizikaci & Arslan, 2019). Research on Albanian students' perspectives and motivations regarding ISM reveals a multifaceted picture shaped by a variety of factors (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016). Economic considerations, such as the pursuit of better educational and career opportunities abroad, often drive students to seek international study experiences. Furthermore, students are motivated by the desire to broaden their horizons, acquire intercultural competencies, and gain exposure to diverse academic and cultural environments.

While the benefits of ISM are clear, Albanian students face a range of challenges and barriers when pursuing international study experiences (Brooks, 2023). Language proficiency and communication barriers can pose significant obstacles, particularly for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds This language gap can lead to difficulties in understanding lectures, participating in discussions, and

completing assignments, which may adversely affect their academic performance and social integration (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Intensive language courses prior to departure can help students improve their proficiency in the host country's language, easing their academic transition (Choudaha, 2017). Offering on-campus language support services, such as tutoring and language labs, can help students continue to improve their language skills during their studies (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Financial constraints may also limit students' ability to participate in ISM programs, despite the availability of scholarships and funding opportunities. The cost of tuition, living expenses, and travel can be prohibitive, and students may face restrictions on working while studying (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Expanding access to scholarships and grants can significantly reduce the financial burden on Albanian students (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Creating opportunities for part-time work or internships can provide students with additional income and valuable work experience (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Moreover, navigating administrative procedures, obtaining visas, and adjusting to unfamiliar academic systems and cultural norms can present additional challenges for Albanian students studying abroad. Pre-departure orientation sessions that cover cultural expectations and norms of the host country can prepare students for the transition, reducing the impact of culture shock (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Establishing mentorship programs that pair Albanian students with local or senior international students can provide a support network, easing their cultural adjustment (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Differences in academic expectations, teaching methods, and assessment styles between Albania and the host country can be challenging. Albanian students may find it difficult to adapt to the different academic rigor or the independent learning style required abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Workshops on study skills, time management, and academic writing can help Albanian students adapt to the academic environment of their host country (Choudaha, 2017). Encouraging faculty to provide continuous feedback can help students adjust their study habits and improve their academic performance (Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Building a social network in a new country can be challenging, especially when language and cultural differences are present. Albanian students may struggle to make friends and participate in social activities, leading to loneliness and a sense of alienation (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Encouraging participation in student organizations, cultural clubs, and social events can help students build connections and feel more integrated into the campus community (Choudaha, 2017). Implementing buddy programs that pair international students with local students can foster friendships and provide support for navigating social situations (King & Raghuram, 2013).

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in facilitating ISM cannot be overstated (Teichler, 2004). Albanian HEIs are increasingly recognizing the importance of providing comprehensive support services and infrastructure to facilitate student mobility and internationalization. Initiatives such as internationalization at home, language support programs, and cultural orientation sessions aim to prepare students for successful study experiences abroad and promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

In conclusion, studies on ISM in the Albanian context reflect a dynamic landscape characterized by both opportunities and challenges (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As Albania continues to integrate into the global higher education community, ISM represents a pathway for enhancing academic quality, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and fostering international cooperation. By addressing the unique needs and challenges of Albanian students, policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders can work together to maximize the benefits of ISM and ensure that all students have access to transformative international study experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

This study employs a qualitative methodology utilizing an online questionnaire to gather data from Albanian students who have previously experienced ISM programs. The questionnaire aims to

analyze the pushing and pulling factors influencing international students' choice of study destination abroad. A total of 271 online questionnaires were obtained, of which 246 were considered valid for analysis.

The online questionnaire was distributed during the period January – March, 2024 to Albanian students who have previously participated in ISM programs or are currently experiencing ISM programs abroad. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their responses would be used responsibly and confidentially only for the stated purpose of the study.

Qualitative data analysis techniques are used to analyze the responses obtained from the online questionnaire. Responses are categorized and coded based on recurring themes and patterns related to factors influencing study destination choice, challenges faced during study abroad, overall experience, and recommendations. Thematic analysis is utilized to identify key insights and findings from the data.

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology for several reasons. First, qualitative methods allow for a deeper exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of Albanian students participating in ISM programs (Marginson, 2014). Through open-ended questions and narrative responses, qualitative research provides rich and nuanced insights into the complexities of students' decision-making processes, challenges faced, and overall experiences abroad. Second, ISM involves multifaceted factors that influence students' study destination choices and experiences abroad (Teichler, 2004). Qualitative methods are well-suited to capture the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, allowing researchers to explore diverse perspectives, contexts, and interactions that may not be adequately captured through quantitative approaches alone. Third, qualitative research offers flexibility to adapt to the dynamic and evolving nature of ISM (Altbach & Knight, 2007). It allows researchers to probe deeper into emerging themes, explore unexpected findings, and adapt data collection strategies based on the unique experiences and contexts of participants. Finally, qualitative methods enable researchers to gain a contextual understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors shaping students' study abroad experiences (Bowman & Weaver, 2023). By contextualizing students' narratives within the broader socio-cultural context of Albania and the global higher education landscape, qualitative research enhances the validity and relevance of study findings.

3.2 *Descriptive statistics*

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics providing a comprehensive overview of student's demographic profiles and fields of study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Characteristic	Description	Details
Gender distribution	- Female: 138 (56.1%) - Male: 108 (43.9%)	Total responses: 246
Age range	- 18-20 years: 29 (11.7%) - 21-25 years: 193 (78.5%) - 26-30 years: 24 (9.8%)	Predominantly young adults in early 20s
Level of education	- Undergraduate: 123 (50%) - Master's: 123 (50%)	Equal distribution across undergraduate and graduate levels
Field of study	- Business and Economics: 108 (44%) - STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics): 55 (22%) - Other fields: 83 (34%)	Other fields include Digital Marketing, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, etc.

Source: Authors elaboration

The gender distribution shows a slight majority of female respondents over male, which could be

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

Journal of Educational and Social Research
www.richtmann.org

Vol 14 No 6
November 2024

reflective of a higher interest or opportunity among female students in participating in international mobility programs. A significant majority of the respondents are within the 21 - 25 year age range, indicating that the primary participants in international student mobility programs are young adults who are likely in the latter stages of their undergraduate education or beginning their graduate studies. The equal distribution of undergraduate and master's level participants suggests that there is a balanced interest in international mobility across different stages of higher education, with half of the respondents pursuing their bachelor's degree and the other half involved in master's level studies. This balance indicates the widespread appeal and accessibility of international mobility programs to students at various educational levels.

The data reveals that a large portion of the respondents are from the field of Business and Economics, constituting nearly 44% of the total. This is followed by STEM fields, which represent approximately 22% of the respondents. Other fields, such as Social Sciences, Law, and Digital Marketing, make up smaller percentages, reflecting a diverse range of academic interests among the students participating in international mobility programs.

4. Findings

Figure 1 shows the distribution of countries where students have studied abroad as part of the ISM programs. It provides insightful information about the preferences and trends among Albanian students.
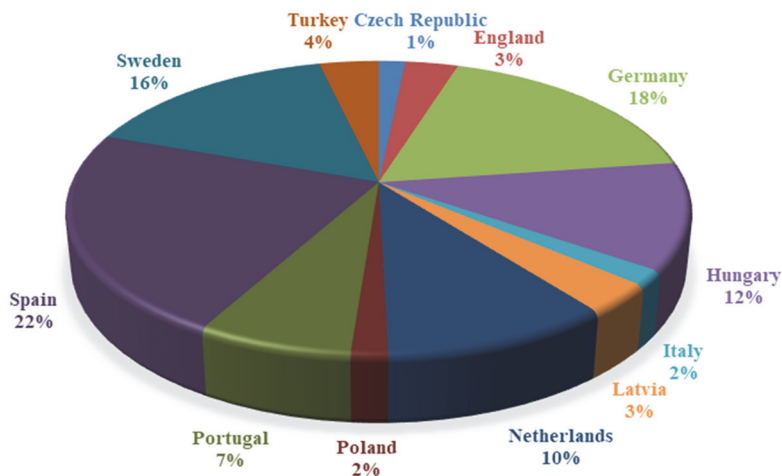

Figure 1. Country selection
Source: Authors elaboration

Spain emerges as the most popular destination for students (22%, 55 students). This could be attributed to its vibrant culture, diverse academic offerings, and perhaps language learning opportunities, as Spanish can be an appealing second language for many students. Germany is a preferred destination due to its renowned higher education system, strong engineering and business programs, and no tuition fees at public universities which is a significant factor considering financial considerations in study choices (18%, 44 students).

The high percentage for Sweden can be linked to its high-quality education, innovative research, and strong English-language programs across various disciplines. Sweden's quality of life and progressive society may also attract students (16%, 39 students). Hungary, particularly Budapest,

is known for affordable living compared to other European countries, alongside solid education systems especially in the fields of medicine and engineering (12%, 29 students).

Known for its liberal society and high-quality education system, the Netherlands offers numerous English-taught programs which are appealing to international students (10%, 25 students). Portugal's popularity could be influenced by its warm climate, affordable cost of living, and the growth of English-taught programs (7%, 17 students).

Students may choose Turkey for its unique position straddling Europe and Asia, offering a blend of cultures and relatively lower costs of living and education (4%, 9 students). England's appeal usually lies in the prestige of its universities, though the lower number compared to others could be due to higher costs of living and tuition fees (3%, 8 students). Latvia and Poland offer less expensive living and education costs, which can be attractive for students looking to minimize expenses (3%, 8 students for Latvia and 2%, 4 students for Poland).

Both countries offer rich cultural histories and specific academic strengths (like arts and architecture in Italy and sciences in the Czech Republic), but the low percentages suggest that other factors such as language barriers or lesser awareness might deter higher student mobility to these locations (2% each, 4 students for both).

The choice of country appears to be heavily influenced by a combination of academic reputation, language considerations, cultural appeal, and financial aspects. Countries like Spain, Germany, and Sweden, which are known for high-quality education and have substantial support systems for international students, attract the highest numbers. On the other hand, traditional educational powerhouses like England attract fewer students, likely due to higher costs. This data is crucial for higher education institutions in Albania to understand where their students prefer to study and what factors might be influencing these decisions. It can help these institutions tailor their international education partnerships and marketing strategies accordingly.

Table 2 summarizes the experiences of students who participated in ISM programs across various countries offers insightful details about the average length of stay and general feedback.

Table 2. The average duration of stay the general feedback received

Country	Average stay (months)	General feedback
Italy	6	Excellent, highly recommended
Portugal	5.5	Varied, generally positive
Hungary	5.6	Very positive, academic growth
Germany	6.2	Transformative, highly positive
Spain	5.8	Culturally enriching, positive
Sweden	5.3	Positive, some social challenges
Netherlands	4.8	Excellent education and integration
Turkey	6	Culturally rich, personal growth
Latvia	6	Academically and socially rewarding
Czech Republic	9	Highly satisfying, cultural and academic benefits
England	6	Positive academic and cultural exposure
Poland	3	Beneficial despite short duration

Source: Authors elaboration

Students who went to the Czech Republic had the longest average duration of stay at 9 months, with feedback highlighting highly satisfying cultural and academic benefits. This suggests a well-rounded experience that combines learning with cultural immersion. Similarly, students in Germany reported transformative experiences with an average stay of about 6.2 months, pointing to the high value placed on both academic and personal development in this setting. Sweden and Turkey both had an average stay of 6 months, where students described their experiences as positive, though some social

challenges were noted in Sweden. These countries seem to offer a robust environment for both personal growth and academic achievement. Students in Spain, Latvia, and England also averaged around 6 months per stay, enjoying culturally enriching experiences that enhanced their academic journeys. This duration appears to be quite typical and sufficient for gaining significant benefits from study abroad programs. On the shorter side, students in Poland had the briefest average stay of 3 months. Despite the shorter duration, the feedback was still positive, suggesting that even limited exposure to educational systems abroad can be beneficial. The Netherlands offered a slightly shorter than average duration of 4.8 months, yet students reported excellent educational integration and experiences, indicating a highly efficient and welcoming academic environment.

Overall, the feedback from students across these countries was predominantly positive, with many noting the added academic opportunities, cultural exposure, and personal development as key highlights of their international study experiences. These findings suggest that regardless of the length of stay, studying abroad is perceived as a valuable and transformative component of higher education.

Figure 2 shows the evaluation of the main reasons for choosing to study abroad through an ISM program. As reported by the students it shows varied importance levels across different motivational factors, but highlights a general trend towards significant value in several areas.
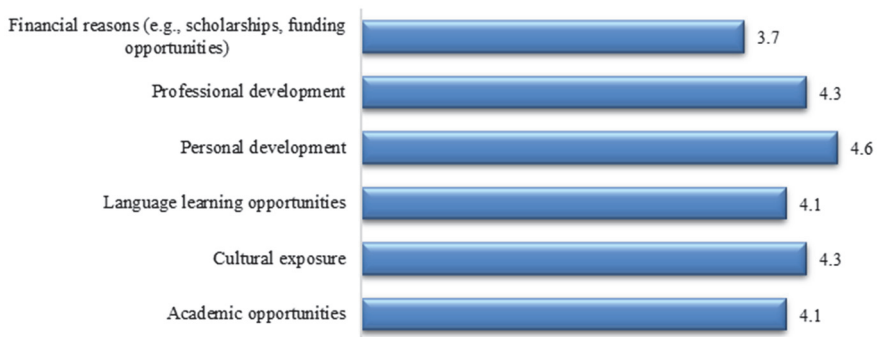

Figure 2. The main reasons for choosing to study abroad
Source: Authors elaboration

Personal development scores highly across the board (4.6), showing that students perceive ISM programs as a chance to grow personally, which includes developing independence, resilience, and adaptability. This aligns with the transformative experiences students often report from their time abroad. Cultural exposure (4.3) is another highly rated reason for studying abroad, often marked close to the top of the scale. This suggests that students value the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, experience different ways of life, and broaden their worldviews, which is a fundamental aspect of the ISM experience. Professional development is also seen as a key motivator (4.3), though it might slightly lag behind personal development and academic opportunities. Students recognize that international experience can enhance their resumes and prepare them better for global job markets. Students generally rated academic opportunities highly (4.1), reflecting the importance of advancing their educational experiences and gaining access to different academic resources and teaching styles. This reason is consistently rated towards the higher end of the importance scale, indicating that academic growth is a central motivation for participating in ISM programs. The importance of language learning (4.1) varies more than other categories but is generally rated as important. This indicates that for many students, the ability to improve or learn new language skills is a significant draw of studying abroad, providing practical skills that

complement their academic and personal growth. Financial Reasons (e.g., scholarships, funding opportunities) has a broader range of responses (3.7), suggesting that while some students rely on financial support to participate in ISM programs, others might not consider it as pivotal. This likely reflects varying personal or national economic contexts and the availability of funding opportunities.

Overall, the findings highlight that while academic and cultural factors are predominant reasons for studying abroad, personal and professional development also play crucial roles. Financial considerations are variable but can be a decisive factor depending on the student's circumstances. This multifaceted motivation underscores the comprehensive benefits that ISM programs offer to students.

Figure 3 represents the evaluation of various factors in selecting a study destination abroad. Findings reveal a clear prioritization of certain elements that influence their decision-making process.
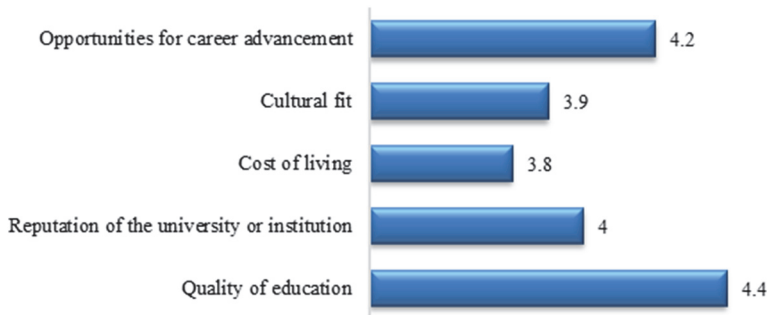

Figure 3. The main factors when selecting a study destination abroad
Source: Authors elaboration

The quality of education is highly valued (4.4), with many students rating it as extremely important. This indicates that academic standards and the reputation of educational programs are crucial in choosing where to study abroad, highlighting the priority of achieving a high-quality education. Opportunities for career advancement through networking, internships, and job prospects after graduation are rated highly (4.2). This suggests that students are not only looking for immediate educational benefits but also long-term professional outcomes from their study abroad experience. The reputation of the university or institution holds significant weight in the decision process (4). Students are keen on attending universities that are well-regarded globally, suggesting that the perceived value of the educational institution can greatly influence their choice. Cultural fit (3.9), though slightly less emphasized than academic reputation or cost considerations, is still deemed important. This factor pertains to how well students feel they can integrate into the local culture, which can impact their overall experience and comfort while studying abroad. The cost of living is also a critical factor (3.8), with varied responses but generally skewing towards higher importance. This reflects students' awareness of the financial implications of their stay abroad, including accommodation, food, and daily expenses, which can be a deciding factor depending on their budget constraints.

Overall, these findings depict a scenario where students place a high premium on the academic reputation and quality of education provided by the host institution, along with economic factors like the cost of living. Additionally, the potential for cultural integration and career opportunities also plays significant roles in their decision-making process for choosing a study destination abroad. These priorities reflect a balanced approach to maximizing both personal growth and professional development opportunities during their international study experience.

Figure 4 shows the main challenges or barriers faced by students during their study experience abroad. Academic challenges were also notable, with students experiencing difficulties adjusting to

the academic standards and teaching methods abroad (3.2). This highlights the differences in educational systems and the adaptation required from students, which can be a substantial hurdle. Social integration challenges were also highlighted by many students (3.1). Making new friends, entering new social circles, and feeling part of the community can be daunting, particularly in a foreign setting, affecting students' social life and mental health. Financial difficulties received a high importance rating from several students, pointing to the economic pressures of studying abroad, such as managing living costs, tuition fees, and other expenses (3). Financial constraints can severely limit the accessibility and sustainability of international study opportunities. Cultural adjustment issues were prominent, indicating that adapting to a new cultural environment is a significant challenge for students (2.9). This includes dealing with different social norms, customs, and perhaps even experiencing culture shock, which can impact the overall experience negatively if not managed well. Language barriers are a significant challenge for many students (2.8). Those who rated this factor highly likely experienced difficulties in communication, which could affect both academic performance and social integration. This suggests a need for better language preparation or support services at the host institutions. Other unspecified challenges were also mentioned, which could include issues like housing, visa regulations, or personal matters that arise while living abroad (2.4). This category's rating indicates that there are diverse, unforeseen challenges that can significantly impact the study abroad experience.

Overall, these findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by students studying abroad, from language and academic difficulties to cultural and financial issues. Each of these barriers can significantly impact the success and enjoyment of their international education experience. The data suggests a need for comprehensive support systems from both home and host institutions to help students overcome these challenges and enhance their overall experience.
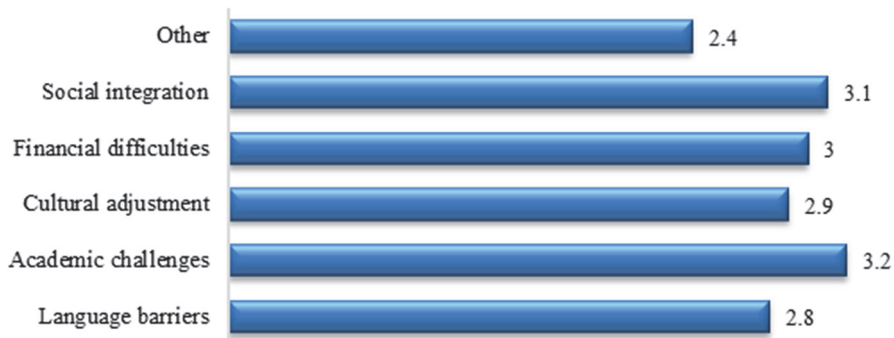

Figure 4. The main challenges or barriers faced during the study experience abroad
Source: Authors elaboration

The findings from the survey data regarding the overall experience of students in the ISM program, their recommendations to others, and additional shared experiences highlight several key insights (see Figure 5). The majority of students rated their overall experience studying abroad through the ISM program as "Excellent" (68%). This high rating underscores the positive impact such programs can have on students, offering enriching academic, cultural, and personal growth opportunities. Almost all respondents would recommend participating in an ISM program to other Albanian students. This strong endorsement reflects the perceived value of these programs in providing meaningful and transformative experiences.
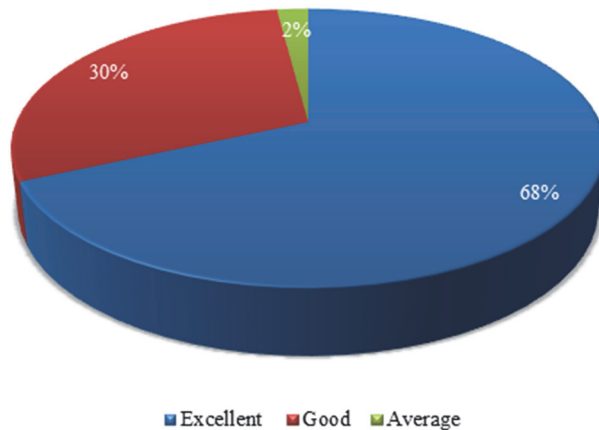
E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

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Figure 5. The overall experience studying abroad through an ISM program
Source: Authors elaboration

Finally, students share a variety of insights that shed light on both the benefits and challenges of studying abroad. Key points include:

1. *Life-changing impact:* Many described their experience as life-changing, providing them with invaluable learning and personal development opportunities that they would not have had otherwise.
2. Cultural exposure and adaptation: Students valued the exposure to new cultures and the opportunity to develop a broader, more inclusive worldview. However, adapting to different cultural norms and practices also presented challenges.
3. *Academic growth:* The academic experience abroad was often different from what students were used to at home, with some facing challenges due to different teaching styles and academic expectations.
4. *Language barriers:* For some, language barriers were a significant hurdle, impacting their social and academic integration.
5. *Financial considerations:* The financial aspect was a critical concern for many students, with some facing difficulties managing the costs associated with studying abroad.
6. Social connections: Building new friendships and integrating into social circles was highlighted as both a challenge and a rewarding aspect of the study abroad experience.
7. *Professional advantages:* Many students noted that the experience provided them with advantages in their professional lives, offering networking opportunities and enhancing their resumes.
8. *Personal advice:* Several respondents offered personal advice to future participants, emphasizing the importance of being open to new experiences, being financially prepared, and actively participating in campus and community life to make the most of their time abroad.

The findings indicate that while the ISM program is highly valued and recommended, it comes with its set of challenges that require adequate preparation and support. Students' shared experiences and advice provide a rich resource for potential future participants to better prepare for and maximize their international study opportunities.

Overall, several key push and pull factors are identified by respondents as influential in their decision to pursue education abroad. The most commonly cited push factor was the unfavorable economic conditions in Albania, with 70% of respondents indicating that limited job opportunities

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

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and economic instability were significant reasons for seeking education abroad. Over half of the respondents (55%) identified the lack of advanced academic programs, research facilities, and specialized courses in Albania as a major push factor. Political and social instability, including concerns about personal safety and governance issues, was noted by 40% of the respondents as a factor pushing them to study abroad. The most significant pull factor was the perceived higher quality of education in host countries, with 80% of respondents indicating that academic reputation, research opportunities, and faculty expertise were primary reasons for choosing a particular destination. Career prospects, including the availability of internships, job placements, and post-graduation employment opportunities, were identified by 65% of respondents as a crucial pull factor. Cultural exposure, including the desire to experience a new lifestyle, learn a new language, and engage with diverse cultural communities, was cited by 60% of respondents as an important factor in their decision-making process. Scholarships, lower tuition fees, and other financial aid options were significant pull factors for 50% of the respondents.

To better understand how these push and pull factors varied across different demographic groups, a correlation analysis was conducted, focusing on age, gender, and field of study. Younger respondents were more likely to emphasize cultural appeal (75%) and language learning opportunities (70%) as critical pull factors. They appeared to be motivated by the broader personal development opportunities associated with studying abroad. In contrast, older students placed greater emphasis on career opportunities (80%) and the quality of education (85%). This demographic was more focused on the long-term benefits of obtaining an internationally recognized degree, particularly in terms of career advancement. Female respondents showed a higher concern for safety and cultural fit, with 68% identifying these as important pull factors. They also placed more emphasis on financial incentives (55%), suggesting that financial support is a critical consideration for female students. Male respondents were more likely to prioritize career opportunities (70%) and academic quality (75%) over other factors. Additionally, economic conditions in Albania were a more significant push factor for male students (75%) compared to female students (65%). Students from STEM fields were particularly drawn to the quality of education (90%) and research opportunities (85%) available in host countries. This group also identified limited educational opportunities in Albania as a significant push factor (65%). Respondents from Humanities and Social Sciences were more likely to be influenced by cultural appeal (70%) and language learning opportunities (65%). They also placed a relatively higher importance on financial incentives (60%) compared to STEM students.

The analysis reveals that while certain push and pull factors are universally significant, such as the quality of education and economic conditions, their relative importance varies across different demographic groups. Younger students and those in non-STEM fields are more motivated by cultural experiences and personal development opportunities, while older students and STEM majors prioritize career prospects and academic quality. Gender differences also play a role, with female students placing more emphasis on safety and financial support.

5. Discussion

The data gathered from the survey of students who participated in the ISM program reveal a predominantly positive outlook on their experiences, marked by a strong endorsement for such programs. These findings suggest several implications for educational policy and program design.

The overwhelming positive feedback on students' overall experience highlights the ISM program's role in fostering significant educational and personal growth. Institutions should consider expanding these programs to offer more students the opportunity to gain international exposure (Bowman & Weaver, 2023; Granja & Visentin, 2024).

While students appreciated the chance to immerse themselves in a new culture, challenges related to cultural adjustment and language barriers were notable. This suggests a need for preparatory sessions that equip students with basic language skills and cultural knowledge before

they embark on their journey. Additionally, hosting universities could develop mentorship programs to facilitate better integration (Finn, 2017; Neff & Apple, 2023).

Mentorship plays a crucial role in developing future leaders within higher education. Daher-Armache and Armache (Daher-Armache & Armache, 2024) highlight the significant impact of mentoring in nurturing the next generation of leaders in U.S. institutions. Their study emphasizes that effective mentoring programs can enhance students' academic and personal development, preparing them for leadership roles in their respective fields (Daher-Armache & Armache, 2024). Additionally, understanding the personality traits that influence students' entrepreneurial intentions can inform the design of more effective entrepreneurship education programs. Tsaknis et al. (2022) examine the mediating role of the theory of planned behavior in this context.

In recent years, the emphasis on digital entrepreneurship has grown significantly. Institutions are increasingly incorporating digital tools and frameworks to enhance students' entrepreneurial mindsets. One notable strategy is the use of the Business Model Canvas, which provides a structured approach to developing business ideas and understanding market dynamics. This method has been found to be particularly effective in academic settings, helping students to conceptualize and test their business concepts in a real-world context. Rizan et al. (Rizan et al., 2024) highlight the importance of the Business Model Canvas in their study, demonstrating its effectiveness in improving the entrepreneurial mindset of students. They argue that integrating such frameworks into the curriculum not only enhances the learning experience but also better prepares students for the challenges of digital entrepreneurship.

Financial difficulties were frequently cited, indicating the necessity for clearer information on the costs associated with studying abroad and more robust financial support structures. Scholarships, grants, and information sessions on budget management could alleviate some of the financial burdens faced by students (Whatley, 2017).

The professional advantages mentioned by respondents underscore the importance of international experiences in globalized job markets. Universities should market these benefits more aggressively and work with career services to help students leverage their international experience in their job searches and career planning (Mok et al., 2017; Valls-Figuera et al., 2023). Effective management and internationalization of research strategies are also essential for enhancing the economic well-being and academic reputation of higher education institutions. Canaj et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of these strategies in fostering international collaboration and innovation. Additionally, the role of good university governance is critical for transforming traditional universities into entrepreneurial institutions. Daniri et al. (2023) argue that strategic governance practices can drive such transformation, enhancing the entrepreneurial mindset and capabilities of both students and faculty.

Educational institutions and policymakers should interpret the data as a robust endorsement for the continuation and expansion of ISM programs. There is a need for enhanced funding, improved preparatory courses addressing language and cultural barriers, and better integration strategies to further increase the benefits of these programs (Gümüş et al., 2020). Furthermore, strategic agility plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainable competitive advantage of higher education institutions. Rizki et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of strategic flexibility and responsiveness to changing educational landscapes.

Universities could develop more comprehensive support structures for students abroad, including financial planning assistance, counseling services, and academic support, to mitigate the challenges identified by participants (Pham & Soltani, 2021). Understanding student satisfaction with online learning environments is also crucial. Patitsa et al. (Patitsa et al., 2021) explore the impact of Big Five personality traits on students' satisfaction with synchronous online academic learning, providing insights into how personality factors can affect the online learning.

The high recommendation rates serve as a testament to the value of the ISM programs. This should encourage educational institutions to maintain and expand these programs, ensuring they remain accessible and beneficial to a broad student base (Pham & Soltani, 2021).

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

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The ISM programs are invaluable in preparing students for global citizenship by providing them with the tools needed to navigate different cultural, academic, and professional landscapes. The benefits, as articulated by the participants, include enhanced academic knowledge, personal growth, professional development, and a deeper understanding of different cultures.

However, the challenges highlighted—such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, and financial issues—suggest areas for improvement. Addressing these challenges through strategic program adjustments and enhanced support services can significantly improve the efficacy and accessibility of ISM programs (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Teichler, 2017).

Ultimately, the data advocate for a sustained commitment to and investment in international education programs. By doing so, educational institutions can better prepare students for the complexities of the globalized world, enriching their educational journey and broadening their professional and personal horizons.

6. Conclusion

The positive experiences reported by participants in the ISM programs underscore their significant benefits, which not only enhance academic prowess but also contribute substantially to personal and professional growth. These programs facilitate the development of crucial skills necessary for thriving in a globalized environment. The exposure to diverse cultures through ISM programs fosters greater understanding and adaptability, essential traits in today's interconnected world (Mok et al., 2017; Valls-Figuera et al., 2023).

The contribution of this study lies primarily in its comprehensive examination of the impacts of ISM programs on students from various perspectives. This study provides detailed insights into how ISM programs contribute to students' academic and personal development, supporting the idea that these experiences enhance learning and growth in a global context. It underscores the professional gains from ISM, such as improved job prospects and skills relevant to a globalized job market, which are crucial for students' future careers. By identifying key challenges like cultural adjustment and financial issues, the study offers actionable recommendations for educational institutions to improve the support and resources available to students, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of ISM programs. The findings have implications for educational policy by suggesting ways to structure more supportive, enriching ISM experiences that can be more accessible to a diverse student body. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted impacts of international study programs, informing future educational strategies and policies.

HEIs should offer robust language support services tailored to the needs of international students, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds. This could include pre-arrival online language courses, in-situ language workshops, and ongoing tutoring sessions. Institutions can establish language labs equipped with software for language learning and provide access to peer tutors or language exchange programs. Additionally, incorporating language support into the curriculum, particularly in the first semester, can help students adjust more quickly to the academic demands of their courses. HEIs should develop comprehensive cultural orientation programs that begin before students arrive and continue throughout their studies. These programs should not only cover academic expectations but also social norms, cultural nuances, and local customs to help students feel more integrated and reduce culture shock. Pre-departure webinars, orientation weeks, and ongoing cultural events (such as international festivals, cultural exchange nights, and local tours) can facilitate smoother cultural adaptation. Peer mentoring programs, where local students or senior international students guide newcomers, can also enhance integration. There is a need to establish or expand dedicated international student offices that provide one-stop services for all needs related to visa processing, housing, health insurance, academic advising, and personal counseling. These offices should be easily accessible and well-staffed with personnel trained to handle the unique challenges faced by international students. HEIs can offer workshops on navigating bureaucratic processes, provide legal support for visa issues, and create a helpline for international students. Additionally,

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

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organizing regular feedback sessions where international students can voice their concerns and suggestions can help institutions continuously improve their services.

HEIs should tailor their marketing strategies to emphasize the quality of education, research opportunities, and career prospects available at their institutions. Highlighting success stories of international alumni, particularly those from similar cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, can be a powerful tool to attract new students. Creating targeted marketing materials, such as brochures, videos, and webinars, that showcase the institution's strengths in specific academic areas can attract students looking for excellence in those fields. Partnering with industry leaders to offer internships and career placement services for international students can also be a key selling point. Since financial constraints are a significant barrier for many international students, HEIs should actively promote the availability of scholarships, grants, and financial aid specifically designed for international students. Transparent communication about the total cost of education and available financial support is crucial. Institutions can create a centralized online portal where international students can easily find information on scholarships and financial aid opportunities. Additionally, offering country-specific scholarships or financial aid packages that cater to the economic realities of students from developing countries can make the institution more accessible to a broader demographic. HEIs should leverage social media and other digital platforms to reach potential international students, particularly in regions where traditional marketing channels may be less effective. Engaging content, such as virtual campus tours, student testimonials, and interactive Q&A sessions, can help build a connection with prospective students. Institutions can create targeted social media campaigns that address the specific concerns and interests of students from different regions. Hosting live events on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube, where current international students share their experiences, can help prospective students feel more confident in their decision to study abroad.

HEIs should develop partnerships with universities, educational agencies, and government bodies in key sending countries. These partnerships can facilitate student exchanges, joint degree programs, and research collaborations that make the institution more attractive to international students. HEIs can establish articulation agreements with universities in developing countries, allowing students to complete part of their degree at home and the remainder abroad. Collaborating on international research projects or hosting joint academic conferences can also enhance the institution's global reputation. Leveraging the experiences and success of international alumni can be a powerful marketing and support tool. HEIs should develop strong alumni networks that can assist with recruitment, mentorship, and career placement for new international students. Creating an international alumni association and organizing regular events where alumni can interact with current students can help build a sense of community. Alumni can also participate in recruitment fairs, webinars, and social media campaigns to share their positive experiences with potential students.

Recognizing the specific challenges faced by Albanian students, such as financial constraints and cultural adjustment, HEIs should offer tailored support services that cater to these needs. For example, creating financial aid packages or offering part-time work opportunities specifically for Albanian students can reduce financial pressures. Institutions could collaborate with Albanian embassies or community organizations to offer scholarships or financial assistance. Additionally, providing information in Albanian or offering services from staff who are familiar with the Albanian context can make the transition smoother for these students. HEIs should conduct regular surveys and focus groups with Albanian students to understand their specific challenges and needs better. This feedback can inform the development of new services or the improvement of existing ones. Establishing a feedback loop where the institution actively seeks and acts upon the input from Albanian students can lead to more effective support services. Publishing annual reports that highlight how the institution has addressed the concerns of international students can also build trust and attract more applicants.

This study provides some limitations. First, the survey results may reflect a response bias, as

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

Journal of Educational and Social Research
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those who chose to respond might generally have more positive experiences, or conversely, those with negative experiences might seek a platform to express dissatisfaction (Zinn et al., 2021). Second, the survey aggregates experiences across diverse countries and universities, potentially overlooking specific issues unique to particular locations or programs (Bowman & Weaver, 2023; Granja & Visentin, 2024).

Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of ISM programs on career trajectories and personal development, providing a more detailed understanding of how these experiences influence professional success and personal growth over time (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Teichler, 2017). Moreover, comparative studies between students who participated in ISM programs and those who did not could illuminate more nuanced impacts of international education, particularly in terms of employability and earnings potential (Keresztes, 2014). Additionally, qualitative research incorporating detailed interviews could delve deeper into the subjective experiences of students, capturing complex emotional and social dynamics not fully explored through survey data (Finn, 2017; Neff & Apple, 2023).

Addressing these limitations and exploring proposed avenues for future research will enhance the design and execution of ISM programs, maximizing their effectiveness and accessibility. Such efforts ensure that international student mobility continues to serve as a powerful tool for fostering global competence and intercultural skills among students worldwide (Goren, 2020).

7. Acknowledgement

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Personal information
1. Gender:
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other (please specify)
2. Age:
   - 18-20
   - 21-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36+
3. Current level of education:
   - Undergraduate
   - Master's
   - Ph.D.
   - Other (please specify)
4. Field of study:

E-ISSN 2240-0524
ISSN 2239-978X

Journal of Educational and Social Research
www.richtmann.org

Vol 14 No 6
November 2024

- Humanities
- Social Sciences
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)
- Business and Economics
- Arts
- Other (please specify)

International student mobility experience

5. Have you participated in an international student mobility (ISM) program such as Erasmus?
   - Yes
   - No
6. If yes, please specify the countries where you have studied abroad:
   _____
1. How long did you stay in each country during your ISM program? (Please specify in months)
   - Country 1: _____
   - Country 2: _____
   - Country 3: _____

Factors influencing study destination choice

2. Evaluate the main reasons for choosing to study abroad through an ISM program? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)
   - Academic opportunities
   - Cultural exposure
   - Language learning opportunities
   - Personal development
   - Professional development
   - Financial reasons (e.g., scholarships, funding opportunities)
   - Other (please specify)
3. Evaluate the following factors in terms of their importance when selecting a study destination abroad. (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)
   - Quality of education
   - Reputation of the university or institution
   - Cost of living
   - Cultural fit
   - Opportunities for career advancement
4. Evaluate the challenges or barriers you faced during your study experience abroad. (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)
   - Language barriers
   - Academic challenges
   - Cultural adjustment
   - Financial difficulties
   - Social integration
   - Other (please specify)

Overall experience

5. How would you rate your overall experience studying abroad through an ISM program?
   - Excellent
   - Good
   - Average
   - Poor
   - Very poor
6. Would you recommend participating in an ISM program to other Albanian students?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe

Additional comments

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with international student mobility or choosing a study destination abroad?

_____