



Factors influencing Korean students' choice of study abroad destination short-term and long-term by destination country

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Abstract

International student mobility has been growing and reshaping the landscape of tertiary institutions. South Korea has one of the largest number of students going abroad for their studies worldwide, but their mobility trends have diversified recently with increasing regionalization and horizontal mobility. This study explores the factors behind Korean students' desire for study abroad by country and across short- and long-term mobility. We draw on a survey of 488 Korean university students to explore push factors associated with negative perceptions of Korean society, which have rarely been studied up to date, but are important factors shaping Korean students' migration decisions. Our findings suggest that despite differing educational focuses, factors motivating short- and long-term mobility are closely linked. While preferences for English-speaking countries as both short-term and long-term destinations are driven by importance attached to English skills and degrees and dislike of domestic education, short-term mobility has a broader scope of countries including horizontal migration to countries like China. Perceptions of gender inequality were associated with not wanting to go to Japan for short-term and/or long-term study abroad. Overall, this study is the first to articulate the quantitative association between push factors and destination countries, pointing to potential problems with the migration decision of students as they are in pursuit of better lifestyles and academic climate.

Keywords East Asia · Push–pull factors · Short-term and long-term student mobility · Internationalization of the student experience · Higher education · Credentialism

Introduction

The number of students studying outside of their home country has been increasing steadily, from 0.8 million in 1975 to 2.1 million in 2000, most recently at 5.1 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2019). This has led to a large body of work focused on international student mobility in the context of internationalization of higher education and a drive for universities to become globally competitive (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). Among sending countries, South Korea has the third largest number of students going abroad for their studies in 2016, after China and India (Ministry of Education, 2017). Korea has followed the

traditional pattern of mostly unidirectional migration from East to West, notably from Asian countries to Anglophone destinations, but such trends have diversified recently with increasing regionalization and horizontal mobility. Korean students are increasingly moving to non-English-speaking neighbor countries (i.e., China), and are increasingly opting for short-term exchange (credit mobility) rather than long-term study (degree mobility) (see Chan, 2012) due to diversifying options for study abroad offered to students. However, little is known about whether the preferred destination and decision process (push and pull factors) differ for short-term and long-term mobility. In particular, some of the most important but understudied factors pushing Korean students to study abroad are related to their negative perceptions of Korean society. They have been mostly studied qualitatively (Abelman et al., 2014; Kim, 2011; Park, 2009), but have not been explored quantitatively up to date to the best of our knowledge, a gap which we seek to address in our study. These are most likely to influence their study abroad decisions in the long-term, but we are unsure if they might

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also push students to want to study abroad in the short-term as well. In order to better understand the motivations for different patterns of mobility in rapidly changing countries such as Korea, we seek to explore Korean college students' destination choices for study abroad short-term and long-term, and their reasons for those destination choices. Specifically, this study sought to address the following questions:

- (1) What are the preferred destinations of Korean students in our sample for short-term study abroad (credit mobility) and long-term study abroad (degree mobility)?
- (2) How do students rank push and pull factors (i.e., academics, career, cost, language, culture, interest, experience) influencing their desire to study abroad for the short-term? How do these factor rankings compare to students' desire to study abroad for the long-term?
- (3) How do push factors related to negative perceptions of Korean society predict students' preferred destination country (United States, United Kingdom, Europe, China, Japan, Australia/New Zealand) for short-term study abroad versus long-term study abroad?

Short-term (credit) mobility versus long-term (degree) mobility

Short-term and long-term mobility are two types of student mobility that have different educational purposes with very different meanings and implications. Short-term mobility also referred to as credit mobility is defined as a short-term non-degree program, typically less than a year, such as the European Erasmus scheme, while long-term mobility or degree mobility is defined as a long-term migration where students take an entire degree at a university outside of their home country (Byram & Dervin, 2009).

One of the key differences between short-term and long-term study is conference of a degree, which is likely to be important in credentialist societies where international degrees are valued over domestic degrees such as South Korea or China (Kim et al., 2020; Xiang & Shen, 2009). The academic quality of host institutions is likely to be more important for long-term degree mobility where students spend time learning new skills and techniques to acquire a degree. Furthermore, the conference of a degree is likely to lead to international career choices, broadening options for long-term mobility students. Short-term mobility requires less commitment as it is less costly and more flexible compared to long-term mobility, and tends to attract students from broader social classes. More touristic reasons are likely to operate for short-term mobility, where students hope to gain international experience without investing as much time and resources.

At present, the majority of studies exploring Asian student mobility have focused on degree mobility because of the importance conferred to credentials. For instance, a new body of emerging work explores how the newly rich economic elites in Russia, China, and India send their children abroad for their secondary and tertiary education to acquire an international degree (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Van Zanten et al., 2015). Hong Kong and Chinese overseas members of the upper and middle classes were found to participate in a process of elite reproduction by sending their children abroad to maintain social advantage through their monopoly on education when faced with an increasingly competitive domestic system where they have to compete with larger sections of the lower-middle class (Waters, 2006; Xiang & Shen, 2009). Thus, studying abroad for a degree has been identified as a middle class privilege (Saxenian, 2005; Waters, 2006), and long-term mobility is more likely to be divided across class lines because they are more expensive than short-term mobility programs.

Most studies only examine Korean students' perception of long-term mobility (e.g., Kim, 2011; Kim & Roh, 2017; Park, 2009). However, a trend of regionalization or horizontal mobility of students within the region emerged recently (Chan, 2012), signaling a need to better understand the phenomenon of short-term mobility that is not related to degree-seeking. The increasing rates of short-term study are a relatively novel and undocumented phenomenon occurring in the Asian region that is no less important as short-term mobility is not only predictive of longer-term mobility by motivating students to pursue long-term study abroad (Paige et al., 2009), but also represents a form of study mobility with a different educational purpose.

Choice of study abroad destination within a global hierarchy

The direction of the flow of students has often been from countries with lower levels of development to higher levels of development (as measured by indexes such as Human Development Index and Gross National Income per capita), because pull factors attractive for sending countries are strong in economically powerful English-speaking countries while push factors propel students from less developed countries to leave in search of better opportunities. This movement is referred to as vertical mobility because it assumes a hierarchy in the direction of migration (e.g., Marginson, 2008). Students tend to move to institutions within the 'field of power' (Bourdieu, 1986) with vertical differences including institutional features such as capacity (size and subject diversity), status (the university's age or world ranking) and resources.

Although what is considered the 'best' university and the ranking based on a world hierarchy is a complicated issue

depending on the metric one uses (Deem, 2001), there is a practically unidirectional global flow of students towards English-speaking countries where most of the top-ranked research universities with elite reputations are located. It appears that the internationalization of higher education has proceeded alongside increased global differentiation of the university system resulting in greater values being attached to particular degrees from particular places (Xiang & Shen, 2009). In other words, students' choices operate within the global stratification of higher education. In the case of Korea, enthusiasm for learning English and for workplace opportunities favoring those with US degrees have been well-documented (Abelmann et al., 2009; Park & Abelmann, 2004). US hegemony exerts enormous influences on the production and consumption of academic capital, in Korea and abroad (Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2012; Kim, 2011; Kim & Roh, 2017; Marginson, 2008). The US is one of the major destinations, hosting 971,417 international students in 2016, Korea being the third largest sender (UNESCO, 2019).

Factors influencing study abroad

The push–pull factor model provides a framework to explain how student motivations interact with broader structures (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The term 'push factors' refer to the characteristics of the sending countries that propel students to pursue education abroad, such as poor quality of education, lack of research facilities, enhanced value of a foreign degree, and severe selectiveness of domestic higher education (Cummings, 1984; Lee & Tan, 1984). 'Pull factors' refer to the characteristics of the receiving countries that attract students, such as quality education, availability of scholarships and advanced research facilities, congenial socio-economic and political environments, and geographical proximity (Agarwal et al., 2007).

Cao et al. (2016) classifies these push–pull factors into external and internal factors related to students' environment and their own deeper motivations. The external factors are related to economic, educational, and social factors while internal factors are related to personal motivation and desire. External factors include learning English (Balaz & Williams, 2004), the climate/environment of the host country (Gonzalez et al., 2011), quality of the education degree obtained in host institutions (Gordon & Jallade, 1996; Linda & Reinnhilde, 2013), employment rate and income in host country relative to home country (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Tremblay, 2002), as well as career prospects (Chun & Han, 2015). Practical factors such as mobility cost (tuition fee and living costs) and financial support (Naidoo, 2007; Novak et al., 2013; West et al., 2001) are also important.

On the other hand, individual-driven factors or internal factors can include interest in mobility or interest in gaining another perspective (Cao et al., 2016; Li & Bray, 2007).

Cultural affinity and obtaining new experiences also frequently emerged as motivators for study abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Jon et al., 2014; King & Raghuram, 2013). These factors emerge throughout the literature for a wide range of nationalities including Australian, New Zealand, UK, Turkish and Chinese students (Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2012; Jon et al., 2014; Kondakci, 2011; Zhou, 2015), and have been explored as factors either predicting short-term study abroad (e.g., Chun & Han, 2015; Novak et al., 2013) or long-term study abroad (e.g., Ghazarian, 2014; Kim & Roh, 2017; Park, 2009) without a clear distinction or framework as to why some factors might be more relevant for one type of mobility versus the other. Currently the research has omitted a thorough discussion of the differences in motivation by type of mobility, although a growing body of work does examine the outcomes of study abroad by length of study (see Dwyer, 2004).

Negative perceptions of Korean society as critical push factor

As reviewed above, the promise of upward mobility through study abroad can operate as a strong pull factor while the lack of upward mobility opportunities domestically is a strong push factor, an especially critical factor for study abroad in East Asian countries. For instance, academic failure or anxiety about the future due to rapid social stratification and increasing competition domestically have been found to be prominent reasons for study abroad in China (Waters, 2006; Xiang & Shen, 2009). Despite such desire to escape the domestic exam hell as a critical push factor in East Asia, this phenomenon has rarely been explored. A growing body of scholarship now documents the strong desire for Korean youth to escape what they perceive as a repressive society and system in order to find some freedom through opportunities such as study abroad (e.g., Abelmann et al., 2014; Park, 2009).

Past research suggests how domestic educational discourse in East Asia tends to be overly negative and critical of its own system despite their high achievement in international assessment exercises such as PISA, notably in South Korea (Yoon & Jarvinen, 2016). The excessive exam pressure and bottleneck system are key reasons behind the large-scale migration in Korea that occurred in the early 1990s (Abelmann et al., 2014). The intense dissatisfaction with the domestic system is described in multiple studies on Korean students: "Korean students see US higher education as a means of liberation that resolves some of the inner contradictions of Korean higher education, including gender discrimination, a degree caste system, and an authoritarian learning culture" (Kim, 2011). Park (2009) also found a positive correlation between Korean students' level of dissatisfaction with domestic education and a positive attitude

for outward mobility, explaining the various components of dissatisfaction with domestic higher education that were qualified negatively as stressful, stagnant, repressive, driving Korean students to seek overseas study and to idealize overseas education. However, none of the studies have systematically explored whether and how these factors predict desire for short-term versus long-term study abroad, which we seek to address in this study.

Data and methods

Participants and procedure

This study was part of a larger multi-method longitudinal project examining study abroad motivations and trends among Chinese and Korean students. The first round of data were collected in Seoul, South Korea, to understand why college students want to study abroad within the context of stratification and globalization. This is the data we used for this study. A sample of 488 Korean undergraduate students were recruited from six universities. The universities were purposefully selected to include a large proportion of students who are likely to desire going abroad; they were all located in Seoul, offered 4-year college programs, had a reputation for their internationalization efforts, and traditionally sent a large number of their students abroad. Based on public data collected by the Korean Ministry of Education, the six selected universities sent 1912, 2006, 296, 844, 359, and 687 students abroad in 2017 alone. This is higher than the national average per university, approximately 200 students. Also, several institutions designated these universities top 30 Universities and Global Universities in Korea (US news ranking 2019, Jongang Il bo 2018 University Evaluation). Due to the focus on gender perception, a proportional number of male and female participants were recruited from each university.

Data collection was conducted in the Fall semester of 2018 between October and November. Students were recruited on campus, and a paper survey was distributed and collected in person. Although online surveys have been more common in mobility studies, web-based surveys have low response rates compared to paper surveys: online surveys were reported to have around a 25.7 to 31% response rate (Jon et al., 2014; Lesjak et al., 2015; Wintre et al., 2015) while paper surveys rates are higher, from 83.9% (Li & Bray, 2007) to 76% and 97% (Bakalis & Joiner, 2004). Ethical review and approval were gained from the first author's university where the study was conducted. Trained research assistants carefully explained the project and obtained individual written consent from each survey participant. Each survey lasted 20–25 min.

There were 49% female and 51% male respondents in our sample who were on average 21.27 years old (SD 2.28). Our sample was relatively evenly spread out across the grades, with a majority in their first year of university (38.4% in their first year, 25.1% in their second year, 19.5% in their third year, and 17% in their last year). A wide range of majors were represented: humanities (20.9%), social sciences (32.2%), sciences and medical sciences (37.9%), and other (9%). On average, 75.6% of our participants' fathers and 68.8% of mothers had a college education. Average family income fell between 1,000,000 won to over 7,010,000 won. A quartile (26.84%) of the sample reported that their family income reached 4,000,000 won, 36.68% reported earnings between 4,010,000 and 6,000,000 won, and 36.47% reported earnings above 6,010,000 won. These numbers are representative of the average Korean population living in Seoul. Based on the Korean Retirement and Income Study conducted by the National Pension Research Institute, the average family income of individuals in their 50 s was 4,271,000 won, and those in their 60 s 3,174,000 won. The parents of the respondents generally fell into the 50s and 60s cohort. As more than 70% of the respondents reported their family income to be over 4,010,000 won, the family economic status of the respondents is considerably higher than the national average.

12.3% of our participants reported having lived abroad for educational purposes prior to college whether for a short-term study abroad program or school. Among this group, 48% had been to English-speaking countries (United States, United Kingdom, Australia/New Zealand), 48% went to Asian countries (39% had been to China), and 2 went to a third country (Latin American or African). Students tended to circulate in one geographical region, and all who reported having been to multiple countries ($n=9$) stayed in one region (either English-speaking or Asian). On average, students spent 44.2 months abroad prior to college, from a minimum of 1 month to a maximum of 156 months (13 years).

Measures

Desired destination country

Respondents were asked to select the regions they wished to go to for short-term study abroad with multiple choices being possible (without any limit to the number of regions they can select): US, UK, Europe (excluding UK), Australia/New Zealand, China, Japan. This item was only answered by students who had previously responded positively to the question: "If you have a chance, do you wish to participate in a short-term credit mobility program?" The same was asked of respondents for long-term degree mobility.

Table 1 List of push–pull factors examined

<i>Academic</i>
Academic programs and/or reputation of the college
To pursue higher quality education
College advertisement
My current academic performance
<i>International career</i>
Career prospects and job opportunities
To expand my global professional network
<i>Cost</i>
Tuition costs and scholarship opportunities
<i>Language, culture, proximity</i>
To improve my English skills
Location of the college and practicality
Familiarity with the culture and language of the host country
<i>Interest</i>
My specific major
Interest and fit
<i>Experience</i>
To enjoy a fun and free lifestyle
To broaden my international experience and outlook
To escape from the stress and competition at home

Reasons for studying abroad

Respondents were asked to rate 15 factors that influenced their desire to study abroad on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). As shown in Table 1, items included pull factors of the host country such as the quality of education and academic reputation of the college, college advertisement and location of college/geographic accessibility, familiarity with the culture and language, costs (tuition and scholarship opportunities), career advancement and networking, and international experience. A few other factors related to the individual students were about major and grades, as well as student interest, that could motivate students to make certain study abroad choices. These items were developed based on the previous literature on student mobility, and have been used and validated in past studies of short-term (Chun & Han, 2015; Novak et al, 2013) and long-term student mobility (e.g., Ghazarian, 2014; Kim & Roh, 2017; Park, 2009). In our study, the same questions were asked of students twice, once for short-term mobility and once for long-term mobility as the factors they consider might differ across short-term and long-term. These items were explored descriptively to understand the differences in factors influencing desire to study abroad short-term versus long-term (Research Question 2).

Perceptions of Korean society (push factors)

These items were developed specifically for this study. They were developed after extensive discussions with a group of four college students over the period of 4 months when the survey was designed. The items were subsequently piloted with 10 sample college students prior to being widely distributed to check for validity. These items measure respondents' beliefs about and (negative) perceptions of Korean society that can act as push factors driving them to be interested in study abroad outside of Korea. We look at several dimensions: (1) students' beliefs about the importance of English skills and degrees (2 items, i.e., "English skills are important to become successful", "It is easier to get ahead when attaining a foreign degree (US/UK) than a domestic one"); (2) students' beliefs about the importance of credentials (2 items "I think that it is difficult to get ahead in life when I fail to enter a prestigious university", "Our society values advanced degrees"); (3) their desire to educate their children in Korea reflecting their dislike for domestic education (5 items, i.e., "I wish my children do not attend primary/secondary school in Korea in the future". "I wish my children do not attend university in Korea in the future"); (4) their perceptions of stress levels in Korea (2 items, i.e., "I would like to take a break due to excessive stress"); (5) their perceptions of gender inequality in Korea (2 items, i.e., "It is harder for female job applicants to get a job than equally competitive male applicants in Korea compared to more developed countries"), and (5) their perceptions of inequality in Korean society (4 items, i.e., "Hard work always pays off", "I think that everyone receives an equal opportunity in society"). The last batch of items measuring perceptions of inequality was based on Whyte (2010) and Whyte and Im's (2014) validated instrument of perception of inequality. The scales had acceptable inter-item reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, 0.73, respectively, for those scales with more than 2 items, dislike for domestic education and perceptions of inequality. These items were the main predictors of the regressions looking at the relationship between push factors and students' desire to study abroad by destination region/country (Research Question 3).

Control variables

The demographic variables that were controlled for were respondents' gender, grade level/year in university, current major (humanities, social sciences, sciences/medical sciences, other—sports, education), family income, father's education level, mother's education level. These variables have been linked to desire to study abroad (e.g., Cao et al., 2016). Family income was defined as respondents' parents'

average monthly income in Korean Won since respondents were still in school and often without income.

Data analysis

We first descriptively examined the preferred destinations of Korean students for short-term study abroad and long-term study abroad in order to better understand where students wanted to go abroad for short-term and long-term study (Research Question 1). The survey questions regarding the destination countries and students' experience abroad were used for descriptive analyses. We next examined the 15 most common reasons given for studying abroad (Table 1) (Research Question 2). Items were ranked by their mean score to determine which factors were considered more important than others on average. Lastly, we examined the association between push factors related to the negative perceptions of Korean society that urged respondents to leave Korea to study abroad in the long-term, and students' willingness to study abroad in each region (Research Question 3). Logistic regressions were used to quantitatively examine the associations between the negative perceptions of Korean society and students' desire to study abroad, which was coded as a dichotomous variable by region: United States, United Kingdom, Europe, China, Japan, Australia/New Zealand. Each outcome was coded as a separate variable, such that 1 = indicated they wanted to go to the US (not exclusively), 0 = did not indicate that they wanted to go to the US; the same principle applied to all other variables. We added the relevant control variables at each step.

Results

Research question 1: preferred destinations for short-term study abroad (credit mobility) and long-term study abroad (degree mobility)

For short-term mobility, United States turned out to be the top destination (50%),¹ followed by United Kingdom (34%), Europe excluding UK (37%), Australia/New Zealand (18.2%), Japan (11.9%), and China (6.2%). Very few selected any countries in the developing world: 9 indicated Latin America as a preference destination, 6 indicated South Asia, and one Africa. For long-term mobility, the order was the same: United States was the top destination (30.5%),

followed by the UK (19.7%), Europe excluding UK (15.9%), and Australia/New Zealand (7.4%). Despite the large proportion of students who had already lived in Asia, relatively few indicated Asian countries such as Japan (4.7%) or China (3.7%) as their desired destination for long-term mobility. The numbers were even smaller for developing countries: 7 indicated South Asia, 3 Latin America, and one Africa. Thus, we find that for both short-term and long-term mobility, when asked which country they desired to go to, there was an overwhelming preference for English-speaking countries, especially the United States. We note that even when more students are likely to have experienced living abroad in Asian countries, they do not select it as their preferred destination, even when given an open choice to select as many countries as they wish for their study abroad destination.

Research question 2: motivations for wanting to study abroad short-term and long-term

In order to better understand the factors shaping preferences regarding destinations, we asked students to indicate the extent to which various factors influenced their desire to study abroad for the short-term and the long-term. The push-pull factors we examined were related to academics, international career, cost, language, culture, proximity, interest, experience (Tables 2, 3), and perceptions of Korean society (Table 4) (Tables 1, 4 here).

For short-term mobility, the ranking of items reveals that pull factors such as tuition costs and scholarship opportunities (rank 1), interest and fit (rank 2), higher quality education (rank 3), and international experience and outlook (rank 4) were the highest. Factors related to interest such as specific major (rank 5) were ranked relatively high, followed by pull factors related to issues such as career prospects (rank 6). The lowest ranking factors were global professional network (rank 13), college advertisement (rank 14), and escaping from stress and competition at home (rank 15).

For long-term mobility, tuition costs and scholarship opportunities (rank 1), higher quality education (rank 2), interest and fit (rank 3), and specific major (rank 4) were ranked the highest. Factors related to academics were ranked relatively high, such as specific major (rank 4), followed by career-related issues such as career prospects and job opportunities (rank 5), and academic reputation of college (rank 6). On the other hand, factors related to language (rank 9), culture and proximity (rank 10) tended to be ranked lower. The lowest ranking factors were enjoying a fun and free lifestyle (rank 13), college advertisement (rank 14), escaping from stress and competition at home (rank 15).

We note the similarities in overall patterns for short-term and long-term mobility with equally high rankings (ranks 1 to 3) for tuition costs, interest and fit, and pursuing higher quality education. To escape from the stress and competition

¹ Each percentage hereafter is the percentage of students who selected the country destination in question. For instance, 50% means 50% selected US as a desirable destination, and 50% did not. All country percentages are not mutually exclusive as participants could select multiple countries, so they do not add up to 100%.

Table 2 Factors influencing students' motivations for study abroad short-term

Variable	Ranking	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tuition costs and scholarship opportunities	1	4.35	0.77
Interest and fit	2	4.33	0.64
To pursue higher quality education	3	4.3	0.68
To broaden my international experience and outlook	4	4.19	0.76
My specific major	5	4.15	0.76
Career prospects and Job opportunities	6	4.1	0.72
To improve my English skills	7	4.05	0.87
Familiarity with the culture and language of the host country	8	3.98	0.84
Academic programs and/or reputation of the college	9	3.87	0.79
Location of the college and practicality	10	3.8	0.88
To enjoy a fun and free lifestyle	11	3.78	0.93
My current academic performance	12	3.72	0.79
To expand my global professional network	13	3.7	0.97
College advertisement	14	3.1	0.9
To escape from the stress and competition at home	15	2.9	1.1

Table 3 Factors influencing students' motivations for study abroad long-term

Variable	Ranking	Mean	Std. Dev
Tuition costs and scholarship opportunities	1	4.43	0.74
To pursue higher quality education	2	4.42	0.65
Interest and fit	3	4.41	0.64
My specific major	4	4.33	0.68
Career prospects and Job opportunities	5	4.33	0.67
Academic programs and/or Reputation of the college	6	4.27	0.67
To broaden my international experience and outlook	7	4.19	0.8
Familiarity with the culture and language of the host country	8	4.08	0.87
To improve my English skills	9	4.06	0.91
Location of the college and practicality	10	3.88	0.97
To expand my global professional network	11	3.86	0.95
My current academic performance	12	3.84	0.79
To enjoy a fun and free lifestyle	13	3.76	1.01
College advertisement	14	3.11	0.96
To escape from the stress and competition at home	15	3	1.11

Table 4 Perceptions of Korean society (push factors)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
English skills are important	3.72	.69
Credentialism	3.88	.73
Dislike domestic education	2.93	1.04
High stress level in Korea	3.02	.89
High gender inequality in Korea	3.36	1.13
High social inequality in Korea	3.06	.70

at home were ranked last for both short-term and long-term mobility. This suggests that push-pull factors for host universities attracting Korean students may not differ so widely across short-term and long-term mobility.

Research question 3: how perceptions of Korean society (push factors) predict desired destination country by short-term and long-term mobility

We examined how push factors related to perceptions of Korean society predicted students' interest in academic mobility long-term and short-term by region. We specifically focused on these push factors only (as presented in Table 4) because they have been rarely examined in the literature despite being a potentially powerful predictor of desire to study abroad. Other push-pull factors have been extensively covered in past literature (Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al.; 2012; Jon et al., 2014; Kondakci, 2011; Zhou, 2015). We ran separate logistic regressions predicting wanting to study abroad short-term in each country/region

Table 5 Reasons for choosing to study abroad short-term, by region (push factors due to perceptions of Korean society)

	All countries B (SE)	United States B (SE)	United Kingdom B (SE)	Europe B (SE)	China B (SE)	Japan B (SE)	Australia/New Zealand B (SE)
Female	.22 (.42)	.13 (.23)	-.17 (.23)	.45 (.21)*	.44 (.41)	-.58 (.35)~	.38 (.39)
Grade level	-.02 (.07)	-.07 (.10)	.12 (.11)	.06 (.05)	.02(.24)	-.00 (.08)	.01(.06)
Father education	-.73 (.29)*	-.38 (.24)	-.37 (.15)*	-.42 (.23)~	.19 (.42)	-.72 (.36)*	-.53 (.24)*
Mother education	-.01 (.30)	-.20 (.18)	.18 (.23)	.26 (.22)	-.61 (.28)*	-.22 (.32)	.50 (.25)~
Family income	-.10 (.10)	-.06 (.08)	-.01 (.09)	-.07 (.05)	-.21 (.08)*	-.16 (.11)	-.13 (.04)**
English skills are important	.27 (.14)~	.44 (.15)**	.31 (.14)*	.11 (.08)	.37 (.20)~	.08 (.20)	.03 (.24)
Credentialism	.04 (.06)	-.02 (.11)	.08 (.19)	-.13 (.12)	.27 (.08)***	.03 (.23)	-.19 (.13)
Dislike domestic education	.06 (.08)	-.04 (.12)	-.00 (.17)	-.06 (.12)	-.11 (.19)	-.03 (.10)	.15 (.08)*
High stress level in Korea	.20 (.10)~	.16 (.10)	.24 (.15)~	.24 (.13)~	.10 (.45)	.53 (.18)**	.26 (.11)*
High gender inequality in Korea	.13 (.13)	.06 (.05)	.15 (.14)	.04 (.11)	.02 (.18)	-.34 (.06)***	.17 (.15)
High social inequality in Korea	-.06 (.09)	.10 (.13)	.07 (.13)	-.10 (.10)	.24 (.31)	.06 (.17)	-.11 (.16)

~ $p < 1.0$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6 Reasons for choosing to study abroad long-term, by region (push factors due to perceptions of Korean society)

	All countries B (SE)	United States B (SE)	United Kingdom B (SE)	Europe B (SE)	China B (SE)	Japan B (SE)	Australia/New Zealand B (SE)
Female	.22 (.29)	.01 (.23)	-.10 (.16)	.09 (.07)	.24 (.94)	-.45 (.60)	.41 (.47)
Grade level	.31 (.10)**	.28 (.11)*	.15 (.12)	.15 (.08)~	.04 (.11)	.07 (.22)	.09 (.11)
Father education	.27 (.37)	.15 (.27)	.06 (.17)	.18 (.15)	.01(.95)	-.68 (.46)	-.59 (.50)
Mother education	.02 (.42)	.04 (.37)	.03 (.19)	.02 (.31)	.07 (.78)	.32 (.57)	.43 (.51)
Family income	-.07 (.07)	-.01 (.08)	-.07 (.11)	-.21 (.10)*	-.09 (.16)	.06 (.07)	-.22 (.07)**
English skills are important	.47 (.19)*	.58 (.24)*	.50 (.22)*	.20 (.16)	.36 (.36)	-.02 (.34)	.37 (.38)
Credentialism	-.03 (.11)	-.03 (.14)	-.23 (.21)	-.15 (.08)~	.50 (.38)	.47 (.24)~	-.18 (.17)
Dislike domestic education	.36 (.14)**	.37 (.16)*	.37 (.09)***	.32 (.18)~	-.23 (.29)	-.13 (.16)	.31 (.19)
High stress level in Korea	-.07 (.07)	-.13 (.10)	-.03 (.18)	-.12 (.12)	.42 (.29)	.18 (.29)	.25 (.27)
High gender inequality in Korea	.13 (.10)	.15 (.11)	.06 (.08)	.29 (.08)***	.19 (.19)	-.36 (.15)*	.12 (.24)
High social inequality in Korea	-.07 (.11)	-.01 (.14)	.02 (.25)	-.22 (.18)	.46 (.47)	.39 (.28)	-.11 (.25)

~ $p < 1.0$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

(versus all the other regions) accounting for the clustering occurring across the six universities from which the students were originally sampled. As explained earlier, the countries were not mutually exclusive as students were free to select as many destination countries as they wished. Each time, the basic variables of gender, grade level, major, parent education, and family income were included as control variables.

Next, we examined how several dimensions—importance attributed to English skills/degrees, credentials, disliking domestic education, perception of high stress levels, as well as high gender inequality and social inequality in Korean

society—acted as push factors driving Korean students to leave for study abroad. We found several patterns for short-term and long-term mobility as shown in Tables 5, 6. Those students who indicated that English skills and degrees were important were more likely to select countries such as the US, UK, while those who indicated that credentials were important chose China as study abroad destinations in the short-term, while in the long-term, they selected US and UK. This might be because Chinese universities are becoming increasingly competitive while still being more accessible compared to universities in the US or the UK. The

admission requirement to enter the most prestigious Chinese universities were still lenient for Korean students whose GPAs were not high enough to enter universities in the US or the UK. Those who indicated that they disliked domestic education and wanted to educate their children overseas were more likely to select the US or UK as a preferred destination in the long-term and Australia/New Zealand in the short-term. On the other hand, those who felt particularly stressed and wanted to escape were more likely to indicate neighboring countries such as Japan or Australia/New Zealand in the short-term while no associations were found in the long-term. This might be because of the perception that the competition is less intense and that it is relatively easier to obtain a degree in those countries. Interestingly, those who believed that there was high social inequality in Korea were not more likely to want to study abroad in any country, short-term or long-term.

We found that female college students were more likely to select Europe as a short-term destination, but there was no association for long-term destination. These patterns are likely linked with beliefs about the level of gender inequality in the country: those who believed gender inequality was high in Korea were less likely to select Japan as their country of destination in the short-term and long-term and more likely to select Europe in the long-term.

Another interesting association was father's education. We found father's education to be negatively associated with desire to study abroad short-term overall, and in particular the United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia/New Zealand. However, no associations were found between father education and long-term study abroad. These results are puzzling in light of past studies. Most studies find parent education to be positively associated with study abroad (Pietro & Page, 2008; Soysal & Cebolla-Boado, 2020), fathers' education being a traditionally positive predictor for education-related achievements (e.g., Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011; Papas & Psacharopoulos, 1987). In the case of Korea, more educated fathers may tend to discourage their children from pursuing short-term opportunities because short-term exchange programs have now become popular in Korea as a means to relax and explore other cultures rather than study, notably in countries such as Japan or Australia/New Zealand that are less reputable academically. This phenomenon of Korean students pursuing foreign experiences to get away from their current stressful lives aspiring to a freer lifestyle has been widely documented (Chung et al., 2019; Yoon, 2014). Long-term credit mobility is a different matter as they are more likely to be associated with academic pursuit, which is why father education may not be negatively associated with long-term study abroad.

Lastly, we found that those with lower family incomes tended to select countries such as China and Australia/New Zealand as their short-term destination, while selecting

countries such as Europe or Australia/New Zealand in the long-term. This suggests that countries such as Europe, China, and Australia/New Zealand that were ranked as less desirable destinations (compared to the US, UK), were perceived to be more affordable options by Korean students. The top preferred destinations US and UK were seen as more costly, together with Japan (Tables 5, 6).

Discussion

Overall, our study suggests that preferred destinations for study abroad (both short-term and long-term) are heavily biased in favor of English-speaking countries, notably the US. We found quantitative evidence that push factors related to negative perceptions of the Korean system predicted preferred destination countries for study abroad. Top desirable destination countries (US, UK) were more costly, but valued for offering English skills and degrees, and were selected as long-term study abroad destinations by those who tended to dislike domestic education in Korea. Perceptions of high stress at home tended to be associated with students selecting Japan or Australia/New Zealand as destination countries in the short-term, while perceptions of gender inequality at home was associated with being less likely to select Japan as a destination country short-term and long-term while being more likely to select destination countries in Europe (excluding UK) for long-term study.

Previous studies have documented the flow of students toward English-speaking countries in line with the global hegemony of US degrees (e.g., Abelmann et al., 2009; Park & Abelmann, 2004; Xiang & Shen, 2009), but have often been limited to understanding long-term degree mobility. Our study illustrates the overwhelming extent to which a strong preference was found for English-speaking countries, notably the US, as a study abroad destination for not only long-term mobility but also short-term mobility. Most preferred destination countries for both short-term and long-term study abroad were US, followed by UK, Europe (excluding UK), Australia–New Zealand, Japan, and China.

Our study findings regarding the motivations for wanting to study abroad complements the large amount of work on Korean students and long-term credit mobility (e.g., Kim, 2011; Kim & Roh, 2017; Park, 2009). The most revealing motivation that provided new insights into destinations for study abroad were related to push factors related to negative perceptions of the Korean system. Push-factors related to perceptions that the Korean system is oppressive and unequal have been extensively documented in past qualitative studies (Abelman et al., 2014; Kim, 2011; Park, 2009), but have not been explored quantitatively up to date to the best of our knowledge. Our study provides quantitative evidence that such push factors might indeed be associated with desire

to study abroad, and towards specific destinations. This has serious repercussions for Korea's domestic education system, as many college students (even those currently enrolled in domestic universities) are dissatisfied at home and aspire to study abroad, leading to brain drain. The stratification of higher education and a negative perception of the domestic education system and society are likely to induce a flow of students from Korea to English-speaking nations as English skills and degrees are valued more than domestic degrees.

On the one hand, we found that disliking domestic education and subsequently wanting to send their children abroad was more predictive of desire for long-term mobility towards English-speaking destination countries, while those who perceived higher levels of stress domestically were more likely to desire going to neighbor countries such as Japan or Australia/New Zealand for short-term mobility. Australia/New Zealand, China, and Europe (that were also ranked as less desirable destinations compared to US and UK) were identified as less expensive and less competitive than other countries, while English-speaking countries US and UK were identified as desirable destinations for those who indicated that English skills and degrees were important.

Perceptions of gender inequality was particularly interesting, with a lower likelihood of selecting Japan as a destination country when students perceived Korea to be high in gender inequality both short-term and long-term. On the other hand, those who perceived higher levels of gender inequality at home were more likely to desire to migrate to Europe as a destination country for long-term mobility. This illustrates how limited opportunities for women at home might be a push factor for study abroad, corroborating previous research where female students were found to be more likely to study abroad. For instance, the number of female postgraduate students who pursue foreign degrees increased in China due to discrimination in the job market (Xiang & Shen, 2009), and female college students in Korea were more likely to choose study abroad for graduate degrees for long-term mobility compared to male students (Jon et al., 2014). Even in US liberal arts colleges, women tended to participate in short-term study abroad programs more than men (Hurst, 2019).

We note that China has started to emerge as a new alternative destination: students who indicated that credentials were important chose China as study abroad destinations in the short-term. This corroborates the perception of China as academically oriented, contrary to Australia/New Zealand (Park, 2009), and suggests that China might be becoming an alternative destination for study abroad in the short-term although it is still a less desirable destination at present. This supports the recently changing mobility trend of regionalization or horizontal mobility of students in Asia, although most Asian nations face a problem of net outflow of students to Western countries (Chan, 2012).

Students who indicated that English skills and degrees were important were more likely to select countries such as US, UK in the short-term and the long-term. Australia/New Zealand were not reflected in this choice, suggesting that there is still a very strong link between study abroad and credentialism, and degrees from US or UK are more valued overall, even for non-degree short-term exchange programs.

Conclusion

Our study thus points to several issues with implications for the field of international higher education. Firstly, students' strong bias for study abroad in countries that rank high in the global hierarchy and high value they attribute to English skills and degrees is likely to lead to increased global stratification in higher education as even short-term study abroad that do not confer a degree becomes affected by such logic. The discrepancy between actual study abroad experience (most students having gone to China) and desired destination (English-speaking countries) may further pose potential problems as students are most likely to end up in a destination which is not their original choice. In the case of Korea, the cutoff scores for study abroad programs differ by country, as more popular destinations require a higher GPA compared to less popular destinations as a minimum requirement. This is likely to reinforce global stratification.

Our study also found that push factors related to negative perceptions of Korean society were actually predictive of desire to study abroad long-term and short-term, acting as a real motivator for Korean college students who might opt for study abroad with an escapist attitude. For instance, perceiving high stress levels at home or disliking domestic education positively predicted students' desire to move to countries such as Australia/New Zealand in the short-term and Europe in the long-term. Thus, negative perceptions of Korean society might not only push students to study abroad, but also impact their choice of destinations. Despite the overwhelming preference for English-speaking countries overall, there was some variation in country choice shaped by the push factors linked with negative perceptions of Korean society. Our study is the first to articulate the quantitative association between such push factors and destination countries, pointing to potential problems with the migration decision of students as they are in pursuit of better lifestyles and academic climate. In the future, studies further examining how students' preferences translate into current mobility trends would be useful to understand how students circulate internationally.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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