Effective Factors on of International Student Satisfaction at University: The Comparative Study between Iranian and Turkish Universities

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Abstract

Today, the importance and effects of higher education have become more apparent than ever, and accordingly the popularity of higher education has been intensified. The internationalization of universities requires strategic policy to improve research, educational and service activities, so that universities worldwide compete with one another in the phenomenon of attracting international students, including these competitions on the student satisfaction with the destination university. In this regard, the present study is the applied one in terms of purpose and mixed one in terms of nature and method. Data collection was done through interviews and questionnaires. The targeted sampling was consisted of 12 international students of Ondokuz Mayis University (OM) in Turkey and 12 at the University of Tehran and the semi-structured interviews were used. Also, data analysis was performed through primary and secondary coding by Atlas T8. Ultimately, it has led to the identification of seven factors along with 35 selected codes that include concepts such as educational, research, cultural, international, welfare, administrative and social, which results in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the university, improving the university ranking, attracting more international students, and effective communication with other cultures as well as strengthening and improving global cultures.

Keywords: satisfaction of international student, internationalization of university, comparative study

1. Introduction

Internationalization is now considered an effective strategy to meet the diverse needs of the international community (Altbach, 2014), and it relates to internationalization of programs and student selection at universities (Knight, 2007). Therefore, one of the main indicators of internationalization of universities is to attract the international students (Mohe Malasia, 2011). That is why governments and institutions invest vast amounts of money on internationalization (Zaman & Mohsin, 2014). In this regard, some countries in their programs allocate some percentage of the market to attract international students. They have adopted strategies for attracting and retaining international students (Brajkovic & Helms, 2018). Given that the English language is a significant factor in attracting these students and universities know that one of the best marketing tools is the favorable recommendation of satisfied students (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). Accordingly, Michael believes that students are key customers of the university. Meanwhile, Elliott and Shane contend that the main clients of universities are students, and that higher education places great emphasis on meeting students' expectations and needs (Jurkowitsch, 2006). Sander et al. also consider students as primary customers of higher education services (Alnaser, 2010). Not only does Focusing on student satisfaction enable the university to re-engineer its organization to meet the needs of students, but also it allows the university to develop an ongoing monitoring system to deal effectively with students' needs (Tajpour & Hosseini, 2021). Therefore, the student satisfaction approach is important for developing culture and continuous quality improvement (Jurkowitsch, 2006). Assessing the student satisfaction with higher education services is essential to continuously improve curricula, teaching, staffing, and facilities. Over time, this ongoing evaluation provides critical information for effective decision-making, performance control, and resource allocation (Motefakker, 2016). So, it can be said that old international graduates and current university students from any country can be marketing to attract other students. Therefore, it is possible to keep current students satisfied by examining their needs and problems and, thus, addressing these shortcomings. International students can be considered as ambassadors of different countries (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). By paying attention to the importance and necessity of examining strategies to increase the satisfaction of international students and also providing a better ground for attracting international students, this study aims to make a comparative study between Iranian and Turkish universities for the satisfaction of international students at the university in the academic year 2019-2020. The researchers intend to

explore ways to increase the satisfaction of these students and future students. The novelty of the present study arises from the fact that so far no comparative study has been conducted for investigating the satisfaction of international students between Iranian and Turkish universities. According to studies, the lack of an appropriate model to increase the satisfaction of international students for the mentioned goals is essential. Then, the researchers seek to identify critical concepts related to the satisfaction of international students between the two countries.

2. Literature Review

Globalization is an important and turbulent issue (Carnoy, 1999). Some see internationalization as a response to globalization (Guruz, 2008). Despite these differences, it can be said that universities are the headquarters of international organizations that have been able to integrate internationalization with their title as well as the various functions of theirs (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). Internationalization is an effort that simultaneously competes and cooperates with other international organizations (Tajpour & Hosseini, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that the internationalization of the university is the process of integrating the international, intercultural and global dimensions into the goals, functions and services of universities. Internationalization is a continuous effort and a growing evolutionary feature (Knight, 2007). Internationalization is a set of activities related to the expansion of international scientific and academic cooperation and communication which aims to provide an educational and research setting at universities which is truly relevant to global perspectives and developments (Altbach, 2014). Additionally, it can also be argued that several issues affect the internationalization process of universities, the most critical of which are political realities and national security, government policies and tuition fees, increasing the capacity of higher education, English language and internationalization of curricula (Knight, 2003). In this respect, the phenomenon of transferring university students from one country to another to continue their education, which is called "student transfer", is one of the most important academic research studies related to internationalization. The countries that seek to attract international students achieve one of the internationalization strategies and, as a result, this path is ranked first among the international strategies of universities (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). Student mobility to another country creates opportunities for students to develop another country's experiences, such as intercultural skills and international perspectives, and even entrepreneurship

and business building, which are desirable for employment in the global knowledge economy in order to serve them (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). In addition to the students themselves taking advantage of the destination country, the countries of origin and destination also benefit from their existence (Tajpour et al., 2021). Therefore, there is competition between universities around the world to attract international students. Accordingly, international students study at foreign universities (Gribble, 2008). It is also estimated that the number of international students will have reached eight million by 2025 (Bohm et al., 2004). Educational and research services, especially those provided by universities and institutes of higher education, are among the most important service areas in society that lead to quality of university life such as education, research, welfare, economics and the future of personal growth. (Yu Dong & Grace, 2008). Institutional studies for internationalization can be described as, first, structural approaches and patterns of cultural behavior, and second, the role of international offices and internal communications as crucial factors in the internationalization of the institution (Yonezawa, 2017). As a result, universities need to improve their teaching and research activities in order to succeed in international competitions. Also strengthen training systems that can produce or absorb manpower (Take & Shoraku, 2018). Meanwhile, universities working in the field of internationalization respond to the needs of innovation in society, education and research in the field of business as well as research and industrial centers (Take & Shoraku, 2018). In other words, today internationalization in universities leads to the creation of new administrative structures and privileges. Internationalization of program presentation and student selection in universities is a new model of entrepreneurship that moves towards new concepts of knowledge and students (Knight, 2007). In this regard, higher education systems in different countries, due to global changes in the last two decades, have faced changes such as competitiveness and internationalization of universities (Mohammadi et al. 2009).

German universities have established a desirable atmosphere for students, researchers and experts worldwide to build their internationalization structure (Wahlers, 2018). Characteristics of an international university involve as a significant portion of international students, teaching activities abroad, international cooperation in research, international curriculum, social and scientific participation between students and the transfer of staff and students to study abroad (Neale et al., 2018). As internationalization in higher education has recently received a great deal of attention to

the globalization debate, Japanese universities have begun to develop study abroad programs to support students using international experiences (Take and Shoraku, 2018)

Adams (2016) examined the student satisfaction at regional universities in Yuna State. In this study, there was a discrepancy between priorities and student satisfaction in US universities, which included: using the costs of student activities, informing on time for financial aid etc. Progler (2014) examines international students who come to the Asia-Pacific region with cultural background and sees the university as a living laboratory in which cultural interaction can be achieved through an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to teaching (Progler, 2014). Thus, it can be concluded that the learning and behavior of international students would cause positive energy among their peers if they were excellent (Hosseini et al., 2021), as well as international students who are more satisfied are more active at the university. At the University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey, the number of international students is more than 5,000 and the number of students at the University of Tehran is 1,200. In summary, based on articles in the field of internationalization of the university and student satisfaction, researchers consider the comparative study of international student satisfaction at the University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey and the University of Tehran to be important and vital.

3. Research Method

This research is one of the applied ones in terms of purpose, it is mixed in terms of how to obtain data, therefore we are looking to answer the question of what factors increase the satisfaction of international students of Ondokuz Mayis University in Turkey and University of Tehran in Iran?
In the first part of this research, texts related to the satisfaction of the students and internationalization of the university have been extracted from library sources. The criterion for selecting the written texts had the student satisfaction, internationalization of the university and its derivatives. The second part consists of two sections: interview and questionnaire. The interview consisted of 24 people, consisting of international students who had 3 years of study at the University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey and the University of Tehran in Iran. The sampling method is non-random. In this study, interviews were conducted through semi-structured interviews and the 5w1h technique to answer questions such as: why, what, where, who, when, and how (Nikraftar et al., 2021). The codes extracted from interview 21 onwards have become

saturated and no new code has been added to the previous codes during further interviews. This number of samples was enough for the interview section. In order to analyze the data, two stages of primary and secondary coding have been performed. In this research, in order to determine the validity of the research tool, three methods have been used, including applying two tools for writing questions, correcting the questions by experts, and finally reviewing the questions by conducting two preliminary interviews. In this study, after 24 interviews, it finally led to the identification of seven factors with 35 codes. In this article, the interviews are summarized by asking ten questions about "What factors did the international students of the University of Tehran and Ondokuz Mayis cite as their satisfaction with the university conditions?" (Open interview) and also, two stages of open and axial coding were used. An example of an interview question is: What factors have international university students cited as increasing satisfaction with university conditions? What are the critical indicators on increasing the satisfaction of international university students? In the first stage of coding (initial coding), 213 preliminary codes were identified and after refining and merging similar codes, 35 final codes were identified. Finally, the codes approved by the experts were designed in the form of a 35-item researcher-made questionnaire and 120 individuals were given separately between international students at the University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey and the University of Tehran in Iran (a total of 240 international students) to collect data. The two universities were compared according to the average of each question for the satisfaction of international students.

Table 1. Results of axial coding of codes and average of codes

Dimension	Factors	Codes	Ranking		Scores	
			Tehran	Turkey	Tehran	Turkey
international student Satisfaction	Educational	Relation of course content to students' needs	*	*	4.30	4.25
		Learning job skills	*	*	4.24	4.18
		Providing space for creativity		*	4.20	4.24
		The updated curriculum	*	*	4.27	4.24
		professors' mastery of the subject	*	*	4.25	4.22

		More practical work in the educational setting		*	4.17	4.23
	International	facilitating the process of visa issuance and other things		*	4.15	4.20
		Regular and coordinated meetings of the faculty with international students		*	4.1	4.14
		Sending students with sabbatical leave	*	*	4.17	4.22
		Discovering international opportunities at the university	*	*	4.11	4.15
		using short-term and long-term scholarships of Erasmus projects		*	4.15	4.24
	Research	Scientific resources available in the library	*		4.19	4.22
		Holding scientific conferences at the university	*		4.26	4.27
		Holding workshops in the field of business	*	*	4.19	4.17
		Supporting students' innovative ideas		*	4.22	4.18
		Facilities and equipment in laboratories and research centers		*	4.25	4.30
	Welfare	Accessing to better quality of sports facilities	*		4.22	4.17
		Better access to university internet	*		4.16	4.08

		Dietary diversity at the predecessor of the university	*	*	4.24	4.21
		Dormitory health status	*	*	4.10	4.12
		Better access to medical services	*		4.25	4.19
	Cultural	Holding intercultural conferences for students	*		4.11	4.19
		Holding cultural meetings between students		*	4.12	4.18
		Adapting to the culture of the destination country		*	4.09	4.16
		exchanging culture between students and		*	4.11	4.17
		developing cultures of global students	*	*	4.09	4.17
	Administrative	University Registration Site (in English)		*	4.16	4.23
		Facilitating the student registration process	*	*	4.10	4.15
		Transparency of rules at the university		*	4.10	4.16
		Student-related staff expertise			4.17	4.21
		Updating the university site		*	4.17	4.2
	Social	Proper treatment of professors with students	*	*	4.12	4.16
		Student responsibility	*	*	4.23	4.26
		staff responsibility	*	*	4.15	4.18
		faculty' responsibility	*	*	4.15	4.18

The reasons for selecting these two universities are because the University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey is ranked 1868 among the best universities in the world in 2019. The university started its

activities with the aim of studying the scientific and technological issues to create an educational environment with the best quality. This university is among the best universities in Turkey in the international arena. The international students studying at this university are more than 5000 people from different countries. Also, the University of Tehran, as a symbol of the country's higher education, has adopted strategic plans, including a vision document on the horizon of 1404, five-year plans and a comprehensive scientific map of the country, to develop strategic plans to promote the university in all aspects. The national and international level is a practical step in achieving the goals of the university in all aspects, especially in the field of science and technology. The University of Tehran is also ranked 542 in the Times rankings in 2019. The international students studying at this university are more than 1000 people from different countries.

4. Findings

The purpose of this study is a comparative study between the international student satisfaction in two universities OM Turkey and the University of Tehran in Iran. Satisfaction was assessed through 7 factors of education, research, welfare, international, cultural, administrative and social. According to the analysis performed through the average studied propositions, the researchers concluded that the educational factor was extracted from six codes, three of which are related to the needs of students, updated curriculum and professors' mastery of subjects at the University of Tehran by international students. In contrast, the codes for learning job skills, providing space for creativity and more practical work in the educational setting with a higher score are located at OM University.
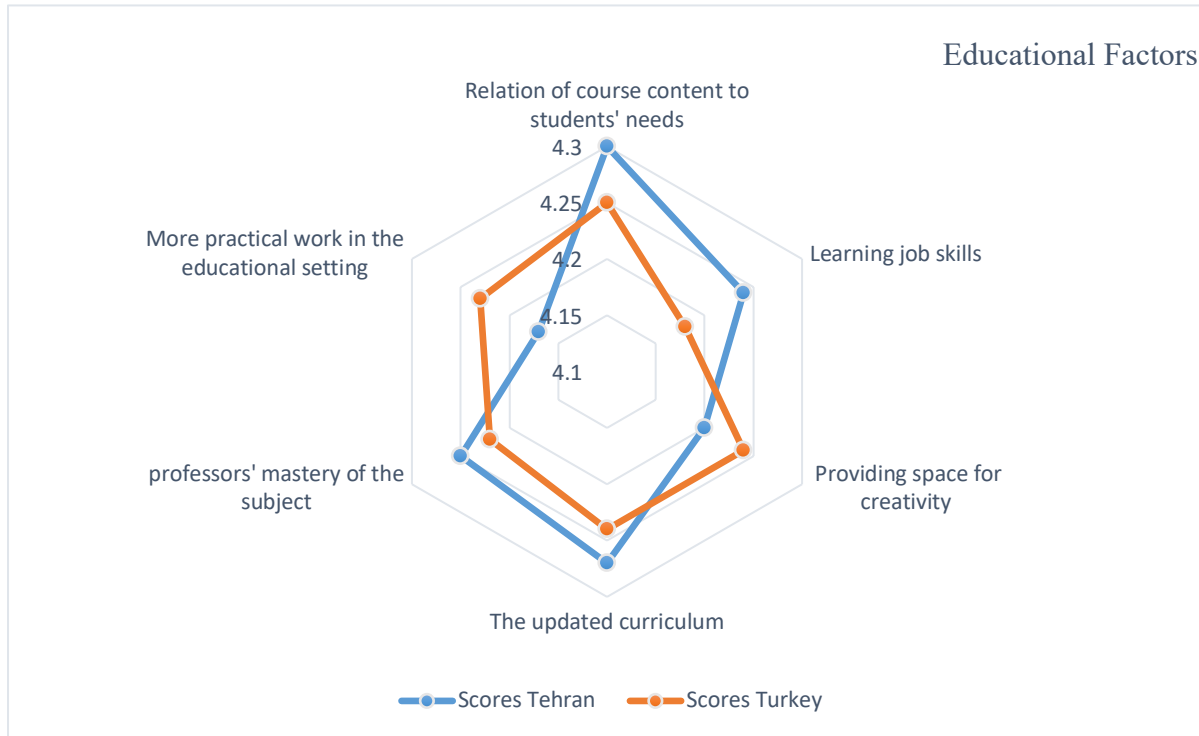
Figure 1. Educational Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

Concerning the international factor, five codes were selected, which include facilitating the process of visa issuance, regular and coordinated meetings of professors with international students and sending students with sabbatical leave, discovering international opportunities at the university and using short-term and long-term scholarships of Erasmus projects. Initially, the score between the two universities was the identical, in general, the score of OM University was higher than the University of Tehran, which can be concluded that the international students of OM University have a higher level of satisfaction than the University of Tehran.
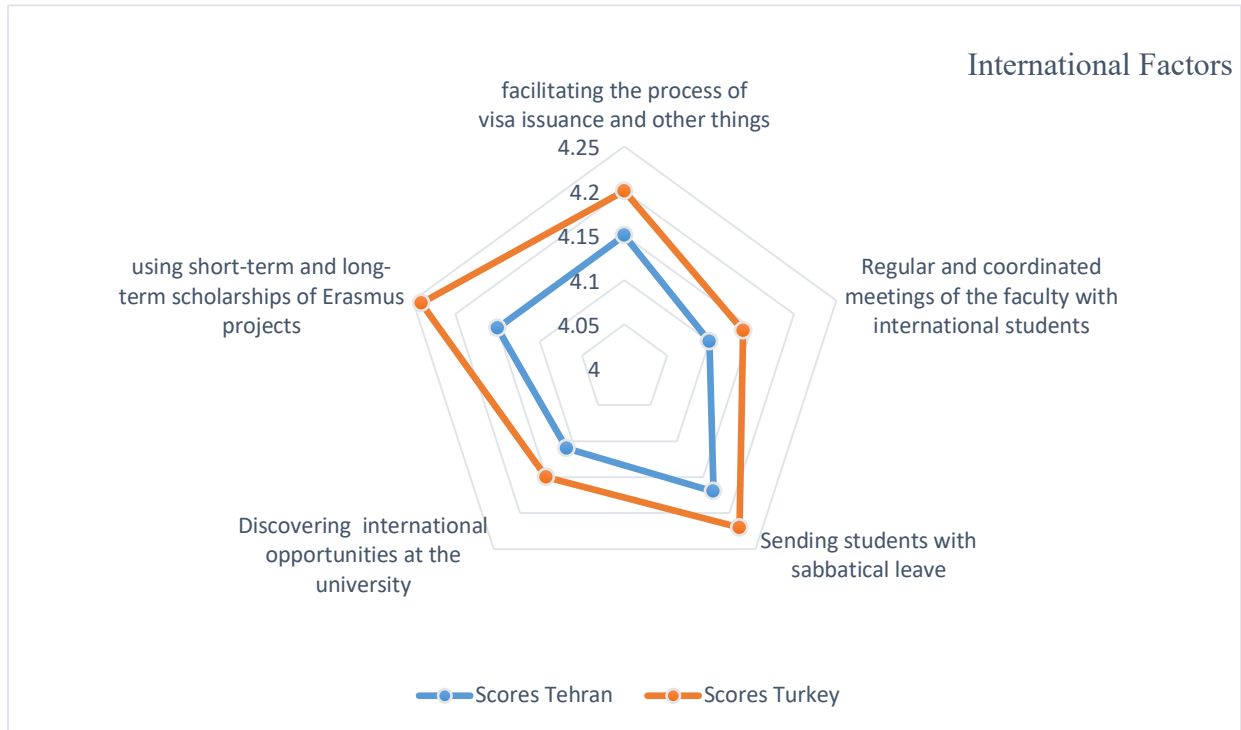
Figure 2. International Factors Affecting the Satisfaction of International Students in Turkey and Tehran

Also, the research factor has five codes, which include (holding workshops in the field of business and supporting students' innovative ideas) at University of Tehran, and in contrast to the codes (holding scientific conferences at universities, scientific resources available in the library and facilities and equipment in laboratories and research centers) at OM University.
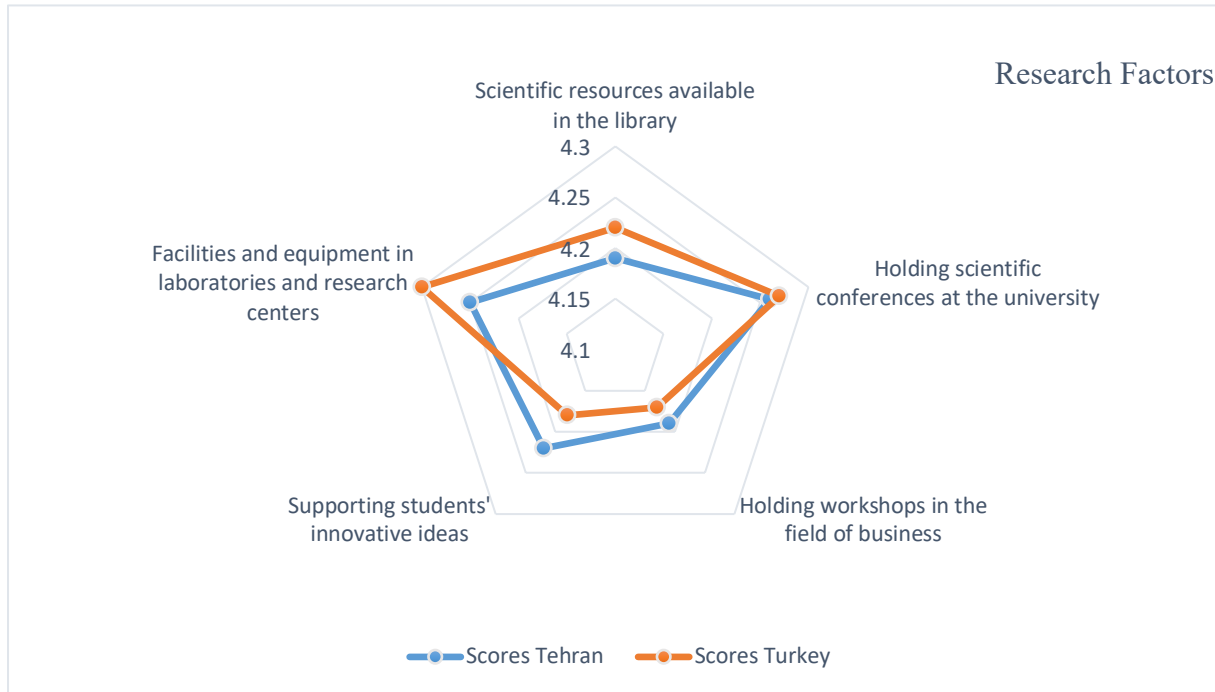
Figure 3. Research Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

Regarding the welfare factor, it can be said that the factor includes five codes, of which (accessing to better quality of sports facilities, better access to the university Internet, dietary diversity at the university predecessor, dormitory health statue and better access to medical services). The University of Tehran was more and, in reverse, the health status of the dormitory at OM University was more.
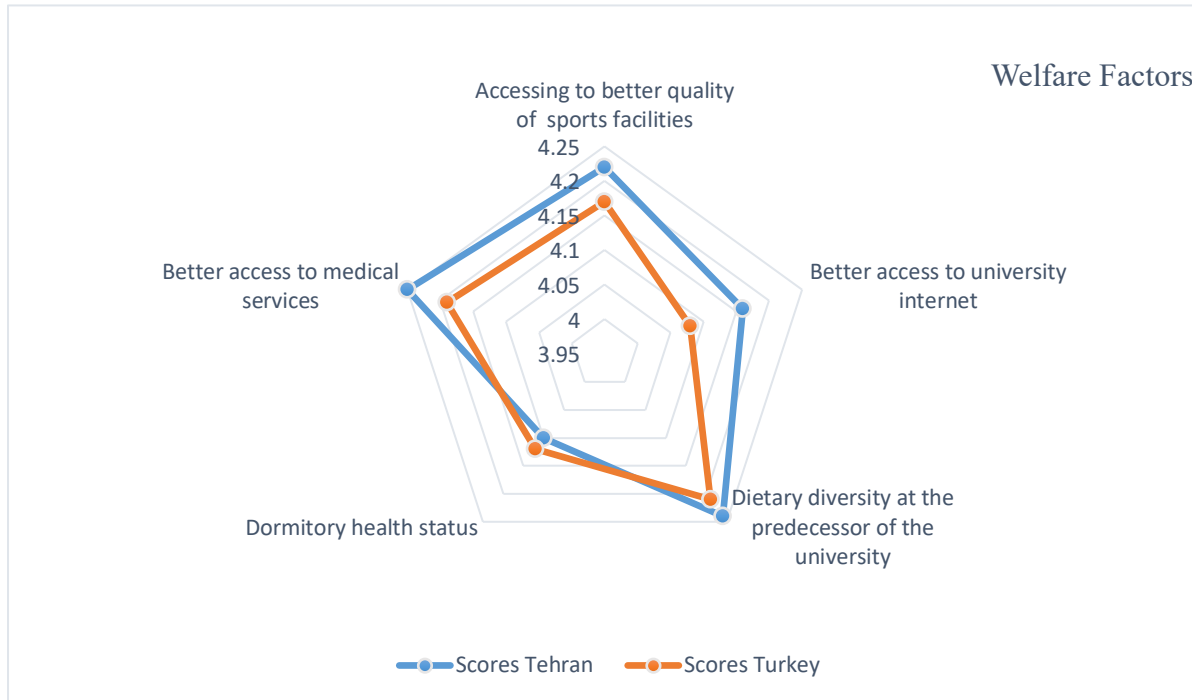
Figure 4. Welfare Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

In line with the research, the cultural factor of the five codes was identified, all five of which include holding intercultural conferences for students, holding cultural meetings between students, adapting to the culture of the destination country, exchanging culture between students and developing cultures of global students, the score of OM University in Turkey is higher than the University of Tehran in Iran. According to these scores, it can be concluded that the cultural factor at the University of Tehran, considering that it has a close score with OM University, but is more minor in all cultural dimensions.
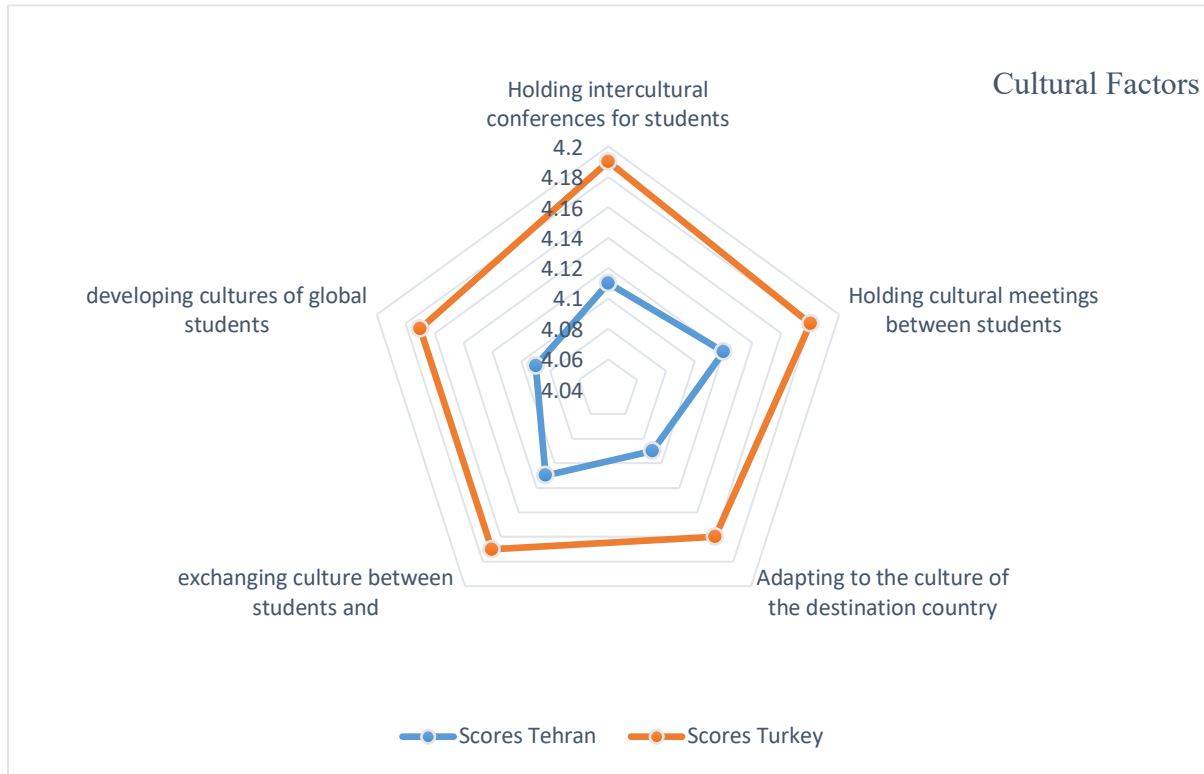
Figure 5. Cultural Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

The administrative factor in this research includes five codes. From the five codes selected, it was determined that all five codes include the university registration site (in English), facilitation of the student registration process, transparency of rules in the university, specialization of student-related staff and updating the university site are approximately same in both universities. However, scores are higher than the University of Tehran in Iran. According to these findings, it can be concluded that the administrative factor at the University of Tehran is not acceptable.
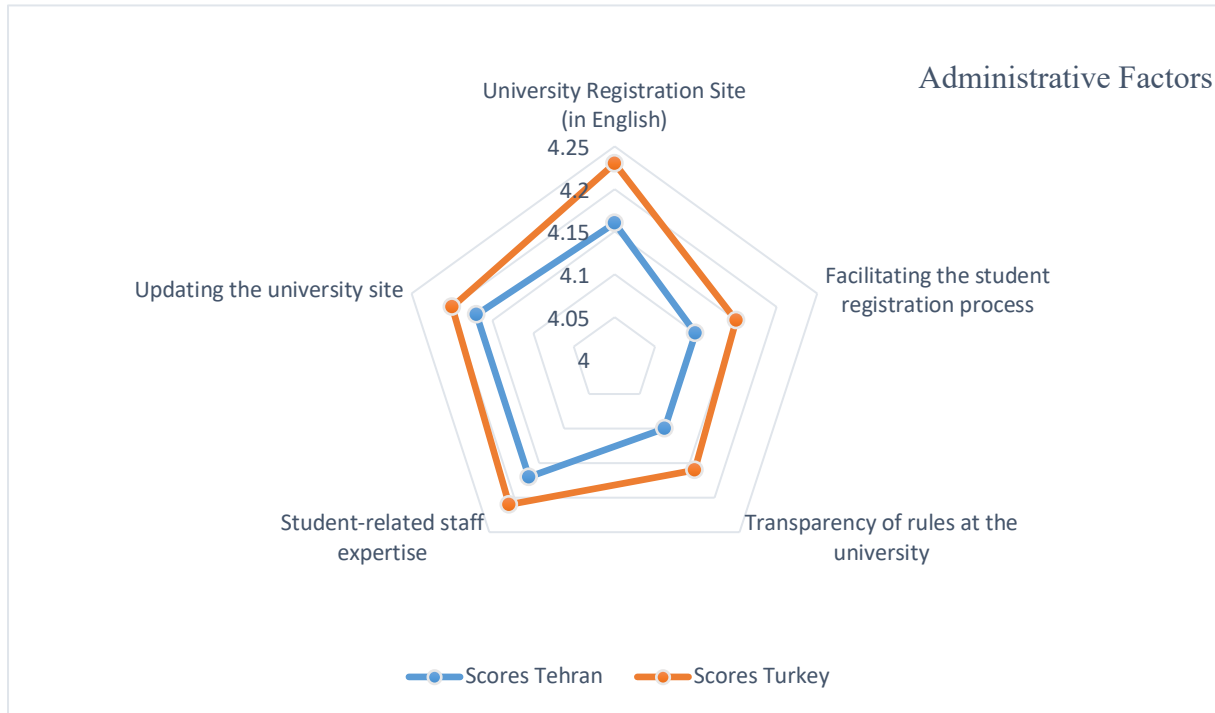
Figure 6. Administrative Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

The social factor with four codes was examined. According to the codes of the factor, which include the proper treatment of professors with students, student responsibility, staff responsibility and faculty responsibility, the scores of both universities are close to each other, in general, the score of OM University in Turkey is higher than Tehran University in Iran. According to these scores, it can be concluded that the social factor at the University of Tehran is not in good condition.

Figure 7. Social Factors Affecting the International Student Satisfaction in Turkey and Tehran

Finally, the average of the factors obtained from the research propositions is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Average Factors of the International Student Satisfaction at OM and Tehran Universities

Factor	Scores Tehran	Scores Turkey
educational	25.43	25.36
International	20.68	20.95
research	21.11	21.14
welfare	20.97	20.77
cultural	20.52	20.87
administrative	20.70	20.95
social	16.65	16.78

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this paper, seven primary factors were extracted that the educational and welfare factors at the University of Tehran are higher than OM University but the research, administrative, cultural, social and international factors in OM University are higher than the University of Tehran. According to the analysis, the main phenomenon that was a comparative study between Iran and Turkey regarding the satisfaction of international university students by researchers in this process is the international and cultural factors that is one of the critical elements in that field. It also leads to progress in internationalization and attracting more international students and it is less at the University of Tehran. Students' diverse cultures empower them in academia and enable them to be creative and use their potential (Duane Ireland et al., 2006). The diversity of student culture causes a strategic change in the structure of the university (Lombardi et al., 2017). If a university teaches intercultural curricula and approaches and is internally prepared, but the conditions outside the university are not compatible with interactive intercultural approaches, it is likely to teach in a vacuum, therefore internationalization requires an academic environment. It creates a supportive mindset among different people that leads to active participation (Yonezawa, 2017). In this regard, it is suggested that Ondokuz Mayis University and the University of Tehran take steps to strengthen internationalization and pay more attention to the university infrastructure in this direction. Also, managerial support is one of the factors that has a significant effect on attracting international students because it demonstrates the desire of managers to facilitate and promote the internationalization activities of the university. This action can be done in a different of ways, including supporting the innovative ideas of international students and providing the necessary resources or expertise for international students. Therefore, there must be a motivating factor throughout the university to change the culture and mentality of individuals towards internationalization. In order to internationalize the university, it is also necessary to establish communicative channels with world-renowned universities and scientific and information exchanges with scientific associations, as well as to welcome new ideas in the field of internationalization (Zamani Manesh, 2018; Knight, 2013).

The educational and research factors have been identified by international students in Turkey and Tehran. Education can be defined as the development of individual-specific skills (behaviors, knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that may be helpful in generating long-term advantages to society and the economy for their careers (Rae & Wang, 2015). English as an academic language paves

the way for employment opportunities and earning potential for international students after graduation (Chankseliani, 2018). The more the university pays attention to innovation support tools and creates a better platform to support the innovative ideas of international students, the more successful in fulfilling the university's mission. The results of Gruber et al. (2010) at the University of Ludwigsburg are in line with education. In the field of international student research, it is stated that laboratories should be equipped with more advanced equipment, and holding workshops in the field of business to get acquainted with the environment outside the university and to welcome international students' research projects can lead to the progress of the two universities. In this respect, it is suggested that by reviewing the international strategies and goals of the university bilateral cooperation between industry-government and university activists to reach these students should be considered in order to satisfy and improve the process, and attract international students, besides holding processes outside the main educational activities to encourage student activities in the international field.

Another factor was selected from the perspective of international student welfare facilities. Therefore, in order to have a deeper understanding of international students, multi-stage processes should be identified by activists and the key factors and activities of each stage should be taken into account (Salamzadeh et al., 2011). International students have placed great emphasis on the lack of sports, leisure and welfare facilities at the university, which has considered the weakness of these services as one of the factors reducing academic life. Therefore, it is recommended to equip the OM University International Student dormitory with sports tools. According to the findings of this study, the researcher presents the final model as follows.
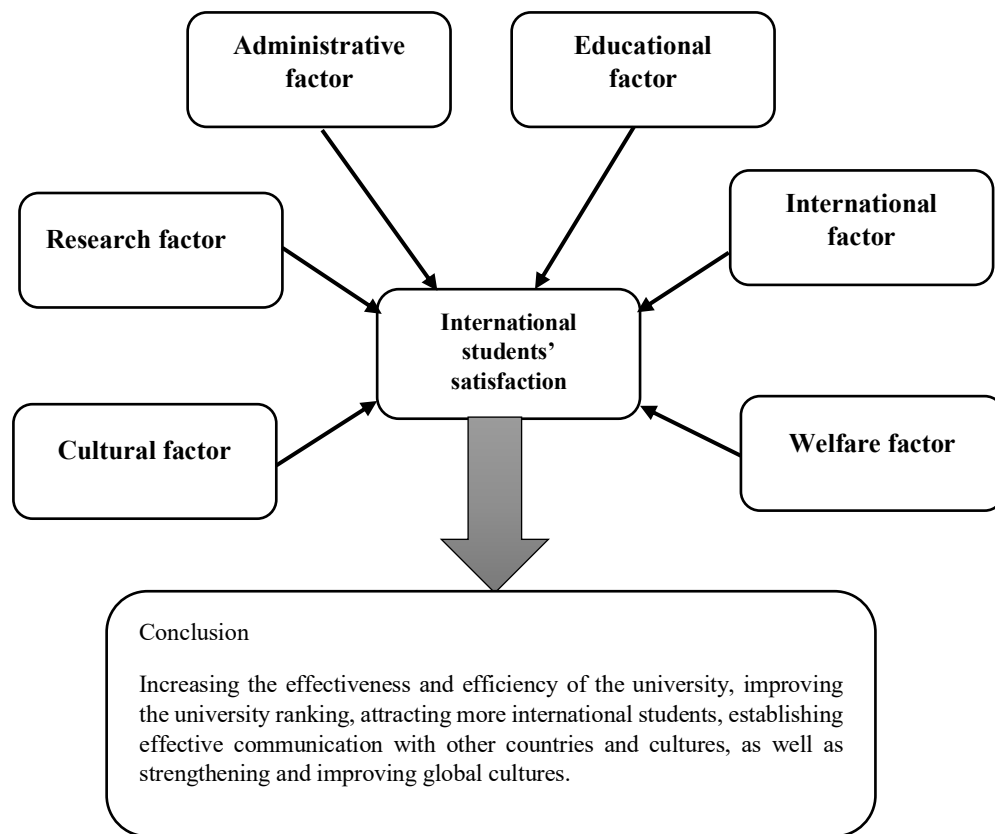
Figure 7. Final Research Model (Researcher Findings)

The results also demonstrate that the more competitive the job market, the better the hope of finding a good job for many college graduates. In addition, it can be said that the student satisfaction with the university increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the university improves its ranking, attracts more international students, establishes effective communication with other cultures and also strengthens and improves global cultures. Finally, it can be concluded that the intermittent and effective communication by the staff in the international field of the university will attract more international students in this university. Researchers in this field are also suggested to use the final model of this paper in their quantitative research or comparison of their university and other universities nationally or internationally.

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