

# From Experience to Endorsement: Determinants of Satisfaction and Intention to Recommend International Student Mobility

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## ABSTRACT

Studying abroad brings valuable experiences and benefits, not just for the students themselves, but also for the home and host countries. While these opportunities provide global exposure and help build human capital, many students still face hurdles. Challenges such as high living expenses, a lack of emotional and academic support, and difficulties adjusting to new cultures can impact their level of satisfaction and whether they would recommend the program to others. This study aims to examine the influence of physical (environment, cost, and personal safety) and social factors (emotional support, ethical conduct, and student-lecturer attachment) on Indonesian students' satisfaction with international mobility programs, and how satisfaction impacts their intention to recommend these programs to others. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected from 202 Indonesian students who had participated in international mobility programs in the last 4 years through purposive sampling. An online questionnaire, adapted from validated instruments, was distributed via digital platforms. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results show that physical environment, emotional support, and student-lecturer attachment significantly contribute to student satisfaction. In contrast, cost, personal safety, and ethical conduct do not have a significant effect. Furthermore, student satisfaction positively influences their intention to recommend the mobility program. These results indicate that stakeholders should view students not only as beneficiaries but also as potential ambassadors. It is important to develop platforms for alumni to share their stories, mentor prospective applicants, or participate in outreach, which can help amplify the program's impact.

**Keywords:** international student mobility, physical and social factors, satisfaction, intention to recommend

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## INTRODUCTION

Like international trade and services, higher education has become a component of the global landscape in today's more interconnected globe (Pimpa, 2003). The increasing number of students seeking education overseas is among the most obvious indicators of this change. It aligned with Rizvi (2011), who stated that the number of students in foreign countries has increased dramatically, although studying abroad is not a new practice. By 2014, over 5 million students were enrolled in institutions outside their home countries—more than double the number from 2000—driven by an average growth rate of 10% per year (University of Oxford, 2015).

Indonesia is one of the countries that has actively participated in this global mobility. Up to 59,224 Indonesian students were enrolled in overseas higher education programs in 2023, with Australia and Malaysia being the most popular countries (Marietha, 2024). This momentum is supported by national initiatives such as the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), which offer undergraduate students the opportunity to study at world-class universities (Ministry of Education, 2022). In addition, graduate-level scholarships such as LPDP, Australia Awards, and Chevening, alongside collaborative programs between Indonesian and foreign universities, have further expanded access to international study experiences.

The decision to pursue education abroad is often explained using the push-pull framework, which identifies how specific disadvantages in the home country (e.g., limited academic opportunities) and attractive features in host countries (e.g., academic quality, safety, cost, or global recognition) shape students' choices (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Lipura & Collins, 2020). These rationales reflect both personal aspirations and structural conditions, making international education a strategic move for many students.

International student mobility offers numerous benefits for both home and host countries. These include cultural diplomacy (de Wit, 2011), knowledge and technology transfer (Altbach & Knight, 2007), human capital development (Teichler, 2004), societal transformation (Tran & Phan, 2024), global network strengthening (King, 2011), and economic and policy advancements (OECD, 2013; Kuznetsov, 2006). At the individual level, research also shows that mobility is positively linked to better employment prospects, with mobile students more likely to secure jobs after graduation (d'Hombres & Schnepf, 2021). However, despite these advantages, students often face challenges such as high living costs, limited emotional support, and difficulties adapting to academic expectations in the host country (Rizvi, 2011).

A critical performance indicator of international mobility programs is student satisfaction, especially when considering the challenges students often face during their studies abroad. While satisfaction is widely recognized as essential, earlier research has only partially examined the specific factors that shape it, particularly those related to the physical environment, cost, and emotional support (Arambewela, 2003; Lapina et al., 2016). Chelliah et al. (2019) advanced this area by assessing both physical and social dimensions, yet found that some social elements, such as emotional and ethical conduct, had limited influence on satisfaction. Likewise, the effects of tuition fees (Latip et al., 2019; da Costa Alves et al., 2022), and emotional support (Matschke, 2022; Mansouri et al., 2022) on satisfaction have shown inconsistent results across different contexts, indicating the need for further investigation.

In addition to its intrinsic value, student satisfaction plays a strategic role in influencing behavioral outcomes, particularly the intention to recommend the program to others. Previous studies have found a strong link between satisfaction and recommendation behavior (Ozturk & Gogtas, 2015; Hosany & Prayag, 2013), which is vital for sustaining the visibility and credibility of mobility programs. This is further emphasized by Rustemova et al. (2021), who observed that outbound student mobility remains limited, in part due to weak pull factors such as affordability and the absence of peer recommendations. These findings highlight the importance of positive word-of-mouth and alumni advocacy in encouraging wider participation in international mobility initiatives.

As discussed above, there is still debate regarding findings in previous research. This study, then, aims to examine how physical and social factors influence Indonesian students' satisfaction with international student mobility programs, and how this satisfaction affects their intention to recommend the program. The findings are expected to contribute in two key ways: first, by offering insights to enhance the effectiveness of international student mobility initiatives; and second, by supporting efforts to attract more participants, not only for government and donor-funded programs, but also for university-led collaborations with international partners.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, three main elements influence an individual's behaviour: perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, and attitude towards the behaviour. Actual behaviour is influenced by behavioural intentions, which are influenced by several factors. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is applied in this study to comprehend how social and physical aspects affect students' happiness and intention to promote the program. The standard of facilities and emotional support, the relationships between lecturers and peers, and the capacity for adaptation all influence attitude. Thus, TPB provides a useful framework for examining the mobility experiences of international students.

### Physical Factors

Physical factors play a crucial role in shaping international students' experiences and satisfaction with mobility programs. One key element is the physical environment, which includes the quality of human-made surroundings such as academic facilities, student accommodations, and food services (Handayani et al., 2022). Modern, well-maintained infrastructure—such as updated classrooms, access to support staff, suitable living arrangements for both students and accompanying family members, and a variety of food options—can significantly influence how students perceive their host institutions (Bodycott, 2009; Chelliah et al., 2019).

In addition to environmental quality, cost and safety are also important considerations. The affordability of tuition fees, meal prices, and companion accommodation has been linked to student satisfaction and positive attitudes toward the program (Kotler et al., 2022). Meanwhile, personal safety is often a determining factor when students choose a study destination. A safe campus environment and proactive health support services not only provide peace of mind but also enhance the perceived value of the institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2003; Chelliah et al., 2019). Together, these physical aspects form the foundation of a supportive and welcoming study environment for international students.

### Social Factors

Social factors significantly influence how well international students adapt and engage during their mobility experience. One key element is emotional support, which encompasses empathy, care, and genuine attentiveness from institutional staff. This type of support is crucial in helping students cope with cultural and psychological challenges they may face while adjusting to a new environment (Misra et al., 2003; Matschke, 2022). Indicators of emotional support include staff friendliness, willingness to assist, personalized attention, and calming communication, all of which contribute to a sense of belonging and emotional well-being (Chelliah et al., 2019).

Another important aspect of the social environment is ethical conduct, which involves fair treatment, transparency, and institutional accountability (Amado, 1999). Ethical practices such as respecting student privacy, delivering promised services, and clearly communicating academic or procedural risks help build trust between students and the institution (Chelliah et al., 2019). Alongside this, student-lecturer attachment plays a vital role in enhancing students' academic comfort. When students feel a sense of connection with familiar lecturers, perceive faculty as approachable, and experience supportive interactions in the classroom, it fosters a secure and productive learning environment (Chepchieng et al., 2006; Chelliah et al., 2019). Together, these social factors form the interpersonal foundation that supports student satisfaction and engagement in international programs.

### Satisfaction and Intention to Recommend

Satisfaction is the emotional response to whether experiences meet expectations (Engel et al., 1982). Student satisfaction refers to how students evaluate their overall educational experience, particularly while studying abroad. It involves both cognitive and emotional judgments about whether their expectations have been met (Oliver, 2010). In the international education context, this extends beyond academics to include social, psychological, and environmental aspects. Key factors include academic quality, campus facilities, support for cultural adjustment, and living conditions (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Thoo et al., 2023).

Satisfaction is also shaped by emotional experiences, such as positive interactions, a sense of well-being, and memorable moments during the program (Cho et al., 2020). Life satisfaction abroad can be influenced by how well students adapt, feel supported, and engage with the host culture (Jiang et al., 2020). Overall, student satisfaction is a multidimensional construct that reflects the extent to which academic, cultural, and personal expectations are fulfilled.

Higher satisfaction levels often translate into positive behavioral outcomes, including the willingness to promote or endorse the experience. One of the most common forms of such behavior is the intention to recommend the program to others. Intention to recommend refers to a participant's willingness to endorse their experience to others. It reflects post-satisfaction behavior and is often influenced by the overall quality of the experience (Ozturk & Gogtas, 2015). A strong intention to recommend can become a key indicator of program success and sustainability (Hosany & Prayag, 2013).

### **Hypotheses Formulation**

The physical environment is a key factor influencing international student satisfaction during exchange programs. In service contexts, physical surroundings—such as facility layout, cleanliness, comfort, and aesthetics—can shape perceptions of quality (Booms & Bitner, 1982). In higher education, this includes academic facilities, student housing, and campus safety (Handayani et al., 2022). Studies show that improved campus environments enhance student satisfaction (Costa & Steffgen, 2020; Ma et al., 2022).

Price or fee is another influential factor in shaping student satisfaction. Latip et al. (2019) found that students are more satisfied when they perceive the cost of education to be justified by the quality of services received. For some programs, personal or additional costs not covered by scholarships can negatively affect satisfaction, especially when perceived as excessive.

Personal safety is also critical for international students adapting to new environments. Safety concerns can influence both academic engagement and social participation. Research shows that campus safety significantly contributes to student satisfaction (Collins et al., 2022).

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), students' attitudes toward their learning experience are shaped by their evaluations of external conditions—including physical environment, perceived costs, and personal safety. When these factors are perceived positively, they foster favorable attitudes and enhance overall satisfaction.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Physical environment has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

H2: Price/fee has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

H3: Personal safety has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

Emotional support is a vital component of international students' adjustment and overall well-being during exchange programs. It helps students cope with cultural and academic challenges, fosters social integration, and enhances their sense of belonging in a new environment (Matschke, 2022). Students who receive strong emotional support are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward their experiences, which contributes to higher levels of satisfaction.

Ethical conduct in academic settings, including fairness, transparency, and respect, can also influence student satisfaction. Although some studies emphasize the importance of ethical behavior in fostering trust and comfort among students, others suggest that its role may be secondary compared to more tangible aspects such as facilities or support services (Mansouri et al., 2022). Nevertheless, students who perceive ethical practices are more likely to view their academic environment positively.

Student-lecturer attachment refers to the quality of interactions and relationships between students and faculty members. Supportive lecturer engagement can increase students' confidence, provide valuable academic guidance, and help them adapt to unfamiliar educational systems (Ramachandran et al., 2020). Such relationships often play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of the program.

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), students' attitudes—and ultimately their satisfaction—are influenced by their evaluations of social interactions and support within the academic environment. Positive experiences in these domains can enhance satisfaction. Based on these discussions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Emotional support has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

H5: Ethical conduct has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

H6: Student-lecturer attachment has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

Student satisfaction reflects the degree to which their academic, social, and personal expectations are fulfilled during the mobility program. When students feel that their experiences align with or exceed expectations, they are more likely to express favorable opinions and encourage others to participate (Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2015). Satisfaction not only reinforces positive attitudes but also contributes to the formation of behavioral intentions.

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), intention is influenced by individuals' attitudes toward the behavior in question. In this context, satisfied students are more likely to form positive attitudes that drive their willingness to recommend the mobility program to peers.

Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on intention to recommend.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the effects of physical and social factors on international student satisfaction and their intention to recommend mobility programs. Data were collected using purposive sampling from Indonesian students who had participated in international mobility programs since 2021. A total of 202 respondents (Table 1) completed the questionnaire.

An online questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool and was distributed via digital platforms, including social media and Meta-based networks. Survey items were adapted from validated instruments in previous studies and measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The constructs and their sources are summarized on Table 1.

Table 1. Sources of the Constructs

Construct	Source(s)
Physical Environment	Foskett et al. (2006); Padlee et al. (2010); Kusumawati et al. (2010); Ma et al. (2022)
Price/Fee	Mazzarol & Soutar (2002); Foskett et al. (2006)
Personal Safety	Arambewela (2003); Ma et al. (2022)
Emotional Support	Foskett et al. (2006); Veerasoontorn & Beise-Zee (2010); Guiry et al. (2013)
Ethical Conduct	Morgan & Korschgen (2001)
Student-Lecturer Attachment	Hassan & Sheriff (2006)
Student Satisfaction	Kusumawati et al. (2010); Hassan & Sheriff (2006); Morgan & Korschgen (2001); Ma et al. (2022)
Intention to Recommend	Prayag et al. (2016)

A pilot test was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument prior to distributing the questionnaire to the main sample. A total of 32 respondents participated in this preliminary phase. The data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation and construct reliability measures. The results indicated that most items had an  $r$ -value above the R-table threshold of 0.349 ( $N = 32$ ), except for item PE2 (0.253). Additionally, most variables demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.6, except for the Physical Environment variable ( $\alpha = 0.586$ ). According to Hair et al. (2010), a larger sample size enhances the validity and reliability of factor analysis and instrument testing. Based on this consideration, all indicators were retained for the actual study sample. The final data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

## RESULTS

### Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Table 2. Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Respondents' Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	69	34.2
	Female	133	65.8
Age	19	1	0.5
	20	8	4
	21	61	30.2
	22	85	42.1
	23	27	13.4
	>23	20	9.9
Program	IISMA	75	37.1
	IISMA Co-Funding	15	7.4
	IISMA Entrepreneurship	52	25.7
	IISMA Vocational	12	5.9
	University Partners	37	18.3
	Others	11	5.4

Respondents' Profile		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Funding</b>	Self-Funded	14	6.9
	Co-funded	41	20.3
	Full Funded	147	72.8
<b>Home University</b>	Universitas Airlangga	14	6.9
	Universitas Diponegoro	9	4.5
	Universitas Gadjah Mada	19	9.4
	Universitas Indonesia	18	8.9
	Universitas Islam Indonesia	53	26.2
	Others	89	44.1
<b>Host University</b>	Anadolu University	6	3
	Curtin University	15	7.4
	Frankfurt School of Finance and Management	8	4
	Mahidol University	6	3
	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	14	6.9
	University of Adelaide	12	5.9
	University of Melbourne	38	18.8
	Others	103	51
<b>Destination Country</b>	United State	8	4
	Australia	70	34.7
	Netherland	5	2.5
	United Kingdom	10	5
	Germany	11	5.4
	South Korea	15	7.4
	Malaysia	20	9.9
	Taiwan	6	3
	Thailand	16	7.9
	Turkey	8	4
	Others	33	16.3
<b>Year</b>	2021	9	4.5
	2022	15	7.4
	2023	47	23.3
	2024	128	63.4
	2025	3	1.5
<b>Program Duration</b>	< 1 month	15	7.4

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the 202 respondents who participated in this study. The majority were female (65.8%), while male participants accounted for 34.2%. Most respondents were aged 21 (30.2%) and 22 (42.1%), indicating that the sample primarily consisted of upper-year

undergraduate students. In terms of academic level, the vast majority were enrolled in bachelor's programs (90.1%), followed by vocational (7.4%) and master's programs (2.5%).

Regarding mobility program types, the largest proportion of students participated in the IISMA scheme (37.1%), followed by IISMA Entrepreneurship (25.7%) and university partnership programs (18.3%). Most students received full funding (72.8%), with the remainder either co-funded (20.3%) or self-funded (6.9%). All respondents came from Indonesian universities, with Universitas Islam Indonesia contributing the highest proportion (26.2%), followed by Universitas Gadjah Mada (9.4%) and Universitas Indonesia (8.9%). However, a significant number (44.1%) represented other institutions across the country, indicating that the respondent pool was diverse and reflective of students from various regions in Indonesia, thus strengthening the national representativeness of the sample.

Respondents were placed in a wide range of host institutions abroad. Notably, the University of Melbourne was the most common host (18.8%), followed by Curtin University (7.4%) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (6.9%). In terms of host countries, Australia was the most popular destination (34.7%), followed by Malaysia (9.9%) and Thailand (7.9%). Most students participated in 3–6 months programs (56.9%) and joined their mobility experience in 2024 (63.4%). Although more than half of the respondents (57.4%) had no prior international experience, the remaining participants had either visited (36.6%) or undertaken long-term stays abroad (5.9%), suggesting a mix of novice and experienced individuals with diverse backgrounds in global mobility. Lastly, regarding the duration of prior experience, a significant portion had participated in short-term activities (up to 1 month), while a smaller group had joined long-term stays (over 1 month). This diversity highlights varying levels of international readiness among participants.

### Measurement Model Test – Validity and Reliability

To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, several statistical tests were conducted, including convergent validity, discriminant validity (via Fornell–Larcker and HTMT), and internal consistency reliability.

The convergent validity test is tested using two methods, namely factor loading and AVE. Indicators can be said to be valid if they have a factor loading value more than 0.6, and other criteria are that each latent variable must have an AVE value more than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 3, after deleting four items that have factor loading less than 0.6 (PE2, PE3, PE4, and PE7), the rest constructs met the minimum threshold for convergent validity with factor loading values above 0.6, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values more than 0.50. This result confirms that each item adequately represented its respective construct. Furthermore, both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values for all latent variables were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 3. Validity Convergent & Reliability Results

Latent Construct	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
PE1	0.747	0.622	0.798	0.568
PE5	0.776			
PE6	0.737			
FE1	0.849	0.701	0.828	0.617
FE2	0.684			
FE3	0.814			
PS1	0.614	0.874	0.900	0.532
PS2	0.721			



Latent Construct	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
PS3	0.801	0.909	0.929	0.687
PS4	0.759			
PS5	0.704			
PS6	0.801			
PS7	0.768			
PS8	0.647			
ES1	0.801			
ES2	0.830			
ES3	0.786	0.775	0.855	0.598
ES4	0.838			
ES5	0.869			
ES6	0.848			
EC1	0.731			
EC2	0.831			
EC3	0.831			
EC4	0.690			
SLA1	0.854	0.797	0.880	0.710
SLA2	0.856			
SLA3	0.818			
SAT1	0.758	0.853	0.895	0.630
SAT2	0.791			
SAT3	0.826			
SAT4	0.769			
SAT5	0.821			
ITR1	0.860	0.801	0.870	0.628
ITR2	0.756			
ITS3	0.855			
ITR4	0.687			

Table 4. Discriminant Validity of Constructs (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

No.	Latent Construct	EC	ES	FE	ITR	PE	PS	SAT	SLA
1.	EC	0,773							
2.	ES	0,583	0,829						
3.	FE	0,187	0,145	0,786					
4.	ITR	0,489	0,498	0,168	0,793				
5.	PE	0,421	0,382	0,134	0,285	0,754			

No.	Latent Construct	EC	ES	FE	ITR	PE	PS	SAT	SLA
6.	PS	0,595	0,611	0,208	0,433	0,441	0,730		
7.	SAT	0,540	0,592	0,053	0,512	0,473	0,453	0,794	
8.	SLA	0,572	0,482	0,203	0,448	0,316	0,423	0,558	0,843

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Table 5. Discriminant Validity of Constructs - Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

No.	Latent Construct	EC	ES	FE	ITR	PE	PS	SAT	SLA
1.	EC								
2.	ES	0,696							
3.	FE	0,258	0,185						
4.	ITR	0,603	0,590	0,209					
5.	PE	0,601	0,516	0,196	0,389				
6.	PS	0,720	0,682	0,273	0,517	0,585			
7.	SAT	0,653	0,671	0,106	0,609	0,644	0,509		
8.	SLA	0,719	0,564	0,269	0,554	0,440	0,495	0,666	

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Table 4), where the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the inter-construct correlations, satisfying the discriminant threshold. The HTMT values (Table 5) were also below the 0.90 limit, confirming that each construct was empirically distinct. In addition, Table 6 shows that the structural model explained 26.2% of the variance in student satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.262$ ) and 51.1% of the variance in intention to recommend ( $R^2 = 0.511$ ), both with acceptable predictive relevance ( $Q^2 > 0$ ).

Table 6. Variance Explained and Predictive Analysis

Construct	R2	Q2
Student Satisfaction	0.262	0.151
Intention to Recommend	0.511	0.308

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Structural Model Assessment

The multicollinearity test assesses whether variables in a structural model are excessively correlated, which can cause redundancy and affect model accuracy. Hair et al. (2017) recommend using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for this purpose. As shown in Table 7, all item relationships had VIF values above 0.50, indicating no multicollinearity issues.

Table 7. Multicollinearity Test

	EC	ES	FE	PE	PS	SAT	SLA	ITR
EC						2,086		
ES						1,892		
FE						1,066		
PE						1,321		
PS						1,956		
SAT								1,000
SLA						1,589		
ITR								

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Table 8 presents the results of hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Significance is determined by a t-value above 1.96 and a p-value below 0.05. Of the seven proposed hypotheses, four were found to be statistically supported.

Table 8. Hypotheses Results

Hyp	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Physical Environment → Student Satisfaction	0.230	3.310	0.001	Supported
H2	Price/Fee → Student Satisfaction	-0.102	1.674	0.094	Not-supported
H3	Personal Safety → Student Satisfaction	-0.015	0.176	0.860	Not-supported
H4	Emotional Support → Student Satisfaction	0.318	3.824	0.000	Supported
H5	Ethical Conduct → Student Satisfaction	0.119	1.487	0.137	Not-supported
H6	Student-Lecturer Attachment → Student Satisfaction	0.290	6.150	0.000	Supported
H7	Student Satisfaction → Intention to Recommend	0.512	4.110	0.000	Supported

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Among the physical and social antecedents, physical environment (H1:  $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), emotional support (H4:  $\beta = 0.318$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and student-lecturer attachment (H6:  $\beta = 0.290$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) had significant positive effects on student satisfaction. In contrast, price/fee (H2:  $\beta = -0.102$ ,  $p = 0.094$ ), personal safety (H3:  $\beta = -0.015$ ,  $p = 0.860$ ), and ethical conduct (H5:  $\beta = 0.119$ ,  $p = 0.137$ ) were found to have no significant influence.

Furthermore, student satisfaction had a significant and positive impact on students' intention to recommend the mobility program (H7:  $\beta = 0.512$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), confirming its mediating role between experiential factors and behavioral outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into the determinants of international student satisfaction and their intention to recommend mobility programs. Among the six examined antecedents, only three—physical environment, emotional support, and student-lecturer attachment—showed a

significant positive impact on student satisfaction. This result aligns with prior research indicating that a supportive and resource-rich environment is crucial for enhancing international student experiences (Costa & Steffgen, 2020; Matschke, 2022; Ramachandran et al., 2020).

Interestingly, price/fee, personal safety, and ethical conduct did not significantly influence satisfaction, suggesting that while these factors may be important in initial decision-making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Arambewela, 2003), they may become secondary once students are immersed in the academic and social experience. This echoes the findings of Chelliah et al. (2019), who noted that once students are integrated into a learning environment, experiential and interpersonal elements—such as emotional support and student-lecturer interactions—tend to carry more weight in shaping satisfaction outcomes.

The lack of significance in the price/fee variable may also be understood in the context of the respondents' background. The majority of students in this study participated in fully funded programs, minimizing direct financial burden during their studies abroad. However, as Indonesia is a developing country with generally lower income levels compared to most host countries, students may still perceive even subsidized or uncovered expenses as high. This perceived expense, regardless of actual cost, might not correlate with satisfaction because it is framed more as a structural limitation than a service issue. Furthermore, a large portion of students had not previously experienced international exposure, which could limit their basis for comparing value and cost, thus diminishing the relevance of fee perceptions in their satisfaction evaluation.

Ethical conduct, although widely acknowledged as essential (Mansouri et al., 2022), may have been perceived as a baseline expectation rather than a differentiating factor. The insignificance of ethical conduct in shaping satisfaction in this study also resonates with Chelliah et al. (2019), who noted that while ethics play a critical role in customer satisfaction in personalized service industries such as healthcare and hospitality, their relevance may be diminished in international education contexts. In university settings, ethical standards may be seen as institutional norms rather than features that distinctly shape the student experience.

The finding that personal safety does not significantly influence student satisfaction aligns with Tasci and Boylu (2010) and Ringle et al. (2011). Tasci and Boylu (2010) found that cultural differences shape how individuals perceive safety and its impact on satisfaction. Their study found that travelers from certain backgrounds may view safety as a non-issue once familiarity and trust are established. They also noted that longer stays were associated with higher satisfaction, likely due to deeper engagement with the environment. Meanwhile, Ringle et al. (2011) also found that perceived safety has a significantly greater impact on the overall customer satisfaction of people who travel for pleasure than on that of business travelers. Since most mobility programs observed in this study could be classified as business purposes and lasted less than six months, students may not have stayed long enough to develop strong emotional responses to safety conditions, whether positive or negative.

To add a discussion, it is also important to note the current global context marked by geopolitical instability, conflicts, and public safety concerns. These ongoing global security issues may not directly affect students' satisfaction after they are already abroad, but could strongly influence their initial decisions to participate in mobility programs and recommend them to others. As reported by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2023), rising concerns around safety, war, and political tensions are becoming increasingly influential in shaping students' destination choices and risk tolerance.

Finally, this study confirms that student satisfaction positively influences intention to recommend (Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2015), supporting the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which links attitude formation to behavioral intentions. This has important implications for both home universities and government-led programs such as the IISMA. For home universities, the findings highlight the need to go beyond establishing academic partnerships; they must also ensure that their

selected host institutions provide supportive environments that enhance the student experience. Satisfaction-driven outcomes can reinforce institutional prestige and validate international collaboration efforts. For government agencies, particularly in the context where IISMA is currently on hold due to the transition in national leadership, these results serve as strong empirical evidence that more than two years of program implementation have produced substantial value. The high levels of student satisfaction—and their proven influence on peer recommendations—demonstrate that programs like IISMA are not only instrumental in shaping student development but also generate organic advocacy that supports wider student participation.

Therefore, stakeholders should view student satisfaction not merely as an end goal but as a strategic indicator of program success. Investing in quality mobility experiences—characterized by strong academic support, emotional care, and meaningful lecturer engagement—can help transform beneficiaries into long-term ambassadors. This is particularly vital for ensuring program sustainability and regaining momentum once flagship initiatives resume under the new governmental structure.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined key physical and social factors influencing Indonesian students' satisfaction with international mobility programs and their intention to recommend such programs to others. The findings revealed that only three antecedents—physical environment, emotional support, and student-lecturer attachment—had a significant positive effect on satisfaction. These results emphasize the importance of providing a supportive academic and social ecosystem, aligning with previous studies that highlight the experiential dimension as central to positive mobility outcomes.

Conversely, price/fee, personal safety, and ethical conduct did not show a significant impact on satisfaction. This may be due in part to the unique context of the respondents, most of whom were beneficiaries of fully funded programs and had limited prior international exposure. Additionally, cultural and economic backgrounds, particularly for students from developing countries like Indonesia, shape how factors such as safety and costs are perceived and integrated into satisfaction judgments. The study also reinforces earlier findings that ethical standards in education, though important, may be viewed as institutional norms rather than satisfaction drivers.

Importantly, this research affirms that student satisfaction significantly influences the intention to recommend, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior. However, in today's world, where global security remains fragile due to geopolitical tensions and regional instability, students' initial decisions and post-program advocacy may also be shaped by perceived risks and destination safety, regardless of how these aspects affect satisfaction during the stay.

These findings underscore the strategic value of satisfaction as more than a programmatic outcome—it is also a driver of organic promotion and long-term engagement. For both universities and government agencies, the results offer strong justification for investing in the quality of student experiences abroad, as these directly contribute to program reputation, sustainability, and growth through student advocacy. In uncertain times, designing mobility programs that are emotionally enriching, academically supportive, and socially inclusive is not only vital for individual development but also for strengthening the global visibility and credibility of national education initiatives like IISMA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From an academic perspective, future research should broaden the scope by including comparative analyses across countries, program types, or funding schemes. Future studies may yield different outcomes if conducted among students who personally finance their mobility programs, as their expectations and sensitivity toward expenses may differ significantly. Moreover, applying the same

model to students from other developing or developed nations could reveal contextual differences in how satisfaction develops and translates into behavioural intentions. Lastly, incorporating moderating variables such as cultural distance, language proficiency, or prior international exposure may further clarify how individual traits influence satisfaction.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the significance of emotional support, robust student-lecturer relationships, and high-quality physical environments in influencing student satisfaction. For program administrators—especially in government-led schemes like IISMA—ongoing evaluation of host partnerships should consider student experience, not just academic rankings. In light of current global uncertainties, safety and geopolitical factors may increasingly influence destination choices, even if they have a limited impact on satisfaction after arrival. Since satisfaction strongly predicts recommendation, students should be seen as ambassadors. Creating alumni engagement platforms—for mentoring, storytelling, or outreach—can help amplify the program's impact. In Indonesia's policy transition period, such evidence-based efforts are vital for sustaining momentum and ensuring long-term success.

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