

Academic And Living Experiences Of International Female Students In Saudi Arabia: A Perspective From Southeast Asian Students

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Abstract

The current study aims to reveal the impressions of female international students from Southeast Asian countries studying for their bachelor's degree at a Saudi university regarding their living and academic experiences. The study employed a qualitative methodology suitable for its objectives, conducting semi-structured interviews with students from Southeast Asia. The results indicate that the participants had positive impressions of their living and academic experiences in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the findings show that the participants felt satisfied with their academic experience, noting that the higher education system in Saudi Arabia is advanced, the professors are qualified, and the educational facilities are good. There is also satisfaction with academic advising and psychological support services. The participants had significantly positive impressions of the supportive services provided by the university, finding that the International Students Center plays a good role, and there is satisfaction with the housing services provided to students as well as the sports and recreational facilities. The results indicated that international students faced difficulties in adapting at the beginning of their arrival in Saudi Arabia and experienced culture shock. Language barriers posed social and academic challenges for the participants. The study provided several recommendations.

Keywords: Impressions of international students, higher education management, internationalization of education, quality of services, higher education in Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION:

Total quality has become one of the fundamental pillars upon which higher education institutions rely in their pursuit of academic excellence and the establishment of a comprehensive university environment that supports student learning and enhances their quality of university life. The evaluation of university performance is no longer limited to the quality of academic programs; it now encompasses a broader system of supportive services, such as administrative support, student services, infrastructure, university housing, and technical, sports, and recreational facilities. All of these factors contribute to enhancing student satisfaction, improving educational outcomes, and strengthening the competitiveness of universities at both regional and global levels (Borishade et al., 2021; Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022; Halpern et al., 2021; Weerasinghe et al., 2017).

Accrediting bodies, whether at the programmatic or institutional level, are increasingly emphasizing the measurement of student satisfaction with the educational and non-educational services provided to them. One of the prominent bodies in the Saudi context is the "Education and Training Evaluation Commission," which bases its standards for institutional and program accreditation on the level of student satisfaction, considering it a core indicator of university performance quality and integration (Education and Training Evaluation Commission, 2025). In line with the ambitious Vision 2030 of the Kingdom, the state seeks to expand the scope of attracting international students, whether through scholarship programs or by attracting self-funded students, thereby enhancing the internationalization of higher education and increasing cultural and knowledge diversity within the campus, in addition to contributing to transforming the higher education sector into an economically productive sector (Ministry of Education, 2025; Al-Mutairi, 2024).

With the increasing number of non-Saudi students, especially non-Arabic speakers, there has emerged a growing need to understand their experiences within Saudi universities, both academically and in terms of services and living conditions. Monitoring their impressions and evaluations of non-educational services—such as housing, international student affairs management, security, and technical infrastructure—is crucial for understanding their adaptation and the quality of their university experience. At the same time, it represents an important entry point for improving institutional policies and practices for this significant group of students.

Problem of the Study:

Despite the significant efforts made by Saudi universities to develop their educational environment and provide a system of services and support specifically directed at international students, there remains a clear gap in understanding the subjective experiences of these students, particularly among non-Arabic-speaking female students, who represent a group with unique linguistic and cultural characteristics. The undergraduate stage is one of the most sensitive and impactful phases in shaping academic and professional pathways, making the exploration of female students' experiences during this time of great importance. Although there is an ambitious national direction led by Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to enhance the internationalization of higher education and attract more international students for temporary study and living in Saudi Arabia, qualitative studies addressing the impressions of international female students from Asian countries regarding living and studying in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remain limited in both number and depth (Al-Bashir, 2023). Accordingly, the problem of the study arises from the need for a deeper understanding of the impressions of international female students from Southeast Asian countries and to explore their experiences in living and studying at a higher education institution in Saudi Arabia.

Research Question:

What are the impressions of international female students from Southeast Asia regarding their living and academic experiences at a public university in Saudi Arabia?

Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the impressions of Asian female students in the undergraduate stage regarding university life at a Saudi university.
- To explore the impressions of Asian female students regarding their academic experience.
- To understand the impressions of Asian female students regarding supportive services such as housing and sports and recreational facilities.
- To discover the main challenges faced by Asian female students.

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Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies: First: The Theoretical Framework: Total quality is considered a relatively modern management concept that has gained increasing attention across various sectors, particularly in higher education. It has become a central element in developing institutional performance and enhancing the quality of educational, research, and service outcomes. The concept of total quality is based on a management philosophy that focuses on continuous improvement in all aspects of the institution, with the participation of all its employees, and revolves around meeting the needs of beneficiaries and exceeding their expectations.

In the context of higher education, the roles of universities are no longer limited to teaching and knowledge transfer; they are now required to provide a comprehensive educational experience that

responds to labor market demands, achieves sustainable development, and simultaneously considers the needs and satisfaction of students. Thus, the concept of total quality has gained strategic importance in leading institutional transformation within universities by focusing on improving the learning environment, developing curricula, enhancing faculty efficiency, and providing administrative, technical, and supportive services that meet student aspirations and facilitate their university experience.

Second: Previous Studies Al-Shawawra (2020) conducted a study aimed at identifying the level of services provided by the Islamic University of Madinah from the students' perspective. The researcher used a descriptive analytical approach and developed a questionnaire to collect information. A total of 816 students from various disciplines and colleges at the university participated in the study. Among the key findings was that the percentage of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and library services was high, while the satisfaction rate regarding student assessment and academic advising services was moderate. The study found statistically significant differences related to academic level, with undergraduate students rating the teaching process higher than graduate students. Additionally, there were statistically significant differences regarding the quality of library services between undergraduate and graduate students, as graduate students, especially at the doctoral level, benefit more intensively from the services provided by the university library and its facilities compared to other academic levels.

In 2021, Al-Qarni completed a study entitled "Developing Student Housing Services at Umm Al-Qura University: A Proposed Vision." The study aimed to identify the reality of the services provided by Umm Al-Qura University to its students in the area of student housing and to present a proposed vision for developing student housing services at the university in light of global experiences. The researcher used a descriptive analytical approach and employed a questionnaire as a study tool, which was applied to a sample of 104 male international students at Umm Al-Qura University. The study's key findings indicated that the satisfaction level regarding the quality of student housing among the sample was moderate, as was the satisfaction with the programs offered by the student housing administration.

Badr Al-Din (2021) aimed to assess the satisfaction of Najran University students with the central library services, focusing on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of those services. The researcher used a descriptive and analytical approach by applying a questionnaire to a sample of 190 male and female students from four different colleges. The study revealed that the evaluation of library hours and the internal environment was high. Students also rated the interaction of library staff with them positively. On the other hand, the evaluation of the services provided by the library to beneficiaries was generally high. Additionally, the study found statistically significant differences in the questionnaire responses based on the variable of college (scientific, humanities).

Omar and Al-Jalali (2022) conducted a study aimed at discovering the level of psychological empowerment and social and cultural adaptation among a sample of international students at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, as well as understanding the relationship between psychological empowerment and social and cultural adaptation. The study applied a correlational descriptive method and it used a questionnaire as a data collection method. The study sample was 200 international students from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences for Foreign Students, and the Faculty of Education for Boys at Al-Azhari University in the capital, Cairo. The study results found that the level of psychological empowerment and level of social and cultural adaptation for the sample collectively was moderate. The study results found a statistically significant positive relationship between psychological empowerment and social and cultural adaptation. The study found differences in psychological empowerment and social and cultural adaptation depending on the academic year variable with higher academic levels reporting higher psychological empowerment and social and cultural adaptation levels. The study results even suggested it was possible to predict social and cultural adaptation from psychological empowerment. Jrowan (2022) conducted a study of the psychological and social quality of life of the international students at Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University and King Saud University. The study got to the heart of the social adaptation of

international students at King Saud University and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher applied a descriptive survey method using a questionnaire as the data collection tool. The study sample was 423 international students. The study had various results - the most important result was that the level of social adaptive capacity of the international student groups of King Saud University and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh was high during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also included several recommendations, such as the need to activate recreation for international students, directing libraries at the universities and public libraries make preparations for plan B during pandemics for serving students and beneficiaries, improve internet quality in university housing, increase financial allowances for international students, provide psychological services for international students, and provide international students with financial loans that are easily accessible.

Al-Bashir (2023) undertook a study called "Evaluating the Quality of University Services at King Saud University from the International Students' Perspective in the College of Education." The aim of the study was to evaluate the quality of university services at King Saud University from the international students' perspective in the College of Education. The researcher employed a descriptive analytical approach and used a questionnaire as a tool to collect data. The sample for the study consisted of 93 male international students from the College of Education in various academic levels and disciplines. Some of the key findings in the research were a general level of satisfaction from the international students about university services in advance of arrival to the Kingdom. The results found that there was a very high level of satisfaction internationally about the quality of public facilities and a high level of satisfaction with the services of the International Students Administration. Furthermore, the results of the study indicated high levels of satisfaction as it relates to the quality of educational environment and facilities, and the academic services for international students. The study concluded that the level of satisfaction amongst international students about university services at King Saud University was high.

Al-Bashir (2024) conducted a research study to identify the amount of quality of services offered by King Saud University, from the perspective of international students. The researcher developed a questionnaire using a survey instrument, and used a descriptive analytical approach which was appropriate to meet the research aims and objectives of the study. The researcher developed a questionnaire consisting of five dimensions to measure the quality of university services, which had a total of 50 items in the questionnaire. The sample for the study included 184 international students who were students at King Saud University. The findings of the study, indicated that there was a high amount of quality of university services, at King Saud University, from the perspective of international students.

The findings indicated that the quality of public services and academic services at King Saud University was very high from the viewpoint of international students, while the quality of the educational environment, facilities, and the level of social and health quality of life were also rated high by international students. The study results also indicated statistically significant differences in the responses of the study sample regarding the evaluation of university services attributed to variables such as (native language, age, academic level, college), while no statistically significant differences were found in the responses of the study sample regarding the evaluation of university services attributed to variables such as (gender, continent, duration of stay in Saudi Arabia, academic performance).

Commentary on Previous Literature: Based on the previous literature, researchers have benefited from deepening the theoretical understanding of the experiences of international students. These studies have contributed to clarifying aspects related to their educational and living experiences, as well as the challenges they face in different educational and cultural environments. They have also helped to shape the fundamental concepts associated with student satisfaction, cultural adaptation, and the quality of university services. Researchers have utilized the findings of these studies to

connect them with the results of the current study, allowing for scientific comparisons that contribute to interpreting and analyzing the results within a broader framework of cumulative knowledge.

Despite the valuable scientific contributions of the previous literature, the current study is distinguished as the first qualitative study—according to the researchers' knowledge—aimed at discovering the impressions of female students from Southeast Asian countries in the undergraduate stage at a Saudi university. This represents a new addition to educational literature, particularly in the context of higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Study Sample and Methodology:

The study sample was selected using a purposive sampling method, consisting of 14 female students from three Southeast Asian countries, all of whom are recipients of full scholarships from the Saudi government and are studying in undergraduate programs at a public university. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 25 years, with the majority being from the Republic of Indonesia (11), along with one student from Singapore, one from the Philippines, and one from Malaysia. All participants are enrolled in undergraduate programs in humanities related to Islamic and Arabic sciences.

After obtaining the participants' consent, the first researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the students via Zoom during the years 2022 and 2023. All interviews were carried out in Arabic. For the purpose of this study, the audio recordings were first converted into verbatim transcripts. To enhance the credibility and reliability of the qualitative data, which is critical amidst the ongoing discussion concerning the trustworthiness of qualitative studies, peer review was used. This study adopted a qualitative approach for its investigative design and scope because it facilitates understanding complex issues through interview-based exploration. The methodology of phenomenology was applied, capturing essence as described by participants and refraining from generalizing (Al-Rashidi, 2018).

The analysis was founded on a model proposed by Bingham (2023), which consists of five interrelated stages:

1. Organizing interview data and initial coding for common themes.
2. Classifying all remaining data into relevant subsets.
3. Analyzing to extract deeper meaning.
4. Data interpretation along recurrent patterns and themes identification.
5. Descriptive sharing for considered results captured on experience studied.

RESULTS:

Qualitative data in this study was evaluated according to the methodological steps by Bingham (2023), which consists of five interrelated stages: data organization, initial coding, category development, interpretation, and results presentation. The analysis of interviews with international female students from Southeast Asia who are non-Arabic speaking undergraduates at a Saudi university led to identifying several sub-themes that highlight their impressions regarding university life in higher education institutions in the kingdom.

Grouped within 3 main themes.

A. Impressions of the Academic Experience

General impressions of the academic experience

- University educational facilities
- Faculty members
- Academic and psychological advising

B. Impressions of The Level Of Support Services

This theme encompasses three sub-themes:

- Impression about services offered by International Students Center
- University housing appraisal.
- Sports and recreational facilities.

C. General Impressions

A. Impressions of the Academic Experience

This theme contains four sub-themes :

- General impressions concerning academic experiences
- Impressions of the university's learning spaces
- Impressions of teaching staff
- Impressions of counseling services in academics and psychology

A.1: Overall Impressions of the Academic Experience

Findings from semi-structured interviews with a group of Southeast Asian female students studying at a Saudi Arabian University indicate that students were satisfied with the academic experience in general. Most of these students appreciated the effectiveness of relevant educational policies, faculty members, physical educational facilities, as well as access to various online learning platforms. Nevertheless, this positive image had some gaps pertaining to language-related academic difficulties which were prominent in most students' narratives especially among non-native Arabic speakers.

Concerning the academic programs and curricula, participants demonstrated active engagement by sharing feedback based on their experiences and expressed contentment highlighting issues such as logical sequencing alongside clear articulation of objectives for curriculum topics which included important and emerging issues aligned within their disciplines. A good number expressed positiveness regarding programmatic options, remarking that there was an adequate balance between diversity and accessibility which enhanced satisfaction boosting integration academically and otherwise.

The majority of students showed strong appreciation toward their faculty members due to their professional knowledge and dedication to teaching. The students observed a positive environment that promoted mutual respect and encouragement which helped boost their confidence leading to better engagement with their studies. The students reported that the combination of Modern Standard Arabic and quick academic vocabulary posed difficulties because it made it hard for them to understand concepts during first attempts. The language barriers appeared during conversations about test comprehension and written assignments because several students needed more time to read questions and write answers compared to their Arabic-speaking classmates. Although educational platforms offer simple interfaces students identified language as an obstacle when accessing theoretical materials which need exact linguistic. Conversely, the students praised the university facilities, particularly the equipped classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, considering that this physical environment played an important role in facilitating learning and compensating for some of the language-related difficulties. They also expressed satisfaction with the educational platforms, confirming that their use facilitated access to content and the following of lectures and activities. The administrative and service aspects were also generally well-received, as the students felt that academic procedures were clear and that support was available when needed, whether through direct communication or electronic systems. This contributed to an overall sense of stability and encouraged many students to continue and engage positively within the university campus.

Regardless of some language barriers, students felt that they were improving both academically and personally. It is very interesting to note that these language difficulties did not sour the students' attitudes towards their appreciation for the academic rigor offered; rather, students suggested that the university presented them with rigorous challenges from which they received varying degrees of help, some requiring more language assistance than others during the beginning phase of their studies.

In summary, international female students at the university have an enriching and engaging academic experience as a whole. While there are difficulties in terms of language mastery, such struggles do not diminish...

A.2: University Educational Facilities Feedback

The interviews showed that Southeast Asian students expressed general satisfaction with the educational facilities such as libraries and computer and science labs which have been set aside for teaching purposes. The computer laboratories received special praise from a number of participants who referred to these facilities as good or excellent along with admiration for their organization, the orderliness and general preparation put in them was commendable, with one of the students referring to them as "very beautiful," which indicates an affirmative impact of the learning environment in improving the learning experience and feeling comfortable within the campus.

It was apparent that libraries were some of the most conspicuous buildings that drew the students' attention, providing them with a quiet place in which to study and an array of electronic and print materials, which provides them with an opportunity to easily prepare for study and research assignments. The other students were similarly satisfied with the use of computer labs, especially in handling technical assignments or viewing online lectures, as they considered them essential facilities that made it convenient for them to accomplish the requirements of their academic work.

At the same time, other students narrowed their observations to the indication that there were some malfunctioning computers in certain labs, which occasionally caused confusion while doing work or making project presentations. This did not, however, discourage them from generally rating the facilities as good and sufficient for their learning needs. No complaints were also raised regarding the availability or access to the facilities and the issues that ensued while accessing them, which is an indication of management effectiveness in organizing the spaces and placing them at users' disposal. Some students exhibited a sense of relief and satisfaction because such facilities were available at the university or college, perceiving them to be a very important part of the level of education and life at the university since they facilitate personal study, collaborative work, and attainment of interactive tasks. Some students described the facilities as comfortable and sufficient for any learning requirements, which helps to promote a stimulating and well-structured learning environment.

Overall, the international female students were extremely content with the facilities provided for study at the university. They enjoyed the planning, the design, and the presence of facilities, which enhanced the effectiveness of their study life and enabled them to complete study tasks. While some minor observations of maintenance in certain of the labs were made, the overall picture is one of a highly equipped study environment that is capable of responding to the requirements of multilingual and multicultural students.

A.3: Impressions of Faculty Members

Findings from the content analysis of foreign students' feedback revealed high degrees of satisfaction with the academic competence of the university's faculty members and pedagogical styles in teaching and assessment. Most of the subjects were extremely grateful for the learning process provided by the instructors through repeated emphasis with positive adjectives such as "excellent," "very excellent," and "very good" in a learning environment characterized by professionalism and hospitality.

In regard to teaching approaches, the students were clearly content with the manner in which information was presented during class, noting that the explanations were clear and well structured despite not having Arabic as their home language. There were individuals who bore witness to the fact that the instructors did try to diversify teaching approaches to accommodate the different languages spoken by the students, and this helped in reaching an easier level of comprehension and heightened level of interaction within the class. There was also a respect for the flexibility of the professors in making information accessible in a manner that respects the capacity of international students, evidencing an educational awareness among faculty of the necessity to accommodate the needs of diverse groups of students.

In terms of measuring methods, some of the students indicated that the applied standards were clear and just, allowing them to critique their performance, which gave them assurance and confidence in their results. Assessment was not regarded as a pressure element in the learning process but as an

enabling factor because students felt that the academic effort they used in their performance was met with corresponding academic reward.

In terms of student-faculty relationships, there was an important human component, with the responses highlighting positive contact, continuous encouragement, and academic and moral support by the professors. The academic relationship was characterized as being based on cooperation and mutual respect for each other, with a safe and stimulating learning environment that enhances students' self-esteem and promotes positive interaction and participation in the classroom.

It can be seen from the above that the faculty is among the university's strongest points for international students' learning experience. The high level of academic work, pedagogical diversity, equitable evaluation, and pedagogical and human inclusiveness have been elements contributing to the creation of a comprehensive education environment in favor of students' advancement and integration into the university community. The extremely high satisfaction rate on this scale is an indicator of the institution's capacity to recruit educational staff able to respond effectively to students' great diversity of culture and language and provide an education experience based on interaction, support, and trust.

A.4: Impressions of Academic and Psychological Advising

The results of the interviews with international Asian students indicated that they expressed a generally positive impression of the academic and psychological advising services provided by the university. Many described their experiences with these service providers as "excellent" or "very good," indicating that these services played an important role in supporting them, both academically and psychologically.

Through the interviews, it became clear that academic advisors helped them moderately in selecting appropriate courses and understanding the suitable pathways for their majors. The general impression of the psychological services was good, although some students did not benefit from them; however, they were aware that these services were available to them. Data indicated that many participants confirmed the ease of access to these services and the positive interaction with the staff, which contributed to building a sense of trust and reassurance during times of need, especially when facing academic difficulties or cultural challenges.

Despite the praise for academic and psychological advising services, three participants noted that there is an opportunity to improve the methods of introducing these services. They described that several international students did not learn about the availability of these services until late in their studies, which deprived them of benefiting from these services at the beginning of their studies. Therefore, they suggested that improving the mechanisms for advertising these services—whether through introductory meetings at the beginning of the semester or providing information in multiple languages—would be an important step to ensure that all students benefit from these services.

In light of the results, it can be interpreted that there is a high level of satisfaction regarding the academic and psychological advising services provided by the university, according to the perspectives of international Asian students studying in undergraduate programs.

B: Impressions of the Level of Support Services

This theme includes three sub-themes:

- Impressions of the International Students Center services
- Impressions of university housing
- Impressions of sports and recreational facilities

B.1: Impressions of the International Students Center Services

The analysis of the responses from international Asian students regarding their impressions and experiences with the services provided by the International Students Center at the university revealed a clear overall satisfaction, reflecting the quality of administrative performance of this center. International students require many services from the International Students Center, particularly in facilitating procedures for obtaining legal residency in the country, as well as other services such as securing annual travel tickets and facilitating the process of obtaining university housing, given that

all participating students are part of the government scholarship program funded by the Saudi government through universities.

The majority of participants agreed that the services provided to them were efficient and organized, contributing to improving their university experience, especially in administrative aspects. The high level of services at the center saved the students a lot of time and effort, allowing them to focus on their academic matters.

Many participants expressed their appreciation for the staff's responsiveness and the cooperative nature of the administration, which respects the students and maintains their privacy while genuinely caring for their affairs, whether related to registration procedures, academic follow-up, or support in various areas. Some students shared their experiences with certain staff members at the center, describing them as approachable and friendly, which positively alleviates the impact of cultural and linguistic differences and enhances the sense of belonging among international students. Most students confirmed that the International Students Center is highly committed to serving non-citizen students, indicating the existence of an administrative system specifically designed to meet the needs of this group of students. Based on the participants' experiences, it can be concluded that the general impressions of the participants regarding the services of the International Students Center were significantly positive.

B.2: Impressions of University Housing

The results of the interviews conducted with international students at a Saudi university revealed the importance of the student housing provided by the university in supporting their educational and living experiences. It is noted that all participants are scholarship students with limited financial means that do not allow them to rent housing outside the university campus. All participants in this study confirmed that living on campus relieved them of many financial and organizational burdens, creating a stable environment that helped them focus on their studies and accelerate their adaptation to living and studying conditions in Saudi Arabia.

The results indicated that participants believed that university housing is not just an option but a necessity that cannot be dispensed with, given the high cost of external housing, which does not align with their financial capabilities. Participants also added that the scholarship funded by the Saudi government, which includes housing costs, was a significant reason for their ability to continue their studies in Saudi higher education institutions.

Participants' impressions of the level of satisfaction with university housing varied. Most described their impressions of university housing as ranging from excellent to average, reflecting variability based on the quality of the building, the interaction among residents, and the degree of adaptation to the new lifestyle of living in shared accommodation. Among the common observations, complaints were registered about shared facilities, particularly kitchens and washrooms. Two respondents complained about the uncleanness and untidiness of some students, which diminished their comfort. They preferred stricter monitoring systems or awareness campaigns to create a culture of responsibility among the housing.

One of the problems raised by one of the participants was the absence of areas that are specifically designated and safe for them to leave their personal items when they take breaks, such as the summer break and other long holidays wherein students shift residence. They wanted the policy to be flexible enough to allow them to keep their belongings in order in the residence even when they are on break. Finally, some of the students were moderately satisfied with the cultural and recreational programs created by the housing administration, indicating the potential for increasing such programs to be more diversified and appealing so that the living environment in the residential community could be enhanced.

Generally speaking, it can be said that the impressions of university housing services by the participants were generally positive.

B.3: Impressions of Sports and Recreational Facilities

The Asian students' reactions to analysis were typically positive in their views regarding the university's sporting and recreational facilities. According to the students, the facilities provided them

an opportunity to escape the academic routine and engage in something physical or recreational that calms them and balances their mental and physical well-being while attending the university.

While a number of the answers were brief and direct, they suggested familiarity with the availability of such services and the extent to which they met fundamental needs with respect to personal welfare. Of most significance is that there were no complaints or negative remarks registered regarding the quality of the facilities or difficulties experienced in their access, indicating the efficiency of the infrastructure for such services and their accessibility by students despite challenges they may face, e.g., language or unfamiliarity with university conditions.

Despite the lack of details about the nature of the available activities or their diversity, the positive evaluations suggest that the minimum expectations, and perhaps more, were met for this group of students. These results also reflect the important role that recreational and sports facilities play in supporting the overall university experience, as they contribute to creating a more balanced environment and encourage students to engage socially and participate in non-academic activities, enhancing their sense of belonging and integration into university life.

Based on the above, it can be said that the university has succeeded in providing sports and recreational facilities that meet the needs of international students to a satisfactory degree, with future opportunities to enhance this experience by expanding the activities offered and providing more diverse programs that consider the cultural backgrounds and different interests of the students. Continuing to develop these spaces is an important element in enhancing the quality of university life and improving the overall experience of students within the campus.

DISCUSSION:

The results of the study found that the overall impression of international female students from Southeast Asia regarding their experience of living and studying in Saudi Arabia was generally positive. The participants expressed good overall experiences and felt grateful to Saudi Arabia for granting them full scholarships to study at a public university. The findings indicated that the participants did not encounter any racist or hostile situations, which underscores the positive academic environment at the university they attend. Additionally, the results showed that the participants had positive impressions of their academic experience, finding the education system in Saudi Arabia to be advanced and the study environment to be satisfactory, particularly regarding educational facilities. The participants confirmed that the professors at their universities were competent and qualified to perform their teaching duties while considering the individual differences among students. They also expressed satisfaction with the level of academic and psychological advising services.

The main challenges faced by the participants were related to language difficulties, as all of them were non-native speakers of the official language of instruction at the university, which is Arabic. The Arabic language posed a challenge for most participants, and they faced some difficulties in adaptation and experienced cultural shock, albeit in a non-severe manner.

The results of the semi-structured interviews also indicated that the students from Southeast Asia had positive impressions of the support services provided by the university, such as the services of the International Students Center, where the participants had positive experiences when interacting with the center's staff. The level of satisfaction with university housing was generally leaning towards being satisfactory for international students, and there was consensus on the excellence of the sports and recreational facilities at the university. Overall, the results show that Southeast Asian female international students who were studying in undergraduate degree programs at a Saudi Arabian public university had positive impressions and experiences regarding living and studying in Saudi Arabia. These results are in line with the following studies.

C: General Impressions

The findings of the study showed that the overall attitude of Southeast Asian international female students towards living and studying in Saudi Arabia was generally positive. Most of the participants were comfortable and satisfied with the social and living conditions provided to them in Saudi

Arabia. These good feelings were reflected in their descriptions of their Saudi Arabian lifestyles and studies, using descriptors like "very beautiful," "full of happiness," and "an invaluable opportunity" to describe their Saudi lifestyles. The participants were grateful to the Saudi government and people for providing them with the opportunity to study and receive full scholarships, which enabled them to study abroad; otherwise, without this scholarship, it was extremely difficult for them to complete their university studies.

The participants ensured that the peaceful and hospitable atmosphere they were provided by the staff members and peers facilitated their social integration. They referred to the reality of actual social support and amiable interaction within the university environment. They also appreciated the nature of Saudi society, as they depicted it as "friendly," in preference to creating a secure psychological environment that will promote academic success and personal growth. The respondents emphasized the feeling of security in Saudi Arabia, stating that they never experienced any harassment, robbery, or discrimination and racism of any kind.

One of the most vivid observations in the research was the mention by some of the respondents to the religious and spiritual nature of their experience to studying in Saudi Arabia, which contains the two holiest sites for Muslims, Medina and Mecca. They appreciated it as a privilege to reside in the Kingdom because it provides religious opportunities such as conducting Umrah and visiting sacred places for Muslims, along with being engaged in an Islamic environment that encourages the religious and cultural identity of the Muslim students, as all participants are Muslims. A majority of the students also had a particular interest in learning the Arabic language, given their experience of exposure to Arab surroundings as a good opportunity for language learning and cultural adjustment. Despite such positive impressions, some students did reveal challenges they encountered, particularly at the beginning of their sojourn, the most significant of which were homesickness and the adjustment to some issues of culture, often referred to as cultural shock. Some students cited language as a main hindrance initially, especially when they came across regional dialects or colloquial definitions. Others indicated experiencing intermittent emotions, reporting enjoyment of the learning experience in addition to reporting intermittent psychological or social difficulties, most commonly reporting physical distance from family and needing more time to get accustomed to the new cultural context.

The collective atmosphere of the living experience, though, was imbued with a critical sense of appreciation, as all but a few participants perceived their sojourn in the Kingdom as a qualitative learning experience for development and learning in a safe and challenging learning environment. These results show that the students, to a certain degree, were able to adjust positively to the new situation and settle issues concerning cultural and linguistic differences, proving the effectiveness of the university environment in integrating international students and enhancing their feelings of stability and belonging.

The outcome of this research is consistent with previous research that sought to investigate the realities, experiences, and challenges of Saudi Arabian higher education international students. The outcomes concur with Al-Bashir (2023; 2024) research as well as those by Al-Shawawra (2020) and Badr Al-Din (2021), where the academic and living experiences of the participants were satisfactory, including that of satisfaction with the services and facilities offered at universities. In addition, the results of this study for moderate student housing satisfaction agree with Al-Qarni (2021).

Recommendations:

- Provide Arabic Language Enhancement Programs: Develop programs to improve Arabic language skills among non-native speakers, and alter exams based on language differences. Additionally, train instructors to manage cultural diversity effectively.
- Improve Housing Facilities: Improve the quality of housing facilities, provide room for keeping personal belongings, provide diversity in food at reasonable prices, and engage students in recreational and cultural activities.

- **Improve Communication with Students:** Improve communication with students and offer additional administrative and information support services to facilitate their transition into university life.

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