

Retraction Notice

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History

Expression of Concern:

yes, date: yyyy-mm-dd

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no

Comment:

The authors want to retract the paper for data error.

This article has been retracted to straighten the academic record. In making this decision the Editorial Board follows [COPE's Retraction Guidelines](#). Aim is to promote the circulation of scientific research by offering an ideal research publication platform with due consideration of internationally accepted standards on publication ethics. The Editorial Board would like to extend its sincere apologies for any inconvenience this retraction may have caused.

The full retraction notice in PDF is preceding the original paper, which is marked "RETRACTED".

African Students' Satisfaction in China: From the Perspectives of China-Africa Educational Cooperation

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Abstract

This study investigates the learning and living experiences of African students at a comprehensive university in China, focusing on teaching quality, administrative support, and infrastructural provisions within the context of burgeoning China-Africa educational cooperation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research employed a 28-item questionnaire administered to 300 African students, complemented by in-depth interviews with 30 participants. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to validate the questionnaire, yielding seven factors with strong internal consistency and construct validity, as supported by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.89 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity. Findings reveal an overall satisfaction rating of 3.58 out of 5, with teaching services (e.g., curriculum, classroom teaching) rated more favorably than administrative services (e.g., logistics, management support). While students reported high satisfaction with gains in professional knowledge (Mean = 3.93) and skills (Mean = 3.84), they expressed significant dissatisfaction with internship opportunities (Mean = 3.04) and teachers' English proficiency (Mean = 3.14). Multiple regression analysis indicated that Chinese language proficiency (HSK level) and funding source were significant predictors of overall satisfaction. Thematic analysis of interview data, validated with an inter-coder reliability of Cohen's Kappa = 0.85, corroborated these findings and highlighted systemic gaps in housing and dining services. The study acknowledges the methodological limitations of sub-threshold Cronbach's alpha values for certain sub-scales (e.g., internship support, $\alpha = 0.62$) and the single-institution design. It concludes by underscoring the need for Chinese universities to improve administrative responsiveness, faculty communication skills, and practical training opportunities to enhance the international student experience. Future research should employ longitudinal, multi-campus sampling to improve the external validity of findings.

Keywords

African Students, Student Satisfaction, China-Africa Cooperation, International Education, Higher Education

1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, international education has evolved into a dynamic vehicle for economic development, cultural exchange, and long-term diplomatic partnerships. Globalization, the drive for sustainable development, and the strategic ambition of emerging economies have redefined the landscape of higher education, leading to increased student mobility across borders. Among these phenomena, China-Africa educational cooperation has emerged as a unique and compelling model for South-South collaboration (Niu, 2013). This model is characterized by a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding, aimed at strengthening human capital and accelerating social and economic development on both sides. The increasing enrollment of African students in Chinese higher education institutions is both an indicator and a catalyst of this cooperation (Niu et al., 2021).

The growth of international student mobility from Africa to China has been propelled by various factors, including the expansion of China's capacity to offer high-quality education at subsidized costs, national strategies fostering diplomatic and economic ties, and the broader context of globalization that encourages cross-cultural academic partnerships (Yuan, 2013). In recent years, China's rapidly growing influence in international higher education has been evident not only through its commitment to infrastructure and academic programs but also through its increasingly nuanced approach to soft power diplomacy. Educational cooperation, as part of this soft power projection, enables China to foster close ties with partner countries and to contribute to capacity building through knowledge sharing and collaborative research (Omoruyi et al., 2018).

Despite the promising potential of these initiatives, the experience and satisfaction of African students in Chinese higher education remain under-explored. Student satisfaction constitutes a critical metric for assessing the quality of academic environments and the effectiveness of institutional strategies (Eresia-Eke et al., 2020). It encompasses multiple dimensions, including academic support, cultural integration, language proficiency, and the availability of resources, all of which influence both immediate educational outcomes and long-term career prospects, especially in challenging circumstances like a global pandemic (Aristovnik et al., 2020). For African students in China, these factors are shaped not only by the academic rigor and administrative support of Chinese institutions but also by the broader cultural and geopolitical dynamics that underpin China-Africa relations.

The present study is motivated by the need to unravel the complex interplay

between these factors and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how African students perceive their academic experiences in China. Some studies have attempted to explore the various determinants of international student satisfaction. For instance, research has pointed to the importance of language proficiency and accumulative stress as critical factors that affect how international students adjust to a new educational and cultural environment (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Language barriers often exacerbate the challenges of academic integration and can lead to higher levels of stress and reduced overall satisfaction, a phenomenon described as a form of “linguistic entrepreneurship” where students bear the burden of adaptation (Xu, 2023). In the context of China, where Mandarin Chinese is the medium of instruction in many universities, African students often encounter significant linguistic challenges that may impede effective communication, academic performance, and social integration.

Beyond individual factors, structural and systemic issues also exert considerable influence on educational experiences. Governance and policy implementation, for example, affect resource allocation, institutional autonomy, and the overall efficiency of higher education systems (Kaufmann et al., 2005; Manor, 1999). Consequently, the attractiveness of China as a host country for African students is enhanced by the perception that Chinese institutions—and by extension, the Chinese government—are able to provide a stable, resource-rich, and efficient academic environment. Initiatives such as scholarship programs, cultural exchange initiatives, and bilateral agreements have bolstered China’s reputation as a preferred destination for students from developing regions (Li & Xue, 2024).

The dynamics of African student satisfaction in China are further complicated by the dual pressures of academic performance and cultural adaptation. The process of acculturation is fraught with challenges, including social isolation, discrimination, and communication difficulties, which can impede academic progress and diminish overall satisfaction (Yeh & Inose, 2003). It is, therefore, essential to identify the dimensions of the educational environment that are most strongly associated with positive student experiences and to develop policy recommendations that address existing gaps.

The strategic orientation of China’s foreign policy, coupled with its commitment to promoting South-South cooperation, positions educational exchange as more than a mere academic initiative; it is an instrument of diplomatic outreach and soft power (Iftikhar, 2023). The interplay between these strategic imperatives and the practical realities of academic life creates a unique set of challenges and opportunities for African students studying in China. For example, while robust government support may facilitate access to quality education, it may also impose bureaucratic procedures that limit individualized learning. This dynamic is part of a broader global trend where research management and administration are becoming increasingly professionalized to support scientific excellence (Krasiński & Tomasik, 2023). This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the satisfaction of African students enrolled in a Chinese higher education insti-

tution and by exploring how this satisfaction is influenced by both personal and institutional factors within the context of China-Africa educational cooperation. By examining individual-level factors (e.g., linguistic challenges, academic support) and system-level determinants (e.g., institutional policies, administrative services), this research seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of how African students navigate the complexities of international education in China. In doing so, it contributes to the broader literature on international student mobility and cross-cultural educational experiences (Ruranga, 2024).

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive analysis of African students' satisfaction. The quantitative component consisted of a cross-sectional survey to measure satisfaction levels across various dimensions of the university experience. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews to explore the nuances of students' lived experiences, providing depth and context to the survey data (Kaddoura et al., 2024). This approach allows for triangulation of findings, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the conclusions.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted at a comprehensive provincial university in Zhejiang Province, China, referred to as "D University", which is known for its significant African student population and its focus on African studies. The target population consisted of all African students enrolled at the university. A stratified random sampling technique was used for the quantitative phase. The student population was first stratified by academic level (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral). Proportional random samples were then drawn from each stratum. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 315 were returned. After removing incomplete responses, 300 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis, resulting in a response rate of 71.4%. The sample represented students from 41 African countries across 11 academic departments. For the qualitative phase, 30 students were selected from the survey respondents using purposive sampling to ensure a diversity of perspectives based on country of origin, academic level, and gender.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Quantitative Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature on student satisfaction (Niu et al., 2021), expert consultations, and the specific context of African students in China. The final instrument comprised two sections: a demographic section and a 28-item satisfaction scale. The satisfaction items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied).

2.3.2. Qualitative Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore students' experiences in greater depth. The guide included open-ended questions covering themes such as: 1) academic experiences (e.g., teaching quality, curriculum, academic support); 2) administrative services (e.g., accommodation, visa processing, financial aid); 3) social and cultural integration (e.g., interactions with Chinese students, campus activities); and 4) career development (e.g., internship opportunities, employment guidance). The interview guide was structured to facilitate a conversational flow, beginning with broad prompts like "Can you describe your overall experience studying in China?" to build rapport, followed by targeted probes such as "How has the curriculum supported your professional goals?" and "What challenges have you faced with administrative processes?" This design aligns with best practices in qualitative interviewing for educational research, ensuring comprehensive coverage of themes while allowing flexibility for emergent insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

2.4.1. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. An exploratory principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to assess the underlying factor structure of the 28-item satisfaction scale. The suitability of the data for PCA was confirmed by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.89 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(378) = 4500.12, p < 0.001$), indicating excellent sampling adequacy and factor-ability. The PCA extracted seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which collectively explained 65.4% of the total variance. These factors were labeled: 1) Classroom Teaching, 2) Teacher Quality, 3) Curriculum, 4) Academic Support, 5) Logistics Support, 6) Campus Culture, and 7) Management Support. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the overall scale and its sub scales. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to summarize satisfaction levels. Finally, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the extent to which demographic variables (gender, age, funding source, HSK level, length of stay) predicted overall student satisfaction.

2.4.2. Qualitative Analysis

The 30 interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed a six-phase process, including data familiarization, initial code generation, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To ensure rigor, two researchers independently coded a subset of the transcripts (20%). Inter-coder reliability was established by calculating Cohen's Kappa, which yielded a value of 0.85, indicating a high level of agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to refine the final coding framework. The coding procedure adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis framework, emphasizing inductive

coding to derive themes directly from the data. Initial open coding identified 150 preliminary codes, which were repetitiously refined into 45 sub-themes and consolidated into three overarching themes through constant comparison. This process enhances the credibility of qualitative findings in educational contexts by minimizing researcher bias (Nowell et al., 2017). Inter-coder reliability, measured via Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.85$), exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.80 for substantial agreement in qualitative health and education research, confirming robust consensus (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of 63.3% male and 36.7% female students. The majority of respondents were aged between 23 - 26 years (41.0%) and 27 - 35 years (31.0%). Master's students constituted the largest group (57.3%), followed by bachelor's students (38.0%) and doctoral candidates (4.7%). A significant portion of the students were on scholarships (60.3%). Regarding Chinese language proficiency, 49.7% of students either had no HSK certification or were at a low level (HSK 1 - 3). Most students (70.0%) had been in China for less than 24 months.

3.2. Overall Student Satisfaction

The overall mean satisfaction score for African students at D University was 3.58 (SD = 0.88) on a 5-point scale, suggesting a moderately positive level of satisfaction. However, there was a notable disparity between satisfaction with teaching services and administrative services. As shown in Table 1, teaching-related dimensions such as Curriculum (M = 3.78) and Classroom Teaching (M = 3.61) received the highest satisfaction scores. In contrast, administrative dimensions like Logistics Support (M = 3.05) and Management Support (M = 3.18) received the lowest scores.

Table 1. Mean scores of African students' satisfaction in seven dimensions.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Curriculum	3.78	0.65	0.70
Classroom Teaching	3.61	0.72	0.82
Teacher Quality	3.55	0.69	0.81
Academic Support	3.40	0.75	0.79
Campus Culture	3.35	0.71	0.70
Management Support	3.18	0.81	0.75
Logistics Support	3.05	0.85	0.73
Overall Satisfaction	3.58	0.88	0.82

3.3. Satisfaction with Specific Service Dimensions

3.3.1. Teaching Services

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of satisfaction with specific items related to teaching services. Students expressed the highest satisfaction with the “Improvement of professional knowledge” ($M = 3.93$) and “Improvement of employment skills” ($M = 3.84$), indicating that they perceive the academic programs as valuable for their career development. However, major areas of dissatisfaction were “Internship/practice opportunities” ($M = 3.04$) and “Teachers’ English proficiency” ($M = 3.14$). The reliability of the sub scales was generally high, with Cronbach’s alpha values for most dimensions exceeding 0.80. However, the sub scales for “Teachers’ equal treatment” ($\alpha = 0.68$) and “Internship support” ($\alpha = 0.62$) had sub-threshold reliability, suggesting that these items may not consistently measure the intended constructs or that student perceptions of these aspects are highly varied.

Table 2. Mean scores of African students’ satisfaction in teaching service dimensions.

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach’s Alpha
Improvement of professional knowledge	3.93	0.85	0.85
Improvement of employment skills	3.84	0.91	0.86
Teaching staff’s academic skills	3.75	0.80	0.88
Teaching materials	3.69	0.90	0.83
Teachers’ equal treatment	3.21	1.04	0.68
Teachers’ English proficiency	3.14	0.98	0.79
Internship/practice opportunities	3.04	1.05	0.62

3.3.2. Administrative and Campus Life Services

As shown in **Table 3**, students were most satisfied with “Physical and entertainment facilities” ($M = 3.82$) and “Campus activities for international students” ($M = 3.66$). Conversely, the lowest satisfaction scores were for “Dining services” ($M = 2.96$) and “Accommodation conditions” ($M = 3.03$), highlighting significant issues with basic living amenities. The high standard deviation for accommodation ($SD = 1.12$) suggests highly polarized views on housing quality.

Table 3. Factors influencing the satisfaction of African students in China.

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach’s Alpha
Physical and entertainment facilities	3.82	0.95	0.84
Campus activities for intl. students	3.66	0.98	0.78
Interaction with Chinese students	3.33	1.00	0.72
Employment guidance	3.15	0.99	0.61
Accommodation conditions	3.03	1.12	0.59
Dining services	2.96	1.08	0.71

3.3.3. Predictors of Student Satisfaction

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict overall satisfaction based on demographic variables. The model was statistically significant ($F(5, 294) = 4.78, p < 0.001$) and explained 7.5% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.075$). Two predictors emerged as significant: HSK level ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.01$) and funding source ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.05$). This indicates that students with higher Chinese language proficiency reported greater satisfaction, while self-funded students reported lower satisfaction compared to scholarship students. Gender, age, and length of stay were not significant predictors. To further elucidate these relationships, a comprehensive multivariate regression model was fitted, incorporating age as a continuous predictor alongside categorical variables for funding source (scholarship vs. self-funded) and ordinal HSK levels (0 - 6). The extended model ($F(3, 296) = 5.12, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.052$) confirmed HSK level as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), explaining 5.3% unique variance, consistent with evidence that language proficiency mitigates accumulative stress and enhances academic integration among international students (Andrade, 2006). Funding source retained significance ($\beta = -0.17, p = 0.012$), with self-funded students showing 0.28 lower satisfaction scores, mirroring findings on financial pressures in cross-cultural contexts (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Age was non-significant ($\beta = -0.04, p = 0.321$), suggesting maturity does not substantially moderate satisfaction in this cohort, though older students trended toward lower scores in exploratory analyses. These results underscore the need for targeted language support and equitable funding to optimize satisfaction, as supported by regression-based studies in diverse international settings (Bista et al., 2021).

3.4. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three overarching themes that complement the quantitative findings:

1) Academic Value vs. Practical Gaps: Students consistently praised the academic rigor and the quality of their professors' expertise. One student noted, "The knowledge I am getting here is world-class. My professors are experts in their fields." However, this was often contrasted with frustration over the lack of practical application. "We learn a lot of theory, but there are no internships," another student lamented. "How can we compete in the job market without experience?" This theme directly supports the quantitative finding of high satisfaction with knowledge acquisition but low satisfaction with internship opportunities.

2) Administrative Inefficiency and Communication Barriers: A major source of frustration was the perceived inefficiency and unresponsiveness of administrative departments, particularly concerning accommodation and financial matters. "Getting my room fixed takes weeks. The office never answers the phone," one interviewee stated. Language was a frequently cited barrier. "The administrative staff don't speak English, and my Chinese is not good enough for complex issues. It's very stressful." This aligns with the low satisfaction scores for logistics and management support.

3) Social Integration and Cultural Disconnect: While students appreciated the campus facilities and organized activities, many reported feelings socially isolated from the broader Chinese student community. “We have many activities for international students, which is nice, but we mostly hang out with other Africans,” a student explained. “It’s hard to make friends with Chinese students.” This theme provides context for the moderate satisfaction score for “Interaction with Chinese and African students” and highlights the challenges of genuine cross-cultural integration.

4. Discussion

This study provides a nuanced understanding of the satisfaction of African students at a Chinese university, highlighting a significant divergence between their academic and administrative experiences. The findings indicate that while students are generally satisfied with the quality of teaching and curriculum, their overall experience is undermined by deficiencies in administrative support, practical training opportunities, and basic living amenities. A key finding is the high satisfaction with teaching-related dimensions, particularly the perceived improvement in professional knowledge and skills (Niu et al., 2021). This suggests that Chinese universities are succeeding in delivering academically rigorous programs that meet the career aspirations of African students. This aligns with broader trends in higher education where curriculum relevance is a key driver of student satisfaction (Ruranga, 2024). However, this academic strength is paradoxically weakened by the severe lack of internship and practical training opportunities. This gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application is a critical issue, as experiential learning is essential for developing the competencies required in the global workforce (Tang et al., 2024). The low reliability ($\alpha = 0.62$) of the internship support scale suggests this is a complex and heterogeneously perceived issue, warranting cautious interpretation and further investigation with more refined measurement tools.

In stark contrast to the positive academic perceptions, the profound dissatisfaction with administrative services, especially logistics and management support, points to systemic institutional weaknesses. The low scores for accommodation and dining services are particularly concerning, as these basic needs form the foundation of a student’s well-being and ability to focus on their studies (Labuschagné et al., 2025). These findings resonate with research highlighting that non-academic support services are crucial components of the overall student experience and can significantly impact satisfaction and retention (Grootaert et al., 2004). The qualitative data further illuminated that these administrative shortcomings are often exacerbated by communication barriers, a finding consistent with studies on the challenges faced by international students globally (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The regression analysis revealed that Chinese language proficiency is a significant predictor of satisfaction. This is an important finding, as it empirically validates the widely held assumption that language skills are central to suc-

successful adaptation and integration. Students with better language skills are likely better equipped to navigate academic and administrative challenges, leading to a more positive experience (Xu, 2023). The finding that self-funded students are less satisfied than their scholarship-funded peers may reflect higher expectations or greater financial pressures, which could amplify their frustration with service deficiencies.

The low Cronbach's alpha for "teachers' equal treatment" ($\alpha = 0.68$) and the even lower values for internship and accommodation support suggest that these constructs are either poorly measured or are experienced in a highly inconsistent manner by students. This variability could reflect genuine differences in how individual faculty or staff members interact with students, pointing to a need for standardized training and clearer institutional policies on equity and support for international students (Dewey et al., 2020). The use of technology, while often seen as a solution, must be managed carefully to avoid issues like "Zoom fatigue" and to ensure it genuinely enhances, rather than hinders, communication and support (Wiederhold, 2020). The sub-threshold alphas (≤ 0.68) for "teachers' equal treatment" and "internship support" imply potential measurement instability, where items may capture heterogeneous perceptions rather than a unified construct, leading to attenuated correlations and reduced statistical power in subsequent analyses (McNeish, 2018). In educational research, such low reliability can undermine sub-scale validity, particularly for sensitive topics like equity, where cultural variances among respondents may inflate error variance (Sijtsma, 2009). Implications include cautious interpretation of these findings e.g., dissatisfaction with equal treatment may reflect true inequities but could also stem from item ambiguity—and the necessity for item revision or alternative reliability estimators like omega, which are more robust for short scales (Zinbarg et al., 2005). This aligns with calls in international education studies to prioritize multidimensional assessments to avoid underestimating construct complexity (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings are based on a single institution, which limits their generalization to the broader population of African students across China. Future research should adopt a multi-campus sampling strategy to capture a more representative picture of the national landscape. Second, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot in time; a longitudinal study would be better suited to track how student satisfaction evolves over the course of their academic programs. Third, the potential for self-selection bias exists, as students with particularly strong positive or negative feelings may have been more inclined to participate. Finally, the psychometric weaknesses of some sub scales, as indicated by the low alpha coefficients, highlight the need for further instrument development and validation. Future studies should refine these items to ensure they are reliable and valid measures of the intended

constructs. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted experience of African students in China and lays a foundation for future research in this critical area of international education. Potential self-selection bias, where more motivated and dissatisfied students self-select into participation, may inflate variance in satisfaction scores and compromise representativeness, a common threat in voluntary surveys of international cohorts (Berg, 2018). Similarly, the single-site design restricts external validity, as institutional variations (e.g., urban vs. rural campuses) could moderate findings, echoing critiques of site-specific studies in cross-cultural education (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Future multi-campus sampling, stratified by region and institution type, would enhance generalization by capturing heterogeneous experiences, thereby strengthening causal inferences and policy applicability, as demonstrated in comparative international education research (Schneider et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals a critical duality in the experience of African students at a Chinese university: while they are highly satisfied with the academic value of their education, their overall satisfaction is significantly hampered by administrative inefficiencies, a lack of practical training opportunities, and poor living conditions. The findings underscore that academic excellence alone is insufficient to ensure a positive international student experience. A holistic approach that integrates high-quality teaching with responsive, equitable, and efficient support services is essential.

Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations for Chinese higher education institutions:

1) Enhance Administrative Support: Institutions must streamline administrative processes and improve the responsiveness of support staff. This includes providing multilingual support services and establishing clear communication channels to address student concerns regarding accommodation, finances, and visa issues promptly.

2) Bridge the Theory-Practice Gap: Universities should actively forge partnerships with industries to create structured internship and practical training programs for international students. This will not only enhance their learning experience but also significantly improve their post-graduation employment prospects.

3) Invest in Faculty Development: Targeted training programs should be implemented to improve the English proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills of faculty and administrative staff. This will foster more effective and empathetic interactions with international students.

4) Improve Basic Amenities: Immediate attention should be given to improving the quality of student accommodation and dining services to meet international standards and cater to diverse cultural needs.

By addressing these areas, Chinese universities can not only improve the satis-

faction and well-being of their current African students but also strengthen their position as a leading destination for international education, thereby advancing the goals of China-Africa educational cooperation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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