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THE ROLE OF FOREIGN SCHOLARSHIPS IN SHAPING THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Universiti Utara Malaysia

MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE)
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THE ROLE OF FOREIGN SCHOLARSHIPS IN SHAPING THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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A thesis submitted to the Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Political Science
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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti pengaruh biasiswa luar negara terhadap hubungan antarabangsa Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE). UAE telah berusaha untuk meningkatkan kehadiran diplomatiknya di peringkat global, khususnya melalui penawaran biasiswa luar negara yang bertujuan untuk memupuk hubungan antarabangsa yang lebih kukuh dan memperbaiki imej lembut negara. Namun, UAE sedang berdepan dengan cabaran dalam hubungan antarabangsa, termasuk ketegangan geopolitik di rantau Teluk, konflik berterusan di Timur Tengah, dan ketidakpastian keselamatan serantau, yang terus mempengaruhi penglibatan diplomatiknya. Biasiswa luar negara dilihat sebagai alat untuk membangunkan modal insan dan memajukan hubungan antarabangsa UAE. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menilai bagaimana pemilihan calon biasiswa, reka bentuk program pengajian universiti, dan pemilihan negara destinasi memberi kesan kepada dasar luar UAE. Berdasarkan objektif ini, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan keberkesanan biasiswa tersebut dalam meningkatkan hubungan diplomatik dan memperkukuh imej antarabangsa UAE. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, dengan soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada 357 kakitangan Kementerian Hal Ehwal Luar Negeri UAE yang terlibat dalam pentadbiran biasiswa antarabangsa, serta pegawai program biasiswa yang menyelia pelajar Emirati di luar negara. Data dianalisis untuk menentukan peranan biasiswa luar negara dalam mempromosikan kerjasama antarabangsa dan pertukaran budaya, menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa biasiswa luar negara menyumbang secara positif kepada hubungan antarabangsa UAE melalui pembinaan rangkaian profesional berpendidikan yang mengukuhkan hubungan antara UAE dan negara tuan rumah. Kajian ini turut menekankan kepentingan pemilihan calon yang berkesan dan program pengajian yang disesuaikan bagi memaksimumkan manfaat diplomatik daripada biasiswa tersebut. Implikasi kajian ini adalah signifikan kepada pembuat dasar. Kajian ini mencadangkan penambahbaikan dasar biasiswa serta memastikan pelajar yang kembali dapat diintegrasikan dengan berkesan ke dalam tenaga kerja, sekali gus menyumbang kepada pembangunan negara dan mengukuhkan hubungan antarabangsa. Dapatan ini memberikan pandangan yang bernilai tentang bagaimana biasiswa luar negara dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai alat diplomatik.

Kata Kunci: Hubungan Antarabangsa, Biasiswa Asing, Kerjasama Antarabangsa, Pertukaran Budaya, Pemilihan Calon.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of foreign scholarships on the international relations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has been working to enhance its global diplomatic presence, particularly by offering foreign scholarships aimed at fostering stronger international ties and improving its soft image. However, the country continues to face challenges in its international relations, including geopolitical tensions in the Gulf region, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and regional security uncertainties, all of which affect its diplomatic engagements. Foreign scholarships are viewed as a strategic tool for developing human capital and advancing the UAE's international relationships. The primary objectives of this research are to evaluate how the selection of scholarship candidates, the design of university study programs, and the choice of destination countries influence the UAE's foreign policy. Building on these objectives, the study seeks to determine the effectiveness of these scholarships in improving diplomatic relations and strengthening the UAE's international image. The research adopts a quantitative approach, using questionnaires distributed to 357 UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees involved in international scholarship administration, as well as scholarship program personnel who oversee Emirati students abroad. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data and to assess the role of foreign scholarships in promoting international cooperation and cultural exchange. The findings indicate that foreign scholarships contribute positively to the UAE's international relations by building networks of educated professionals who strengthen ties between the UAE and host countries. The study also underscores the importance of effective candidate selection and well-designed study programs in maximizing the diplomatic benefits of these scholarships. The implications of this research are significant for policymakers. The study recommends improving scholarship policies and ensuring that returning students are effectively integrated into the workforce, thereby contributing to national development and reinforcing international relations. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into how foreign scholarships can be leveraged as a diplomatic tool.

Keywords: International Relations, Foreign Scholarships, International Cooperation, Cultural Exchange, Candidate Selection

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conceptual Background

International relations constitute a complex web of interactions among nations and have become increasingly significant in today's interconnected world (Ghosh, 2020; Sørensen, Møller, & Jackson, 2022). Their importance cannot be overstated, as they influence global economies, education systems, cultures, and the environment. Moreover, international relations play a vital role in maintaining peace and security among nations.

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In a world characterized by diverse political systems, ideologies, and national interests, conflicts often emerge over territorial disputes, access to resources, or ideological differences. International relations are therefore essential for fostering global economic prosperity (Sørensen, Møller, & Jackson, 2022). They also promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding among nations. Through tourism, educational exchanges, and cultural diplomacy, countries cultivate appreciation and respect for different cultures and traditions. Such interactions encourage tolerance and empathy, bridging cultural divides and reducing stereotypes and prejudices.

Additionally, international relations play a crucial role in addressing global challenges, including educational development and collaboration (Chankseliani, Qoraboyev, & Gimranova, 2021). Such issues transcend national borders and require collective action and cooperation among nations. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, as well as cross-border educational and research initiatives, highlight the importance of international cooperation in tackling shared global challenges.

Furthermore, international relations significantly influence domestic policies and governance (Sørensen, Møller, & Jackson, 2022; He, 2020). Nations often collaborate on issues such as human rights, migration, and sustainable development, shaping each other's policies through shared norms, international law, and peer influence. Through these mechanisms, countries are held accountable by the international community for their actions, thereby encouraging adherence to global standards and principles of good governance.

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At the same time, international scholarships play a pivotal role in strengthening international relations by fostering academic exchange, cultural understanding, and global cooperation (Knight, 2022). These scholarships extend beyond financial assistance; they serve as powerful instruments for building meaningful connections and collaborations among students, scholars, and institutions across borders. In essence, international scholarships are vital mechanisms for enhancing mutual understanding and promoting long-term partnerships between nations.

International scholarships promote educational exchange and academic collaboration (Campbell & Neff, 2020; Jones, Leask, Brandenburg, & de Wit, 2021). When students from diverse countries study together, they bring varied perspectives, ideas, and experiences to academic settings. This diversity enriches the learning environment, encourages cross-cultural dialogue, and fosters mutual understanding (Eliyahu-Levi, 2020). Through academic partnerships and research collaborations made possible by such scholarships, scholars can collectively address global challenges and contribute to advancing knowledge across multiple disciplines.

Moreover, international scholarships also serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy and promote intercultural competence (Goren, 2020). By studying abroad or hosting international students, individuals gain firsthand exposure to diverse cultures, languages, and social norms. Such experiences foster empathy, tolerance, and respect for cultural diversity—qualities essential for building bridges between nations. The cultural exchanges facilitated by these scholarships help break down stereotypes and contribute to a more interconnected and harmonious global community (Cabauatan, 2024).

International scholarships further enhance professional networks and promote international cooperation (Gereffi, 2019). Scholars often establish lasting connections with peers, mentors, and professionals from around the world. These networks foster collaboration on research projects, joint publications, and knowledge exchange across borders. As alumni of international scholarship programs advance to leadership roles in academia, government, and industry, they continue to cultivate positive relationships and contribute to strengthening international relations.

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In addition, international scholarships play an important role in driving economic development and global competitiveness. Recipients of international education often return to their home countries equipped with advanced skills, knowledge, and perspectives that stimulate innovation, economic growth, and social progress. Moreover, international students contribute directly to host economies through tuition fees, living expenses, and cultural engagement, thereby supporting local businesses and communities (Martirosyan et al., 2019; Tomasi et al., 2020).

Additionally, international scholarships play a significant role in promoting peace and stability (Campbell & Neff, 2020). By investing in education and academic exchange, countries demonstrate a commitment to dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. Education empowers individuals to become global citizens who are equipped to address complex global challenges, such as climate change, public health crises, and economic disparities through collaborative and informed action.

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Likewise, foreign scholarship policies influencing international relationships have evolved from isolated, purpose-driven programs into relationship-based and market-oriented initiatives that emphasize candidate selection processes (Chowdhry et al., 2020). Moreover, the lack of structured scholarship opportunities can weaken the connection between foreign scholarship programs and higher education institutions, ultimately affecting the cultural and institutional relationships among countries (Novotný et al., 2020). In this regard, considering factors such as candidates' countries of origin, cultural diversity, and communication styles is crucial for ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness (Pennington, 2020). The internationalization of higher education, as Buckner (2019) observes, is a rapidly growing phenomenon that

challenges and transforms the traditional understanding and practice of higher education worldwide.

Countries and higher education institutions around the world are increasingly adopting new policies and procedures to attract a greater number of international scholarship students (Lucaj & Bahna, 2020). While the rationale and approaches to internationalization differ across institutions and nations, the motivations commonly include academic, economic, social, and political dimensions. Academically, internationalization seeks to enhance instructional quality and foster global research partnerships. Economically, it aims to generate revenue through international tuition and the recruitment of distinguished scholars (Masaiti & Mwale, 2020). Social and cultural rationales focus on promoting cross-cultural understanding and global awareness, while political rationales emphasize public diplomacy and the advancement of foreign policy objectives (Czinki, 2020).

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Moreover, competition among nations to attract international students has intensified. Recent global data on student mobility indicate that traditional source countries—once known primarily for sending students abroad—are increasingly becoming important study destinations themselves (Chartrand & Vosko, 2020). This shift reflects the evolving dynamics of global education and the strategic role of scholarship programs in strengthening international partnerships.

Fluctuations in international student numbers over the past decades reveal differing experiences with internationalization. Many scholarship initiatives now focus on building lasting bridges of friendship, promoting cultural exchange, and reinforcing

traditional ties among nations (Chen & Zhu, 2020). For instance, scholarship programs established through bilateral agreements account for a significant proportion of new inbound students, reflecting the growing importance of educational diplomacy (Stewart, 2020).

This evolution suggests that earlier internationalization processes were often shaped by political rationales aligned with national and regional agendas. In response, various structural, legislative, and executive frameworks have been introduced to help higher education institutions attract a more diverse and globally oriented student body (Hsieh, 2020). Studies on foreign scholarship policies also indicate that multiple factors influence international students' choice of study destination, including academic reputation, cultural environment, and institutional support systems (Rembielak et al., 2020).

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The expansion of international education can be understood by examining the flow of students from developing countries to destinations around the world, a movement often explained through the concepts of "push" and "pull" factors (Schmid, 2020). Various studies have identified a range of such factors. The "push" factors typically include limited access to quality education in the home country, perceptions of better academic standards abroad, and the availability of technology-driven programs in foreign institutions (Nezehose, 2019).

Conversely, "pull" factors refer to the attractiveness of host countries, such as shared language and opportunities for language improvement, geographic proximity, institutional reputation for quality, and the variety of programs offered, alongside

strong promotional and marketing initiatives (Branch, 2017). The evolution of foreign policy in this context underscores how international relations have shaped differing interpretations of "foreign policy." As Smith (2020) notes, foreign policy can broadly be seen as an abstract expression of the relationships between political entities, encompassing the influence of foreign scholarship policies on global academic cooperation.

As the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continues to develop new economic sectors including tourism, finance, business services, real estate, and industrial trade its foreign scholarship initiatives and international relations play an essential role in supporting this growth (Muyombano, 2020; Badry, 2019). The UAE has been highly successful in attracting expatriate talent, as a significant portion of the workforce in the private sector comprises employees from other countries (Saheem & Brewster, 2017).

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A key policy and strategic challenge for the future lies in strengthening the capacity to educate and train Emiratis for leadership, employment, and innovation roles in the nation's evolving economy (Barnawi, 2017). Federal institutions such as the United Arab Emirates University, Zayed University, and the Higher Colleges of Technology—under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research form the foundation for Emirati enrollment and preparation for the workforce (Akhonbay, 2018). Currently, more than 34,000 Emirati students are enrolled free of charge in programs ranging from diploma to bachelor's degrees, with postgraduate opportunities also available at subsidized tuition rates (Aithal et al., 2018).

Furthermore, strategic foreign scholarship policies are vital for expanding the capacity of tertiary education and enhancing the nation's social and economic benefits (Ferreira et al., 2020). The UAE is rapidly emerging as both a regional and global model for sustainable economic and social development, with higher education serving as a crucial driver of this progress (Ashour, 2020). The continued advancement of federal higher education institutions and scholarship programs will depend on sustained governmental support, financial investment, and well-aligned policy frameworks (Morgan et al., 2020).

Higher education and foreign scholarship programs can significantly enhance employment opportunities for both men and women while contributing to national development (Al Khayyal et al., 2020). Leaders across the UAE's public and private sectors expect national universities and colleges to expand, diversify, and play a central role in supporting the country's economic growth (Al Hamad, 2020). Given the rapid changes occurring within the region and across the Emirates, the UAE's future success depends on a well-educated workforce and a high-quality higher education system (Ashour, 2020).

To sustain and improve the quality of education for national development a key strategic objective funding allocations per student must be increased, as current levels have fallen below international standards (Al Hamad, 2020). On a global scale, the forces of globalization are creating an environment that requires UAE citizens to acquire a wide range of new skills to operate effectively in the modern economy (Samier, 2020). These forces are influencing every aspect of education and scholarship in the UAE, placing greater demands on students, straining existing resources, and

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underscoring the need for a stronger, long-term societal commitment to education (Pineda, 2020).

1.2 Research Problem

Over the past two decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has strategically expanded its foreign scholarship initiatives as part of its broader vision to strengthen human capital, enhance knowledge exchange, and deepen international relations. In 2022, more than 12,000 Emirati students were enrolled in higher education programmes abroad, mainly in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023). The UAE government invested approximately AED 2.6 billion in overseas scholarships and educational exchange programmes during the 2021–2022 academic year (Ministry of Education, 2025). These programmes aim not only to improve academic and research excellence but also to promote a positive global image of the UAE and to establish long-term diplomatic, cultural, and educational partnerships with key nations (Badry, 2019; Pavan, 2020).

Despite these extensive efforts and investments, several challenges limit the effectiveness of foreign scholarship programme as instruments of the UAE's international relations. One major issue is the misalignment between scholarship objectives and national strategic priorities, especially regarding candidate selection, field of study, and destination country. Another concern is ensuring that students return home after completing their studies abroad and contribute meaningfully to national development. In many cases, graduates find attractive career opportunities overseas or face difficulties readjusting to the local professional environment (Yu, Shek, & Zhu,

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2018; Ma et al., 2020). These challenges not only reduce the national benefits of such programme but also weaken their potential diplomatic and cultural influence.

Recent research shows that international scholarship programme function not merely as educational or economic initiatives but also as strategic tools of foreign policy, public diplomacy, and soft power. Education is increasingly regarded as a "soft power resource" through which nations can attract, connect, and influence (Gauttam et al., 2024). Such programme are often designed to build enduring relationships, create alumni networks, shape perceptions of the donor country, and strengthen bilateral ties (Harrison, 2023). However, empirical evidence linking scholarship initiatives to measurable diplomatic outcomes remains limited. Most studies reveal that their influence occurs primarily through interpersonal connections and transnational networks rather than through direct state-level policy change (Harrison, 2023; Mawer, 2018). These findings highlight the need to examine how programme design particularly in terms of candidate selection, study discipline, and destination shapes both educational and foreign-relations outcomes in the UAE context.

Existing research has tended to focus mainly on the educational or economic dimensions of scholarship programme while overlooking their role in foreign policy and soft-power strategies (Tickner & True, 2018; Grenier & Hagmann, 2016). Consequently, there remains a clear gap in understanding how foreign scholarship policies contribute to the UAE's international relations agenda and how factors such as candidate selection, destination country, and study programme collectively shape their impact.

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Therefore, this study seeks to examine how the UAE's foreign scholarship policy contributes to shaping its international relations. It focuses on three core factors—candidate selection, study programme, and destination country—and investigates how these dimensions influence both the personal experiences of scholarship recipients and the broader diplomatic objectives of the UAE. By clarifying these linkages, the research aims to provide insights for enhancing the strategic alignment of scholarship programmes with the UAE's long-term international and national objectives.

1.3 Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the practices in sending UAE citizens to study overseas can play a role in improving the relationship with other countries. The research objectives of this study as follow:

1) To analyze the influence of candidate selection criteria on the UAE's foreign relations.
2) To examine how the types and fields of study programs pursued abroad contribute to strengthening the UAE's foreign relations.
3) To evaluate how the selection of destination countries affects the UAE's foreign relations with other nations.

1.4 Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the practices in sending UAE citizens to study overseas can play a role in improving the relationship with other countries. The research questions as follow:

1. How do candidate selection criteria influence the UAE's foreign relations?
2. In what ways do the fields and focus areas of study programs pursued abroad contribute to enhancing the UAE's foreign relations?

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3. How does the selection of destination countries shape the UAE's foreign relations with other nations?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The objective of this research study will certainly increase the understanding as well as awareness of foreign scholarship policy influencing on the international relationships of UAE. The significance, for clarity has been divided into practical and theoretical significance. Both are explained separately in detail below.

1.5.1 Practical Significance

This study serves as a guide for candidate selection, study programs, and destination countries in the context of international relations. International scholarships have emerged as vital instruments in global diplomacy and development. While traditionally regarded as educational opportunities, their impact extends far beyond academia. In the realm of international relations, scholarships foster long-term people-to-people connections, promote mutual understanding, and function as instruments of soft power, global cooperation, and capacity building.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the understanding of how foreign scholarship policies influence the international relations of the UAE, offering new opportunities to strengthen policy retention and organizational influence. The current research plays an important role in providing insights into strategies for enhancing institutional commitment and improving the implementation of foreign scholarship policies. It enables organizations to develop, maintain, and promote scholarship frameworks that align with both present and future national needs in the UAE.

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This research also provides valuable guidance for academicians, scholars, and institutions seeking to further explore the relationship between foreign scholarship policies and the UAE's international relations. Scholarships often form part of formal diplomatic agreements between nations and contribute to stronger political ties by demonstrating goodwill and trust. Such programs reinforce foreign policy objectives through educational diplomacy, fostering sustained collaboration among governments, academic institutions, and civil society.

By immersing students in new cultural environments, international scholarships encourage cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, reducing prejudice and fostering global citizenship. Alumni often act as cultural ambassadors for their host countries, thereby enhancing public diplomacy and contributing to peaceful international relations. Additionally, these programs help establish global alumni networks that promote research collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange across fields such as diplomacy, business, science, and civil society. Such networks become valuable diplomatic and economic assets for both sending and receiving countries.

Countries that offer scholarships or send their citizens abroad to pursue them often employ these initiatives as a means of projecting a positive international image. This form of soft power enhances a nation's reputation and influence by promoting its language, culture, and values while establishing long-term relationships in strategically important regions. Thus, this study highlights that international scholarships function as more than academic instruments; they are effective tools of diplomacy, cultural exchange, and global partnership. By fostering international relationships, nurturing future leadership, and strengthening mutual understanding,

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scholarships play a crucial role in the advancement and practice of international relations.

1.5.2 Theoretical Significance

Moreover, this study contributes additional insight and theoretical understanding by applying Social Exchange Theory and Cultural Theory to examine how foreign scholarship policies influence the international relations of the UAE and affect candidates within organizations. Academic researchers will find this study valuable as it enhances understanding of the theoretical linkages between education diplomacy and international engagement, while identifying potential research gaps for future exploration. This research is distinctive in its integration of multiple variables into a single conceptual framework, offering a clearer understanding of outcomes related to international scholarships and their broader relational impact.

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International scholarships serve as powerful tools for fostering cross-border relationships, mutual understanding, and long-term diplomatic engagement. Theoretically, their contribution to international relations can be analyzed through the lenses of Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory, both of which provide meaningful perspectives on how individuals and states interact, build trust, and sustain cooperation.

Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1978; Hofstede, 1980) posits that individuals' beliefs and behaviors are shaped by their cultural environments. Within the context of international scholarships, exposure to new cultural settings fosters intercultural competence and mutual understanding. This process supports soft power diplomacy,

whereby nations influence others not through coercion but through attraction, shared values, and cultural exchange. Scholarship recipients often act as cultural bridges, internalizing multiple value systems and serving as informal ambassadors for both their host and home countries. Such intercultural capital mitigates conflict, promotes global citizenship, and enriches diplomatic interactions. Through academic exchange, scholars bring back policy models, governance practices, and innovative ideas to their home countries, contributing to reform and modernization. This diffusion aligns with constructivist perspectives in international relations, which emphasize how identity, norms, and discourse shape global politics.

Thus, Cultural Theory positions international scholarships as instruments for normative and identity transformation, reinforcing relational diplomacy, reducing cultural biases, and promoting peace building through mutual understanding. Conversely, Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964) suggests that human relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. International scholarships often operate within bilateral or multilateral agreements, symbolizing trust and goodwill. The UAE, for instance, provides educational opportunities with the expectation of fostering future cooperation, influence, or economic and political returns. For students, receiving a scholarship involves a cost-benefit process investing time and effort in exchange for education, global networks, and career advancement. Host institutions, on the other hand, benefit from the diversity, innovation, and global prestige associated with international participation. Former scholars who later assume leadership positions in government, academia, or industry often maintain favorable views toward their host countries, thereby strengthening diplomatic and economic ties.

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Social Exchange Theory thus frames international scholarships as rational and strategic tools for relationship-building in international relations. These exchanges are not purely altruistic; they represent calculated diplomacy in which long-term relational gains outweigh short-term costs. By integrating Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study positions international scholarships as both ideational and instrumental mechanisms within international relations. They shape worldviews, reduce ethnocentrism, and nurture transnational identities. At the same time, they function as strategic investments in influence, trust, and collaboration. This dual theoretical perspective enriches our understanding of international scholarships not merely as educational opportunities but as dynamic soft power instruments that contribute to stable, cooperative, and culturally attuned international relations.

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1.6 Research Scope

This research examines the impact of foreign scholarship policy on the international relations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The study excludes programs categorized as temporary, expansion-based, or those still under governmental integration. The research is geographically distributed across all emirates of the UAE to ensure a comprehensive representation of state-level scholarship initiatives and international engagement programs. The scope of this study was determined based on factors such as candidate selection, number of recipients, study programs, destination countries, and the broader social and diplomatic impacts of foreign scholarships on international relations.

One of the key challenges encountered during this research was the initial uncertainty and limitations related to data accessibility within the UAE context. To address this, the researcher developed strong interpersonal skills when interacting with participants, clearly explaining the importance of the study and assuring them of strict confidentiality and privacy regarding the information provided. This approach enhanced participants' trust and improved the accuracy of responses, thus ensuring the reliability of the questionnaire data.

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and collected responses in person, which helped overcome logistical challenges and improved the completion rate. Respondents were encouraged to provide their answers not only by marking checkboxes but also through alternative means such as shading or crossing where appropriate, allowing greater flexibility and accuracy in their responses.

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This study also provides a brief background and overview of how foreign scholarship policies influence the international relations of the UAE. The target population consists of employees within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who possess direct knowledge of students studying abroad under scholarship programs. Although the study focuses on all seven emirates, greater emphasis is placed on regions with higher scholarship engagement and policy activity. To ensure ethical integrity, participants were assured that all collected data would remain confidential and that no identifying information would appear in the final report.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

This study includes several key terms that must be defined from the outset, as they form the foundation of the main concepts discussed. The definitions of these essential terms are as follows:

1.7.1 Candidates Selection

Selection refers to the process of identifying and choosing the most suitable candidate for educational or organizational purposes. In the context of education, it involves matching institutional requirements with the qualifications, skills, and potential of applicants (Karam et al., 2020).

1.7.2 Study Programs

A study program refers to the vocational or academic curriculum offered to students during their educational journey. It encompasses the structured learning experiences, instruction, and assessment designed to achieve specific educational outcomes (Jabbarova, 2020).

1.7.3 Destination Country

An international student is an individual who crosses national borders to pursue education in another country. The destination country refers to the host nation where the student undertakes academic or vocational studies, which differs from the individual's country of origin (Wilkins & He, 2020).

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1.7.4 International Relations

International relations is an interdisciplinary field that combines elements of economics, history, and political science to analyze global issues such as human rights, poverty, environmental sustainability, globalization, security, and governance. It focuses on understanding the interactions and relationships between states, international organizations, and non-state actors within the global system (Baylis, 2020).

1.8 Structure of the Study

The context body of the thesis is formulated of five chapters as the following:

- Chapter One focuses on the background of the study, presenting the problem statement, research questions, and objectives. It also explains the significance, scope, and definitions of key terms relevant to the research.
- Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature to justify the research questions and objectives established in Chapter One. It discusses previous studies and theoretical contributions related to the topic, with particular attention to the influence of foreign scholarship policies on the international relations of the UAE.
- Chapter Three presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study. The conceptual framework serves as the foundation for the hypotheses tested in the research. This chapter also details the research methodology, including the design, data collection procedures, and analytical methods used to answer the research questions and verify the hypotheses.

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- Chapter Four outlines the findings of the statistical analyses conducted on the collected data. It presents the processes of data screening, demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, measurement model assessment, structural model assessment, and moderation analysis, supported by thorough interpretation and discussion of results.
- Chapter Five provides a summary of the study's key findings, conclusions, additional discussions, limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research and policy development.

1.9 Summary

The study explains foreign scholarship policy influencing on the international relationships of UAE and the objective are the impact of candidates' selection to international relations in UAE, the impact of candidates' numbers to international relations in UAE following the impact of study programs to international relations in UAE, finally the impact of destination country to international relations in UAE. The study is filling the gaps and enabling this study in foreign scholarship policy in UAE context of both existing evidence and its practical applications.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature that underpins the present study. It begins by examining key issues within the UAE's higher-education landscape, followed by discussions on federal and emirate-level scholarship programs, the regional and global context of Emirati aid, and the theoretical perspectives that frame this research. The chapter concludes by presenting the conceptual framework and hypotheses development.

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Foreign scholarship policies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have become strategic instruments for strengthening the nation's international relations. Through government-sponsored programs, Emirati students are funded to study abroad with the expectation that they will not only enhance their academic and professional competencies but also serve as cultural and intellectual bridges between the UAE and their host countries (Campbell & Baxter, 2019). Alumni networks formed through these international programs are viewed as long-term channels for cooperation, mutual understanding, and socio-economic collaboration. Examining the effectiveness of such initiatives provides valuable insight for policymakers, program administrators, and

graduates seeking to align scholarship outcomes with the UAE's diplomatic and developmental goals.

Participation in overseas study exposes students to diverse academic environments and broadens their professional and cultural perspectives. De Wit et al. (2019) argue that international education enhances human capital formation and indirectly strengthens diplomatic relations by developing individuals with global competencies and cross-cultural awareness. Thus, scholarship programs contribute not only to the personal development of Emirati students but also to the UAE's broader engagement with the international community.

However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on several policy and implementation factors. As Pilkington (2016) notes, maximizing the benefits of international scholarships requires continuous improvement in higher education, refinement of scholarship policies, and alignment between academic fields and national priorities. Similarly, Campbell and Nef (2020) emphasize that when properly structured and managed, foreign scholarship programs can yield significant returns in human capital development and enhance the UAE's external relations.

Although restrictions exist—such as funding limitations, return-of-service requirements, and administrative challenges, government-sponsored scholarships remain an essential mechanism through which the UAE advances its international relations agenda. These programs are designed to produce positive outcomes by cultivating highly skilled individuals who represent the nation's values and aspirations abroad (Leonchuk & Gray, 2019).

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Building on previous research, this study identifies key variables that explain the impact of foreign scholarships on the UAE's international relations (Asad et al., 2020). These variables include candidate selection, number of participants, study programs, and destination countries, as well as the broader historical, political, financial, and academic contexts within which these policies operate (Asad et al., 2021). By critically examining these elements, this chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding how foreign scholarship initiatives function as strategic tools for strengthening the UAE's international relations and enhancing its global presence.

2.2 Key Issues for UAE Higher Education

The development of higher education in the UAE has been guided by several foundational policy decisions, many dating back to the 1970s that continue to shape the structure, operations, and strategic orientation of universities across the country (Szolomicka & Szolomicki, 2020). These early policy choices, grounded in Arab cultural values yet responsive to global educational trends, laid the foundation for a system designed not only to meet national labor market needs but also to align with international academic standards (Burton, 2020).

Among the pillars of this policy framework were the establishment of UAE-based universities, gender-segregated campuses, the recruitment of internationally trained academic staff, English-medium instruction, and the goal of universal access for Emirati students, including women (Zakarneh et al., 2020). While these measures supported rapid educational expansion, they also introduced significant financial and structural challenges. Davidson and Mackenzie (2012) noted that gender-segregated campuses and reliance on expatriate faculty contribute to higher operational costs

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compared to other higher-education systems. These financial and logistical pressures continue to affect the long-term sustainability of institutions (Asif, Asad, Bhutta, & Khan, 2021).

Beyond these historical issues, recent studies emphasize that the UAE's higher-education system now faces global imperatives such as shifting from quantity to quality, enhancing research productivity, and aligning with knowledge-economy objectives (Aboelenein, 2022; Jaleel & Saber, 2025). For instance, Aboelenein (2022) finds that although UAE universities have expanded in number and capacity, their research performance remains below international benchmarks. Similarly, a 2024 study in Frontiers in Education highlights that higher education has become a catalytic element of national development in the UAE, yet systemic reforms remain necessary to fully realize its potential.

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Therefore, the key challenges for UAE higher education extend beyond expansion—they require strategic transformation. This involves aligning institutional objectives with future workforce needs, improving academic and research quality, and integrating UAE institutions into global knowledge networks. These issues are directly relevant to the current study, as the effectiveness of the UAE's foreign-scholarship policy as a tool of international relations depends heavily on the domestic higher-education environment. In essence, if national higher education fails to produce globally competitive human capital and effective academic linkages, overseas scholarship programs may fall short of achieving their intended diplomatic and developmental outcomes.

2.3 Federalism and Emirate Programs

The UAE was established in 1971 as a federation of seven emirates, each maintaining a degree of administrative autonomy while sharing national goals in governance, development, and education (Sarker & Rahman, 2020). Since then, federal institutions have played a leading role in coordinating national policy, while emirate-level authorities have also developed their own initiatives to address regional priorities. Over time, this dual structure has produced a complex governance model for education—one that balances centralized regulation with localized flexibility (Boateng, 2020).

In the early years, higher-education policy was primarily directed by the federal government through the Ministry of Education and later by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). However, the growing economic and demographic diversity among the emirates particularly Abu Dhabi and Dubai has encouraged more localized approaches to policy and institutional management. Abu Dhabi's establishment of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) in 2005, later merged into the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), illustrates how emirate-level bodies have increasingly influenced educational reform agendas, focusing on school management, teacher training, and international partnerships (Samsonova, 2021; Romanowski, 2020).

This federal emirate balance presents both advantages and challenges. On one hand, decentralized governance allows each emirate to innovate and attract international collaboration. For example, Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has been instrumental in expanding partnerships with foreign universities and

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private education providers (Al-Dhaafri & Alosani, 2020). On the other hand, uneven development across emirates can result in disparities in institutional quality, duplication of resources, and policy fragmentation. As Sarker and Rahman (2020) argue, regionalized governance may dilute national coordination and complicate the implementation of unified quality standards.

Quality assurance remains a key concern within this federal framework. Maintaining internationally recognized standards in staffing, curricula, and research output is vital for the UAE's competitiveness and the credibility of its graduates (Хакимов, 2020; Krejsler, 2020). Failure to uphold these standards risks diminishing graduate employability and public confidence in higher education. Consequently, national universities such as the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) and Zayed University have sought institutional and programmatic accreditation from international bodies particularly U.S. regional accrediting agencies to align with global benchmarks (Tezcan Unal, 2018).

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In recent years, collaboration between federal and emirate-level authorities has increasingly emphasized quality assurance as part of the UAE's national innovation and knowledge-economy strategy (Abo-Khalil, 2024). This evolution from federal control to shared responsibility reflects how education in the UAE operates within a multilayered policy environment. Such a structure is directly relevant to the present study, as the design and implementation of foreign-scholarship programs are also distributed between federal and emirate-level institutions. Understanding the interplay between centralized coordination and local autonomy is therefore essential to

evaluating how scholarship policies contribute to the UAE's broader international-relations objectives.

2.4 Emirati Aid in a Regional and Global Context

The UAE has emerged as one of the most active aid donors in the Middle East, alongside Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait. Among these Gulf benefactors, the UAE has distinguished itself through its recent efforts to institutionalize and increase the transparency of its foreign aid activities (Elkahlout, 2020). While Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have long published detailed annual reports through their national aid agencies, the UAE's establishment of the Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid (OCFA) in 2008 later integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC) marked a significant milestone in aligning its aid reporting with international standards (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2013).

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Although scholarship-specific data remain limited, this expansion of institutional capacity has repositioned the UAE as a notable "non-traditional donor" in global development assistance (Kanna, 2014). Historically, most academic discussions of Arab donors have focused on humanitarian or financial aid; however, in recent years, attention has shifted toward educational assistance and human-capital investment as emerging forms of soft power (Zreik, 2024). Within this broader framework, the UAE's foreign-scholarship programs represent a strategic component of its aid and diplomacy agenda—supporting not only human-resource development but also long-term relationship-building with partner nations.

Scholarly perspectives increasingly recognize international scholarships as a form of educational diplomacy a mechanism through which states cultivate global networks and promote mutual understanding (Ng & Nyland, 2020; Perna et al., 2015). In this context, scholarships operate simultaneously as instruments of aid, providing financial support to deserving students, and as instruments of foreign policy, shaping how nations are perceived abroad. Custer and Akaeze (2019) observe that the conditions attached to scholarship awards—such as return-of-service requirements or field-of-study restrictions—often reflect national policy objectives. Likewise, Ennin (2020) notes that government-funded scholarship recipients are frequently required to return to their home institutions or work in designated sectors, ensuring that the acquired knowledge contributes to national development.

From an international-relations perspective, this conditionality closely aligns with state interests. As Werle (2020) explains, scholarship agreements incorporating structured return mechanisms function as a form of human-capital diplomacy, ensuring that the benefits of international education are reinvested domestically. At the same time, such arrangements foster enduring academic and professional linkages between donor nations and host institutions relationships that often persist long after the period of study has ended (Yılmaz & Bıkmaz, 2020).

Nevertheless, some scholars have raised concerns that certain scholarship and admissions programs may overemphasize non-academic attributes such as symbolic achievements or athletic talent at the expense of academic merit, thereby introducing bias and potentially diverting attention from developmental objectives (Kamis et al., 2023). Cavanna et al. (2021) further argue that effective scholarship policy requires

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evidence-based selection criteria, transparent evaluation processes, and strong collaboration between sending and receiving institutions to maximize program outcomes.

Overall, the UAE's approach to foreign aid particularly its growing investment in human-capital development through scholarship initiatives illustrates how education serves as both a developmental and diplomatic tool. By funding study opportunities abroad, the UAE not only enhances the competencies of its citizens but also strengthens its global presence through enduring educational and professional networks. This intersection between foreign aid, educational policy, and international relations provides the essential context for understanding how the UAE's foreign-scholarship programs operate as strategic instruments of foreign policy, a theme further developed in the subsequent sections of this study.

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2.5 International Relations

The discipline of international relations (IR) has evolved significantly over the past century, reflecting the increasing complexity of global interdependence. Since the mid-twentieth century, departments, research centers, and scholarly associations dedicated to IR have expanded rapidly worldwide, establishing the field as a cornerstone of political and social science (Acharya, 2014). Traditionally, IR scholarship focused on state-centric analyses of power, security, and diplomacy; however, contemporary approaches now integrate economic, cultural, and transnational dimensions to explain how states and non-state actors interact within the international system (Paksoy & Çelik, 2019; Heilbronn & Skilbeck, 2020).

The intellectual foundations of IR have been shaped by distinct schools of thought such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism, each offering different explanations for cooperation and conflict in world politics. Realist scholars emphasize state sovereignty and the pursuit of power, while liberal perspectives highlight the role of institutions, law, and cooperation in achieving global stability (Singer, 1961; Adesina, 2020). Constructivist and post-colonial theorists, in turn, argue that norms, identity, and historical experiences—particularly those of the Global South—profoundly influence international behavior (Xu, 2017; Kaczmarska, 2020). As Kaczmarska (2020) observes, IR is no longer dominated exclusively by Western epistemologies; emerging voices from Asia and the Middle East are re-framing debates on knowledge production and global governance.

Despite these advances, many developing countries still face obstacles in producing locally grounded IR scholarship. Limitations such as restricted data access, political sensitivity, and limited research funding have constrained the development of independent academic traditions (Kibera, 2020). Consequently, a renewed effort has emerged to "globalize" the study of IR by integrating diverse perspectives and experiences (Ren, 2020; Goren et al., 2020). This global shift is directly relevant to the UAE, whose growing participation in international education, diplomacy, and soft-power initiatives provides fertile ground for analyzing how smaller states navigate a multipolar world.

In recent years, international relations have become increasingly intertwined with higher education, human-capital mobility, and knowledge diplomacy. Educational exchange is now recognized as a significant dimension of foreign policy, enabling

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states to build trust, share expertise, and enhance mutual understanding (Sus & Hadeed, 2020). For the UAE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has incorporated scholarship programs as part of its diplomatic strategy to prepare a new generation of leaders capable of representing the nation abroad. The MoFA Scholarship Program supports outstanding Emirati students pursuing degrees in fields such as international law, political science, and global economics at leading foreign universities, with the explicit objective of cultivating competencies relevant to the UAE's diplomatic corps (Alali et al., 2024).

Similarly, public universities such as United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) and Khalifa University provide graduate assistantships and research fellowships for both national and international students, fostering academic collaboration and strengthening the UAE's presence within global knowledge networks (Buckner, 2021). Other institutions including Abu Dhabi University and Al Qasimia University offer merit-based and fully funded scholarships that promote educational and cultural exchange across regions. While many of these programs are not explicitly linked to foreign policy, they collectively contribute to the UAE's international engagement by enhancing its reputation as a regional hub for education and by nurturing transnational professional relationships.

In this context, international relations and educational diplomacy converge. The UAE's growing investment in scholarship programs serves not only domestic capacity-building but also the nation's foreign-policy objectives by cultivating globally minded citizens who can advance the country's interests abroad. These initiatives exemplify how smaller yet economically dynamic states use education and

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mobility to project influence and build enduring partnerships. Understanding this connection between international relations theory and the practical mechanisms of scholarship diplomacy provides an essential conceptual bridge for the present study.

2.6 Candidates Selection

The selection of candidates for international scholarships has long been recognized as a key determinant of program success and impact. Historically, the provision of scholarships to students from developing countries represented one of the earliest forms of educational cooperation and development assistance (Caretta et al., 2018). Over time, bilateral agencies, multilateral organizations, and private foundations have expanded these initiatives, guided by overlapping humanitarian, diplomatic, and economic motivations (Boeren, 2018). These programs aim not only to build human capacity within recipient countries but also to strengthen bilateral relations and promote mutual understanding between donor and host nations (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

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2.6.1 Purpose and Policy Orientation

Candidate-selection policies vary widely depending on the objectives of the sponsoring agency. In most cases, donors design eligibility and assessment criteria to reflect their own political or developmental priorities (Hayter & Parker, 2019). For example, programs financed from development-cooperation budgets typically target specific partner countries and focus on disciplines linked to national or regional capacity building (Rahman et al., 2020). By contrast, scholarship schemes embedded within foreign-policy frameworks such as those of the UAE tend to prioritize strategic

partnerships, diplomatic visibility, and the cultivation of globally competent professionals.

According to Dassin and Navarrete (2018), the funding source strongly influences who is selected and how: public–sector sponsors may emphasize merit and leadership potential; private donors may favor specialized expertise; and joint international initiatives often stress reciprocal academic exchange. Regardless of model, a transparent and equitable selection process is essential to ensure both fairness and policy legitimacy (Mensah, 2020).

2.6.2 Merit, Equity, and Strategic Fit

Modern scholarship programs balance three interrelated principles academic merit, equity, and strategic alignment. Academic merit remains the dominant criterion, typically measured through grade-point averages, research experience, publications, and English-language proficiency (Gallagher, 2019; El Masri, 2020). Yet many programs also incorporate financial-need considerations or affirmative-action mechanisms to widen access (Segarra et al., 2020). For doctoral and postgraduate awards, research potential and relevance to national priorities have become particularly significant (McEvoy, 2018).

Within the UAE, government-funded programs such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Scholarship, UAE University PhD Scholarship, and Khalifa University Graduate Assistantship apply rigorous, merit-based criteria. Applicants are evaluated on prior academic performance, research output, and alignment with strategic sectors such as renewable energy, health, transport, and advanced technology (Johnson, 2020).

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Competitive programs like the H.H. Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Scholarship further restrict eligibility to UAE nationals or GCC citizens, reflecting national human-capital goals.

2.6.3 Capacity Development and Return Expectations

A distinguishing feature of many government-sponsored scholarships is the inclusion of return-service obligations designed to ensure that recipients reinvest their expertise domestically (Ennin, 2020; Werle, 2020). This requirement transforms scholarships into a form of "human-capital diplomacy," where knowledge transfer and national development are intertwined (Froehlich, 2020). In the UAE context, such policies align with broader efforts to link higher-education outcomes to the country's foreign-relations agenda. The objective is not only to train competent professionals but also to produce global ambassadors who can represent the UAE's values and interests abroad.

Makundi et al. (2017) and Yaari et al. (2019) emphasize that candidate selection can amplify the diplomatic impact of scholarships when selection criteria explicitly consider leadership qualities, cross-cultural adaptability, and potential for long-term international engagement. By contrast, overly narrow academic metrics risk overlooking candidates capable of contributing meaningfully to international cooperation. Thus, strategic balance between excellence, equity, and diplomatic potential is essential for maximizing the return on national scholarship investments.

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2.6.4 Implications for the UAE's Foreign-Scholarship Policy

The UAE's candidate-selection systems reflect the intersection of educational quality assurance and foreign-policy ambition. Rigorous evaluation standards ensure that scholarship recipients perform at internationally competitive levels, while the emphasis on national-priority disciplines aligns these individual pursuits with broader development goals (Mensah, 2020; Johnson, 2020). Moreover, the inclusion of return-service clauses, professional-placement tracking, and alumni-network initiatives helps translate personal academic achievements into collective diplomatic value.

Consequently, candidate selection is more than an administrative process it is a policy instrument that shapes who represents the UAE abroad, how knowledge circulates globally, and how educational exchanges translate into sustained international partnerships. Understanding the logic and outcomes of this process is therefore central to assessing how foreign-scholarship programs contribute to the UAE's international-relations strategy.

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2.7 Study Programs

International scholarship programs have long been recognized as strategic instruments for building human capital and promoting socio-economic transformation, particularly in developing and emerging economies (Olopade et al., 2020). The study programs funded under these schemes typically follow a structured pathway through which selected candidates receive academic training, professional exposure, and intercultural experience intended to translate into developmental and diplomatic gains upon their return (Kõu & Bailey, 2017). While each scholarship initiative differs in scope and design, most share common objectives: to enhance individual capabilities, strengthen

national competitiveness, and foster international collaboration (Campbell, 2016; Keiser & Miller, 2020).

2.7.1 Structure and Administration of Study Programs

The administration of study programs involves several coordinated stages from program design and candidate recruitment to post-study reintegration. Transparent advertisement, eligibility screening, and selection procedures are essential to ensure equitable access and credibility (Cuskelly et al., 2020). Once selected, scholarship recipients are typically supported through a combination of funding sources, including government sponsorship, university tuition waivers, and external partnerships (Gonzaga et al., 2020). Many programs also include non-academic components such as mentoring, academic advising, and personal development plans to maximize participants' success.

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Study programs are not confined to formal classroom learning; they emphasize holistic professional and social development. Scholars are encouraged to participate in seminars, student associations, cultural exchange events, and community engagement activities that foster intercultural competence and leadership skills (Savarese, 2020; Van Wart et al., 2020). Some programs require internships or work placements to facilitate knowledge transfer between academia and industry, while others promote academic networks linking host and home institutions.

2.7.2 Learning Outcomes and Capacity Development

Well-structured study programs aim to achieve both tangible and intangible outcomes. Tangible outcomes include academic degrees, research outputs, and technical skills; intangible outcomes encompass the acquisition of cross-cultural understanding, global perspectives, and leadership capacity (Carpenter et al., 2019; Hahn et al., 2019). Through immersion in diverse educational and cultural environments, scholarship recipients are expected to enhance their adaptability and problem-solving abilities qualities that are increasingly valued in globally interconnected labor markets (Caggiano et al., 2020; Setyono & Widodo, 2019).

Networking opportunities are another essential component. Alumni often form long-lasting professional relationships with peers, mentors, and policymakers, which in turn serve as informal diplomatic linkages between countries (Carpi et al., 2017). These human networks facilitate knowledge exchange, future collaboration, and policy dialogue, thus reinforcing the notion that international scholarships operate as vehicles of soft power and cultural diplomacy (Rahiem, 2020; Elalfy et al., 2020).

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2.7.3 Economic and Strategic Dimensions

From a policy standpoint, study programs also serve as competitive tools for attracting talent. Many governments and universities have increased merit-based awards to recruit high-achieving students who contribute to research excellence and innovation (Evans, 2020). While this competition enhances global mobility, it also raises questions about whether funding should prioritize national development goals or institutional prestige (Ortiga et al., 2020). Elalfy et al. (2020) note that study programs

are often grounded in human-capital logic, where investment in education is viewed as a means to achieve economic growth and national advancement.

In the UAE, the design of study programs under foreign-scholarship schemes reflects this dual logic of development and diplomacy. Universities such as the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Khalifa University, and Abu Dhabi University offer extensive graduate and postgraduate programs across disciplines including engineering, information technology, education, and medicine. These programs are often supported by targeted scholarships such as the TDRA-ICT Fund Scholarship, the Hamdan bin Rashid Scholarship for Educational Innovation, and the Arab Space Pioneers Program for space science (Buckner, 2021). Such initiatives are strategically aligned with the UAE's Vision 2031 priorities in renewable energy, artificial intelligence, health, and advanced manufacturing (Al Ali & Al Mansoori, 2024).

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International students are eligible for many of these programs, and applications are typically processed through online portals that integrate both admission and scholarship assessment (UAEU, 2024). Selection is competitive and based on academic excellence, research potential, and English-language proficiency. For Emirati scholars, participation in overseas programs often under MoFA or Ministry of Education sponsorship extends the UAE's diplomatic outreach by embedding students within global institutions that shape research, technology, and policy.

The diplomatic relevance of study programs lies in their capacity to transform educational exchange into sustained international engagement. Graduates returning from prestigious institutions abroad bring with them not only advanced knowledge but

also cross-cultural insights and professional networks that can strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation. As Knight (2022) explains, such programs serve as "educational bridges" that connect nations through shared academic values and mutual trust. In the context of the UAE, study programs thus operate as both a developmental mechanism enhancing national human capital and a diplomatic instrument that broadens the country's global partnerships.

2.8 Destination Country

The selection of a destination country represents one of the most influential factors shaping the success and impact of international scholarship programs. Country image, educational quality, safety, and socio-cultural environment strongly influence both students' decisions and governments' scholarship allocations (Yousaf et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2020). Understanding how destination choice affects academic, social, and diplomatic outcomes is therefore essential for evaluating the broader implications of foreign scholarships in shaping international relations.

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2.8.1 Country Image and Educational Appeal

Research consistently demonstrates a positive relationship between a country's image and students' preference for that destination (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Economic stability, technological advancement, and political reputation often serve as the most decisive pull factors (Wen & Hu, 2019). Beyond material indicators, the socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic affinities between sending and host countries also shape destination preferences (Maksüdünov et al., 2019). Students are generally drawn to nations perceived as culturally inclusive and academically prestigious.

For governments, these same attributes influence policy decisions regarding where to send sponsored students. Destination countries with long-standing diplomatic or trade partnerships often become preferred choices, as scholarship cooperation reinforces bilateral trust and knowledge exchange (Phú & Nguyễn, 2020). As Fischer et al. (2018) note, student flows frequently mirror existing economic and political linkages between nations, reflecting the soft-power dimensions of educational mobility.

2.8.2 Economic and Strategic Rationales

At a global level, higher-education institutions have embraced internationalization as both an economic and strategic priority. With public funding constraints and rising demand for tertiary education, many universities now depend on international student tuition and partnerships as alternative revenue streams (Beech, 2018; De Wit, 2019). This economic logic has positioned education as a tradable service and intensified global competition among destination countries (Altbach et al., 2019). In parallel, destination governments use scholarships and visa incentives to attract talented students who can later contribute to their innovation ecosystems (Callender & Dougherty, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020).

The traditional dichotomy between "sending" and "receiving" countries has blurred as emerging economies such as Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and the UAE have transitioned from importers to exporters of higher education (Welch, 2018). These nations now host international branch campuses, build education hubs, and promote two-way academic exchanges (Hoang et al., 2018; Macrander, 2017). This shift transforms international student mobility from a unidirectional flow into a reciprocal, networked form of cooperation.

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2.8.3 Pull Factors and Policy Instruments

Common pull factors that influence destination attractiveness include academic reputation, research infrastructure, employability outcomes, cost of study, visa flexibility, and international recognition of qualifications (Sziegat, 2020). Destination countries also employ deliberate policy instruments such as scholarship funding, post-study work rights, and targeted marketing campaigns to enhance their global visibility (Knight, 2022).

In this evolving landscape, the UAE has positioned itself as both a sending and receiving country for international students. Its world-class universities such as UAEU, Khalifa University, and New York University Abu Dhabi offer internationally accredited programs, often in partnership with leading global institutions (Samier, 2020). The UAE's strategic geographic location between Europe, Asia, and Africa enhances its appeal as a regional higher-education hub (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017). The country's modern infrastructure, extensive air connectivity, and safe living environment further reinforce its attractiveness (Doyle, Khan, & Burton, 2019).

2.8.4 Destination Choice and Foreign-Policy Linkages

For the UAE government, the destination country of scholarship recipients is not merely an academic consideration but a deliberate foreign-policy choice. Selecting host countries in line with strategic partnerships such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, and China helps consolidate diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties. These choices reflect what Nye (2021) terms "soft-power alignment," wherein educational exchange becomes a channel for influence and mutual benefit.

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By sending Emirati scholars to globally influential universities, the UAE invests in relationship-building and long-term trust with host nations. Graduates returning from these countries often occupy positions in diplomacy, technology, and governance, serving as cultural intermediaries who strengthen the UAE's international presence. Likewise, hosting foreign students in the UAE enhances cultural diplomacy by projecting the nation as tolerant, modern, and knowledge-driven—a key element of its post-oil diversification strategy (Al Ali & Al Mansoori, 2024).

Destination-country selection therefore serves dual purposes: advancing individual learning and achieving state-level diplomatic objectives. The UAE's engagement in both outbound and inbound scholarship programs demonstrates how higher-education internationalization can operate as a two-way mechanism of soft-power projection and international cooperation. Understanding the strategic rationale behind destination selection provides crucial insight into how foreign scholarships contribute to shaping the UAE's foreign relations a central concern of this research.

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2.9 Underpinning Theories

This study is anchored in two main theoretical perspectives—Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory—that together explain how foreign-scholarship initiatives can influence the international relations of the United Arab Emirates. These theories provide the conceptual basis for understanding both the cultural dimensions and the reciprocal interactions that occur through international educational exchanges.

2.9.1 Cultural Theory

Cultural Theory is rooted in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and political economy, and it explores how shared values, beliefs, and practices shape individuals and societies (Serrat, 2017). It suggests that culture is a dynamic system of meanings that governs social behaviour and institutional structures. In the context of international education, cultural theory helps explain how cross-cultural exposure contributes to social transformation, intercultural understanding, and the enhancement of a nation's global image (Lähdesmäki, 2022; Edwards, 2024).

From a policy perspective, cultural theory also highlights that education and exchange programs are powerful forms of cultural diplomacy, allowing states to project their identity and values across borders. The UAE's foreign-scholarship programs exemplify this approach. By sending Emirati students to study in world-class institutions, the UAE invests not only in human-capital development but also in strengthening its soft power through cultural interaction and mutual understanding (Gauttam et al., 2024). These students often become informal ambassadors who represent Emirati culture and promote dialogue between nations.

Moreover, cultural theory emphasizes that international engagement through scholarships can reshape social attitudes, worldviews, and cultural competencies. Exposure to different societies enhances empathy, tolerance, and global awareness skills that are valuable in diplomacy and international cooperation (Mesoudi, Whiten & Laland, 2006). When these graduates return home, they bring not only academic knowledge but also intercultural skills that enrich local institutions and strengthen international partnerships.

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Therefore, cultural theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how the UAE uses educational exchange as a tool for soft-power diplomacy and for cultivating long-term cultural linkages. It bridges education policy with international relations by demonstrating that knowledge exchange and cultural understanding are central to a nation's global engagement strategy.

2.9.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) originated from the works of Homans (1961), Blau (1964), and Emerson (1972), and it explains human interaction as a process of reciprocal exchange based on perceived costs and benefits. The theory assumes that individuals and institutions engage in relationships that provide mutual rewards such as trust, support, recognition, or shared outcomes (Cook et al., 2013).

Within the context of international scholarship programs, SET provides a valuable framework for analysing how sending and host countries, scholarship recipients, and academic institutions maintain cooperative and reciprocal relationships. For example, the UAE provides financial and institutional support for scholars, while expecting that these individuals will return with advanced skills and global networks that contribute to national progress (Ahmad et al., 2023). This exchange of resources—financial investment for intellectual and diplomatic capital—illustrates how scholarship initiatives operate as structured systems of reciprocity.

SET also explains the long-term relational benefits of scholarship programs. Alumni who maintain professional ties with their host countries often become bridges for bilateral cooperation, research collaboration, and trade partnerships (Lin, 2024). Such

sustained relationships generate social capital that strengthens diplomatic trust and contributes to the UAE's foreign-policy objectives. In this way, education exchange becomes not only a tool for human-resource development but also a mechanism for sustaining mutual interdependence and goodwill among nations.

Furthermore, SET emphasizes the role of fairness and balance in sustaining these relationships. If scholarship recipients perceive the benefits and obligations as equitable, they are more likely to remain loyal to their sponsors and contribute positively to the program's goals. For the UAE, this balance ensures that its investments in education yield long-term diplomatic and developmental returns.

SET provides a relational lens through which to view the UAE's scholarship initiatives not merely as one-way assistance but as reciprocal interactions that produce shared value, trust, and enduring cooperation between nations. Together, the two theories complement each other: Cultural Theory explains the ideological and symbolic dimensions of exchange, while Social Exchange Theory clarifies the relational and behavioural mechanisms that make such exchanges successful.

In summary, Cultural Theory supports the influence of study programs and destination countries on international relations by explaining how educational and cultural exposure enhances mutual understanding and national soft power. Meanwhile, Social Exchange Theory provides the basis for the candidate selection process, illustrating how reciprocal exchanges between scholarship providers and recipients strengthen long-term cooperation and trust. Together, these theories form the foundation for the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 2.1, where each independent variable

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candidate selection, study program, and destination country is hypothesized to have a positive effect on international relations.

2.10 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between three independent variable candidate selection, study programs, and destination country—and the dependent variable, international relations. As presented in Figure 2.1, this framework seeks to explain how the UAE's foreign-scholarship policy contributes to strengthening international relations through educational, cultural, and diplomatic exchange.

This framework is grounded in the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier, namely cultural theory and social exchange theory. Social exchange theory explains the reciprocal and mutually beneficial nature of scholarship relations between the UAE and host countries. Through well-structured selection processes, students receive opportunities to study abroad, while the UAE gains long-term diplomatic and developmental returns when these students contribute to national progress upon their return. Meanwhile, cultural theory clarifies how exposure to different societies, languages, and academic systems enhances cross-cultural understanding, soft-power influence, and global engagement. Together, these theories provide the foundation for analysing how the UAE's foreign-scholarship policy serves as a strategic instrument for promoting cooperation and mutual trust in international relations.

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Foreign scholarships represent one of the UAE's most strategic educational investments, designed not only to build human capital but also to advance diplomatic and cultural objectives. By offering scholarships to study in globally recognised institutions, the UAE seeks to produce graduates who are academically competent, internationally minded, and capable of representing Emirati values abroad (Asad et al., 2021; Blaney & Tickner, 2017; Edwards et al., 2020). Such students act as informal ambassadors, contributing to cultural dialogue and international collaboration, thereby projecting a positive image of the UAE on the global stage.

The conceptual framework proposes that the quality of Candidate Selection, the relevance of Study Programs, and the strategic choice of Destination Country directly influence the effectiveness of international relations. Appropriate candidate selection ensures that motivated and capable students are chosen to represent the UAE; study programs determine the quality of learning, research, and skills transfer achieved through international exposure; and the destination country shapes the geopolitical and cultural dimensions of these exchanges. In this way, scholarship programs become powerful tools of soft-power diplomacy that strengthen the UAE's presence in global academic and policy networks.

Grounded in both theoretical and practical reasoning, this framework assumes that improved practices in these three dimensions will lead to stronger international relations between the UAE and its partner countries. Consequently, the following hypotheses are developed and examined in the subsequent subsections to test these relationships empirically.

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2.10.1 Candidates Selection and International Relations.

Candidate selection refers to the process of identifying and choosing the most qualified students to represent their home country in foreign-scholarship programs. Effective selection is based on transparent criteria such as academic merit, leadership potential, language proficiency, and alignment with national priorities (Acharya & Buzan, 2017; Drezner, 2017; Gofas et al., 2018). Previous research has shown that the effectiveness of the selection process significantly influences the overall success of scholarship programs and their contribution to international relations (Acharya, 2017; Grenier et al., 2020; Ha et al., 2020; Hansen, 2017; Lacatus, 2020; Sevin et al., 2019; Wohlforth et al., 2018; Zhang, 2016). When scholarship candidates are carefully selected based on both academic and cultural competencies, they are more likely to perform well abroad, represent their country positively, and foster stronger bilateral ties (Paul, 2017; Whyte, 2019).

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According to Social Exchange Theory, candidate selection can be viewed as a reciprocal investment between the UAE government and the student (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). The government provides financial and institutional support, while the scholar contributes by achieving academic excellence, building international networks, and acting as a cultural ambassador. This exchange strengthens mutual trust and cooperation between the UAE and the host countries, as successful candidates enhance the nation's reputation and contribute to sustainable diplomatic relationships.

From a Cultural Theory perspective, selected candidates serve as carriers of cultural values and national identity. Their interactions within foreign academic environments facilitate cross-cultural understanding and promote the UAE's image as a nation that

values education, inclusivity, and international collaboration (Lähdesmäki, 2022; Edwards, 2024). Thus, selecting candidates who embody the UAE's academic and moral values ensures that scholarship programs serve as tools of soft-power diplomacy, enhancing the country's presence and reputation in global education and policy networks.

In the UAE context, effective candidate selection plays a vital role in ensuring that scholarship recipients represent the country's strategic interests and cultural values while abroad. Graduates who return from these programs often bring valuable experience and global networks that strengthen national development and international cooperation (Asad et al., 2023). Therefore, the candidate selection process is not only an administrative mechanism but also a key diplomatic instrument that shapes the UAE's relationships with partner countries.

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Based on the theoretical and empirical discussion above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Hypothesis 1: Candidates Selection has a significant positive impact on International Relationships of UAE.

2.10.2 Study Programs and International Relations.

Study programs refer to the academic disciplines and structured curricula offered to students within scholarship schemes (Alden & Aran, 2016; Hendrix & Vreede, 2019; Peters & Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 2016). In most foreign-scholarship systems, students are given the opportunity to select preferred study fields that align with their interests and the strategic priorities of their home country (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2020; Lange,

2017; Mawer, 2017). Previous studies have found that the design, relevance, and diversity of study programs have a significant positive effect on international relations by facilitating academic cooperation, intercultural learning, and research partnerships (Alden & Aran, 2016; Aras & Mohammed, 2019; Grenier & Hagmann, 2016; Rathbun et al., 2016; Sitaraman, 2016).

From the perspective of Cultural Theory, study programs serve as instruments of soft power and cultural diplomacy. When scholarship recipients engage in programs that emphasize global understanding, innovation, and intercultural collaboration, they act as bridges between the UAE and host nations. These programs foster mutual respect, cultural exchange, and long-term academic ties that enhance diplomatic goodwill (Lähdesmäki, 2022; Edwards, 2024). The inclusion of subjects such as global governance, international law, or regional studies promotes a shared appreciation of global challenges and encourages dialogue across national boundaries, thereby deepening the UAE's integration into international academic and policy networks.

From a Social Exchange Theory viewpoint, study programs create structured exchanges of knowledge and expertise between institutions, faculty, and students. The UAE government invests in these programs expecting reciprocal benefits in the form of advanced skills, innovation, and international cooperation. In return, host universities gain talented and diverse students who contribute to their research, global rankings, and international visibility (Cook et al., 2013). This reciprocal relationship builds institutional trust and strengthens bilateral relations through continued collaboration and alumni engagement.

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In the UAE context, universities such as the American University in Dubai, the University of Sharjah, and Middlesex University Dubai offer study programs that cultivate intercultural awareness and professional competence (Allam et al., 2021; Ajina et al., 2024; Asad, 2024). Graduates from these programs frequently pursue careers in diplomacy, government service, and international organizations, acting as conduits for sustained political, cultural, and economic relations. Furthermore, research-oriented programs in areas such as international development, cultural diplomacy, and regional security directly support the UAE's foreign-policy objectives and contribute to its growing role as an educational and diplomatic hub in the Middle East (Ta'amnha et al., 2024; Karolak, 2021).

Therefore, the structure and orientation of study programs within the UAE's foreign-scholarship policy play a pivotal role in shaping international relations. By producing globally competent graduates and fostering institutional partnerships, these programs serve as vehicles of knowledge diplomacy and soft-power projection that reinforce the UAE's international standing.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:.

- Hypothesis 2: Study Programs have a significant positive impact on International Relationships of UAE.

2.10.3 Destination Country and International Relations.

Destination country refers to the host nation where scholarship students pursue their studies and engage in academic, cultural, and professional experiences (Aggestam et al., 2019; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016; Oren, 2018). The selection of destination countries

for international scholarships is not a random choice but a strategic decision that reflects political trust, academic reputation, and the potential for long-term bilateral cooperation (Bell, 2017; Drezner, 2017). Prior studies have shown that the destination country plays an important role in shaping international relations by creating enduring educational, cultural, and economic linkages between the sending and host countries (Acharya & Buzan, 2017; Berenskoetter & van Hoef, 2017; Grenier et al., 2020; Sevin et al., 2019; Stein, 2017; Zhang, 2016).

From a Cultural Theory perspective, the destination country provides the social and cultural context in which Emirati students experience intercultural learning and develop a global mindset. Studying in culturally diverse environments such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia enables students to appreciate other societies' values while sharing Emirati traditions, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and soft-power diplomacy (Hansen, 2017; Jahn, 2017; Wohlforth et al., 2018). Exposure to foreign education systems and intercultural collaboration not only strengthens students' personal competencies but also reinforces the UAE's reputation as a nation committed to global engagement and educational excellence.

According to Social Exchange Theory, the relationship between the UAE and destination countries is built on mutual benefit. The UAE invests in human capital by sending talented students abroad, while host nations gain academically qualified, culturally diverse students who contribute to their universities' internationalization goals (Cook et al., 2013). This reciprocal exchange fosters collaboration in research, innovation, and policy development, deepening bilateral relationships between the

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UAE and host countries. Furthermore, the networks students form during their studies often evolve into long-term professional and institutional partnerships that sustain diplomatic cooperation.

Empirically, the UAE maintains strong educational partnerships with countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia, which host large numbers of Emirati scholarship recipients (Alali, Altaher, & Almarri, 2024). These relationships go beyond education, contributing to broader political, economic, and cultural cooperation. Alumni who return from these destination countries often become intermediaries in international trade, research collaboration, and cultural exchange, acting as informal ambassadors who enhance the UAE's global image and influence (Jose & Chacko, 2017; Pauceanu et al., 2018).

Therefore, the strategic choice of destination countries in the UAE's foreign-scholarship policy plays a crucial role in advancing international relations. By aligning educational destinations with diplomatic priorities, the UAE strengthens its soft-power presence and forges lasting partnerships that extend across academic, economic, and political domains.

Based on the theoretical and empirical discussion above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Hypothesis 3: Destination Country has a significant positive impact on International Relationships of UAE.

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2.11 Summary

This chapter reviewed the evolution of higher education and foreign scholarship policies in the United Arab Emirates, highlighting their strategic role in advancing the nation's human capital and international engagement. Since the 1970s, four major policy directions have shaped the UAE's higher education system—focusing on nation-building, gender-based access, qualified international faculty, and the integration of modern educational models. These reforms reflected the country's recognition of both Arab cultural values and global academic standards, establishing a foundation for international cooperation in education and diplomacy.

The UAE's commitment to expanding its international presence through education has paralleled its broader foreign policy objectives. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Abu Dhabi Education Council and the Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid (OCFA) demonstrate the UAE's intent to align educational development with its diplomatic and humanitarian strategies. The country's increasing openness and participation in international scholarship programs illustrate its use of education as a tool of soft power and global influence.

This chapter also examined the theoretical foundations underpinning the study—Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Cultural Theory explains how cultural values, knowledge exchange, and identity representation shape international collaboration and mutual understanding. Social Exchange Theory, on the other hand, frames scholarship programs as reciprocal relationships that generate trust, cooperation, and shared benefits between the UAE and host countries.

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Drawing from these theoretical perspectives, the conceptual framework of this study proposed a model in which foreign scholarship policy influences international relations through four key components: candidate selection, candidate numbers, study programs, and destination country. Each component contributes to the UAE's global positioning by fostering educational, cultural, and diplomatic connections that support the nation's long-term international objectives.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in this study. It includes the development of the research framework, sampling procedures, questionnaire design, participant selection, hypotheses formulation, research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to evaluate the collected information. In the preceding chapter, the independent variables—identified as the determinants of candidate selection (CS), candidates' numbers (CN), study programs (SP), and destination country (DC)—were established in relation to the dependent variable, international relations (IR), to achieve the study's objectives.

3.2 Research Design

According to Creswell (2014), a research design is a plan or procedure that extends from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. The research design chosen for this study is grounded in the methodological and philosophical foundations of logical positivism, which emphasizes the use of empirical observation and scientific rigor in the pursuit of knowledge (Indick, 2002).

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This study developed its variables, hypotheses, and operational definitions based on existing theoretical frameworks. Consequently, a quantitative research design was adopted, as the study sought to examine how foreign scholarship policy influences the variables of candidate selection, candidate numbers, study programs, and destination countries in relation to international relations. The quantitative approach focuses on measurement and the numerical analysis of data to provide clear and objective explanations of observed phenomena.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) describe the quantitative approach—also referred to as the scientific method—as the conventional mode of inquiry in empirical research. It emphasizes the use of systematic procedures, statistical methods, and standardized instruments to test hypotheses and draw generalizable conclusions. This approach was particularly suitable for the present study, as data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using established statistical tools to identify patterns, correlations, and significant relationships among variables.

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In addition, this research incorporated a case study method to gain deeper insights into the specific context and challenges surrounding the UAE's foreign scholarship policy. The case study approach focuses on an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon within its real-life setting, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics and implications. In this study, the case study design enabled the researcher to examine the UAE's experience with foreign scholarships, providing contextual depth to complement the quantitative findings.

3.3 Population, Sampling, and Data Collection

The entire group of individuals relevant to a study is referred to as the population, while a sample represents a subset of that population selected for analysis. A sample typically includes a group of participants who reflect the characteristics of the broader population, enabling researchers to generalize findings. In research, studying a representative sample allows for an accurate examination of population perceptions and behaviors. Selecting an appropriate sample size and sampling technique is therefore crucial to ensuring that the sample accurately represents the population in both composition and diversity (Hair Jr et al., 2016).

3.3.1 Population

The study population comprises Emirati employees engaged in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). This includes staff members working in UAE embassies and consulates worldwide, as well as those responsible for managing external scholarship programs in these institutions. It also covers employees within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Abu Dhabi and other emirates who are directly involved in international relations or the administration of foreign scholarship programs.

Additionally, the population includes professionals and experts working in political and international affairs who possess relevant experience and can provide informed insights related to the study topic. According to official reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, approximately 5,000 employees are employed across departments, offices, and embassies associated with this study area, namely, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic missions abroad.

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sampling strategy refers to the plan used to ensure that the selected sample accurately represents the population from which it is drawn. An appropriate sampling strategy defines the population, sampling frame, eligibility criteria, inclusion and exclusion parameters, representation, and design while also considering potential sources of sampling bias, sampling error, power analysis, and effect size. Common sampling methods include convenience, snowball, quota, purposive, simple random, and cluster sampling (Charan & Biswas, 2013).

Probability sampling involves random selection, ensuring that every element in the population has an equal and independent chance of being chosen. This approach enhances the representativeness of the sample and increases confidence in the generalizability of results. The main types of probability sampling include (1) simple random, (2) stratified random, (3) cluster, and (4) systematic sampling.

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In contrast, non-probability sampling relies on non-random selection methods. Although it is less likely than probability sampling to yield a fully representative sample, it is commonly used in exploratory and specialized research contexts. The main non-probability methods include (1) convenience, (2) quota, and (3) purposive sampling (Landernean & Creek, 2009).

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, to identify respondents who possess relevant expertise and experience related to the research topic. Participants were selected from employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and individuals responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies.

According to data from the Statistics and Competitiveness Center of the UAE, the total population for this study consists of approximately 5,000 employees working within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies worldwide. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, the appropriate sample size for a population of this size is 357 participants, assuming a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

Table for Determining Sample Size of a Known Population

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	1000000	384

Note: N is Population Size; S is Sample Size *Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970*

Figure 3. 1 Morgan's Sampling Table

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3.4 Instrument Development, Validity, and Reliability

This study consists of five main constructs, and it is essential to use an appropriate instrument to measure each construct accurately. The research employed a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, adapted from previously validated studies. To ensure the quality, clarity, and suitability of the instrument, procedures for assessing reliability and validity were undertaken.

3.4.1 Questionnaire Design

The original survey instrument was developed to examine the determinants of candidate selection (CS), study programs (SP), destination country (DC), and international relations (IR) in alignment with the objectives of this study. Drawing on insights from the literature review, the questionnaire was refined and customized to fit the context of the UAE's foreign scholarship policy.

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The survey was divided into two main sections. Section One collected general demographic information about the respondents and their organizations. Section Two contained the measurement items for all the study variables.

All scale items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, an interval scale that employs five anchors: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree (Sekaran, 2016). The Likert scale was selected because it provides a simple yet robust way to capture attitudes and perceptions. It allows the aggregation of responses into composite scores that can be statistically analyzed to examine relationships between variables. This approach enhances both interpretability and reliability, making it widely applicable in social science research.

The Likert scale also offers practical advantages—it is straightforward to construct, administer, and score. After the completion of data collection, each item was analyzed individually and collectively to generate composite scores for each construct using statistical software.

The focus of this research is on foreign scholarship policy and its influence on the international relations of the UAE. To achieve the research objectives, the questionnaire incorporated items adapted from previous studies relevant to each construct. The adaptation process ensured that the items reflected the specific context of the UAE while maintaining theoretical and methodological consistency. The details of the measurement items for all constructs are presented in the following sections, based on previously published literature.

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3.4.1.1 International relations

1. Your relations with the country where the students have been sent on scholarship have become very strong.
2. Cultural exchange has gained strength because of sending students on scholarships.
3. By sending the students on scholarship diplomatic relations have gained strength.
4. Economic ties have increased because of sending the students on scholarship.
5. Cultural exchange because of sending the students on scholarship has improved relations with the host countries.
6. Tourism with the country where the students have been sent on scholarship has increased.

7. By sending students on scholarship foreign policy of the country has aligned with the country where students are studying on scholarship.
8. International media plays a significant role in selecting the country where the students are sent for studies.

3.4.1.2 Candidate's Selection (CS)

1. The modes and procedures of application of scholarship are fair and transparent for all the prospective candidates.

2. Selection and Screening of scholarship candidates was Affected by Political Influence.

3. Favoritism and nepotism have affected the selection and screening of candidates for scholarship awards.

4. As a beneficiary, the scholarship serves as an important opportunity for improving your career path, world view and self-confidence.

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3.3.2.3 Study Programs (SP)

1. The beneficiaries were admitted in universities and higher institutions that have good teaching and learning infrastructures in terms of science, technology and research.

2. The beneficiaries were admitted in universities and higher institutions that students graduate on scheduled time.

3. The course you were admitted is in line with the profession you want to pursue.

4. Scholarship beneficiaries were admitted in Institutions that have adequate manpower.

3.4.1.4 Destination Country (DC)

1. There is security of lives and properties in this country of your study.
2. Implementation of scholarship afforded the beneficiaries opportunity to travel beyond the borders of UAE in search of knowledge, skills and research that would not have otherwise been available.
3. The skills and experiences acquired by the beneficiaries were optimally utilized for the development of the state.

3.4.2 Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

To ensure the accuracy and quality of the research instrument, both validity and reliability assessments were carried out. Content validity was first established through consultation with an expert panel of three specialists. The panel was asked to review and provide feedback on the first draft of the questionnaire, focusing on whether each item effectively measured its intended construct. The experts included a professor of political science and a senior manager from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their comments regarding wording, sequence, phrasing, and item relevance were collected and incorporated into a revised version of the questionnaire. The updated instrument was then subjected to a face validity test to confirm its clarity and comprehension among the target respondents.

Following this, a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability of the constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which measures internal consistency among the items of a variable. The pilot test served as a preliminary step to verify the soundness of the instrument before proceeding with the main data collection.

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency or stability of a measurement, indicating whether similar results can be achieved when the same instrument is used under identical conditions. It is commonly examined through test–retest consistency, internal consistency among items, and agreement between multiple raters or observers. Validity, on the other hand, addresses the accuracy of the measurement and determines whether the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Internal validity ensures that the results reflect the true relationships between the variables being studied, whereas external validity determines whether the findings can be generalized to other populations or contexts. Content validity assesses whether the questionnaire adequately covers all relevant aspects of the construct, while construct validity evaluates the extent to which the instrument aligns with theoretical expectations and established concepts.

Assessing validity often involves comparing the measurement results with existing data or established theories to confirm coherence with the broader body of knowledge. A measurement that is valid is generally reliable because accuracy in measurement presupposes consistency. Ensuring both validity and reliability is therefore essential to guarantee the credibility and trustworthiness of research findings. High reliability demonstrates that results are consistent and replicable, while high validity ensures that they accurately capture the phenomena under study. Researchers must, therefore, employ well-planned procedures to establish these qualities and draw meaningful conclusions from their research.

In this study, the pilot test included twenty-eight participants to evaluate the feasibility and clarity of the questionnaire. Data collected during this pilot phase were analyzed

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using SPSS version 23, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each construct. The results, presented in Table 3.1, indicate that all constructs achieved Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.733 to 0.922, which are above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70. According to Hair Jr., Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel, and Page (2015), internal consistency reliability is considered acceptable when Cronbach's alpha values fall between 0.70 and 0.95. For exploratory studies, values above 0.60 are also regarded as satisfactory. The results of this pilot test therefore confirm that the questionnaire used in this study demonstrates adequate reliability and internal consistency across all measured constructs.

Table 3. 1
Pilot Study Reliability Tests Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha (Pilot TEST) N=29
Candidate's Selection (CS)	0.715
Candidates Numbers (CN)	0.722
Study Programs (SP)	0.733
Destination Country (DC)	0.844
International Relations (IR)	0.922

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3.4.3 Data Collection

This study employed an online survey method to collect data from a targeted sample of employees located in various regions around the world. This approach was selected to ensure accessibility, efficiency, and wide geographic coverage among participants affiliated with UAE diplomatic missions and institutions. Using online survey tools allows the researcher to reach participants distributed across multiple countries while maintaining consistency in the data collection process. Evidence suggests that when

study participants are geographically dispersed, online data collection methods represent the most effective and reliable approach (Nuno & John, 2015).

As outlined earlier, the data collection process targeted respondents across selected locations through secure online channels. The researcher, supported by a trained team, coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate access to potential participants. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the surveys were distributed electronically via official communication channels to encourage participation. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. The use of online distribution ensured that data could be gathered efficiently and simultaneously from participants across different time zones and embassy locations, minimizing logistical constraints and enhancing response rates.

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3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, data will check the reliability and normality analysis using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 21. The several methods are used in data analysis included:

- Descriptive analysis
- Validity and reliability test
- Normality test
- Correlation analysis
- Regression analysis

3.6 Summary

This study adopts a deductive approach, beginning with theoretical foundations and concluding with hypothesis testing. It employs a quantitative research design, utilizing statistical analyses based on descriptive measures, variance, and covariance techniques. The study is exploratory in nature, as it addresses an area that has been examined in previous research but requires further empirical investigation. It is also scientific in approach, following systematic steps that begin with theoretical assumptions and end with hypothesis confirmation or rejection.

The research instrument a structured questionnaire was developed in English and adapted from established literature to suit the context of this study. It was later translated into Arabic to facilitate understanding among participants. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: a demographic section and a perception section, both designed with closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale. To ensure quality and consistency, instrument validation was conducted through content validity (expert panel review), face validity (focus group testing), and internal consistency reliability (pilot study).

The study population includes Emirati employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, encompassing personnel at all levels both those stationed in UAE embassies around the world and those working within the ministry's offices in Abu Dhabi and other emirates. According to official reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Statistics and Competitiveness Center of the UAE, the total population relevant to this study is approximately 5,000 employees. To obtain a representative group from this population, the study employed a convenience sampling technique, which was

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deemed appropriate given the nature of the research and the accessibility of participants within the ministry and diplomatic missions.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This section involves all the results drawn from the gathered data after using the structural equation modeling as well as a diagnostic test with the SPSS 25 and SMART PLS 4.0. The first section of the chapter discusses early detection and data screening. This chapter presents the results of research using data collected from employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of foreign scholarship policies. Firstly, the response rate as well as the non-response bias test has been used for the data. Descriptive statistics were used by participants of the study to determine demographic factors such as age, gender, and qualifications of respondents to identify the situations that required analysis.

In addition, the common method bias test as well as descriptive analysis of major variables which involves analysis of missing data, analysis of normality, as well as assessment of multicollinearity have been examined. Likewise, the results of the study involved the evaluation of PLS structural equation modelling. Similarly, the evaluation of the measurement model includes Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability Average Variance Extracted, as well as Discriminant Validity by Fornell

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and HTMT criterion. Finally, the evaluation of the structural model which involves the direct relationships, as well as the evaluation of predictive relevance has been examined.

4.2 Response Rate

Data were collected from employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as from international relations experts and individuals responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies. To facilitate participation and improve the accuracy of responses, free consultations were provided to assist respondents in completing the survey (Alkhuzaie & Asad, 2018). According to Bougie and Sekaran (2019), strategies such as reminders through phone calls, SMS messages, and in-person visits can significantly enhance response rates.

As a result of these combined efforts, a total of 402 questionnaires were returned out of 901 distributed online to employees and experts across the targeted institutions. This represents a response rate of 44.61%. However, after data screening, only 357 questionnaires were found to be complete and valid for analysis, yielding a usable response rate of 39.62% (Baruch, 1999). A total of 64 questionnaires were identified as incorrectly completed, while 78 respondents did not provide sufficient responses and were excluded from further analysis. The achieved response rate is comparable to those reported in previous empirical studies (Baruch, 1999), indicating that the level of participation in this research is both satisfactory and representative of similar large-scale organizational surveys.

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Table 4. 1
Response Rate

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
No of questionnaires distributed	901	100%
No of questionnaires not responded	64	7.10%
Returned questionnaires	402	44.61%
Excluded questionnaires	78	8.65%
Useable questionnaires	357	39.62%

4.3 Non-Response Rate

Non-response bias testing is conducted in survey research to determine whether there are significant differences between those who respond and those who do not. The unwillingness or inability of some respondents to provide information leads to non-response errors, which may affect the accuracy and representativeness of survey findings (Alkhuzaie et al., 2024). According to Xie et al., (2023), missing responses or incomplete data can influence the integrity of the analysis and may necessitate the exclusion of certain cases from the dataset.

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Non-response errors are particularly problematic when the characteristics or responses of non-respondents differ significantly from those who participated. As indicated by Armstrong and Overton (1977) and Asad (2020), such discrepancies can distort conclusions and reduce the generalizability of findings. When non-response bias is present, the results may no longer accurately represent the entire population, thereby threatening the external validity of the study.

To minimize non-response bias, several strategies were employed, including follow-ups through WhatsApp, phone calls, SMS messages, and consultations, to encourage

participation and timely completion of the survey (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007; Kanaan et al., 2024; Amir & Asad, 2018; Asad & Ahmed, 2024). Response patterns were also analyzed based on response time, as earlier and later responses can provide an indication of potential bias (Asad et al., 2024).

To test for response bias, respondents were divided into two groups: early respondents and late respondents. Those who completed the questionnaire within 15 days of distribution were categorized as early respondents, while those who took longer than 15 days were classified as late respondents.

To determine whether there were significant differences between these two groups, Levene's test for equality of variances was applied to assess the homogeneity of variance, followed by a two-tailed t-test for equality of means based on the Levene test results. These tests evaluated whether the responses of early and late participants differed significantly across the key research variables, which included candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations. The findings indicated that the variances between the two groups were statistically insignificant, suggesting that non-response bias was not present in this study. Therefore, the data collected from early and late respondents were deemed consistent, allowing the results to be generalized to the broader population with confidence.

Table 4. 2
Non-Response Rate

Variables	Response	N	Mean	SD
Candidate Selection	Early	291	3.34	0.88
	Late	66	3.43	0.93
	Early	291	3.66	0.76

Variables	Response	N	Mean	SD
Study Program	Late	66	3.54	0.81
Destination Country	Early	291	3.76	0.92
	Late	66	3.88	0.87
International Relations	Early	291	3.55	0.69
	Late	66	3.68	0.82

Table 4.2 indicates the measured values of the non-response bias test which are collected after assuring that the gathered data was free of any form performing the previous structural analysis. The results of the independent samples showed that the t-test indicated that the same variances do not have substantial variances as the P values for the four main variables of the study because the findings were greater than the significance level 0.05 of assumed values for Levine's test equality of variance. Therefore, the study ensured that the assumptions of equal variances among early and late responders were adequate.

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4.4 Demographics of Respondents

This section has investigated the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Age, Gender, and Qualification among employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of foreign scholarship policies.

4.4.1 Age of Respondents

The study examined the respondents' responses to ascertain which employee age groups responded well from the employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in

charge of foreign scholarship policies. Thus, the respondents' age findings are mentioned in Table 4.3.

Table 4. 3
Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
26-35	78	21.84	21.84
36-45	83	23.24	45.08
46-55	101	28.29	73.37
Up to 55	95	26.61	100
Total	357	100	

Table 4.3 indicates that most of the respondents are between the age groups are 46-55 and above the findings are 101 which shows that their percentage is 28.29 which is above other age groups. Thus, to provide an understanding of the results, which are presented in Figure 4.1 graph below.

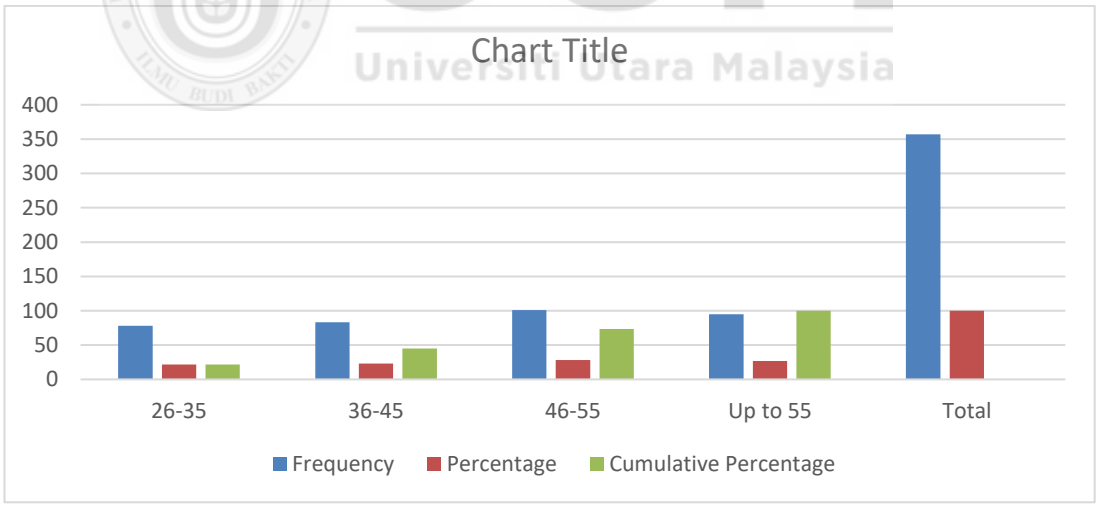


Figure 4. 1 *Age of Respondents*

4.4.2 Gender of Respondents

The gender of the respondents has been assessed to determine which gender group of employees reacted well from the employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of foreign scholarship policies. The results of the respondent's gender are demonstrated in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 4
Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Cumulative Percentage**
Male	303	84.87	84.87
Female	54	15.12	100
Total	357	100	

Table 4.4 demonstrates that most of the respondents are male, and the findings are 303 which represents that their percentage is 84.87, whereas the frequency of females is 54 which indicates that their percentage is 15.12. Therefore, for a better understanding of the results which are revealed in Figure 4.2 graph below.

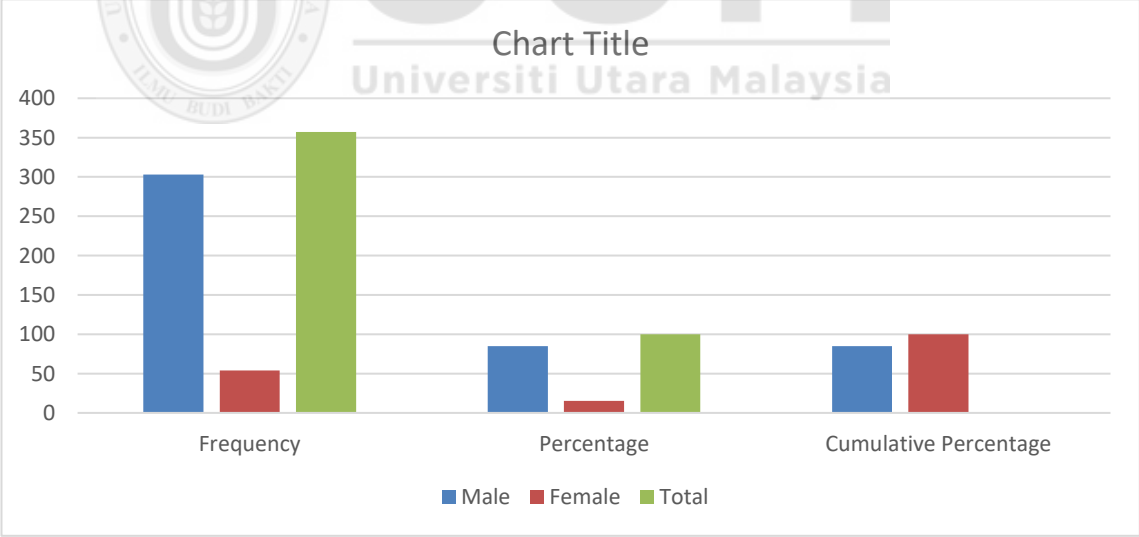


Figure 4. 2 *Gender of Respondents*

4.4.3 Qualification of Respondents

The respondent's qualification has been assessed to better understand the demographic of the respondents from the employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of

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foreign scholarship policies. Therefore, the findings of the qualification of respondents are shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4. 5
Qualification of Respondents

	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Cumulative Percentage**
Matriculation	84	23.52	23.52
Diploma	77	21.56	45.08
BA	104	29.13	74.21
Postgraduate	92	25.77	100
Total	357	100	

The above findings of the respondent's qualifications reveal that the BA respondents have more persistence as compared with other respondents' qualifications. Thus, for easier understanding of the respondent's qualification findings are shown in Figure 4.3 below.

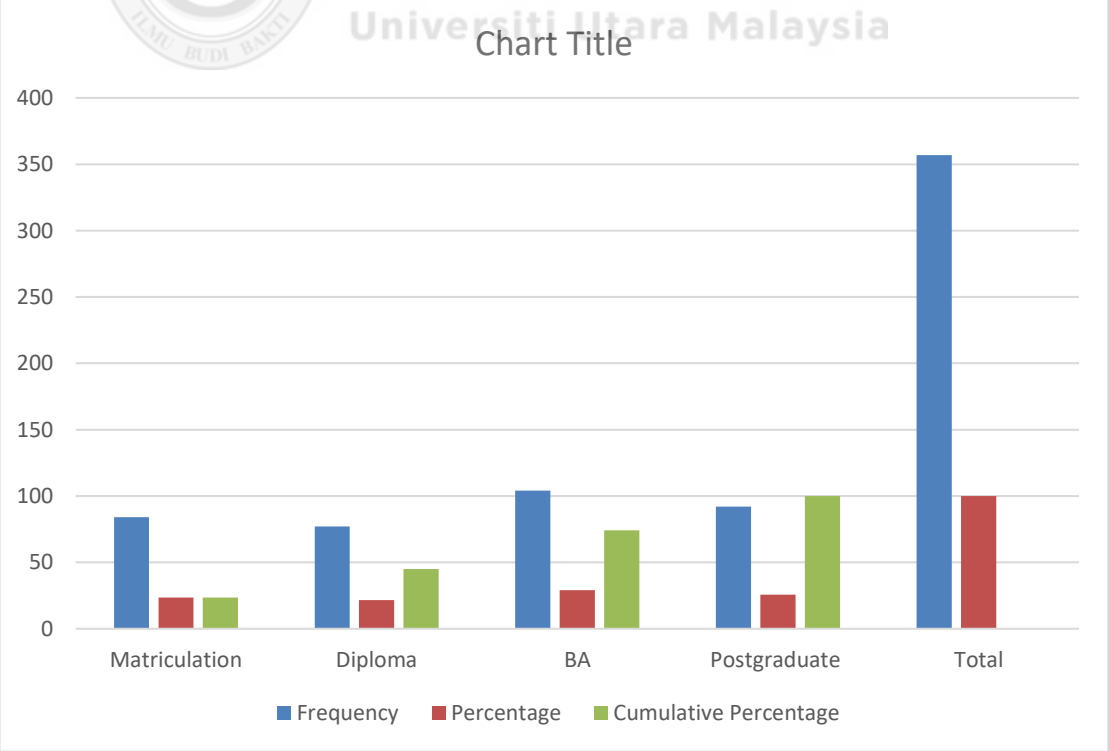


Figure 4. 3 *Qualification of Respondents*

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4.5 Common Method Bias Test

Exogenous factors and endogenous variables were collected simultaneously using the same instrument, which may have resulted in common method bias affecting the data. The study aimed to verify that observed scores are not affected by an overstated method correlation effect in contrast to a potential problem carried on by the common method bias in the study behavior. The common method preference explained the differences observed between the results of the dimension method of several underlying variables that each measurement represents individually (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

Likewise, there are several arguments regarding the significance of common method bias on data. The common method variance can be addressed by utilizing the numerous statistical approaches and techniques. Additionally, the academicians invited applicants who did not notably answer the item questionnaires to highlight their uncertainties. They were also assured of their discretion in terms of their identity as well as what response they would provide. As a result, the adoption of the scale enhancement items has been consistent with their objectives.

4.6 Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables

The analysis of the descriptive statistics of the main variables that have been determined in the study. Initially, the study conducted the analysis of indicative indicators to reveal the average, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. The study employed Likert scale items which have a 5-point Likert scale (Asad, et al., 2024; Ta'Amnha, Alsoud, Asad, Magableh, & Riyadh, 2024).

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For candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations 1 indicates strongly disagree, whereas 5 indicates strongly agree according to the availability of candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations. Therefore, the results of the descriptive statistics are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4. 6
Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables

	Average	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Candidate Selection	3.82	0.97	1	5
Study Program	3.73	0.85	1	5
Destination Country	3.45	0.94	1	5
International Relations	3.94	0.89	1	5

4.7 Analysis of Missing Data

The presence of missing values represents a significant concern in data analysis and can influence the accuracy and reliability of statistical results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Previous studies have demonstrated that ignoring missing data in quantitative research may lead to biased parameter estimates, information loss, and reduced statistical power (Dong & Peng, 2013).

Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) noted that there is no universally accepted threshold for an acceptable percentage of missing data, as the acceptable level may vary depending on the research context and sample size. Schafer and Graham (2002) indicated that in multivariate analysis, a missing data rate below 5% is typically considered insignificant. Similarly, Bennett (2001) emphasized that if more than 10% of the data are missing in a statistical analysis, the results may become biased and unreliable.

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In the present study, the missing data analysis revealed that none of the variables contained missing values exceeding the 5% threshold. The range of missing data across all variables was between 0.2% and 1.5%, which falls well within acceptable limits. According to George and Mallery (2019), one of the most common statistical techniques for addressing missing data is mean substitution, which replaces missing values with the mean score of the respective variable. Therefore, this study applied the mean replacement method using SPSS version 25 to handle missing values before conducting further statistical analysis. This procedure ensured that the dataset remained complete and that the statistical results maintained their validity and reliability.

4.8 Analysis of Normality

Following the analysis of missing data, the normality of the dataset was examined to ensure the appropriateness of subsequent statistical procedures. Assessing data distribution is a critical step in structural equation modeling (SEM) and statistical analysis, as many techniques assume or are influenced by normality (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Although Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is a variance-based approach that does not require data to be normally distributed (Sarstedt et al., 2014), it remains important to verify that the data are approximately normal. Highly non-normal data may distort parameter estimations, inflate standard errors during bootstrapping, and potentially compromise the stability of the model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

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According to Hair et al. (2010), normality refers to the distribution shape of metric variables and the extent to which it resembles a standard statistical distribution. To evaluate deviations from normality, this study assessed skewness and kurtosis values for all measurement items. Visual inspection of distribution shapes was also used to support the statistical analysis and confirm that the data conformed to acceptable levels of normality.

Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) stated that deviations from normality are less likely to impact the results significantly when the sample size exceeds 200 participants. They suggested that acceptable skewness values should fall below ±2, while kurtosis values should remain below ±7. Similarly, Joanes and Gill (1998) proposed that absolute skewness values greater than 3 and kurtosis values exceeding 10 may indicate potential normality issues, with values above 20 suggesting severe deviation.

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In the present study, the skewness and kurtosis values for all measurement items ranged between 2 and 7, which falls within the recommended thresholds. These results confirm that the dataset satisfies the normality assumption required for further analysis and supports the reliability of the subsequent statistical modeling.

Multicollinearity occurs when two or more exogenous latent variables are highly correlated, causing redundancy among independent variables in a statistical model (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), multicollinearity issues arise when independent variables exhibit strong intercorrelations, which can distort the accuracy and interpretation of regression coefficients.

When two or more predictors are significantly associated, they often convey overlapping information, thereby reducing the explanatory value of the model. Such redundancy can inflate the standard errors of the regression coefficients, leading to unstable estimates and lowering the statistical significance of the predictors. As a result, excessive multicollinearity diminishes the reliability of the regression analysis and weakens the ability to identify the true influence of each independent variable.

The two most widely used indicators for detecting multicollinearity are Tolerance and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), tolerance values below 0.10 or VIF values above 10 indicate a serious multicollinearity problem. In this study, the correlation matrix was first examined to identify potential inter-variable relationships, followed by the calculation of tolerance and VIF values using SPSS collinearity diagnostics.

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The results, presented in Table 4.7, show that tolerance values ranged between 0.54 and 0.93, which are well above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.10, while VIF values ranged between 1.09 and 1.97, which are substantially below the upper limit of 10. These findings indicate that the independent variables are not excessively correlated and that the dataset meets the statistical assumptions for multicollinearity.

Therefore, based on the tolerance and VIF results, it can be concluded that multicollinearity does not exist among the variables in this study. This confirms the suitability of the data for subsequent analyses within the structural equation modeling framework.

Table 4. 7
Multicollinearity Analysis

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Candidate Selection	0.54	1.09
Study Program	0.74	1.23
Destination Country	0.66	1.97
International Relations	0.93	1.31

4.10 Evaluation of PLS-SEM

The evaluation of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was conducted to assess both the measurement and structural models in this study. The factor analysis results are presented in this section, focusing on the reliability and validity of the variables included in the model. The outer model (measurement model) indicates that the study's constructs are unidimensional and that the items adequately represent their corresponding latent variables.

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After validating the measurement model, the structural model (inner model) was examined to evaluate the relationships among the latent constructs and to confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement outcomes. According to Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, and Wang (2010), the evaluation of both the outer and inner models is a fundamental step in PLS-SEM, which should be conducted after ensuring that the dataset meets the necessary quality standards.

PLS-SEM was used in this study to analyze the relationships between constructs and to estimate the strength and direction of causal paths. The analysis was performed using SmartPLS version 4.0, following the procedure recommended by Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, and Hair Jr. (2014). This method was selected due to its

robustness in handling complex models and its flexibility in analyzing non-normally distributed data.

Before performing the PLS-SEM analysis, the model was carefully specified to ensure conceptual clarity and accurate interpretation of indicators. It was necessary to distinguish between formative and reflective indicators, as the analytical procedures differ between these two types (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). In this study, all latent construct indicators were treated as reflective, meaning that the indicators are manifestations of the underlying latent variables rather than contributors to their formation.

Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on first-order constructs, as second-order structures (those comprising multiple layers of sub-dimensions) were beyond the scope of this analysis. The model included four latent variables: three exogenous (independent) variables Candidate Selection, Study Program, and Destination Country and one endogenous (dependent) variable, International Relations. These constructs represent the key elements of the research framework and form the foundation for testing the study's hypotheses through the PLS-SEM approach.

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4.10.1 Evaluation of Measurement Model

The outer model, also referred to as the measurement model, establishes the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators (Chin, 1998; Sarstedt et al., 2014). In this study, both the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the constructs. Reliability and validity are fundamental criteria in evaluating measurement models, as

they determine the quality and stability of the instrument. Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) emphasize that these two components are crucial for ensuring the soundness of a measurement process, while Cook and Beckman (2006) define reliability as the ability of an instrument to remain stable and consistent across repeated administrations.

According to Chin (2009), reliability can be examined at both the individual indicator level and the construct level. In the present study, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to assess the measurement model. The evaluation included an analysis of outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity, which was tested using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Hair et al., 2013; Henseler et al.,2015).

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These indicators collectively provide evidence of the measurement model's internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Figure 4.4 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation, demonstrating that all latent constructs and their indicators meet the required statistical thresholds, thereby confirming the robustness and adequacy of the measurement model used in this study.

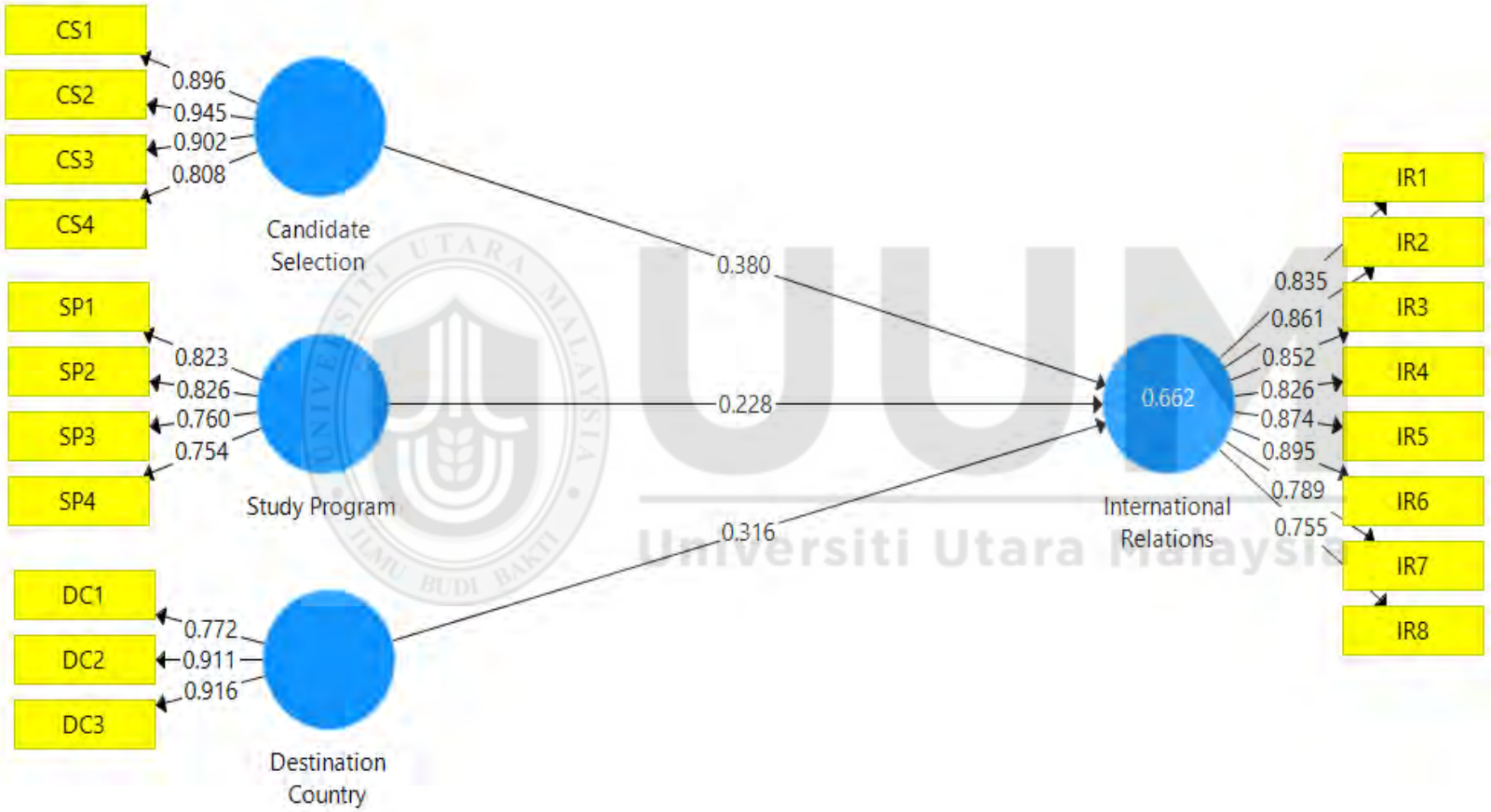


Figure 4. 4 The Measurement Model

4.10.1.1 Outer Loadings

Initially, the study evaluated all outer loading to identify any issues with any items as well as to determine the convergent validity. Similarly, all the item loading indications on their values of all variables including candidate selection, destination country, international relations, and study program between a lower bound of 0.754 and a higher bound of 0.945 are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4. 8
Outer Loadings

	Candidate Selection	**Destination Country**	**International Relations**	**Study Program**
CS1	0.896			
CS2	0.945			
CS3	0.902			
CS4	0.808			
DC1		0.772		
DC2		0.911		
DC3		0.916		
IR1			0.835	
IR2			0.861	
IR3			0.852	
IR4			0.826	
IR5			0.874	
IR6			0.895	
IR7			0.789	
IR8			0.755	
SP1				0.823
SP2				0.826
SP3				0.760
SP4				0.754

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Table 4.8 reveals the outer loadings analysis which ensures that all items are sustained in the model that have outer loading values are greater than 0.7 which implies that a significant number of items has been left over after the elimination of item loading values that have below 0.7. Subsequently, it is claimed that the reliability scale is not considerably affected if less than 10 percent of the items are removed.

Additionally, according to Quinlan, Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2018), all the item's loading values should be greater than 0.7. Therefore, the instrument used to identify the variables in the study had less than 10 percent of the items removed.

4.10.1.2 Cronbach's Alpha

The study involves Cronbach's Alpha, which has been used to assess the validity of all variables including candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations are mentioned in Table 4.9.

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Table 4. 9
Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's Alpha
Candidate Selection	0.911
Study Program	0.801
Destination Country	0.833
International Relations	0.939

Table 4.9 exhibits Cronbach's alpha analysis for all variables including candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations values are 0.911, 0.801, 0.833, and 0.939. Consequently, the results demonstrate exceptional internal consistency among the items utilized in the calculation of all variables.

4.10.1.3 Composite Reliability

The internal consistency shows the outcomes of reliability among the same items have been considered in the evaluation of composite reliability. Internal consistency is a method that is used to confirm the items used to measure the variables which creates findings that are similar if used again in the same situation as referred by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013). Similarly, composite reliability has been used to assess the internal consistency in the study.

Furthermore, the composite reliability varies from 0 to 1; whereas the measured values of composite reliability of all variables must be higher than 0.60 according to the threshold level of composite reliability (Hair Jr, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). Consequently, if the values are higher than 0.70, it is considered adequate and appears significant (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). However, it will be recognized as more significant if the measured values are 0.70 or higher than 0.70 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010).

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Therefore, the findings of composite reliability for all variables candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations show that the measurement model is reliable are mentioned in Table 4.10.

Table 4. 10
Composite Reliability

	Composite Reliability
Candidate Selection	0.938
Study Program	0.870
Destination Country	0.902
International Relations	0.949

T

he composites reliability analysis is shown in Table 4.10, where all the measured values are higher than the threshold level of 0.70. Consequently, the lowest value of composite reliability for the study program is 0.870, whereas the highest value of composite reliability is 0.949 which is determined for international relations as well as other variables values which are candidate selection is 0.938 and designation country is 0.902.

4.10.1.4 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The research investigates the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to identify a convergence point in the variable measurement. Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, and Wang (2010) stated that convergent validity shows the extent to which the same variables are theoretically associated with one another. Convergent validity, as identified by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), is the degree of correlation between the measurement of numerous items in the same variables.

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In addition, convergent validity ensures a threshold level of 0.7, and higher than 0.7 is considered as significant (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Moreover, the results showed convergent validity, indicating that it may be possible to determine if the item loadings are significant or not significant. The AVE coefficients for various indicators are appropriate in terms of composite reliability. It was also necessary to ascertain that the elements displayed have distinctive latent variables to ensure their convergence validity.

Likewise, when the value of AVE is 0.5 or higher than 0.5 the variables are highly convergent and can indicate the existence of higher than 50 percent of the variance. Consequently, AVE has been applied to determine the convergent validity of the study. Thus, Table 4.11 demonstrated that all variations of AVE values were greater than the threshold level of 0.50 that was recommended by (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

Therefore, the results of AVE measurements with coefficient findings ranging between 0.626 and 0.790 show that convergent validity has been attained for all variables used in the model are mentioned in Table 4.11.

Table 4. 11
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Candidate Selection	0.790
Study Program	0.626
Destination Country	0.754
International Relations	0.701

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Table 4.11 reveals the AVE analysis in which the calculated values of all variables including candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations 0.790, 0.626, 0.754, and 0.701. Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013) identified that the criteria for the measured values should be higher than the threshold level of 0.5 as shown above. Therefore, all the measured values of variables are greater than 0.5 indicating that all variables in the model are valid and must be sustained.

4.10.1.5 Discriminant Validity by Fornell-Larcker Criterion

In this study, discriminant validity was assessed to determine the extent to which each latent construct is distinct from other constructs within the model. Establishing discriminant validity ensures that a construct captures phenomena unique to itself and not reflected by other variables. Several approaches are available for evaluating discriminant validity in Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modeling, including the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the examination of cross-loadings (Chin, 1998; Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). This study primarily relied on the Fornell–Larcker criterion, complemented by cross-loading analysis, as these are widely recognized and commonly used methods for assessing discriminant validity.

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. This comparison ensures that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other variables in the model. Similarly, Roldán and Sánchez-Franco (2012) explained that, within the Fornell–Larcker matrix, the diagonal elements (representing the square roots of the AVE values) should be significantly higher than the off-diagonal elements (representing inter-construct correlations) in both rows and columns. This pattern confirms that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Therefore, based on these guidelines, the discriminant validity results using the Fornell–Larcker criterion for all constructs Candidate Selection, Study Program, Destination Country, and International Relations are presented in Table 4.12. The findings confirm that all diagonal elements exceeded their corresponding off-diagonal

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correlations, thereby demonstrating satisfactory discriminant validity across the study's constructs.

Table 4. 12
Discriminant Validity by Fornell Larcker Criterion

	Candidate Selection	**Destination Country**	**International Relations**	**Study Program**
Candidate Selection	0.889			
Destination Country	0.609	0.869		
International Relations	0.717	0.721	0.837	
Study Program	0.636	0.764	0.711	0.791

Discriminant validity has been proven and validated after the confirmation of reliability as well as the validity of all variables in the structural model. Reliability and validity are the two main criteria utilized to assess the outer model in the PLS-SEM analysis referred to by (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). As a result, the findings of discriminant validity by the Fornell-Larcker criterion in Table 4.12 show that the measurement of all constructs which are candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations are valid methods of their specific values based on parameter estimations and statistical implications.

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4.10.1.6 Discriminant Validity by HTMT

Discriminant validity in a statistical model verifies that each latent variable is empirically distinct from the others. Within variance-based structural equation modeling, one of the most robust methods for assessing discriminant validity is the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). The HTMT criterion measures the ratio of correlations between constructs that are conceptually different (heterotrait)

and those that are similar (monotrait), thereby determining whether the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another.

Ab Hamid, Sami, and Sidek (2017) emphasized that the HTMT criterion provides a sensitive and reliable test capable of detecting even subtle issues of discriminant validity that may not be captured by other methods. They, along with Hair Jr., Howard, and Nitzl (2020), suggested that an HTMT value below 0.85 indicates satisfactory discriminant validity, whereas values exceeding this threshold imply a potential lack of distinction between constructs.

While the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading assessment have traditionally been used to examine discriminant validity, Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) demonstrated through simulation studies that these conventional techniques may fail to identify discriminant validity issues in certain research contexts. Consequently, the HTMT approach is considered a more reliable and stringent method for verifying discriminant validity in PLS-SEM.

Accordingly, this study applied the HTMT criterion to evaluate discriminant validity among all constructs, including Candidate Selection, Study Program, Destination Country, and International Relations. The results are presented in Table 4.13, which shows that all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, thereby confirming that discriminant validity was adequately established across all constructs in the model.

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Table 4. 13
Discriminant Validity by heterotrait-monotrait ratio

	Candidate Selection	**Destination Country**	**International Relations**	**Study Program**
Candidate Selection				
Destination Country	0.704			
International Relations	0.772	0.811		
Study Program	0.750	0.735	0.815	

Therefore, Table 4.13 shows the findings of discriminant validity by the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) for all variables which are candidate selection, study program, destination country, and international relations are valid approaches of their variables based on their parameter estimations as well as statistical implications.

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4.10.2 Evaluation of Structural Model

An evaluation of an inner model, or structural model, involves investigating the dependent correlations between the exogenous and endogenous latent variables in a theoretical model generated for a study. Sarstedt, M. Ringle, Smith, Reams, and F. Hair Jr (2014) demonstrated that a structural model includes assessing the predictive capabilities of a model and determining the existing correlations among the variables. Therefore, the significance of path coefficients and evaluation of predictive relevance (Q2) are essential concepts for evaluating the structural model in PLS-SEM.

4.10.2.1 Evaluation of Direct Effects

The study uses the structural model to analyze a systematic model. The model has been applied to test hypothesis 1 to 3 and provide a broad picture of the results. The evaluation of the internal model is based on a study in which the relationship between one dependent variable and several independent variables. The PLS-SEM algorithms have been utilized to examine the scope of path coefficients as well as the significance of correlations that were evaluated through the method of PLS-SEM bootstrapping in the Smart PLS 4.0.

Likewise, the initial number of cases was applied to measure the actual number of cases which was attained by using 5000 samples of bootstrapping (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). In addition, the model investigated the analysis of the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables (H1 to H3).

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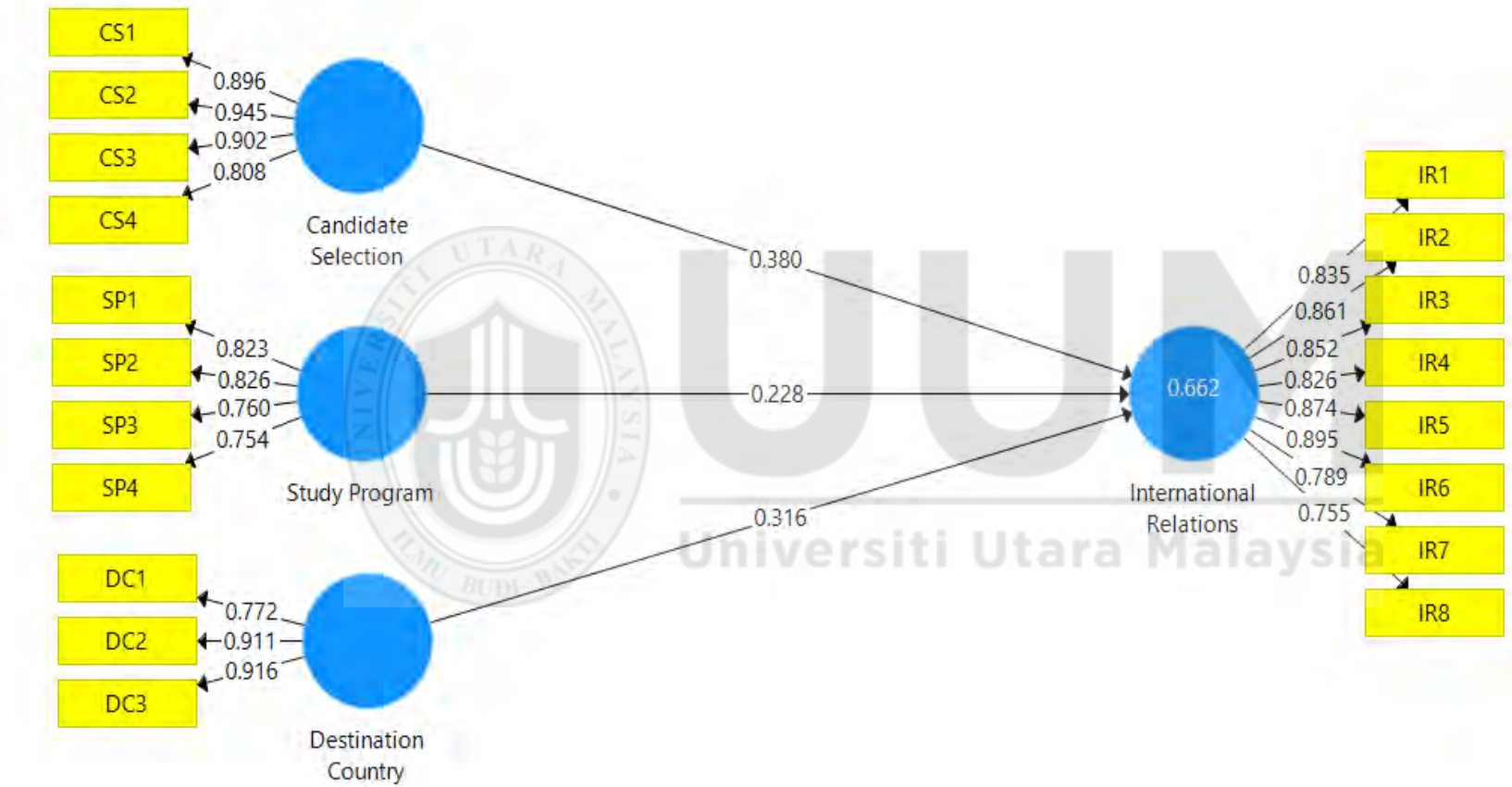


Figure 4. 5 *Direct Effect of Algorithms*

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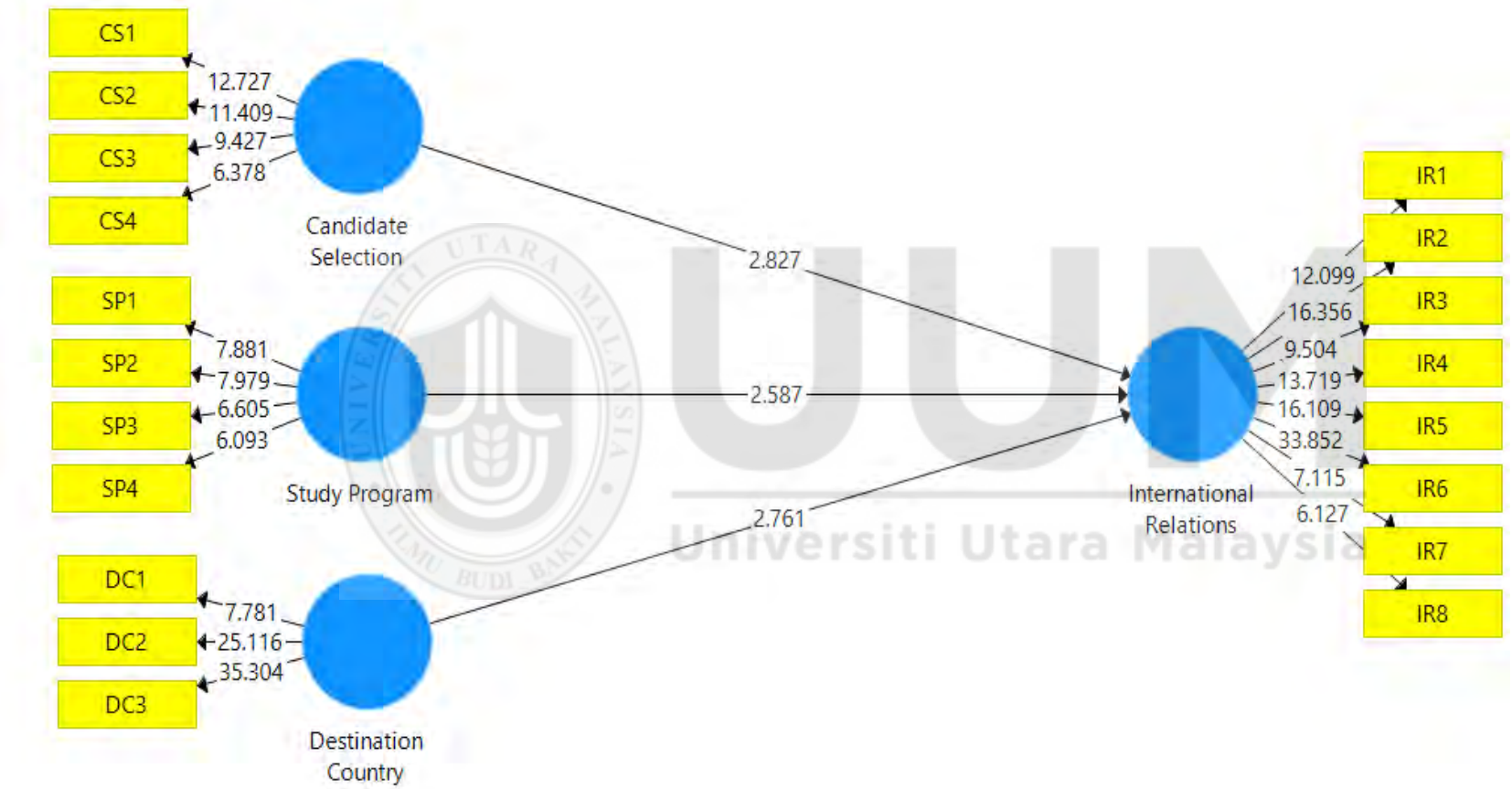


Figure 4. 6 *Direct Effect of Bootstrapping*

The results of the PLS-SEM structural model were examined to determine the direct effects among the study's variables. The path coefficients representing the direct relationships between the independent and dependent variables are illustrated in Figure 4.5, while the statistical results are summarized in Table 4.14. The findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between the exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) constructs.

The results of the bootstrapping analysis, shown in Figure 4.6, further confirm the significance of these relationships. The analysis was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples, which revealed that the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable were significant at $p < 0.005$. Table 4.14 presents the results for the original sample (β), t-statistics, and p-values, which collectively verify the strength and direction of each hypothesized relationship.

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The findings of Hypothesis 1 (H1) demonstrate that Candidate Selection has a positive and significant effect on International Relations in the UAE ($\beta = 0.380$, $t = 2.827$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, the results for Hypothesis 2 (H2) indicate that Study Programs have a positive and significant impact on International Relations ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 2.587$, $p = 0.000$). Finally, Hypothesis 3 (H3) shows that Destination Country also exerts a positive and significant influence on International Relations ($\beta = 0.316$, $t = 2.761$, $p = 0.000$).

Therefore, the path coefficient results for all direct relationships confirm that each of the independent variables, Candidate Selection, Study Program, and Destination

Country positively contributes to strengthening the UAE's international relations. The detailed numerical results of these direct effects are presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4. 14
Direct Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Candidate Selection-> International Relations	0.380	0.360	0.134	2.827	0.000
Study Program-> International Relations	0.228	0.540	0.088	2.587	0.000
Destination Country-> International Relations	0.316	0.389	0.114	2.761	0.000

Table 4.14 shows the analysis of the direct effects of candidate selection, study program, and destination country with international relations which has been determined in the model which indicates that direct effects have a significant relationship.

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4.10.3 Evaluation of Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

One of the criteria in this study is predictive relevance at the construct level of Q^2, which is evaluated by using a theoretical or structural model. The current study used the Stone-Geisser test of predictive significance, employing the subsequent criteria for the analysis of a model that was stated by Geisser (1974). Cha (1994) asserted that models are evaluated based on their ability to precisely match the data, as demonstrated by the results of the Stone-Geisser predictive relevance test.

Likewise, PLS path modeling could generate two different types of Q^2 values, and a blindfolding technique known as cross-validated redundancy (Cha, 1994) whereas,

Chin (1998) highly recommended by employing the cross-validated redundancy in order to verify the predictive capacity of the structural model. Moreover, a cross-validated relevance result in which the value of Q^2 is higher than zero indicates a theoretical or structural model's predictive value is significant, whereas, in a structural model if the value of Q^2 is less than zero which shows that the model has a lack of predictive relevance (Chin W. W., 1998). Therefore, the outcomes of the Stone-Geisser test of the predictive relevance are shown in Table 4.15.

Table 4. 15
Construct Cross validated Redundancy

	SSO	**SSE**	**Q^²(=1-SSE/SSO)**
International Relations	792.000	471.500	0.405

Table 4.15 indicates the analysis of endogenous latent variables Q^2 of cross-validated redundancy for international relations (0.405) which shows that the structural model has a predictive effect in the study (Chin W. W., 2009).

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4.11 Chapter Summary

The findings of the study are based on the gathered information which are summarized in this chapter. Firstly, the chapter begins with a background of the study. Then the response rate and non-response rate were confirmed. The participant's age, gender, and qualifications have been calculated as part of the analysis of demographics with the support of their responses, whereas the common method bias test has been also determined.

Consequently, the elaborative results of the major variables in the study were examined which include descriptive analysis, analysis of missing values, analysis of normality, and multicollinearity analysis have been calculated which involves VIF as well as tolerance. Moreover, the evaluation of PLS-SEM has two models which are measurement and structural. Firstly, the measurement model has been investigated which involves the Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Discriminant Validity (Fornell and HTMT). Additionally, the structural model assessed the analysis of direct relationships which involves PLS structural equation modelling algorithms and PLS structural equation modelling direct bootstrapping effects were assessed, and the path coefficient variables. Lastly, the evaluation of predictive relevance was also examined in this chapter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study, providing an overview of its objectives and how these outcomes relate to previous research. The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationships between Candidate Selection, Destination Country, Study Program, and International Relations among employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as among international relations experts and individuals responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies.

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The discussion in this chapter integrates both theoretical and practical perspectives, highlighting how the study's results contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offering insights relevant to policy development and institutional practices. Additionally, the chapter outlines the theoretical, practical, and methodological implications derived from the analysis of the latent variables. Finally, it presents the limitations encountered during the research process and offers recommendations for future studies aimed at extending and strengthening the understanding of foreign scholarship policy and its influence on international relations within the UAE context.

5.2 Recapitulation of Objectives

1. To determine the influence of candidates' selection to international relations in UAE.
2. To investigate the influence of study programs on international relations in UAE.
3. To determine the influence of destination country to international relations in UAE.

5.3 Discussion on Hypothesis

This research primarily defined the perception of collected information from the employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of foreign scholarship policies. It analyzed the independent variables including candidate selection, destination country, and study program over international relations among employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those in charge of foreign scholarship policies.

Therefore, the discussion of the hypotheses is shown below.

1) Candidates Selection has a positive significant impact on International Relationships of UAE.
2) Study Programs have a positive significant impact on International Relationships of UAE.
3) Destination Country has a positive significant impact on International Relationships of UAE.

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5.3.1 Candidate Selection and International Relations

The first hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between Candidate Selection and International Relations. The hypothesis was tested using responses from 357 participants, including employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies. Based on the PLS-SEM modeling results, the study found that Candidate Selection has a positive and significant impact on the international relations of the UAE ($\beta = 0.380$, $t = 2.827$, $p = 0.000$). As the calculated t-value (2.827) exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and the p-value (0.000) is below the 0.05 significance level, the hypothesis was accepted. This confirms a strong and statistically significant relationship between candidate selection and international relations.

The process of candidate selection involves identifying students who meet the eligibility criteria for scholarship awards based on various academic, personal, and institutional factors (Acharya & Buzan, 2017). Previous research has shown that an effective candidate selection process positively influences international relations by promoting mutual trust, fairness, and transparency in international academic exchanges (Acharya & Buzan, 2017; Hermansen, 2018). Milner (2020) further emphasized that a well-structured and equitable selection process enhances the host country's image, fostering stronger international partnerships and improving diplomatic ties.

In the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), candidate selection plays a particularly important role due to the nation's diverse workforce and its strategic influence in the Middle East. This relationship can also be interpreted through the lens

of Social Exchange Theory, which highlights the reciprocal nature of relationships—in this case, between scholarship candidates and the state. The UAE's investment in talented individuals through scholarship programs represents a mutual exchange of value: students gain educational and professional advancement, while the country benefits from their acquired skills and the strengthening of its global relationships.

Recruitment and selection practices in the UAE face several challenges, particularly related to workforce localization, international student recruitment, and expatriate management. Both public and private sector organizations often experience difficulties in attracting local candidates due to limited educational specialization, high salary expectations, and competition from other employers (Waxin, Lindsay, Belkhodja, & Zhao, 2018). Public sector institutions typically reserve specific positions for Emirati nationals and adopt more targeted recruitment strategies compared to private entities. These organizations frequently review job descriptions, implement transparent selection processes, and employ culturally trained staffing committees to ensure fairness and inclusivity (Waxin et al., 2018).

The UAE has also positioned itself as an emerging education hub, attracting international students through key push-pull factors such as high-quality education, safety, and rich cultural experiences (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017). Understanding these factors enables policymakers and institutions to refine recruitment and marketing strategies, thereby enhancing the nation's global academic reputation.

Furthermore, multinational corporations (MNCs) in the UAE emphasize technical competence during expatriate selection but often overlook cross-cultural training and

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adjustment support. Effective expatriate management requires selecting candidates with appropriate cultural adaptability, offering pre-departure and post-arrival training, and implementing structured repatriation programs (Tahir, 2018).

Overall, the UAE faces unique challenges and opportunities in candidate selection that directly influence its international relations. Workforce localization initiatives continue to evolve, with public organizations leading more targeted approaches. The UAE's growing role as a global education destination demands a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping international student choices. Similarly, successful expatriate management in multinational contexts necessitates attention to both technical skills and intercultural competence. Collectively, these findings underscore that well-structured and transparent candidate selection mechanisms significantly enhance international relations by promoting collaboration, trust, and mutual benefit between the UAE and its global partners.

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5.3.2 Study Program and International Relations

The second hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between Study Programs and International Relations. The hypothesis was tested using responses from 357 participants, including employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and individuals responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies. Based on the PLS-SEM modeling results, the study revealed that Study Programs have a positive and significant impact on the international relations of the UAE ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 2.587$, $p = 0.000$). Since the t-value (2.587) exceeds the threshold of 1.96 and the p-value (0.000)

is less than 0.05, the hypothesis was accepted, confirming that Study Programs significantly influence the UAE's international relations.

Study programs are designed to equip students with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills relevant to global diplomacy, communication, and intercultural engagement. In the UAE context, programs in international relations aim to develop competencies in negotiation, cross-cultural communication, analytical reasoning, and strategic thinking—skills essential for effective participation in global diplomacy and policy-making. Graduates of such programs are prepared for roles including international affairs analysts, diplomats, and policy advisors, where they contribute to analyzing global policies, forecasting international trends, collaborating with international institutions, and preparing diplomatic reports and briefings.

Given the UAE's strategic geopolitical location and growing influence in global economics and diplomacy, these academic programs are intentionally aligned with national priorities. They prepare individuals who can effectively represent the UAE's interests abroad while fostering stronger global partnerships. The international orientation of these programs enhances the country's capacity to engage constructively in global governance and international cooperation.

The UAE's higher-education sector is highly internationalized, with many universities offering curricula embedded with global perspectives and partnerships with prestigious foreign institutions. This academic internationalization reflects the theory of social exchange, which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between student development and national needs. In this exchange, the state invests in educational

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opportunities to develop globally competent citizens, while graduates, in turn, contribute to advancing the UAE's international relations and soft power influence.

Furthermore, the integration of global content within UAE higher education helps students develop a deeper understanding of international systems, policies, and cultural dynamics. This not only enhances individual employability but also strengthens the UAE's diplomatic infrastructure by cultivating a generation of professionals capable of engaging in cross-cultural collaboration and policy negotiation.

In conclusion, the results of this study, supported by prior research, confirm that Study Programs have a positive and significant impact on the International Relations of the UAE. Well-structured, globally oriented academic programs play a crucial role in building the human capital necessary for the UAE's diplomatic success, ensuring that education continues to serve as a powerful instrument of both national development and international engagement.

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5.3.3 Destination Country and International Relations

The third hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between Destination Country and International Relations. The hypothesis was tested using data from 357 respondents, including employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those responsible for managing foreign scholarship policies. Based on the PLS-SEM modeling results, the study found that Destination Country has a positive and significant impact on the international relations of the UAE ($\beta = 0.316$, $t = 2.761$, $p = 0.000$). Since the t-value

(2.761) exceeds the threshold of 1.96 and the p-value (0.000) is below 0.05, the hypothesis was accepted. This confirms a strong and statistically significant relationship between destination country and international relations.

A destination country refers to the host nation where a student pursues studies after successfully obtaining scholarship approval and visa clearance (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016; Oren, 2018). Prior research consistently indicates that the choice of destination country significantly influences international relations, as it shapes cross-cultural interactions, educational collaborations, and long-term diplomatic ties (Acharya & Buzan, 2017; Pasha, Gofas, Hamati-Ataya, & Onuf, 2018). Studying abroad provides students with an immersive cultural experience that fosters understanding, appreciation, and respect for other societies, thereby strengthening people-to-people diplomacy and improving bilateral relations between the home and host countries (Jamaludin, Sam, & Sandal, 2018; Wen & Hu, 2019).

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In the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), students who study overseas serve as informal ambassadors of their nation, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Their exposure to international environments enhances their intellectual and professional competencies while also projecting a positive image of the UAE abroad. Upon their return, these graduates bring back valuable global knowledge, skills, and perspectives that can contribute to the UAE's social, economic, and diplomatic development. This process of exchange often translates into stronger bilateral relationships, deeper cultural appreciation, and expanded cooperation in areas such as education, trade, and technology.

From a theoretical standpoint, this relationship aligns with Cultural Exchange Theory, which posits that international education promotes intercultural understanding and global harmony by facilitating the exchange of values, traditions, and experiences among nations. Through such exchanges, cultural diplomacy is strengthened, fostering international goodwill and enhancing the UAE's reputation as a progressive, knowledge-driven society.

Furthermore, the skills and expertise gained by UAE students abroad have a lasting impact on the nation's economic and policy development. Graduates specializing in fields such as international relations, economics, business, and technology play crucial roles in shaping the UAE's foreign policy strategies, global trade relations, and innovation-driven economic initiatives (Alali, Altaher, & Almarri, 2024). These contributions strengthen the country's international standing and reinforce its strategic partnerships.

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Educational pathways that emphasize international exposure also prepare students for careers in diplomacy, foreign policy, and global governance. According to EduRank (2024), such graduates are well-equipped to navigate complex international issues, build cross-national partnerships, and contribute meaningfully to their countries' diplomatic objectives.

Ultimately, the destination countries selected by UAE students for higher education play a critical role in shaping the nation's international relationships. These academic linkages foster educational partnerships, cultural and economic exchanges, workforce development, and mutual policy influence between the UAE and its host nations.

Based on the results of this study and supporting literature, it is therefore concluded that the Destination Country has a positive and significant impact on the International Relations of the UAE, reinforcing the country's soft power and global engagement through education and cultural diplomacy.

5.4 Contribution of the Study

The findings of the current study provide the implications and conclusions of the research which are analyzed under three various aspects; theoretical implications, practical implications, and methodological implications have significant contributions between candidate selection, destination country, study program, and international relations. Therefore, the discussion about theoretical implications, practical implications, and methodological implications are shown below.

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this research contribute to the existing body of knowledge by reinforcing prior results, extending the literature on understudied variables, and addressing methodological gaps within the specific context of this study. In particular, the research sheds light on the influence of Candidate Selection, Destination Country, and Study Program on International Relations among employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and those overseeing foreign scholarship policies. This contribution helps fill a recognized gap in the limited literature on the intersection of scholarship policy and international diplomacy.

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From a theoretical standpoint, this study offers a dual contribution by integrating Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory into a unified framework. This integration provides a more comprehensive lens for understanding how foreign scholarships function as a strategic instrument of international relations. Cultural Theory explains how exposure to diverse cultures through study abroad programs enhances mutual understanding and intercultural acceptance, thereby reinforcing international ties. In contrast, Social Exchange Theory underpins the reciprocal relationship between the state and scholarship recipients, where the exchange of knowledge, skills, and opportunities strengthens both human-capital development and diplomatic engagement.

While prior research has typically examined these constructs independently, this study is among the few to evaluate their combined influence on international relations within a single empirical model. By merging the separate lines of inquiry into an integrated theoretical framework, the study establishes a broader conceptual foundation that explains how education-based exchange mechanisms contribute to state-level diplomatic objectives. This integrated approach also provides a model that can guide policymakers in using international scholarship programs as a deliberate tool to enhance diplomatic relations.

Furthermore, the study's framework has implications beyond the UAE context. Other governmental and educational bodies across the Gulf region can draw lessons from these findings, as the shared socio-political structures and national strategies make them relevant to comparable systems of scholarship administration and international engagement. The investigation of how candidate selection, destination country, and

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study program collectively influence the execution of international-relations strategies adds an important theoretical dimension to the existing scholarship on educational diplomacy.

In summary, this study contributes to theory by proposing an integrated model that links Cultural Theory—addressing variables such as destination country and international relations—with Social Exchange Theory, which explains variables such as candidate selection and study program. The integration of these perspectives offers a holistic understanding of how education-driven exchanges strengthen diplomatic relations. Consequently, the research provides valuable theoretical insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners concerned with leveraging scholarship programs as instruments of soft power and international cooperation, particularly within the UAE and comparable regional contexts.

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5.4.2 Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, this research highlights the significant role of Candidate Selection, Destination Country, and Study Program in shaping the UAE's International Relations. The findings demonstrate that these three factors have direct and measurable implications for government authorities and policymakers responsible for scholarship management and foreign relations. Decisions made at the policy level in these areas influence not only the educational outcomes of scholarship recipients but also the diplomatic and cultural engagement of the UAE with other nations.

Government agencies—particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates—can utilize these findings to design more strategic scholarship frameworks

that align academic opportunities with national foreign policy objectives. Effective candidate selection processes, for instance, ensure that scholarship recipients possess both the academic competence and the cultural adaptability required to represent the UAE positively abroad. This enhances the country's global image and fosters stronger bilateral and multilateral relationships.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of strategic destination-country choices in scholarship policy. By prioritizing partnerships with nations that share mutual diplomatic, economic, or technological interests, the UAE can strengthen international collaboration and expand its influence in key regions. Likewise, the design and content of study programs can be optimized to meet the country's future diplomatic and economic needs, ensuring that returning graduates contribute meaningfully to national development and global engagement.

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The results also point to a need for improved coordination among policymakers, program administrators, and diplomatic representatives to ensure that scholarship programs are not only managed efficiently but also aligned with the broader goals of soft power diplomacy. Despite the existence of several government programs that aim to enhance international relations through education, this study finds that some initiatives are underutilized or insufficiently integrated with national strategic goals. Hence, the findings encourage greater inter-agency collaboration, long-term planning, and performance evaluation mechanisms to maximize the impact of scholarship policies on international relations.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable practical insights for decision-makers and policymakers within the UAE's government and diplomatic institutions. It emphasizes that the effectiveness of international relations can be substantially improved through carefully structured scholarship programs that consider candidate selection, destination country, and study program as interrelated components of educational diplomacy. By strengthening these elements, the UAE can continue to position education as a cornerstone of its international engagement strategy, fostering mutual understanding, cooperation, and sustainable global partnerships.

5.4.3 Methodological Implications

In addition to its theoretical and practical significance, this research offers several noteworthy methodological contributions. Previous studies on international relations have primarily relied on conventional statistical tools such as SPSS for data analysis. However, this study advances methodological practice by employing SmartPLS 4.0 for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), following the guidelines of Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, and Hair Jr. (2014). The use of SmartPLS 4.0 enables more robust analysis of complex relationships among latent variables, facilitating the simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models with greater precision and reliability.

A further methodological contribution lies in the adaptation and application of the measurement scales for Candidate Selection, Destination Country, and Study Program constructs. These scales were derived from previously validated instruments and contextualized to fit the current research setting, marking the first time they have been operationalized in the GCC region, particularly within the UAE context. This

adaptation enhances the cross-cultural applicability of the measurement tools and provides a validated framework for future studies in similar socio-political environments.

Moreover, this study establishes the reliability and validity of the adapted measurement model through comprehensive statistical procedures, including Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Discriminant Validity (assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio). The findings revealed that all indicators exceeded the recommended threshold levels, confirming the internal consistency and construct validity of the instrument.

Consequently, the methodological framework introduced in this study provides a replicable model for future researchers investigating similar constructs in the fields of international relations and educational diplomacy. By validating the measurement model within the UAE context, this research enhances the methodological rigor of quantitative studies in this domain and contributes to the refinement of data-analysis techniques suitable for emerging research settings.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Like most empirical research, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. The first limitation concerns the scope of variables examined. Although numerous factors can influence international relations, this research focuses specifically on Candidate Selection, Study Program, and Destination Country as determinants. While these variables provide valuable

insights, other potential influences—such as governmental strategies, institutional partnerships, and socio-political factors—were not included in the current model, thereby narrowing the study's analytical scope.

A second limitation relates to the composition of the sample. Data were collected exclusively from employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international relations experts and individuals responsible for foreign scholarship policies. The perspectives of other relevant stakeholders, such as senior government officials, educational policymakers, or representatives from partnering academic institutions, were not incorporated. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the perceptions of employees directly engaged in operational aspects rather than strategic decision-making levels.

Another limitation arises from the time frame and design of the study. The research employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time during 2024. This design limits the ability to examine causal relationships or changes in perceptions over time. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how the effects of candidate selection, study program, and destination country evolve and influence international relations in the long term. Additionally, the study's time and resource constraints restricted broader data collection, which may have affected the diversity and representativeness of the sample.

Moreover, the study relies on self-reported perceptions of participants, which introduces the possibility of perceptual biases or subjective judgments. Respondents' opinions may have been influenced by personal experiences, cognitive biases, or

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organizational culture. Although efforts were made to minimize such biases through clear instructions and anonymity assurances, the inherent limitations of self-reported data must still be recognized.

Lastly, the study's findings are context-specific to the UAE and may not be fully generalizable to other geopolitical or cultural environments. Future research could expand this scope by incorporating comparative analyses across different countries or regions to test the external validity of the proposed framework.

While these limitations do not undermine the overall significance of the study, they highlight the need for future research to include a broader range of variables, stakeholder perspectives, and longitudinal approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between scholarship policies and international relations.

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5.6 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings and limitations of this research, several recommendations are proposed to guide future studies and policy development. First, future research should expand the scope of variables influencing international relations beyond candidate selection, destination country, and study program. Additional factors such as institutional partnerships, government policy frameworks, alumni networks, and socio-economic conditions could provide a more holistic understanding of how scholarship programs shape diplomatic and educational outcomes.

Since this study collected data exclusively from employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international-relations experts and

those responsible for foreign-scholarship policies, future investigations should consider including senior government officials, decision-makers, and representatives from higher-education institutions. Broadening the participant base will capture multiple perspectives, offering a more comprehensive view of how scholarship policies influence the UAE's international relations and human-capital development.

Given that the present research adopted a cross-sectional design, future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal research approaches to examine how the relationships between variables evolve over time. Longitudinal data collection would enable researchers to assess the long-term effects of scholarship policies and international education on diplomatic relations, policy effectiveness, and workforce outcomes.

Moreover, while this study utilized a quantitative research method supported by statistical analysis, future research could adopt a mixed-methods or qualitative approach to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and motivations. Conducting in-depth interviews or focus-group discussions with scholarship recipients, policymakers, and diplomatic staff could uncover nuanced perspectives that quantitative surveys may not fully capture.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the practical relevance of international scholarship programs in strengthening the UAE's international relations. Future research should further explore how these programs can be strategically aligned with national foreign-policy objectives and educational reforms. Such studies can offer

actionable insights for policymakers to enhance scholarship management, foster cultural exchange, and sustain diplomatic partnerships.

In conclusion, expanding the research scope, diversifying methodologies, and incorporating longitudinal and qualitative approaches will provide a richer and more dynamic understanding of the role of international scholarship policies in advancing the UAE's international-relations agenda.

5.7 Conclusion of the Study

The results of this research confirm a strong and significant relationship among Candidate Selection, Destination Country, Study Program, and International Relations. All proposed hypotheses were supported, demonstrating that these three factors play an essential role in shaping and enhancing the UAE's international relations. Despite certain limitations, the study successfully addressed all research objectives and answered the guiding research questions.

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The findings reveal that employees of embassies, consulates, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with international-relations experts and scholarship-policy administrators, perceive that improvements in candidate selection, destination-country strategies, and study-program alignment can collectively strengthen international relations. This indicates that well-structured policies, transparent selection processes, and strategically designed academic programs can serve as catalysts for diplomatic collaboration and global engagement.

The study also provides substantial theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it reinforces the relevance of Cultural Theory and Social Exchange Theory as frameworks for understanding how educational exchange and scholarship programs foster cooperation, cultural understanding, and reciprocal relations among nations. Practically, it offers insights for policymakers and government institutions to refine foreign-scholarship policies that align with the UAE's diplomatic goals. Methodologically, the study establishes a reliable and valid framework for examining similar constructs in future research using advanced analytical techniques such as PLS-SEM.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that effective candidate selection, well-structured study programs, and carefully chosen destination countries contribute not only to the UAE's human-capital development but also to its soft-power diplomacy and long-term international partnerships. These factors collectively enhance mutual understanding, trust, and collaboration with other nations.

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Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations while providing a foundation for future research to expand on additional variables, employ longitudinal designs, and include broader stakeholder perspectives. Overall, the study emphasizes that foreign-scholarship policies are strategic instruments of diplomacy and development, capable of reinforcing the UAE's global presence and fostering sustainable international relationships through education and cultural exchange.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick (√) in the box relevant to you.

A. Gender

- □ Male
- □ Female

B. Age

- □ 26-35
- □ 36-45
- □ 46-55
- □ Up to 55

C. Qualification

- □ Matriculation
- □ Diploma
- □ BA
- □ Postgraduate

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International relations

Please (√) in the appropriate option: No Support =1, Slight Support =2, Neutral=3, Supportive =4, and Very Supportive =5.

No	**International relations**	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Your relations with the country where the students have been sent on scholarship have become very strong.					
2.	Cultural exchange has gained strength because of sending students on scholarships.					
3.	By sending the students on scholarship diplomatic relations have gained strength.					
4.	Economic ties have increased because of sending the students on scholarship.					
5.	Cultural exchange because of sending the students on scholarship has improved relations with the host countries.					
6.	Tourism with the country where the students have been sent on scholarship has increased.					
7.	By sending students on scholarship foreign policy of the country has aligned with the country where students are studying on scholarship.					
8.	International media plays a significant role in selecting the country where the students are sent for studies.					

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Candidate's Selection

Please (√) in the appropriate option: No Support =1, Slight Support =2, Neutral=3, Supportive =4, and Very Supportive =5.

No	**Candidate's Selection**	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The modes and procedures of application of scholarship is fair and transparent for all the prospective candidates.					
2.	Selection and Screening of scholarship candidates was Affected by Political Influence.					
3.	Favoritism and nepotism have affected the selection and screening of candidates for scholarship awards.					
4.	As a beneficiary, the scholarship serves as an important opportunity for improving your career path, world view and self-confidence.					

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Study Programs

Please (√) in the appropriate option: No Support =1, Slight Support =2, Neutral=3, Supportive =4, and Very Supportive =5.

No	**Study Programs**	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The beneficiaries were admitted in universities and higher institutions that have good teaching and learning infrastructures in terms of science, technology and research.					
2.	The beneficiaries were admitted in universities and higher institutions that students graduate on scheduled time.					

3.	The course you were admitted is in line with the profession you want to pursue.					
4.	Scholarship beneficiaries were admitted in Institutions that have adequate manpower.					

Destination Country

Please (√) in the appropriate option: No Support =1, Slight Support =2, Neutral=3, Supportive =4, and Very Supportive =5.

No	**Destination Country**	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is security of lives and properties in this country of your study.					
2	Implementation of scholarship afforded the beneficiaries opportunity to travel beyond borders of UAE in search of knowledge, skills and research that would not have otherwise been available.					
3	The skills and experiences acquired by the beneficiaries were optimally utilized for the development of the state.					

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