Challenges Faced by International Students in Adapting to Chinese Universities Life: A Case of Zhejiang Normal University

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the challenges encountered by international students at Zhejiang Normal University, employing a qualitative methodology to gain insights into their adaptation to Chinese universities within the larger framework of global education integration. Through comprehensive interviews, the study highlights crucial challenges such as variations in academic standards, teaching techniques, evaluation methods, and linguistic hurdles. Cultural differences, particularly regarding social interactions and authority deference further obstruct students' engagement and

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social assimilation. Environmental factors, such as subtropical weather and the local living environment, also add to the adaptation challenges. Despite these difficulties, international students demonstrate perseverance and adaptability, actively working to enhance their language proficiency and build supportive networks. The research suggests that educational institutions should facilitate tailored academic assistance services, improve cultural sensitivity training for both staff and students, improve accommodation options, and create programs to orient students to the local environment. By promoting intercultural engagement and fostering a more inclusive atmosphere, educational establishments can better assist international students, enriching their academic journeys and cross-cultural encounters while contributing to the ongoing discussion on global education and intercultural comprehension.

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of students studying in China has risen from 442,773 in 2016 to 492,185 in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018), nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's social and economic impacts, the number of enrolled students sunk to 292,000 international students in 2022 (Conversation, n.d.; Yang et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe impacts on social-economic aspects, including the educational sector. In 2023, China's regionals steadily increased the number of Chinese students attending international universities. Due to the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and the flexibility of mobility across the nations, 622,100 Chinese students traveled beyond Chinese borders (Ukhurebor et al., 2024).

China's education system prioritizes examinations and career preparation, which presents distinct difficulties for foreign students. These individuals frequently encounter cultural confusion, linguistic obstacles, and restricted chances for social interaction (Forbes-mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Kwan et al., 1996). In contrast to the Western focus on intellectual discovery, students in China perceive tertiary education as a significant investment. This research investigates how international students adjust to Chinese universities' demanding and organized academic landscape while navigating the challenges of high educational expectations alongside social integration.

1.1 Research Questions

i. What challenges do international students at Zhejiang Normal University encounter in adapting to Chinese universities?
ii. How do international students at Zhejiang Normal University adapt to Chinese universities' challenges?

iii. What institutional supports are available at Zhejiang Normal University to assist international students in adapting to Chinese universities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The adaptation process for international students to new educational environments is crucial for addressing the challenges they face. As Yuan, 2010 emphasized, international students must be informed about the new environments they will encounter. Over the years, studies have explored critical issues and perceptions related to this adjustment. Academic adaptation in a foreign country presents additional challenges compared to adapting to familiar systems in one's home country.

For international students in Chinese universities, adapting to the new environment involves understanding course selection, interpersonal relationships with teachers, lecture comprehension, and new assessment methods (Hussain & Shen, 2019; Shaw et al., 2011). These challenges are amplified by the distinctive education systems in different countries, which often make accommodation difficult. For example, Holmes 2005 highlighted the challenges encountered by Chinese students in New Zealand due to cultural contrasts. In particular, Asian students struggle with inquiry-based learning, which requires active engagement and questioning, a stark contrast to their home culture, where teachers are seen as moral authorities not to be challenged (Kukatlapalli, 2016).

Thus, considering the aim of this study, the need to review theories, concepts, and ideas linked to it has a vital contribution. Consequently, this chapter will detail the associated literature that forms the theoretical foundation. The literature

review will pinpoint various concepts, such as challenges and adaptation to learning systems.

2.1 Challenges in Adapting to Chinese Universities

Higher education institutions should focus on supporting foreign students' learning, psychological well-being, and social adjustment. Despite a significant increase in the number of international students, their attitudes towards these new systems have not been adequately addressed.

Brandenburg & De Wit 2015; Malakloluthu & Selan 2011 call for a shift in internationalizing higher education from a minor consideration to a central institutional goal, echoing earlier studies by Smith et al. (1964); Yeh & Inose (2003) which highlighted difficulties in social interactions and campus life adjustments. Major challenges identified for international students include language barriers, academic stress, and cultural differences (Zhai, 2004). Gebhard (2012) also noted issues related to academic systems, social interactions, and emotional adjustment, Curtin et al. (2012) attributed many difficulties to new educational systems rather than language alone.

To facilitate effective integration, educational institutions and governments must thoroughly understand these challenges (Rienties et al., 2012). This section will specifically address the common difficulties faced by international students in Chinese universities.

2.1.1 Language barrier

The language barrier is one of the major challenges for international students. When people who speak different languages find it difficult or impossible to communicate with one another, this is referred to as a language barrier (Glass et al., 2017). For example, Mandarin is the language that most Chinese universities use to deliver their curricula, which can be a major barrier for non-native speakers. Furthermore, Language limitations among international students make it difficult for them not only to succeed academically but also to interact socially with their peers (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Students from other countries could have trouble following lectures, contributing to class discussions, and finishing tasks in a language they do not fully understand (Shaw et al., 2011).

2.1.2 Cultural differences

The experiences of international students studying abroad are greatly influenced by cultural differences. The cultural background that students experience when they relocate to a new nation may be different in terms of language, traditions, social norms, values, and communication styles (Wang & Hannes, 2014). Different cultures have different influences on the classroom. Rienties et al. (2012) explained that throughout cultures, there are differences in educational structures, pedagogies, and classroom dynamics. International students may find themselves in new classroom settings with varying standards for student involvement, critical thinking, and academic writing. International students may require some time to acclimatize and comprehend the academic culture of their host country because learning new teaching techniques and approaches can be difficult (Fu, 2015).

International students in China may face challenges adjusting to the cultural environment, including unfamiliar norms, values, and social customs, which can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in academic relationships with classmates and faculty (Rienties et al., 2012). Language barriers, cultural differences, and limited knowledge of social dynamics make it difficult for them to form meaningful connections with local students, often resulting in feelings of isolation and struggles to engage in extracurricular activities (Ngwira et al., 2015).

2.1.3 Teaching and learning practices

International students encounter significant challenges in adjusting to the teaching and learning environments of their host countries, as each nation has unique educational strategies (Hudson et al., 2020). The differences in learning styles and evaluation methods between their home education systems and those of the host country can complicate their transition. Furthermore, the variation in educational practices, such as an emphasis on rote memorization, hierarchical classroom structures, and teacher-centered approaches in some countries, can add to the difficulty. Consequently, it may take time for international students to adapt to these teaching techniques and develop the necessary skills for academic success (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Moraros et al., 2015).

Finally, adapting to Chinese universities is generally different and difficult for international students. They face several difficulties, including language limitations, cultural differences, adjusting to the way they are taught, social integration, and homesickness.

2.2 International Students' Adjustment to the New Environment

2.2.1 Educational adjustment

International students encounter a variety of difficulties in addition to adapting to a different educational framework, which profoundly influences their comprehensive learning journey. Major challenges include the differences in instructional approaches, availability of resources, assessment methods, and language issues, all of which can obstruct their involvement in academic and campus activities (Glass et al., 2017). Language gaps, especially in verbal communication and auditory comprehension, complicate effective interaction, impacting students' capacity to adjust and excel academically (Kuo, 2011). Successful adaptation often relies on students' resilience, coping strategies, and access to reliable information, which is vital during their initial adjustment period (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Orientation programs and early experiences on campus assist international students in familiarizing themselves with university life and classroom dynamics, although they may continue to face challenges due to the contrasting learning paradigms between their native and host nations (Hubbard, 2022). Despite ongoing obstacles, many students retain an optimistic perspective and exhibit adaptability, gradually acclimatizing to their new surroundings with assistance and encouragement (Young, 2011).

2.2.2 Psychological adjustment

The psychological adaptation of foreign students in Chinese universities is influenced by many factors, including psychological, physiological, and situational elements. Typical obstacles encompass feelings of sadness, stress, isolation, and physical ailments like headaches (Hwang et al., 2014). Elevated anxiety among some students is exacerbated by unrealistic aspirations and academic demands (Paudel, 2021). Research shows that aspects such as length of stay and willingness to seek assistance are closely linked to students' mental well-being, with issues like depression and the process of cultural acclimatization being particularly prevalent (Li et al., 2014). Attributes like confidence, receptiveness, and emotional steadiness are vital for easing the transition (Lee et al., 2011). A favorable emotional adaptation is also associated with self-belief and the perception of social backing from colleagues, while group-based assertiveness workshops have been demonstrated to enhance emotional fortitude (Tavakoli et al., 2009; Yusoff, 2012). In the end, personal variances influence the flexibility of international students, affecting how they manage the social and academic demands of a foreign cultural setting.

2.2.3 Cultural adjustment

After performing an in-depth study of cultural acclimatization, Trivonovitch 1980 concluded that foreign learners used to feel enthusiastic, which was followed by a sense of ease and achievement with their new life overseas but occasionally, it could feel like conflict because of cultural disparities and misunderstandings. The students could endure cultural shock, which shows up as discomfort, frustration, despair, perplexity, anxiety, and sadness (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Students are now more likely to attribute their problems to outside factors. Additionally, individual students can experience cultural distrust, which would make them uncooperative and demotivated especially when engaging in accomplishing their educational goals (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Mesidor and Sly 2016 further noted that to cope with this circumstance, students participate in more calming activities such as interacting with one another. Cultural adjustment can be better comprehended by grasping the two key notions of emotional and cultural intelligence. Similarly, according to Mesidor and Sly, (2016), cultural intelligence is the capacity of a person to communicate, relate, acclimate, and function effectively across cultures. Understanding the notion of cultural intelligence can help us better comprehend how overseas students adjust to their campus life while they are abroad.

2.2.4 Research gap

Scholars have extensively documented the comprehensive challenges including financial, environmental, and social faced by international students across diverse regions. In the Chinese context, studies such as Hwang et al. 2014 and Di et al. 2022 highlight similar issues, with particular emphasis on language barriers, cultural disparities, and social integration

difficulties country-wise. These challenges significantly impact international students' academic performance, underscoring the complex interplay between adaptation and academic success for foreign students in China.

Nonetheless, a considerable knowledge gap remains regarding the adaptation challenges faced by international students at Chinese universities. This study aims to address this gap, using Zhejiang Normal University as a case study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative methodology to examine the challenges encountered by international students as they adapt to Chinese universities, with a specific emphasis on the case of Zhejiang Normal University. This approach enabled a more profound investigation into these students' challenges and adaptation experiences, highlighting the significance of grasping their distinct viewpoints (Creswell, 2014; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). By interacting directly with students through open-ended inquiries, the researcher sought to reveal the intricacies of their adaptation experiences. Interviews with international students yielded essential insights regarding their challenges, such as social integration, cultural differences, and communication barriers. Furthermore, discussions with institutional support personnel were conducted to enhance the understanding of the assistance frameworks and services provided to students, which could aid in policy formulation and foster a more inclusive academic environment. Thematic analysis was utilized to pinpoint recurring themes within the narratives, providing a systematic foundation for interpreting the various insights gathered from the discussions. Purposive sampling was employed to select a diverse array of participants, ensuring that their experiences corresponded with the research goals (Voss, 2016). A total of 30 individuals were targeted for qualitative interviews, facilitating an in-depth exploration of their experiences (Oshagbemi, 2017). Ethical considerations were emphasized during the recruitment of participants to uphold anonymity and safeguard privacy.

3.2 Measures and Procedures

The main goal of this research is to examine the wellness of international students as they

acclimate to new academic environments within Chinese universities, exploring their encounters concerning educational, socio-cultural, environmental, and adaptation techniques. To improve organized and effective data gathering, qualitative research methods were utilized (Oshagbemi, 2017). Semi-structured interview frameworks supported the expression of personal narratives, enabling participants to convey the hurdles they encountered and the tactics they adopted during their transition. The interviews offered a deep comprehension of the intricacies of international students' experiences, emphasizing challenges connected to academic demands, social integration, cultural disparities, and environmental influences. Participants recounted their personal stories, which revealed the distinctive strategies they employed to navigate through their new surroundings. The qualitative perspective provided an exhaustive understanding of international students' experiences while adjusting to academic and social settings in Chinese universities, underscoring the significance of individual viewpoints in grasping their well-being throughout this period of change.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Challenges in Adapting to Chinese Universities

4.1.1 Challenges associated with classroom interaction

Students in the interviews highlighted various teaching methods used by Zhejiang Normal University's faculty. Some students, who preferred greater opportunities for student engagement and critical thought, found it difficult to adapt to the more lecturing approach. This realization highlights the complexity of adjusting to various instructional approaches. One of the students commented:

> *"Engagement in the classroom has posed certain challenges for me. Actively joining discussions and fully grasping complex subjects in learning is difficult because of the language barrier."*

4.1.2 Challenges associated with advisor-relationship and research-based paper

Nevertheless, the interview findings revealed the absence of uniformity in Zhejiang Normal University's research publications was the

main concern for the students. Inconsistencies in teachers' writing styles, thesis lengths, and academic standards were highlighted as obstacles to speedy adaptation. One of the students said:

> *"There is no unified thesis template for the university. In the science field, we use LaTeX for writing, and having a ready-mode template would make writing the thesis easier"*

4.1.3 Challenges associated with assessment and program design

Moreover, the interview findings revealed a variety of opinions on evaluation and program design during our interviews. The program's adaptability, which allowed for individualized learning routes, was greatly praised. Some students did, however, note the need for more explicit disclosure of the evaluation standards. They believed that clear standards and consistent grading procedures would improve their learning environment. Overall, there was agreement that while the program design had strengths, improving the evaluation procedures and standards may lead to a learning environment that was even more efficient. During the interview student said:

> *"I was not familiar with the testing system in China. I did not know how students were evaluated at the end of the semester or what areas students should focus on in their learning."*

This means that, despite the existence of good evaluation systems and programs, improvements are still needed to ensure availability and flexibility in adjusting.

4.1.4 Language barrier

International students who participated in interviews discussed their various encounters with language barriers. Individuals found it difficult to explain themselves clearly during communication. Others had trouble understanding academic material and adjusting to the teaching methods. Language had a significant impact on students' confidence and capacity to express their thoughts and ideas, which frequently had an impact on students' self-understanding. The student had this to say:

> *"One of the challenges I face in my learning journey at Zhejiang Normal University is*

related to language acquisition. Learning new words was quite demanding, and I find it challenging to acquire and memorize new words. This difficulty affects my overall language proficiency, making it a significant aspect that requires attention and improvement"

Another student had the following to comment:

> *"I would like to highlight the difficulty I face in writing, particularly when it comes to Chinese characters. Expressing myself in writing is crucial, but the intricacies of writing Chinese characters pose a significant hurdle"*

> *"I can communicate very clearly when it comes to verbalism, the problem is I cannot write what I can speak, and this also affects my Chinese exam performance"*

4.1.5 Social interaction barrier

Furthermore, the study findings identified the response repeatedly emphasized the considerable cultural differences between the Chinese school system and the systems in their home countries in the interview including student-teacher interactions. International students frequently reported difficulty adjusting to the learning environment at Zhejiang Normal University as a result of these disparities.

Here is a student's comment that emphasizes the cultural contrasts between their university educational setting and that of China:

> *"In my country, where critical thought and creative thinking are highly valued, learning is frequently more personal. Chinese education might be more group-oriented and exam-focused, in comparison. While my previous experience was more focused on autonomous learning, group work, and cooperation are greatly emphasized."*

4.1.6 Barriers to the values and beliefs

The findings revealed that students discussed their perspectives on values and beliefs in the context of their academic journeys during interviews. Many students found it quite simple to integrate their ideals and views with the Chinese university system. For instance, some people pointed out the need for respect and discipline. Others, found it difficult, especially when cultural

differences went against their own strongly established beliefs, such as individualism compared to collectivism. These revelations shed light on the deep interplay between values and beliefs as they undergo modification. One of the students said:

"I appreciate the Chinese system's strong emphasis on discipline and respect, it fits in with how I was raised. However, it can be difficult, though, when my personal views clash with the prevailing norms here"

4.2 Another One Contrasted

"The journey through university life has confronted me with the complexities of values and beliefs. Struggling to reconcile differing viewpoints and align personal values with academic and social expectations has been a constant, demanding introspection and resilience"

4.2.2 Climatic barriers

Students in the interviews expressed how China's weather extreme fluctuates have been a difficult aspect of the climate that they experienced. Others noted that they had a relatively easy time adjusting to these environmental factors and that welcomed the variation and the varied seasons. These answers showed how the students' responses to the climate-related adaptation questions were influenced by their individual preferences and past experiences. The quotes below serve as an illustration:

"Adapting to the diverse climatic conditions here caused unexpected challenges for me. Extreme temperatures and weather fluctuations affect daily life, making it a constant adjustment. Staying resilient in such varied conditions demands constant adaptation."

4.2.2 Barriers in natural environments

Participants in the interviews reported about their experiences with the outdoors at Zhejiang Normal University. Many students like the campus's green surroundings and its accessibility to attractive locations, which added to their positive overall impression and sense of well-being and made the process of adapting easier. However, the study findings identified the presence of some natural environments that is not friendly to some international students. One of the students asserted:

"Although I enjoy the outdoors, I have found the summertime humidity and mosquitoes to be rather difficult. While dealing with the insects and climate adaptation has been difficult, I'm getting more adept at it"

4.2.3 Barriers to the social environments

Moreover, the social environment was discussed in interviews with overseas students. Through clubs and common cultural events, many students reported finding friends easily. However, they also noted the difficulty of occasional language difficulties in social contacts. This information acknowledges the role of language in students' social adaption while also highlighting the value of cross-cultural interactions in developing social relationships. Among the students said:

"I found it easy to make friends here, especially through shared cultural events and groups. However, I had also run into a few language hurdles in social situations, which may be difficult at times"

4.3 International Students' Strategies for Adapting to Chinese Universities

4.3.1 Learning by experience

During interviews, students discussed how they used experiential learning to deal with the educational settings within Chinese universities. Many spoke of actively participating in extracurricular activities and internships to supplement their classroom learning. They discovered that this strategy improved their comprehension and ability to adapt. Others acknowledged the need for additional help and direction in this area, while some stated they had not yet fully explored chances for experiential learning. Some students said:

"I actively looked for internships and joined clubs to learn outside of the classroom. It has changed my experience and given me insightful information. I have enhanced my system receptivity"

4.3.2 Direct engagement with the problems

Further, many students emphasized the importance of being proactive, emphasizing actions like asking for academic support,

communicating with professors, or actively taking part in peer study groups. These steps were considered essential for efficiently solving problems and adjusting. The interviews highlighted how different students' strategies for dealing with problems were, demonstrating different levels of self-initiated problem-solving. The students commented:

"I never hesitate to contact teachers or fellow students when I run across academic difficulties. Direct communication and teamwork, in my opinion, are essential for successfully overcoming obstacles"

Another student asserted:

"I take initiative to handle issues, whether it is finding new resources or ending up misunderstandings with instructors. It is necessary for a successful academic career"

The study findings also identified some students who do not take any initiative at the earliest stage of prevailing problems by the notion that the problems should be solved by its selves. In the interview, the student had this to say:

"When issues develop, I often act more passively. Frequently, the hope is that they will solve themselves. But I understand that to adapt better, I need to be more proactive and ask for assistance when I need it"

4.4 Institutional Support for Students' Adaptation in Chinese Universities

Students discussed their opinions of international support services during interviews. Many emphasized the advantages, which included beneficial advice and guidance. They emphasized teamwork and excellent communication. However, some students emphasized the demand for more focused and personalized care. One of the students said:

"International support services have been a source of inspiration. They offer crucial guidance in navigating academic and cultural issues. They cooperate admirably and the communication is good, but I feel like it could be better customized. Some of their recommendations don't quite fit my needs. There would be a noticeable

change with slightly more specialized guidance"

Also, interview study findings revealed that students emphasized the institution's financial assistance in helping them acclimatize to and integrate into Chinese universities. They mentioned helpful resources including study aids and access to libraries. Overall, the institution's support helped students adapt to the Chinese universities more easily and successfully by providing them with their needs. An educational staff officer commented:

"Our institution is dedicated to providing our overseas students complete support. We provide well-stocked libraries with educational materials in different languages as well as online platforms, ensuring that students have access to crucial study resources. We want to make sure that students have the tools they need to succeed in their studies"

He also added:

"As institutional support officers, it is our responsibility to create an environment that is welcoming to international students and our multicultural community has an exceptional experience. Our university, in line with the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative, provides a range of support that include language assistance, cultural integration projects, orientation programs, and specialized counseling services."

Also, the financial staff officer asserted:

"The institution is dedicated to providing financial aid to international students. Several scholarships, grants, and flexible payment plans are available from us. Our mission is to reduce financial burdens and make sure that students have access to the tools they need to succeed in school."

This implies that the institution is constantly striving to ensure that international students smoothly adapt to Chinese universities and improve their career paths.

5. DISCUSSION

Here, the researcher discusses the findings and gathers insights from the interviews. The efficiency of support services, the complex interplay, various strategies, and elements are

thoroughly examined. This chapter gives readers an in-depth knowledge of the findings and offers insightful advice for those working in the field of international education.

5.1 Challenges in Adapting to Chinese Universities

5.1.1 Challenges in educational aspects

International students in Chinese universities face various challenges, especially with academic demands, instructional styles, and assessment methods. The intense workload and elevated academic criteria often contrast these students' educational backgrounds, leading to difficulties in adapting as evidently by (O'Connell & Resuli, 2020; Wu et al., 2015). The Chinese system's emphasis on rote learning and instructor-led lectures differs significantly from the interactive techniques typically found in Western schooling, complicating the adjustment process (Chen, 2011). Furthermore, the variation in evaluation methods, which often emphasize classroom involvement rather than examinations, can be confusing for international students were this fact supported by (Yasmin et al., 2021). To manage these challenges, students commonly seek out mentorship, language assistance, and study collectives (Jiang et al., 2020). However, linguistic obstacles continue to impede effective communication and academic composition (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). Customized support from educational establishments could facilitate these transitions, aiding international learners in navigating academic pressures and language difficulties more successfully.

5.1.2 Challenges in socio-cultural aspects

Adapting to the social and cultural aspects of Chinese universities poses significant challenges for international students, including social integration, cultural disparities, and language barriers. Studies by Mehboob & Shahzad, (2019), in line with the findings of this study highlighted that language issues are among the most prevalent challenges faced by international students, making effective communication in academic and daily settings difficult. Even students with some proficiency in Mandarin often struggle, leading to feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction, as noted by Raki et al. (2018). Additionally, strict standards for academic language can hinder students' ability to complete assignments at the required

level, resulting in poorer grades and increased anxiety.

Cultural differences can further complicate classroom dynamics and interpersonal relationships, particularly in a context that emphasizes deference to authority, which may discourage students from expressing disagreement or asking questions as also reported by (Licence, 2011). Social integration is another challenge, with international students attempting to adapt to local cultural standards, which can lead to feelings of isolation and stress, as observed by (Ladum & Burkholder, 2019). To cope, many students actively participate in language classes, local activities, and cultural exchange programs, while also seeking support from global peers to foster a sense of community as noted by (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2023). Universities can assist by offering counseling, cultural orientation programs, and language support, although persistent language barriers may still impact social engagement and academic success as also highlighted by (Amos & Plews, 2019). In summary, while international students encounter numerous social and cultural challenges in adapting to Chinese universities, effective coping mechanisms and institutional support are essential for facilitating a smoother integration process.

5.1.3 Environmental challenges

Environmental obstacles at Zhejiang Normal University significantly impact international students' ability to adapt. Key issues include climate conditions, living circumstances, and access to natural areas. The climate in Zhejiang Province can be challenging for students from regions with different temperature patterns. For instance, the intense heat and humidity of summer may be difficult for students from colder climates, potentially affecting their daily routines and academic performance, this fact is also supported by (Jiyagatai, 2018).

Living conditions pose additional challenges, as some international students struggle to find suitable accommodation that meets their preferences. Differing standards of living can lead to misunderstandings while adapting to shared dormitory living can be difficult for those used to more private arrangements, this observation of the study is supported by (Lityaga & Sytniakivska, 2023). Access to the area's natural beauty, characterized by rivers, mountains, and abundant greenery, can also present challenges. Students unfamiliar with rural

living may take time to adapt to the local flora and fauna, this examination is supported by (Nazir & Öztürk, 2022). To cope with these environmental challenges, many students employ practical strategies, such as wearing appropriate clothing for the weather and utilizing air conditioning. They may also explore nearby parks and natural landmarks to acclimatize gradually. However, despite these efforts, challenges related to housing and the rural lifestyle can still impact students' well-being. Overall, the environmental factors at Zhejiang Normal University can influence the adaptation process, underscoring the need for the university and support services to consider these elements in their assistance programs to facilitate a smoother transition for international students.

5.2 International Students' Adaptability Strategies to Chinese Universities

5.2.1 Self-adaptability strategies to the Chinese universities

Adaptation of international students to Chinese universities is a dynamic process, largely supported by the development of self-adaptation techniques. These techniques enable students to navigate the challenges of a foreign academic and cultural environment. Language adaptability is a key strategy, where students improve their Mandarin skills through language classes, exchanges, and conversations, leading to better academic performance and social interactions, a similar observation is made by (Ngwira et al., 2015). Cultural participation is another vital tactic, as students engage in festivals and community activities to enhance their understanding of Chinese culture and foster a sense of belonging, this strategy is also appreciated by (Akhtar et al., 2015). Academically, international students utilize tutoring, develop effective study habits, and improve time management to meet the rigorous demands of Chinese universities which is the way that strengthened by (Yan, 2017). Social networks play a crucial role as well, providing peer support, companionship, and emotional help to counter loneliness as supported by (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2023). Additionally, students embrace flexible learning approaches, incorporating online resources and collaborative study groups to adapt to diverse teaching methods. Overall, these self-adaptation strategies reflect the students' proactive efforts to overcome challenges, enriching their personal experiences and the cultural diversity within Chinese universities.

5.2.2 External factors for adaptation to Chinese universities

A complex interplay of external factors influences the adaptation of international students to Chinese universities. Institutional support, such as academic counseling, language assistance, and orientation programs, plays a crucial role in helping students adjust to their new environment as evidently by (Hussain & Shen, 2019). The sociocultural environment, including local attitudes and cultural tolerance, significantly affects students' sense of belonging and well-being as aligned with the findings of the study conducted by (Ahmadi, 2016). Economic factors, such as financial limitations, impact students' ability to access resources and engage in extracurricular activities, while financial assistance and internships can enhance adaptation as supported by (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Technology, through access to online resources and communication tools, also supports academic integration and staying connected with home countries (Jiang et al., 2020). Additionally, international policies and initiatives, such as the "One Belt One Road" initiative, visa requirements, and the overall internationalization of education in China are also important which also evidently by (Ye & Xia, 2020). In summary, the successful adaptation of international students requires a comprehensive understanding of these external factors by educational institutions and policymakers to support academic success and student well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

This research into the difficulties and experiences of adaptation faced by international students at Zhejiang Normal University in the context of Chinese universities has provided priceless insights and opened doors to a more thorough comprehension of the complex aspects of international education. Several important conclusions emerge as we conclude this study.

While adapting, international students face various academic, social-cultural, and environmental difficulties. Depending on their experiences and backgrounds, these obstacles can differ greatly, yet they are all connected by resilience and flexibility.

Institutions are essential to facilitating this adaptability. This study highlighted the value of specialized support services, such as language help and cultural orientation initiatives. Furthermore, the researcher underlines how important it is for educational institutions to view accommodation and environmental orientation as essential components of students' transition experiences.

Additionally, this study not only offers a thorough grasp of the difficulties encountered by overseas students but also highlights how institutions may further enhance the global education landscape and facilitate an easier adaptation for international students by putting this study's recommendations into practice. These findings demand a wider conversation on international education and intercultural awareness in a world that is progressively becoming more globalized.

7. RECOMMENDATION

This study recommends that educational institutions employ comprehensive strategies to improve an inclusive and supportive environment, particularly for international students. This includes developing targeted academic support services such as orientation workshops and language programs to bridge gaps in educational standards. Cultural sensitivity training for faculty and local students is also recommended to promote awareness of diverse perspectives.

Similarly, enhancing housing services, creating open communication channels and environmental orientation programs can help students easily adapt to the local climate and natural surroundings while fostering friendships and peer networks is emphasized as key to social and cultural integration.

The study also provides practical recommendations for international students including prioritizing language proficiency, engaging in cultural integration initiatives, utilizing support services, actively participating in academic life, building peer support networks, exploring cultural opportunities, and practicing continuous self-reflection.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies are recommended to track students' adaptation over time, identifying critical moments and long-term effects. Comparative studies are also recommended to explore regional and international differences in adaptation while

research should also focus on evaluating the effectiveness of institutional support programs and examining the long-term impacts of adaptation, particularly in students' post-graduation careers and their ongoing connections with China.

These recommendations aim to improve the educational and sociocultural well-being of international students while providing a roadmap for further studies to inform institutional practices and policy-making.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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