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Student Satisfaction in a Vietnamese-Austrian Joint Degree Program: A Four-Domain Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Evidence on student experience in long-running joint degrees in Vietnam remains limited. This study examined associations between four program-quality domains and satisfaction in the Tourism and Travel Management joint degree offered by Hanoi University and IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems. A cross-sectional online survey produced 101 valid responses from current students and alumni representing cohorts from 2013-2025. Five-point Likert-type data were summarized descriptively and analyzed using multiple linear regression in SPSS 26. Overall satisfaction was M = 3.91 (SD = 0.79), with 73% satisfied or very satisfied. Academic and teaching quality had the largest reported coefficient (0.42, $p < .001$), followed by student support services (0.31, $p = .002$), learning environment and facilities (0.25, $p = .011$), and program image and reputation (0.18, $p = .037$). Lecturer quality received the highest item mean (M = 4.15), whereas classroom facilities received the lowest (M = 3.41); program recognition had the lowest satisfaction percentage (49%). The results support prioritizing teaching quality, career-facing support, and learning conditions. Because the sample was nonprobabilistic and the available analysis omitted full reliability, model-fit, and diagnostic statistics, the results are interpreted as program-specific associations rather than causal effects.

IMPACT STATEMENT

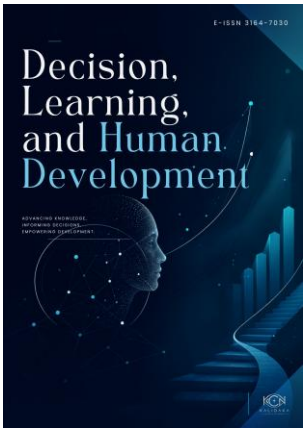
Program leaders can use these results to sequence improvements without treating satisfaction as a measure of learning achievement. The program should preserve strong teaching and accessible staff, then focus on classroom conditions, career guidance, and evidence that makes program recognition and graduate pathways more visible. In joint-degree settings, this approach links resource decisions to the conditions that support student participation and professional preparation.

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1. Introduction

Student satisfaction is an evaluative judgment about whether an educational experience meets students' academic and service expectations. In higher education, that judgment is shaped by interaction with teachers, the coherence of services, institutional image, and the quality of the learning environment [1], [2], [3], [4]. Satisfaction is therefore useful to program leaders because it condenses several parts of the student experience into an outcome that can guide decisions about teaching, support, facilities, and communication. It should not, however, be treated as a complete proxy for learning or human development.

This distinction becomes more important in transnational education. Joint and branch-campus arrangements ask students to navigate curricula, assessment practices, administrative systems, and academic cultures that cross institutional and national boundaries. Studies of transnational and branch-campus provision show that students evaluate academic delivery together with local support, campus conditions, institutional identity, and the fit between expectations and the experience received [5], [6], [7], [8]. A program can therefore deliver a recognized qualification while still producing uneven experiences across the academic and service domains that sustain learning.

The Tourism and Travel Management program jointly offered by Hanoi University and IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems has operated since 2013. Its cross-institutional delivery brings Vietnamese students into contact with Vietnamese and Austrian faculty and with teaching practices associated with both institutions. This setting provides a focused opportunity to examine which dimensions of program quality are most closely associated with satisfaction in a long-running Vietnamese-European partnership.

This study examines a 2025 survey of 101 current students and alumni. It considers four dimensions of their program experience: academic and teaching quality, learning environment and facilities, student support services, and program image and reputation. The analysis identifies priorities for program improvement while treating the cross-sectional results as associations rather than causal effects.

1.1. Research problem and gap

Most student-satisfaction models were developed for conventional institutional settings. They offer useful measures of academic and service quality, but they do not automatically capture the coordination demands of a joint degree, where the learning experience is produced across two institutions and two academic cultures. Existing transnational studies also concentrate heavily on international branch campuses and large destination markets. Evidence from jointly delivered programs in Vietnam remains comparatively limited.

A second gap concerns analytical use. Satisfaction studies often report an overall score without distinguishing between core academic provision and enabling conditions such as advising, facilities, and reputation. The present study addresses this gap by comparing the reported relationships of four program-quality domains with overall satisfaction and by linking item-level ratings to practical priorities. Language of instruction is treated as a contextual feature of academic delivery, not as a measured independent construct, because the source questionnaire did not report a separate language scale.

1.2. Research objectives and hypotheses

The study asks: Which program-quality domains are associated with overall student satisfaction in the Hanoi University-IMC Krems joint degree program, and which aspects of the student experience warrant priority attention? Four hypotheses were specified: academic and teaching quality (H1), learning environment and facilities (H2), student support services (H3), and program image and reputation (H4) would each show a positive association with overall satisfaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Educational service quality and satisfaction

Performance-based service-quality models distinguish the service actually experienced from prior expectations [9]. Higher-education adaptations such as HEdPERF and later hierarchical models broaden this logic beyond classroom instruction to include nonacademic services, access, reputation, and the physical environment [10], [11], [12]. This broader treatment is appropriate because students encounter a program as a connected system: curriculum and teaching remain central, but administrative processes, information, advising, and facilities can either support or obstruct academic participation.

Conceptual and empirical studies consistently place perceived quality upstream of satisfaction, although they differ in how quality is operationalized [13], [14], [15]. Work on retention further shows that academic experience and institutional services are not interchangeable; each can contribute to whether students remain satisfied and continue their relationship with an institution [16]. The implication is not that every service dimension should receive equal investment. It is that program managers need evidence about the relative salience of each dimension in their own setting.

Institutional image enters this framework as both an interpretive lens and a potential consequence of experience. Students may use reputation to reduce uncertainty before enrollment, while their subsequent experience can confirm or weaken that image. Studies across higher-education settings link service quality, satisfaction, image, and loyalty intentions, but generally find that their strengths vary by institutional

context [17], [18], [19]. This variation supports estimating academic quality, support, facilities, and image as related but distinct predictors.

2.2. Satisfaction, engagement, and continued participation

Satisfaction also matters because it is associated with students' willingness to maintain and advocate for an institutional relationship. Loyalty models connect satisfaction with continued participation and recommendation [20], [21], while broader performance frameworks associate the student experience with perceived learning and dropout intentions [22]. These links do not make satisfaction equivalent to achievement. Rather, they position satisfaction as one condition that may support engagement and persistence.

A developmental interpretation therefore requires restraint. Student engagement reflects the interaction between learners and institutional conditions [23], and retention research emphasizes that persistence is produced through sustained academic and social integration rather than a single attitude measure [24]. For the present study, human-development relevance lies in whether the program creates conditions for participation, intercultural learning, career preparation, and continued educational involvement. Those outcomes are implications to be investigated, not outcomes directly measured by the survey.

2.3. Student experience in transnational higher education

Transnational education includes several arrangements in which programs, providers, or qualifications cross national borders [25]. Across Asian settings, students often select these arrangements for international exposure and credentials while remaining embedded in local social and institutional contexts [26]. Their decisions are shaped by perceived quality, career value, cost, and the credibility of the partnership [27], [28]. These conditions make satisfaction partly a judgment about coordination: students evaluate whether the promised international experience is delivered coherently in the local setting.

Teaching and assessment can be especially sensitive points. Research in transnational partnerships shows that students interpret participation, feedback, assessment, and teacher-student relationships through different educational expectations [29], [30], [31]. Socio-cultural adaptation difficulties can also depress satisfaction when support systems do not help students interpret unfamiliar practices [32]. In programs using English or another additional language, language-related perceptions may shape how students evaluate teaching and their ability to participate [33].

Evidence from international programs further shows that local students judge academic delivery together with service responsiveness and institutional reputation [34], [35]. Physical settings remain consequential because campus design, resources, and classroom conditions structure daily learning activity [36]. Studies of branch campuses find that these judgments can differ across sites and cohorts [37], while newer evidence indicates that younger students bring explicit expectations about academic support, flexibility, and campus experience [38]. These findings justify a model that keeps academic quality, support, facilities, and image analytically separate.

2.4. Vietnamese and tourism-education contexts

Vietnamese evidence similarly identifies teaching, administrative support, facilities, and reputation as recurring components of perceived higher-education quality [39], [40], [41]. The local relevance of these dimensions supports their use in the present program, but it does not remove the need to interpret them through the joint-degree context. The same service label may represent a different experience when responsibilities are distributed across partner institutions.

The disciplinary setting also matters. In tourism and hospitality education, satisfaction has been linked with active learning, academic motivation, engagement, and the practical orientation of study [42], [43]. Students may therefore judge curriculum relevance, lecturer interaction, career guidance, and internship support as connected parts of professional preparation rather than as isolated services.

Across countries, recent studies continue to find positive relationships between perceived service quality and satisfaction, although the relative importance of individual dimensions differs [44], [45], [46], [47], [48]. Digital-learning research adds that continuity and support depend on the perceived usefulness and reliability of the learning system [49]. Quality-assurance scholarship likewise distinguishes routine control from evidence-led enhancement [50]. Together, this literature supports using satisfaction data to identify where program decisions can improve the student experience without claiming that a single survey establishes causal effects. Figure 1 summarizes the analytical model.

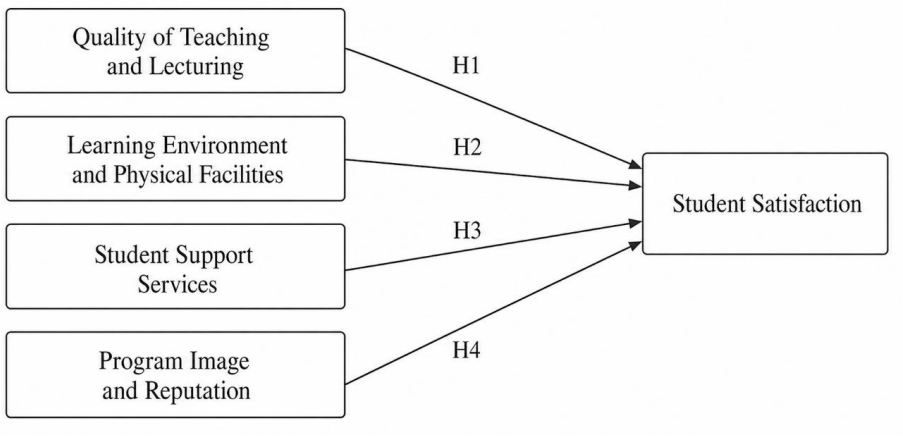


Figure 1. Proposed analytical model of student satisfaction.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The study used a cross-sectional quantitative survey to estimate associations between four program-quality domains and overall student satisfaction. Because the survey captured perceptions at one point in time and did not manipulate program conditions, the regression estimates are interpreted as predictive associations rather than causal effects.

3.2. Participants, sampling, and setting

Participants were current students and alumni of the Tourism and Travel Management joint degree program at the International Education Centre, Hanoi University. Eligible cohorts spanned 2013-2025. The questionnaire was distributed from 28 April to 12 May 2025 through email, Zalo, and the program's Facebook page. Convenience sampling yielded 101 valid questionnaires after screening. The total eligible population, number invited, number of invalid responses, and response rate were not recorded in the materials available for this report. Approximately 60% of respondents were current students and 40% were alumni; respondents from the 2021-2024 cohort group formed the largest share.

3.3. Instrument and operational domains

The researcher-adapted online questionnaire used five-point Likert-type responses ranging from strong disagreement or very low satisfaction to strong agreement or very high satisfaction. Questionnaire indicators covered academic and teaching quality, learning environment and facilities, student support services, program image and reputation, and overall satisfaction. Recommendation and intention to participate in related future training were recorded as single outcomes. The instrument was pilot-tested with a small group to improve item clarity, but the pilot size and revision protocol were not recorded. Table 1 summarizes the constructs, indicators, and analytical roles.

Table 1. Study constructs, indicators, and analytical roles.

Construct	Indicators	Role
Academic and teaching quality	Lecturer quality; lecturer support and accessibility; curriculum relevance; assessment and feedback	Predictor (H1)
Learning environment and facilities	Learning environment; learning resources and materials; classroom facilities	Predictor (H2)
Student support services	Staff attitude and supportiveness; information communication; academic or career counseling and support	Predictor (H3)
Program image and reputation	Program recognition and reputation; post-graduation career opportunities	Predictor (H4)
Overall student satisfaction	Overall satisfaction rating	Dependent variable

3.4. Data analysis and reporting boundaries

IBM SPSS Statistics 26 was used for descriptive statistics, internal-consistency assessment, and multiple linear regression. Means, standard deviations, and the percentage selecting satisfied or very satisfied were reported for the principal indicators. Internal consistency was assessed, but Cronbach's alpha coefficients,

the criterion applied, item-total statistics, and the exact item composition of each regression score were not available for reporting. No reliability values are reconstructed or inferred.

The regression model treated overall satisfaction as the dependent variable and the four program-quality domains as predictors. The available output included a coefficient and p-value for each predictor but omitted unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, confidence intervals, model R-squared, an omnibus F test, multicollinearity diagnostics, residual checks, and assumption tests. The coefficients are therefore used only to compare the reported direction and relative magnitude of associations. They do not establish causal effects or permit a complete evaluation of model adequacy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Item-level evaluations and overall satisfaction

Item-level ratings were generally favorable, with means ranging from 3.41 to 4.15 on the five-point scale (Table 2). Lecturer quality received the highest mean (M = 4.15, SD = 0.72), followed by staff attitude and supportiveness (M = 4.13, SD = 0.73) and lecturer support and accessibility (M = 4.12, SD = 0.74). These ratings place direct interaction with academic and administrative staff among the strongest reported features of the program.

The weakest item was classroom facilities (M = 3.41, SD = 0.94; 58% satisfied or very satisfied). Program recognition and reputation was also comparatively weak (M = 3.63, SD = 0.91), and only 49% selected satisfied or very satisfied. Academic or career counseling and support was rated at M = 3.79 (SD = 0.86), below the ratings for staff attitude and information communication. The pattern suggests that interpersonal service was evaluated more favorably than physical infrastructure, career-facing support, and brand recognition.

Table 2. Student satisfaction ratings by indicator.

Domain and indicator	M	SD	Satisfied or very satisfied
Academic and teaching quality			
Lecturer quality	4.15	0.72	83%
Lecturer support and accessibility	4.12	0.74	82%
Curriculum relevance	3.95	0.81	76%
Assessment and feedback	3.88	0.83	75%
Learning environment and facilities			
Learning environment	4.05	0.76	76%
Learning resources and materials	3.96	0.79	72%
Classroom facilities	3.41	0.94	58%
Student support services			
Staff attitude and supportiveness	4.13	0.73	81%
Effectiveness of information communication	3.95	0.78	74%
Academic or career counseling and support	3.79	0.86	71%
Program image and reputation			
Program recognition and reputation	3.63	0.91	49%
Post-graduation career opportunities	3.98	0.82	69%
Overall satisfaction	3.91	0.79	73%

Note. N = 101. Percentages indicate respondents selecting satisfied or very satisfied; blank cells are domain headings rather than additional estimates.

Overall satisfaction was M = 3.91 (SD = 0.79), with 73% of respondents reporting satisfaction or strong satisfaction. In addition, 67% indicated willingness to recommend the program, and 73% reported an intention to participate in related training programs in the future. These percentages describe stated intentions; they were not tested as behavioral outcomes or modeled as consequences of satisfaction.

4.1.2. Reported predictors of overall satisfaction

All four predictors had positive reported coefficients and p-values below .05 (Table 3). Academic and teaching quality had the largest coefficient (0.42, $p < .001$), followed by student support services (0.31, $p = .002$), learning environment and facilities (0.25, $p = .011$), and program image and reputation (0.18, $p = .037$). On this basis, H1-H4 were supported as positive associations. Because model-fit and diagnostic statistics were unavailable, the model's explanatory power and coefficient stability could not be evaluated.

Table 3. Multiple-regression results for overall student satisfaction.

Hypothesis	Predictor	Estimate	p	Decision
H1	Academic and teaching quality	0.42	< .001	Supported
H2	Learning environment and facilities	0.25	.011	Supported
H3	Student support services	0.31	.002	Supported
H4	Program image and reputation	0.18	.037	Supported

Note. N = 101. The available output did not indicate whether the coefficients were standardized and did not include confidence intervals, model fit, R-squared, or diagnostic statistics.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Academic quality in a cross-institutional program

Academic and teaching quality had the largest reported coefficient and showed the strongest association with satisfaction. This result is consistent with research that places teacher interaction, curriculum coherence, and the quality of the academic experience near the center of student evaluations [1], [10], [11], [15]. The high ratings for lecturer quality and accessibility indicate that students valued the interpersonal dimension of program delivery. In a joint degree, coordination between partner curricula becomes visible through the teaching students encounter, the feedback they receive, and the practical relevance they perceive.

The Vietnamese-Austrian delivery arrangement adds a language and intercultural layer, but the evidence must be read carefully. Research on transnational teaching and English-medium instruction shows that language-related perceptions can shape participation and satisfaction [29], [30], [31], [32], [33]. In this survey, however, language of instruction was embedded in the program context and was not measured as a separate construct. The favorable academic ratings cannot establish that students experienced no language barriers. A future instrument should measure language accessibility, pedagogical adjustment, and intercultural learning directly.

4.2.2. Support, facilities, and program image

Student support services had the second-largest coefficient. The contrast within this domain is more informative than the domain label alone: respondents rated staff attitude highly, but counseling, career guidance, and related support were weaker. Comparable studies show that responsive support contributes to satisfaction in international and Vietnamese settings [32], [34], [35], [41]. The program should therefore preserve responsive administrative contact while strengthening the parts of support that connect study with internships, employment, and further training.

Learning environment and facilities remained positively associated with satisfaction, and classroom facilities produced the lowest item mean. This pattern accords with transnational servicescape research, which treats the physical environment as part of the educational experience rather than a background condition [36]. Facilities should nevertheless be prioritized against their educational function. Improvements that increase access to learning materials, collaborative activity, instructional technology, or professionally relevant simulation are more defensible than cosmetic investment alone.

Program image and reputation produced the smallest coefficient but should not be dismissed. The international qualification and reported career opportunities were evaluated more favorably than brand recognition. Image research suggests that reputation influences how students interpret quality and whether they recommend an institution [17], [18], [19], [20], [21]. The result points to an evidence-based communication problem: the partnership may need clearer public accounts of curriculum standards, graduate pathways, industry relationships, and student outcomes. Promotional activity without corresponding academic and career evidence would be unlikely to resolve the underlying gap.

4.2.3. Implications for program decisions and learner development

The findings point to four practical priorities. Lecturer quality, accessibility, and curriculum relevance should remain protected because academic and teaching quality had the strongest association with satisfaction. Improvements to classrooms and learning resources should target barriers to participation and professionally relevant learning activities. Advising, internship coordination, and career guidance require more systematic support. Program visibility should rely on verifiable curriculum standards, industry links, and graduate pathways rather than promotional claims alone. Table 4 connects each priority to the observed evidence.

Table 4. Evidence-linked priorities for program improvement.

Priority domain	Evidence in this study	Decision implication
Teaching and curriculum	Largest coefficient; lecturer quality M = 4.15	Protect lecturer quality and accessibility; review curriculum relevance and feedback as connected academic processes.
Career-facing support	Support coefficient = 0.31; counseling and support M = 3.79	Strengthen advising, internship coordination, and documented pathways from study to employment.
Learning environment	Facilities coefficient = 0.25; classroom facilities M = 3.41	Prioritize improvements that directly enable learning, collaboration, instructional technology, and professional practice.
Program evidence and visibility	Image coefficient = 0.18; recognition satisfaction = 49%	Communicate verifiable curriculum standards, partnership value, industry links, and graduate pathways.

Note. Priorities are interpretations of the observed ratings and reported coefficients; they are not causal estimates of the effect of future interventions.

The four domains show how institutional choices shape the conditions in which students participate, learn, and prepare for professional work. Accessible teaching, responsive administration, usable learning environments, and credible career pathways are relevant to learner development in a joint-degree setting. Engagement, intercultural competence, achievement, and employment were not measured directly, so future research should test these pathways rather than assume them.

4.2.4. Limitations and future research

Several limitations constrain the conclusions. The sample was small, nonprobabilistic, and drawn from one program; current students and alumni were combined; and all measures were self-reported. Cohorts spanning 2013-2025 may have experienced different curricula, facilities, or labor-market conditions, but the available data did not support a documented cohort comparison. The instrument was researcher-adapted, the pilot sample was not reported, and alpha coefficients were omitted. Regression diagnostics, model fit, and participant-level data were unavailable, preventing independent reanalysis. Future studies should use a documented sampling frame, report full measurement properties, analyze current students and alumni separately, test measurement invariance where feasible, and combine survey evidence with interviews or focus groups.

5. Conclusion

Student satisfaction in the Hanoi University-IMC Krems joint degree program was most strongly associated with academic and teaching quality, followed by student support services, learning environment and facilities, and program image and reputation. Overall satisfaction was favorable, but classroom facilities, program recognition, and academic or career support received weaker evaluations. Program improvement should therefore preserve teaching quality, remove practical barriers to learning, strengthen career-facing support, and communicate program value through verifiable evidence. These findings apply to the surveyed program and should not be interpreted as causal or generalized to other partnerships without further study. The study demonstrates how a multidimensional satisfaction survey can support transparent decisions about a transnational learning environment while keeping its evidentiary limits explicit.

Ethics approval statement

The study records did not identify an ethics-review body or approval number; therefore, no ethics approval identifier is reported.

Informed consent statement

The study records did not document the consent procedure used for the online survey; therefore, no consent procedure is reported.

Author contribution statement

Both authors are responsible for the submitted work. Vu Thi Huyen is the corresponding author.

Disclosure statement

No conflict of interest was identified in the study records.

AI-assisted technologies disclosure

AI-assisted tools were used only for language editing, structural refinement, reference checking, and formatting. No tool was used to generate or alter participant data or statistical results. The authors reviewed the final text and remain responsible for its accuracy, originality, source verification, and integrity.

Data availability statement

The participant-level dataset and analysis files are not publicly available. Requests may be directed to the corresponding author and remain subject to institutional requirements and participant-protection obligations.

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