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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BRIDGING THE GAP: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN SOUTH KOREA AND ENGLAND

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Abstract

Purpose: This study compares how higher education financing, quality policy and demographic pressures affect access, institutional resilience and graduate outcomes in South Korea and England.

Procedure: A structured documentary comparison uses the description, interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison steps of Bereday to new indicators of the OECD and official policy sources.

Results: Korea has a high tertiary attainment that is accompanied by intergenerational inequality and a declining youth population; the fee-and-loan system in England encourages entry at the expense of institutions to recruitment risk. BK21 and TEF are focused on diverse objectives and do not allow making causal assertions on the rankings or employability independently.

Contribution: The comparison stipulates policy mechanisms and trade offs instead of using institutional prestige or headline participation as an indicator of effectiveness.

Implications: Policy makers must combine specific excellence indicators with disaggregated equity indicators, graduate-outcome testing and financial stress testing. The causal policy effects are not estimated in this secondary analysis.

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Introduction:-

Higher education is very important in determining economic and social outcomes, which impact workforce dynamics and innovation. Both South Korea and England aim to match graduate skills with labour-market demands while balancing access, quality and institutional sustainability. However, their tools vary: Korea is a mix of mass tertiary attainment and selective investment in research, whereas England is a mix of fee-based provision and regulation of teaching and student outcomes. The question posed in this article is: How do the structural, financing and policy tools of higher education in South Korea and England vary in creating equity, resilience of institutions and graduate outcomes? It claims that measures aimed at enhancing one aspect of performance are likely to shift the risks to another; their impact should not be assessed based on university standings alone (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b).

Research Question and Contribution:-

The research question is: What are the differences in the structure, financing and other key policy instruments in higher education in South Korea and England in terms of equity, institutional resilience and graduate outcomes? The first contribution is a very explicit cross-case explanation of policy trade-offs: a tool can be used to enhance research

capacity or to indicate the quality of teaching but not necessarily to enhance access or employability. Instead of testing a causal hypothesis, the study promotes the analytical hypothesis that instruments, beneficiaries and unintended risks should be evaluated together.

Context and Background:-

Universities in South Korea and England are part of socio-economic development but have different institutional contexts. Competitive admissions and a substantial sector of the Korean population in the private universities coexist alongside extremely high tertiary attainment among young adults in South Korea. Such accomplishments give possibilities but do not, alone, provide equitable entry to high-status institutions or effective labour-market matching (OECD, 2025a). Higher education in England promotes skills development, employment and research. Regulated domestic charges, tuition-fee loans, research grants and overseas fee revenue are used by institutions. Such a system means that there is no immediate requirement to pay upfront tuition to eligible students, but graduates still have an income-dependent repayment schedule, and universities are vulnerable to alterations in student demand (OECD, 2025b).

The declining birth cohorts in Korea pose a specific risk to institutions that rely on the number of domestic undergraduates. International recruitment can help diversify enrolment, though it does not necessarily offset contraction in all regions and university types (OECD, 2025a). England is a destination of significant international enrolment and research partnership, but foreign fee revenue may also be the focus of financial risk in case of alteration in recruitment patterns or immigration legislation. Internationalisation is hence a weakness and a strength (OECD, 2025b). In both cases, the institutional prestige and increasing access are not policy outcomes that are interchangeable. The following comparison takes into account that it is the beneficiaries of expansion and those institutions that have to cover the costs of expansion and demographic changes.

System Overview:-

In South Korea, the tertiary system encompasses both national, public and private universities and vocationally oriented institutions. There are post-1992 and specialist providers, and higher education in some of the colleges in England is research intensive. The different institutional hierarchies between the countries are differentiated by the state steering and student-finance arrangements. These differences establish the groundwork for the parallel comparisons built out below (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b).

Comparative Education Literature:

The comparative approach of Bereday shifts from description and contextual interpretation to juxtaposition and parallel comparison. Its applicability in this case is that seemingly similar consequences, such as the expansion of higher education, internationalisation and quality assurance, can be achieved through various institutions and policy tools. Later research warns that comparability is not inherent but rather made; the setting and constraints of cross-country categories should not be implicit (Bereday, 1964; Adick, 2018). Recent OECD evidence ties the prevalence of attainment to patterns in Korea on family-background disparities and demonstrates that United Kingdom spending allocates both public and private resources in different patterns than those in Korea. The gap existing in the current discourse is not the absence of descriptions of the countries, but rather the deficit of disciplined contrast between the mechanisms that are proclaimed and the outcomes that are actually recorded (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b).

Historical and Institutional Context:

The higher education system of South Korea comprises national universities, private universities, specialist institutions and shorter-cycle programmes. Its growth is often linked to its high involvement, and the selectivity of specific institutions remains to generate competitiveness of places (OECD, 2025a). The contemporary Korean tertiary education industry grew significantly after the mid-twentieth century. Very selective universities, such as Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University, are still highly symbolic, but institutional prestige is not to be considered a direct indicator of teaching or social mobility. In England, the providers include long-established universities and newer and specialised institutions and higher education programmes which are provided in colleges. The history of the sector and its further growth resulted in a high degree of institutional mission and student population differences. English universities are mostly independent, and the Office for Students (OfS) governs registered providers in England and evaluates access, participation and student outcomes.

Quality Assurance Agency performs a different quality-assurance role; the two agencies cannot be used as synonymous regulators (OfS, 2023b). Both systems strive to achieve academic excellence and professional growth,

though the policy arrangements of these two systems allocate costs, risks, and opportunities differently between students and institutions.

Methodology:-

Structured Documentary Comparison:-

Design, evidence and source selection:-

The national higher education policy system of South Korea and England has been chosen as the unit of comparison, but with the significant limitation that some international statistical series present the United Kingdom and not England. The research is based on documentary analysis rather than on primary interviews, experiments, or a systematic review. Preference was given to publicly available governmental sources published or revised in 2023-2026: OECD Education at a Glance country reports, national government Department of Education and OfS reports, HESA statistical reports, the Ministry of Education of Korea and the International Scholarship Agency of Korea, and UKRI policy briefs. Bereday (1964) and Adick (2018) are only used as methodological references. Sources were also chosen in direct relation to four preset dimensions, such as structure and finance; policy design and accountability; entry and equity; graduate outcomes and external pressures; and identifiable issuing body, publication date and scope. Exclusions were opinion sites, Wikipedia, generic rankings and references that were not related to a claim. The data are presented in the form of raw data in terms of their own denominators and reference years; no inference was performed.

Analytical procedure and limitations:-

Following Bereday, the analysis (1) describes each national system using like-for-like indicators where available; (2) interprets findings in their demographic and regulatory contexts; (3) juxtaposes matched dimensions in comparative tables; and (4) compares mechanisms, beneficiaries and plausible trade-offs in the discussion. A policy is evaluated against its intended goal, which can be observed and may have limitations. Identical source hierarchy is used in both instances; however, comparisons are asymmetric where England-only data are not available. OECD expenditure indicators are for research and development and refer to the United Kingdom in the English context. There was no programme-level counterfactual, common skills-mismatch series or causal estimation, so policy outcomes cannot be ascribed to BK21, TEF or Brexit without suitable evidence.

Section 1: Higher Education Structure and Funding:-

University Types and Hierarchy:

The system of higher education in South Korea is a combination of national research universities, privately run universities, as well as specialised and vocationally oriented providers. In 2024, tertiary attainment among adults aged 25-34 was 71.0%, the highest in the OECD, and in contrast to the OECD average of 48. This is indicative of wide-ranging qualification achievement rather than a level of equal access to the most discriminating universities (OECD, 2025a).

With a shrinking domestic cohort, Korean universities have the incentive to internationalise recruitment and to differentiate programmes. However, the institutions with smaller populations might lack the ability to attract foreign students; national achievement on the headline thereby conceals institutional and geographic differences (OECD, 2025a). England has a diverse provider environment with big disparities in resources, selectivity and mission. Schools are a mix of controlled home charges and international charges, government research aid and other revenue; their reliance on an individual source differs significantly. Aggregate United Kingdom indicators are relied on as contextual proxies in cases where England-only series are not available (OECD, 2025b). In the case of the United Kingdom, total tertiary spending per full-time-equivalent student in the United Kingdom (2022, including research and development) is USD 35,350, which is higher than USD 21,444 in the OECD. The corresponding government element was USD 7,896, though, which means that high total spending is to be misinterpreted as high direct public spending (OECD, 2025b).

The resultant problem of Korea is therefore the unequal exposure to the shrinking domestic demand, whereas that of England is the reliance on tuition fees and the unequal allocation of resources to institutions. These are alternative avenues to a common issue of sustainability as opposed to evidence that one system is inherently better.

The two systems demonstrate the differences between the ways of managing higher education with different levels of government participation and strategic internationalisation, their educational objectives, and socio-economic contexts.

Elite, Mass and Universal Participation:-

The difference between elite, mass and universal participation provides a means of assessing the distribution of educational opportunity, not merely in tabulating the types of universities. In both instances, growth has resulted in a higher number of qualified graduates, and competition to high-status institutions is consequential. The growth of Korea has been especially fast, yet high enrolment does not equate to universal access to well-financed programmes, high credentials or good jobs. The tertiary attainment rate of young adults (71 per cent) also accompanies a 40-percentage-point disparity in tertiary attainment by parental education in a recent OECD skills-survey comparison (OECD, 2025a).

England is a mix of a long-established elite university sector and a varied mass sector in higher education. This may spread participation, with differences in previous attainment, household resources and institutional selectivity remaining to have an impact on opportunity to school. An uncomplicated elite-versus-mass dichotomy thus blurs uneven trajectories within each national system (OfS, 2023b). The comparative question is whether further credentials bring corresponding gains in skills and paid jobs and to whom. High attainment in Korea renders labour-market matching particularly critical; in England, student outcomes differ between providers, as well as among student characteristics. Neither enrollment rates nor income earned by graduates are sufficient to show the efficiency of the policies alone (OECD, 2025a; OfS, 2023a). Expansion and stratification can therefore proceed in tandem: increasing numbers of students are moving into tertiary education, but benefits are concentrated in the selective institutions. The policy should be evaluated on the number of places and the allocation of the benefits.

Funding Models: Public And Private Sources:-

There is a strong provision of higher education in South Korea in the form of the private sector; however, institutional ownership cannot be compared to the lack of public support. According to OECD data 2022, tertiary expenditure totals USD 14,695 per student and direct government expenditure is USD 6,617 per student, which is less than the respective OECD averages. It is not budget amounts in private universities only; they are system-wide measures (OECD, 2025a). The tertiary institutions of the United Kingdom are publicly funded in terms of research as well as tuition and other private revenues. According to OECD data, in 2022, 44% of tertiary education is funded by public sources before transfers, versus 59.8% in Korea; these aggregate shares of funding are separate from direct per-student government spending. The financing profile of the United Kingdom is especially significant to explain the English system of fees and loans (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b).

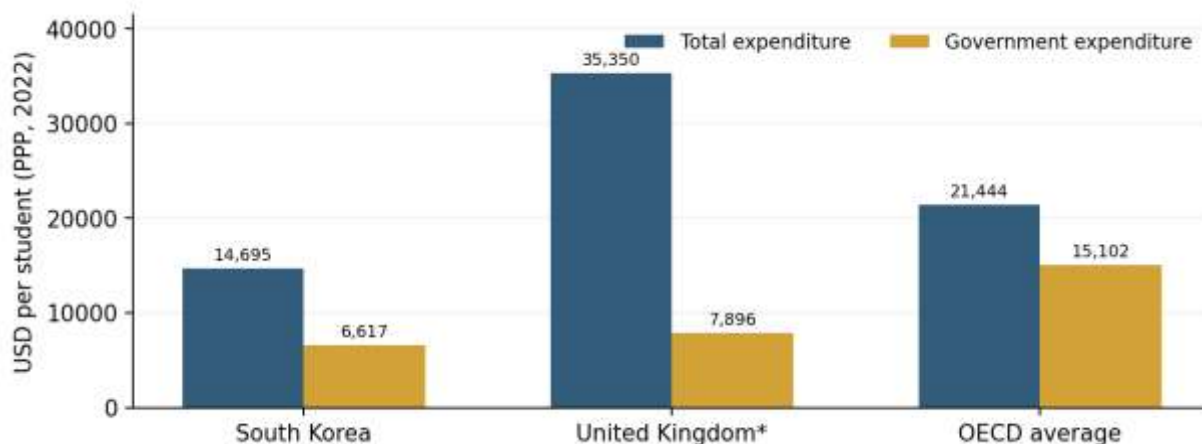
The comparison reveals a distributional trade-off: university resources are conditional on the capacity to charge fees or to enrol students, whereas the capacity of students to meet tuition and living expenses determines whether they can access it or not. The large aggregate spending on education does not guarantee economically sound institutions or fair results. A more informative benchmark thus separates total and public expenditure and separates national financing indicators and institutional balance sheets. Table 1 and Figure 1 compare the two countries with the same OECD definitions.

Table 1. Comparable expenditure indicators for tertiary education (2022)

Indicator	South Korea	United Kingdom*	OECD average
Total per tertiary student (USD, PPP)	14,695	35,350	21,444
Government per tertiary student (USD, PPP)	6,617	7,896	15,102

Source: OECD (2025a, 2025b), financial resources indicators. Figures include R&D. *United Kingdom values contextualise England; they are not England-only estimates. Values are not an institutional ranking.

Figure 1. Total and government tertiary expenditure per student, 2022 (USD, PPP; OECD, 2025a, 2025b). *
The United Kingdom is shown as context for England.



The chart makes clear that the gap in total spending does not track the gap in direct public spending. It compares financing composition, not educational effectiveness.

Tuition Fees, Subsidies and Access:-

Not only the financing of higher education but also when its costs are borne by households and by graduates depends upon tuition and public support. It is misleading to compare headline fees without loan design, maintenance support or institutional mixes of financing. Korea has a big private-provider sector, making tuition a bigger priority, and policies to curb increases in fees may strain providers whose expenses are going up. The impact of scholarships can alleviate personal limits, whereas fee constraints alone do not balance opportunity across universities with varying financial capacities (OECD, 2025a). England has relatively high domestic tuition fees and loans incurred by the government that are based on income. As of 2025/26, the standard full-time fee limit at providers who were eligible and had the necessary regulatory status was equivalent to £9,535; eligible students could take out a tuition loan. This lowers initial tuition obstacles, but does not remove worries regarding the cost of living, graduate debt or university dependence on charge revenues (Department for Education, 2025; OECD, 2025b). The two systems have a conflict between low costs to students and certainty about the revenue to the providers. The test of policy that is relevant here is that support is provided to disadvantaged students and institutions without undermining educational provision, and not whether tuition fees are nominal or high.

Section 2: Government Policy And Quality Instruments:-

State Steering and Institutional Autonomy:-

In South Korea, the state mediates higher education via regulation and target programmes in a system that has a large number of private institutions. The idea behind selective research funding is the building up of research capacity, but institutional competition for scarce awards may favour already-established teams and does not always involve pressures on teaching-oriented or regional institutions (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025). England is a blend of high institutional autonomy and regulation of access, quality and outcomes by the OfS. This fee-and-loan structure provides a powerful incentive for recruitment to the providers, yet it also exposes them to foreign recruitment shocks and domestic fee limits. The policy rewarding performance should be evaluated with the possible impacts on institutional diversity, however (Department for Education, 2025; OfS, 2023b).

The two countries rely on internationalisation to aid in the development of universities. Korea's rationale is a response to the contraction of demographics and collaborating with world research; England's is the need to maintain a globally appealing study and research environment. International enrolment is not a sure alternative to consistent domestic funding (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b). The aftereffects are ambivalent. Selective funding may concentrate the research capacity at the high end but may lead to institutional hierarchies; fee-based funding may make the providers more responsive but more vulnerable to student demand. The two mechanisms are not automatically causally linked to graduate employment, social mobility or global rankings. The comparison is, in fact, between policy instruments and measured outcomes, and not between government involvement and independence as categories which cannot be mutually exclusive.

Brain Korea 21 And The Teaching Excellence Framework:-

The case of Brain Korea 21 (BK21) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in England can be discussed as quality initiatives, but they address different aspects of higher education. The former mainly funds graduate research potential; the second one estimates the experience and achievement of undergraduate students. They cannot be used as interchangeable measures of university quality (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025; OfS, 2023a).

The fourth stage of BK21 encourages the chosen postgraduate research teams and capacity-building. The selective nature of its design can reinforce the participating departments and research training, but the fact of grants or publication activity does not in itself demonstrate that BK21 is responsible for leading to improvement in institutional rankings or equity of access. The direct benefits may be less in institutions that are not part of funded teams (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025).

TEF 2023 evaluated the evidence of student experience and student outcomes, integrating provider and student submissions with benchmarked indicators, and gave Gold, Silver, Bronze or needs improvement results. Its structure provides a public indicator of education delivery, and ratings are not a research quality measure, ranking movement or causal impact of teaching interventions (OfS, 2023a). The policies thus shed light on two different logics of accountability: focused investment in research capacity in Korea, and a comparative assessment of undergraduate provision in England. The selectivity of BK21 can increase the effect of concentration; the indicators of TEF can underestimate the improvement, which is hard to measure or is influenced by the intake traits of students. Table 2 relates the mechanisms and their limits. The lesson to be transferred is that before declaring success, it is important to specify the target of a policy, observable indicators, and potential unintended consequences. BK21 and TEF do not address affordability or disparities in institutions on their own.

Table 2. Analytical comparison of BK21 and TEF

Dimension	South Korea: BK21	England: TEF
Primary target	Selected graduate research capacity	Undergraduate student experience and outcomes
Instrument	Competitive, targeted research and training support	Evidence-informed assessment and public provider ratings
Potential benefit	Research-team capacity and postgraduate training	Visibility of student experience and progression
Analytical limitation	Participation and grants do not establish ranking causality	Ratings do not establish teaching or employment causality
Equity risk	Concentration among selected teams and universities	Differences in intake/context not fully visible in ratings

Sources: Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea (2025); OfS (2023a). Risk statements are analytical implications, not estimated policy effects.

Section 3: Access And Equity:-**Admissions and Equity in Both Systems:-**

Even in the case of high participation, admissions structures may increase or decrease access. The College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) of Korea and the A-level and other qualifications of England have different admission systems; both relate to family resources, institutional selectivity and admissions discretion. In Korea, competition on the CSAT can make the value of additional preparation sensitive and access to selective places sensitive to household advantage. In the OECD note on Korea, 2025 indicates a 40-percentage-point gap in the attainment of young adults between those whose parents have a tertiary education and those whose parents have not completed upper secondary education. This disparity reflects a disparity between generations, and not a causal impact that can be blamed on entrance examinations (OECD, 2025a).

The providers in England involve a blend of qualification and contextual information in admissions. The OfS must have access to and participate in planning by the respective regulated providers, and the risks to equality of opportunity should be considered. Barriers can be mitigated through contextual admissions and focused support, although the effectiveness of such actions should be measured by evidence of progression and completion instead of the policy document (OfS, 2023b). A direct comparison reveals that the formal entry paths and household resources are relevant in both contexts, but the available sources do not permit a straightforward comparison of which admissions system is more just. The more justifiable analogy is associated with the processes involved in recognising and compensating disadvantage.

Both governments thus face the issue of ensuring expansion is not just about entry; low cost of participation, completion and good post-study prospects are all important. Equity must be measured throughout the student lifecycle, not based on higher education achievement or individual admissions scores.

Scholarships and Support For Underrepresented Groups:-

Financial aid facilitates access for those with the same eligibility as the identified barriers. The beneficiaries of international recruitment scholarships, domestic need-based aid and institutional bursaries are different and should not be considered as alternatives. The Global Korea Scholarship of South Korea provides financial aid to international students who are admitted to its schools for tuition and other benefits related to their studies and enhances international educational exchange. This programme is not intended to be, first of all, a solution to financial disadvantages of domestic Korean applicants (National Institute for International Education, 2026). In domestic equity, there is a different analytical priority of need-based assistance, regional access and support of students who suffer structural disadvantage. The documents examined in this context do not determine the extent or causal impact of specific domestic Korean schemes; success claims thus need further programme-level analysis. Provider bursaries, targeted programmes, OfS-regulated access and participation plans, and support of low-income, disabled and otherwise underrepresented students in England. These types of measures are not limited to tuition fees, and they are institution-specific and must be considered in relation to participation, continuation and completion (OfS, 2023b).

University awards and foundation scholarships can be added to the broader system, but the fact that there are individual charitable plans is not a case of sector-wide equality. Coverage, eligibility, average support and costs students are still facing should all be taken into consideration to compare them effectively. TEF must not be mixed up with the access and participation requirements of England. TEF looks at the undergraduate experience and outcomes, and the access and participation framework is explicitly focused on the risks of equality-of-opportunity. They have similar purposes, but different assessments (OfS, 2023a; OfS, 2023b). The most obvious common policy focus is not the number of scholarships, but the question of whether underprivileged students are receiving aid and getting to college, staying in college and enjoying a beneficial higher education.

**Section 4: Educational Quality And Global Competitiveness:-
Graduate Employability and Skills Alignment:-**

Higher education influences labour-market performance, yet achievement should not be taken as synonymous with employability. The 71% tertiary attainment among adults aged 25-34 in Korea suggests abnormally high qualification acquisition, and does not in itself determine the degree of skills mismatch or unemployment due to the growth of universities (OECD, 2025a). The TEF in England involves the use of outcomes like progression and continuation in an assessment of the educational provision at the undergraduate level. It does not directly require employer-designed curricula, nor is a positive rating a guarantee that the skills of graduates fit in all sectors (OfS, 2023a). In the two nations, graduate performance is subject to a mix of local labour-market factors, student background, employer recruitment practices and university teaching. The comparison thus is more in favour of relative employment, earnings patterns and skill utilisation, rather than just the number of degrees or reputational ratings.

BK21 provides more focused postgraduate research development opportunities, whereas TEF brings undergraduate outcomes into the limelight. To mix research programmes with graduate-employment interventions would overstate the evidence. Outcomes at programme-level are required to test the contribution of either policy to labour-market matching. Provision can also be impacted by financial and demographic pressures. Korea needs to think about smaller domestic cohorts; England has to think about how programme choice and student support are impacted by fee dependency and volatility in recruitment. These forces can change quality without necessarily being reflected in the rankings at once (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b). The evidence does not thus justify a wary comparison of policy mechanisms but not a causal assertion that either country has solved the skills mismatch by its framework.

Global Rankings And Internationalisation:-

Rankings and internationalisation affect institutional strategies, though rankings tend to be a mixture of research, reputational and other indicators that are not synonymous with educational quality or equity among students. Their status should thus be considered as a single contextual indicator as opposed to an outcome that can be directly attributed to a specific government programme. The focus on research capacity in Korea provides incentives for publications, training of graduates and international cooperation. BK21 can support research group participants, yet cross-national mobility in global rankings is caused by a variety of factors and cannot be attributed to BK21 unless it is conducted over a long period (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025). International attractiveness of

England is based on a wide range of things that include language, reputation of its institutions and research networks. TEF offers data on the student experience and student outcomes in undergraduate courses, but is not intended to be termed as a key factor in international research rankings or international enrolment (OfS, 2023a).

International recruitment is an issue of concern in both systems, but both are vulnerable in different ways. In the case of the United Kingdom, international students comprised 23% of all tertiary students in 2023; this is a UK-wide figure and must not be reported as a figure in England alone (OECD, 2025b). In the case of Korea, internationalisation can partially counter declining domestic cohorts as well as transforming the language support and campus services. For England, supplementary foreign recruitment will add fee revenue and will expose it to demand and immigration policy fluctuations. In each instance, a diversified recruitment approach is stronger than using volume. Access, educational experience and finances are therefore best assessed as complements to international competitiveness, and not substitutes.

Section 5: Contemporary Pressures And Policy Responses:-

South Korea: Competition And Demographic Decline:-

The system in South Korea is experiencing both high competition to get selective university places and a reduction in birth cohorts. These trends pose various risks: applicants are faced with pressure on admission, and universities with less demand may face under-enrolment. A high tertiary-attainment rate in general does not eliminate the tension (OECD, 2025a). Private tutoring and the prominence of the CSAT can further heighten the inequity of preparation for selective admissions. However, assertions of attendant mental-health or employment impacts necessitate well-constructed studies; neither the cultural context of the examination nor the description of data suffices to confirm the effects. Evidence provided by OECD indicates that the population of children aged 04 in Korea decreased by 40% in 2013-2023 and is set to decrease by 2033. Even though these children are not yet ready to enter university, the cohort trend is an indicator of longer-term strain on future student demand, particularly in institutions with minimal capacity to diversify (OECD, 2025a).

BK21 has the ability to expand postgraduate research capacities but is not a blanket fix to the diminishing undergraduate groups. The problem is solved in different aspects with the help of regional restructuring, programme diversification and support of domestic and international students (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025). The crucial issue is that a two-level adjustment, in which well-endowed institutions absorb research funds while international students and the less-selective providers are faced with an ongoing loss, should be avoided. The monitoring must be able to differentiate between national totals and regional as well as institution-level impact.

England: Brexit, Recruitment And Funding:-

Brexit changed the eligibility for tuition-fee support and the status of home-fee to a good number of new entrants to England because of the EU joining in 2021/22. There are significant exceptions, such as those students who have Withdrawal Agreement rights; it is not correct to say that all EU students have become international-fee students by default (Department for Education, 2024). According to HESA, first-year EU-domiciled student enrolments at UK providers have declined by 53% in 2020/21 and 2021/22, and non-EU first-year enrolments have grown by 32%. These statistics are national and indicate a time relationship; the concomitant pandemic and migration transformation make it impossible to state that the entire movement has been caused by Brexit only (HESA, 2023). Another effect of Brexit was the organisation of research funding, but the account should indicate the further increases or decreases. Under the 2024 work programme, the United Kingdom joined Horizon Europe, having been the subject of uncertainty and funding-guarantee agreements. It would be incorrect to still refer to Horizon exclusion as an issue of unresolved current state (UKRI, 2025).

English providers can recruit diversely to meet the shifting demand in the EU through country and course diversification. However, this does not mean that additional fee-paying enrolment will yield net gains in all institutions when recruitment expenditure, the teaching costs and student mix changes are taken into account (HESA, 2025). The loss of income may limit teaching and research, but the magnitude and orientation of the impact is dependent on the finances of each provider. The current documentary comparison lacks institutional causal estimates of Brexit in relation to staff cuts or increased classes; therefore, the outcomes are viewed as a risk, rather than an observed fact. Domestic fee regulation makes the issue of financial sustainability more complicated. The eligible English provider standard full-time fee limit increased to £9,535 in 2025/26, and comparatively high student debt was still being identified by the OECD.

Access and sustainability should not be considered independently but instead assume that the availability of loans addresses affordability (Department for Education, 2025; OECD, 2025b). The dilemma facing England is how to facilitate fair access and performance of students without over-dependence on recruitment of a select few international markets. Diversified funding and open monitoring of outcomes are more directly related to this analysis than generic demands to be competitive.

Conclusion:-

The country policies of South Korea and England are characterised by contrasting directions of mass higher education and international competitiveness. Korea is a country with extremely high young-adult achievement and demographic decline with selectively financed research capacity, and England is a country with a large amount of financing based on fees, regulation of student outcomes, and adjustments to post-Brexit recruitment. Both models do not show that an increase in attainment or institutional branding necessarily leads to equity or aligning graduate skills (OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2025b). It is marked by a shared mechanism under Bereday-guided comparison: targeted quality and finance instruments develop incentives but also shift risks across institutions and students. BK21 focuses resources on research groups, whereas TEF appraises undergraduate experience and results; the tools cannot be directly compared to ranking or employment interventions (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2025; OfS, 2023a). The primary contribution is to draw the line between policy intention and evidence of effect. One policy reaction that can be justified is to track inequality between groups and institutions of students, enhance student support and financial capabilities, and measure outcomes by graduates with uniform definitions. These implications are conditional and do not mean that the policy instruments can be easily transplanted between the two systems.

Comparative Synthesis and Policy Implications:-

The comparison of the same dimensions of analysis indicates a common tension of expansion, quality and financial stability. The contraction of the Korean population is especially harmful to the institutions that cater to smaller domestic groups; the fees and overseas recruitment in England have an unusually high profile. The resulting challenges are brought about by various mechanisms and not by the same causes. High attainment and parental-background differences in Korea undermine the assumption that mass participation can eradicate structural disadvantage. It should be accompanied by distributional reporting of research investments, and regional institutional monitoring and postgraduate training equity (OECD, 2025a). In England, the fee-and-loan access should be supported by the consideration of living costs, continuation and provider funds. The sensitivity of recruitment is emphasised by Brexit-related EU enrolment changes, and the possibility of the association with Horizon Europe shows that research-policy conditions can evolve and need interpretation that is up to date (HESA, 2023; UKRI, 2025).

The cross-case comparison leads to three practical implications: to evaluate who is funded and supported, quantify student-specific outcomes of completion and post-study, and provide stress-testing of provider sustainability in the face of demographic or recruitment shock. These measures consider the goals already boasted by the systems but do not add unrelated policy purposes. The comparison fails to find a universally better system. It recommends that focused excellence programmes are more plausible in evaluation together with equity and institutional sustainability, with evidence identifying ambition, actualisation and proven outcomes.

Future Outlook and Research Limitations:-

The adjustments in the future will be based on demographic change, international mobility and public financing. The following projections are not forecasts based on an econometric model, but rather implications of the documented trends, which are scenario-based. The decreasing trend in younger generations in Korea suggests that there is a potential medium-term problem with university admissions, which is subject to participation, immigration and programme adjustments. Some of the priorities are regional provision, differentiated missions and evidence on whether international recruitment alleviates demographic pressures (OECD, 2025a). Digital and hybrid delivery might increase flexibility, but its performance must be measured against learning outcomes, student support and access and not technological adoption per se. The providers of England will still have to deal with the international recruitment risk and the impact of differentiated fee eligibility. England-specific financing regulations should be interpreted separately of aggregate UK figures and revised evaluations should visa, funding and mobility policies change (Department for Education, 2024; HESA, 2025).

Institutional policy reactions need to relate student-outcome measures to aid to educational quality and financial viability provision. TEF evidence is only one of the lenses; effectiveness is based on credible, non-aggregated

longitudinal assessment (OfS, 2023a). The work has limitations of its documentary design and the non-equivalence of some indicators, especially the OECD and HESA statistics reported at level of the United Kingdom and not at England level. It is unable to estimate causal effects of programmes, rank institutions, and within-country variation. The proposed mechanisms should be tested by triangulating student-level longitudinal data with institutional finances and interviews with providers in future work.

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