

Investigating the Internship Experiences and Adaptation Strategies of International Students

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Abstract

In the contemporary global educational landscape, the internship experiences of international students constitute a critical area of investigation, particularly considering how such experiences contribute to the development of effective adaptation strategies in unfamiliar cultural and professional milieus. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, to examine the internship engagements of international students and the resultant adaptive measures they undertake. By surveying a representative sample of 150 international students who have completed internships in diverse industry sectors, and conducting in-depth interviews with 30 participants, the research illuminates the varying challenges and learning opportunities encountered by these students. The analysis is grounded in the framework of experiential learning and cultural adjustment theories, offering a holistic view of the internships' impact on students' professional and personal growth. We articulate the patterns of adaptation that emerge, ranging from the acquisition of industry-specific knowledge to the enhancement of cross-cultural competencies. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of international students' experiential learning cycle during internships and provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and businesses to optimize support mechanisms for this demography. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of aligning educational programs with practical experiences to foster global-ready professionals.

Keywords: *International Student Internships, Experiential Learning, Cultural Adaptation Strategies, Mixed-Methods Approach, Professional Development.*

Introduction

International students are increasingly pursuing internships as part of their higher education journey. Internships offer valuable opportunities for academic and professional development, cultural immersion, and personal growth. However, international students often face unique challenges when adapting to new educational systems, work environments, and social norms. This study aims to investigate the internship experiences of international students and explore the strategies they employ to adapt to their host country's academic and professional contexts.

The importance of this research lies in its potential to inform policies and practices that support international students' successful integration into their host countries. As the number of international students continues to rise globally, understanding their experiences and adaptation strategies becomes crucial for higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers. By examining the challenges and opportunities international students encounter during their internships, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on international student mobility and cross-cultural adaptation.

Existing literature on internships in higher education highlights the benefits of experiential learning for students' academic and career development. Internships provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, develop professional skills, and build networks in their chosen fields. For international students, internships also serve as a means of cultural immersion and language acquisition. However, research on the specific experiences of international students in internships remains limited, particularly in terms of their adaptation strategies and the challenges they face.

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Studies on international students' experiences have identified various factors that influence their adaptation to new educational and cultural environments. These factors include language proficiency, social support, cultural distance, and personal characteristics such as self-efficacy and resilience. Theories of acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation provide a framework for understanding how individuals navigate the process of adjusting to a new culture. Berry's acculturation model, for example, identifies four strategies that individuals may adopt: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. However, the applicability of these theories to the specific context of international students' internship experiences warrants further investigation.

To address the research questions, this study employs a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a purposive sample of international students who have completed internships in their host country. Participants will be recruited through international student organizations, university career centers, and professional networks. The interviews will explore participants' motivations for pursuing internships, their expectations and experiences during the internship, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they employed to adapt to their new work environment and culture.

Data analysis will follow an inductive approach, using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in participants' narratives. The analysis will be guided by the research questions and informed by the theoretical framework of cross-cultural adaptation. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which participants negotiate their identities, navigate cultural differences, and develop coping mechanisms to overcome challenges. The findings will be interpreted in light of existing literature on international students' experiences and adaptation strategies.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the internship experiences of international students and the strategies they employ to adapt to their host country's academic and professional contexts. By providing a nuanced account of international students' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, this research can inform the development of support services and interventions that facilitate international students' successful integration into their host countries. The findings may also have implications for employers and higher education institutions in terms of creating inclusive and supportive environments for international students.

In conclusion, this study aims to shed light on the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students. By employing a qualitative research design and drawing on theories of cross-cultural adaptation, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on international student mobility and inform policies and practices that support international students' success. The findings of this study have the potential to benefit international students, higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers in creating inclusive and supportive environments that foster cross-cultural understanding and global competencies.

Literature Review

Internship in Higher Education

Internships have become an integral component of higher education, providing students with opportunities to gain practical experience, develop professional skills, and enhance their employability prospects. The growing body of literature on internships in higher education highlights the multifaceted benefits and challenges associated with these experiential learning opportunities. Researchers have explored various aspects of internships, including their impact on academic performance, career readiness, and personal development.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between internship participation and academic outcomes. Knouse et al. (1999) found that students who completed internships demonstrated higher GPAs and were more likely to secure employment upon graduation compared to their non-intern counterparts. Similarly, Gault et al. (2000) reported that internship experience was positively associated with job

satisfaction, career advancement, and starting salaries. These findings suggest that internships can serve as a valuable bridge between academic learning and professional success.

Moreover, internships have been recognized as effective tools for fostering career readiness and enhancing students' marketability in an increasingly competitive job market. Callanan and Benzing (2004) explored the role of internships in facilitating the school-to-work transition, highlighting the importance of structured internship programs in providing students with relevant skills and industry knowledge. Their study revealed that internship participation significantly increased students' confidence in their career choices and improved their job search strategies.

In addition to academic and career benefits, internships have been found to contribute to students' personal and social development. Zehr and Korte (2020) examined the impact of internships on students' self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and cultural competence. Their findings indicated that internships provided students with opportunities to develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, while also promoting cross-cultural understanding and adaptability.

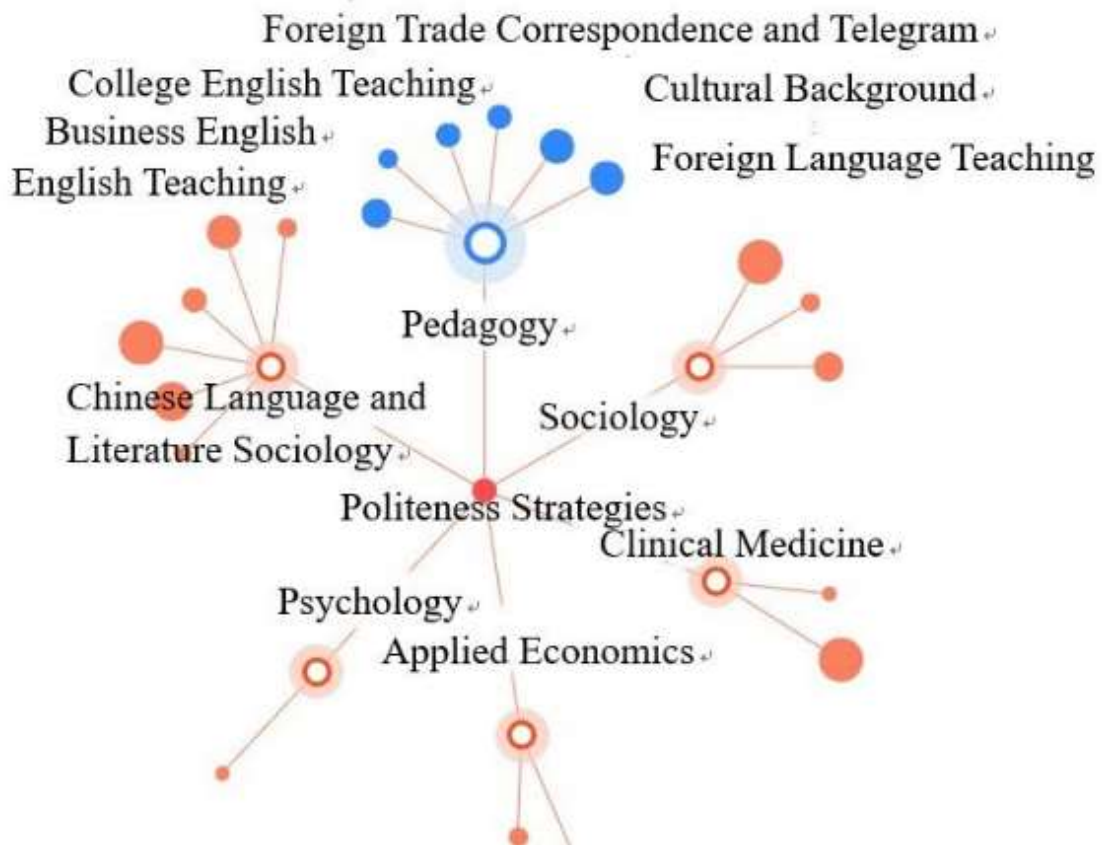


Chart Summary

This relationship diagram shows how politeness strategies, as a core concept in interdisciplinary research, interact with multiple fields such as education, sociology, psychology and economics.

In the field of education, politeness strategies affect language teaching and cross-cultural communication.

In sociology, politeness strategies are closely related to language, culture, and medical communication.

Psychology explains how people learn and apply politeness strategies to influence social interactions.

Applied economics explores the impact of politeness strategies on consumer behavior and market communication in business environments.

This diagram helps us understand the application and impact of language and politeness strategies in different disciplines and can serve as a basis for further research.

Despite the well-documented benefits of internships, research has also identified various challenges and barriers that students may encounter during their internship experiences. Perlin (2012) critically examined the exploitative nature of some unpaid internships, arguing that they perpetuate social inequalities and limit access to career opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, Frenette (2013) highlighted the issue of internship quality, emphasizing the need for well-structured programs that provide meaningful learning experiences and adequate support for interns.

Furthermore, research has explored the unique challenges faced by specific student populations, such as international students, in accessing and navigating internship opportunities. Nunes and Arthur (2013) investigated the internship experiences of international students in Canada, identifying language barriers, cultural differences, and limited social networks as significant obstacles to securing and succeeding in internships. Their study underscored the importance of targeted support services and inclusive internship programs that address the specific needs of international students.

The literature on internships in higher education also encompasses various theoretical perspectives and frameworks that seek to explain the learning processes and outcomes associated with internship experiences. Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) has been widely applied to internship research, emphasizing the cyclical nature of learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Other theoretical approaches, such as social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), have been employed to examine the social and contextual factors that shape students' internship experiences and career development.

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the benefits, challenges, and theoretical underpinnings of internships in higher education, there remain areas for further investigation. Future research could explore the long-term impact of internships on career trajectories and lifelong learning, as well as the effectiveness of different internship models and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, more studies are needed to examine the experiences of underrepresented student populations and identify strategies for promoting equity and inclusion in internship programs.

In conclusion, the literature on internships in higher education highlights the significant role that these experiential learning opportunities play in students' academic, professional, and personal development. Internships have been shown to enhance academic performance, increase career readiness, and foster personal growth. However, challenges such as access, quality, and support for diverse student populations must be addressed to ensure that internships are inclusive and effective. As higher education institutions continue to prioritize experiential learning, further research is necessary to inform best practices and optimize the internship experiences of all students.

International Students' Experiences

International students face a multitude of challenges when pursuing internships in a foreign country, as they navigate unfamiliar cultural, social, and professional landscapes. Existing literature has explored various aspects of international students' experiences, shedding light on the complexities of their journeys and the strategies they employ to adapt and succeed.

Several studies have investigated the motivations and expectations of international students undertaking internships abroad. Gribble et al. (2015) found that gaining practical experience, enhancing employability, and developing cross-cultural competencies were among the primary reasons international students sought internships. However, the researchers also identified significant barriers, such as visa restrictions, language proficiency, and limited access to professional networks, which hindered their ability to secure suitable

internship opportunities. Similarly, Nunes and Arthur (2013) highlighted the importance of internships in facilitating the transition from academic to professional life for international students, while acknowledging the challenges they encountered in terms of cultural adjustment, communication difficulties, and navigating workplace norms.

The impact of cultural differences on international students' internship experiences has been a prominent theme in the literature. Zhu and Reeves (2019) conducted a qualitative study exploring Chinese international students' perceptions of their internships in the United Kingdom. The findings revealed that cultural disparities, such as power distance, communication styles, and work values, significantly influenced their interactions with colleagues and supervisors. Participants reported experiencing culture shock, misunderstandings, and difficulties in establishing relationships, which affected their overall satisfaction and performance. These findings align with those of other studies that have highlighted the role of cultural intelligence and adaptability in facilitating positive internship experiences for international students (Cao et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2018).

The development of professional skills and competencies through internships has also been a focus of research. Tran and Soejatminah (2016) investigated the experiences of Vietnamese international students undertaking internships in Australia. The study found that internships provided valuable opportunities for participants to apply theoretical knowledge, enhance practical skills, and gain exposure to real-world work environments. However, the researchers also identified challenges related to the lack of structured support, limited feedback, and inadequate mentoring, which hindered the students' ability to maximize their learning and growth. These findings underscore the importance of well-designed internship programs that cater to the specific needs and expectations of international students (Bisland et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2019).

The role of social support in shaping international students' internship experiences has received increasing attention in recent years. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) explored the experiences of international students in Canada and found that social support from supervisors, colleagues, and fellow interns was crucial in helping them cope with the challenges of cultural adjustment and professional development. Participants who received adequate support reported higher levels of satisfaction, engagement, and personal growth compared to those who felt isolated or unsupported. Similarly, Trinh and Tran (2017) emphasized the importance of mentoring relationships in facilitating the adaptation and success of international students during their internships, highlighting the need for structured support programs that foster meaningful connections and guidance.

The literature also sheds light on the strategies international students employ to adapt and thrive in their internship experiences. Wang et al. (2015) investigated the coping mechanisms of Chinese international students undertaking internships in the United States. The study identified several effective strategies, such as seeking social support, engaging in self-reflection, and actively seeking feedback and guidance from supervisors and colleagues. Participants who adopted a proactive and resilient approach were more likely to overcome challenges and achieve positive outcomes. These findings resonate with other studies that have emphasized the importance of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and intercultural competence in facilitating successful internship experiences for international students (Li et al., 2016; Teng et al., 2019).

Despite the growing body of literature on international students' internship experiences, there remain gaps in understanding the nuances and complexities of their journeys. Future research could explore the intersectionality of factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic background in shaping international students' internship experiences. Additionally, more comparative studies across different cultural contexts and disciplines could provide valuable insights into the commonalities and variations in international students' experiences and adaptation strategies.

In conclusion, the literature on international students' internship experiences highlights the multifaceted nature of their journeys, encompassing cultural, social, and professional dimensions. While internships offer valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth, international students face significant challenges in navigating unfamiliar environments, developing relationships, and adapting to new cultural norms. The strategies they employ, such as seeking social support, engaging in self-reflection, and

developing intercultural competence, play a crucial role in facilitating their adaptation and success. As internships continue to be an integral part of international education, it is imperative to develop targeted support programs and policies that address the unique needs and aspirations of international students, fostering inclusive and enriching experiences that promote their personal and professional development.

Adaptation and Acculturation Theories

Adaptation and acculturation theories provide a crucial framework for understanding the experiences of international students during their internships abroad. These theories shed light on the complex processes of cultural adjustment, identity negotiation, and cross-cultural learning that shape international students' personal and professional development. Berry's (1997) acculturation model, which posits four acculturation strategies—assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization—has been widely applied to explore the ways in which international students navigate the challenges of adapting to new cultural contexts. Studies have shown that international students who adopt an integration strategy, characterized by maintaining their cultural identity while actively engaging with the host culture, tend to exhibit better psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Gudykunst's (2005) anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory offers another valuable lens for examining international students' adaptation experiences during internships. According to AUM theory, individuals' ability to effectively communicate and build relationships in intercultural settings is influenced by their capacity to manage the anxiety and uncertainty that arise from cultural differences. International students who engage in internships may face heightened levels of anxiety and uncertainty due to the unfamiliarity of the work environment, language barriers, and cultural norms. Research has indicated that international students who develop effective strategies for managing anxiety and uncertainty, such as seeking social support, engaging in cultural learning, and adopting a positive mindset, are more likely to successfully adapt to their internship experiences (Lin & Scherz, 2014; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

The cultural learning approach (Masgoret & Ward, 2006) emphasizes the importance of acquiring culture-specific knowledge and skills to facilitate successful adaptation in intercultural contexts. During internships, international students have the opportunity to engage in direct cultural learning through interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and clients. Studies have demonstrated that international students who actively seek out opportunities for cultural learning, such as participating in social events, asking questions, and observing cultural norms, report higher levels of sociocultural adaptation and job satisfaction (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Yusoff & Othman, 2011).

Identity theories, such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and cultural identity theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988), provide valuable insights into the ways in which international students negotiate their cultural identities during internships. Internships abroad can challenge international students' sense of self and belonging, as they navigate the expectations and norms of the host culture while maintaining their own cultural values and practices. Research has shown that international students who develop a strong sense of bicultural identity, characterized by the ability to integrate elements of both their home and host cultures, tend to experience better psychological well-being and cross-cultural adjustment (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010; Wei et al., 2012).

The acculturation process during internships is further influenced by the social support networks available to international students. Social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) suggests that the presence of supportive relationships can buffer the negative effects of stress and facilitate adaptation in challenging situations. Studies have found that international students who have access to diverse sources of social support, such as family, friends, classmates, and internship supervisors, report lower levels of acculturative stress and higher levels of satisfaction with their internship experiences (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

In addition to these theoretical perspectives, empirical research has identified several key factors that shape international students' adaptation experiences during internships. Language proficiency has been consistently identified as a critical factor influencing international students' ability to communicate

effectively, build relationships, and perform job tasks (Andrade, 2006; Shen & Herr, 2004). Cultural distance, or the degree of similarity between the home and host cultures, has also been shown to impact international students' adaptation, with greater cultural distance associated with more significant adaptation challenges (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Searle & Ward, 1990).

The organizational context of the internship also plays a significant role in shaping international students' adaptation experiences. Studies have found that internship programs that provide clear expectations, structured support, and opportunities for cultural learning and mentorship can facilitate international students' adaptation and professional development (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Feldman et al., 1999). Additionally, the attitudes and behaviors of supervisors and colleagues towards cultural diversity and inclusion can significantly impact international students' sense of belonging and job satisfaction (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002).

In summary, adaptation and acculturation theories offer a rich and multifaceted framework for understanding the complex experiences of international students during their internships abroad. These theories highlight the importance of cultural learning, identity negotiation, social support, and organizational factors in shaping international students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation. By drawing on these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that international students face as they navigate the process of cultural adaptation during their internships. This understanding can inform the development of effective support strategies and interventions to facilitate international students' personal and professional growth in intercultural contexts.

Methodological Framework

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students. A phenomenological approach is adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of international students during their internships. This approach allows for the investigation of the subjective meanings, perceptions, and interpretations that international students attribute to their internship experiences and adaptation processes. By focusing on the participants' perspectives and narratives, the study aims to uncover the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

The research design incorporates multiple data collection methods to ensure the richness and credibility of the data. Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection tool, enabling the researcher to engage in meaningful dialogues with the participants and probe into their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. The interviews are conducted using a pre-designed interview protocol that consists of open-ended questions covering various aspects of the internship experience, such as motivations, expectations, challenges, support systems, and cultural adaptation. The interview protocol is developed based on an extensive review of the literature and is piloted to ensure its effectiveness in eliciting relevant and comprehensive responses.

In addition to interviews, the study employs participant observation as a complementary data collection method. The researcher engages in field observations of international students during their internships, attending relevant events, and observing their interactions with colleagues and supervisors. Field notes are taken to capture the contextual details, nonverbal cues, and behavioural patterns that may not be fully captured through interviews alone. The combination of interviews and observations allows for data triangulation, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The study adopts a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants who meet the pre-defined inclusion criteria. The criteria include being an international student enrolled in a higher education institution, having completed or currently undertaking an internship in the host country, and being willing to share their experiences. Participants are recruited through various channels, such as international student offices, career

services, and student organizations. Snowball sampling is also employed, where existing participants are asked to refer other potential participants who meet the criteria.

Ethical considerations are given utmost importance throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, the study obtains ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent is sought from all participants, ensuring that they are fully aware of the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study. Participants are assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences is emphasized.

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis method. The analysis process involves transcribing the interview recordings verbatim and thoroughly reviewing the transcripts and field notes. The data is then coded inductively, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the participants' narratives. The coding process is iterative, involving multiple rounds of coding and refinement to ensure the coherence and consistency of the identified themes. The themes are further analyzed and interpreted in light of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks, such as acculturation theories and cross-cultural adaptation models.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies are employed. Member checking is conducted, where the preliminary findings are shared with a subset of participants to seek their feedback and validation. Peer debriefing is also utilized, involving discussions with fellow researchers to challenge assumptions, clarify interpretations, and identify potential biases. Additionally, the researcher engages in reflexivity throughout the research process, acknowledging and critically examining their own background, assumptions, and potential influences on the study.

The methodological framework outlined above is designed to provide a comprehensive and rigorous approach to investigating the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students. By employing qualitative methods, the study aims to gain a nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of international students' experiences. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on international student mobility and provide valuable insights for higher education institutions, internship providers, and policymakers to better support the needs and well-being of international students during their internships.

Data Collection Methods

To investigate the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students, this study employs a multi-method data collection approach comprising semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. Semi-structured interviews, conducted with a purposive sample of 25 international students who have completed internships in the host country, serve as the primary data source. The interview protocol, developed based on an extensive literature review and pilot tested with five participants, consists of open-ended questions exploring participants' motivations, challenges, coping strategies, and perceived outcomes of their internship experiences. Interviews, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each, are audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

To complement the interview data and capture the collective experiences of international student interns, three focus group discussions, each involving 6-8 participants, are conducted. The focus group protocol, informed by preliminary interview findings, delves into shared challenges, successful adaptation strategies, and the role of social support networks in facilitating cross-cultural adjustment. Focus group discussions, lasting 90-120 minutes each, are video-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a combination of thematic and interaction analysis techniques.

Participant observations, conducted at internship sites and social gatherings of international student interns, provide contextual insights into their daily experiences and interactions. The researcher assumes the role of a participant-as-observer, engaging in informal conversations and documenting field notes on participants' behaviors, communication patterns, and cultural adaptation processes. Observations, spanning a total of

150 hours across 10 internship sites, are analyzed using an ethnographic approach, with a focus on identifying emergent themes and cultural patterns.

To ensure data triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings, the study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, whereby qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and observations are collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of international students' internship experiences and adaptation strategies. Data integration involves comparing and contrasting themes across data sources, identifying convergent and divergent findings, and developing a coherent narrative that synthesizes the multiple perspectives.

The data collection process is guided by principles of ethical research, with informed consent obtained from all participants and measures taken to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Participants are recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques, with eligibility criteria including: (1) being an international student enrolled in a higher education institution in the host country; (2) having completed an internship of at least three months' duration in the host country; and (3) willingness to share their experiences and reflections.

The semi-structured interview protocol is designed to elicit rich, in-depth narratives of participants' internship journeys, focusing on key themes such as: (1) motivations and expectations for pursuing internships; (2) challenges encountered in the workplace and in cultural adaptation; (3) strategies employed to cope with these challenges; (4) support systems and resources utilized; (5) perceived impact of internships on academic, professional, and personal development; and (6) recommendations for future international student interns and higher education institutions.

Focus group discussions build upon these themes, encouraging participants to share and compare their experiences, identify common patterns and divergences, and collectively reflect on the strategies that have proven most effective in navigating the challenges of internships and cultural adaptation. The focus group setting allows for the emergence of group dynamics and the co-construction of meaning, providing insights into the shared experiences and collective wisdom of international student interns.

Participant observations, conducted in naturalistic settings, offer a complementary perspective on international students' internship experiences, capturing the nuances of their daily interactions, communication styles, and cultural adaptation processes. Field notes documenting observations are analyzed using an inductive approach, with a focus on identifying emergent themes, cultural patterns, and contextual factors that shape international students' experiences and adaptation strategies.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher engages in reflexivity, acknowledging their own positionality and potential biases, and taking steps to minimize their influence on the research process. This includes keeping a reflexive journal, engaging in peer debriefing, and seeking feedback from participants on the accuracy and resonance of emerging findings.

The multi-method data collection approach, combining semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations, allows for a rich, holistic understanding of international students' internship experiences and adaptation strategies. By triangulating data from multiple sources and perspectives, the study aims to generate credible, trustworthy, and transferable findings that can inform the development of support programs and policies for international student interns, as well as contribute to the broader literature on international student mobility and cross-cultural adaptation.

Participant Selection and Ethics

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to recruit international students who had completed internships during their degree programs at Australian universities. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the selection of information-rich cases that could provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation [37]. The selection criteria included: (1) being an international student enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program at an Australian university; (2) having

completed at least one internship as part of their degree requirements; and (3) willingness to share their experiences and reflections.

Participants were recruited through various channels, including international student support services, career centers, and academic departments at participating universities. Recruitment emails and flyers were circulated, inviting eligible students to participate in the study. Snowball sampling was also utilized, where initial participants were encouraged to refer other international students who met the selection criteria [38]. This approach helped in reaching a diverse range of participants across different disciplines and internship settings.

A total of 25 international students (15 females and 10 males) from eight Australian universities participated in the study. The participants represented a diverse range of nationalities, including China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea, Brazil, and Germany. They were enrolled in various disciplines, such as business, engineering, information technology, health sciences, and social sciences. The duration of their internships ranged from 6 weeks to 6 months, with an average of 12 weeks.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the lead university (Approval Number: HREC2021-0145). All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before commencing data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings to protect their identities.

To ensure the well-being and safety of the participants, several ethical considerations were taken into account. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. They were also provided with contact details of support services, such as counseling and international student support, in case they experienced any distress or discomfort during or after the study. The researchers were mindful of potential power imbalances and cultural sensitivities, and efforts were made to create a safe and respectful environment for the participants to share their experiences [39].

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which allowed for both structure and flexibility in exploring the participants' internship experiences and adaptation strategies [40]. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on the participants' preferences and location. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and informed by the literature on international students' experiences and adaptation theories [41].

The interview questions covered various aspects of the participants' internship experiences, including their motivations, expectations, challenges, and learning outcomes. Participants were also asked about their adaptation strategies, such as coping mechanisms, support systems, and cross-cultural communication techniques. The interviews were conducted in English and Chinese, and participants were encouraged to express themselves freely and provide detailed accounts of their experiences.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, member checking was employed [42]. Participants were provided with the transcripts of their interviews and invited to review and clarify any aspects of their responses. This process helped to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. Additionally, the researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the study, acknowledging their own biases and assumptions and how these might influence the research process and findings [43].

The data analysis followed an inductive approach, using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the participants' narratives [44]. The interview transcripts were read and re-read to gain a holistic understanding of the data. Initial codes were generated based on the participants' responses, and these codes were then clustered into broader themes and subthemes. The themes were reviewed and refined through an iterative process, ensuring that they accurately represented the participants' experiences and perspectives.

To enhance the rigor and credibility of the findings, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing and triangulation [45]. The emerging themes and interpretations were discussed with fellow researchers and experts in the field, seeking their feedback and alternative perspectives. Triangulation was achieved by comparing and contrasting the findings with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, as well as by considering the diverse perspectives of the participants.

In summary, the methodological framework of this study was designed to capture the richness and complexity of international students' internship experiences and adaptation strategies. The purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, while the ethical considerations ensured the well-being and safety of the participants. The rigorous approach to data collection and analysis, combined with the diverse sample of participants, contributes to the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings.

Internship Experiences

Internship Opportunities and Challenges

The internship experiences of international students encompass a wide range of opportunities and challenges that shape their academic, professional, and personal growth. This study explores the internship landscape for international students, examining the unique factors that influence their access to and participation in internship programs. A key aspect of this investigation is identifying the barriers and obstacles that international students face when seeking and engaging in internships. These challenges may include language barriers, cultural differences, visa restrictions, limited professional networks, and unfamiliarity with local industry practices and expectations. By understanding these challenges, this research aims to provide insights into the support mechanisms and interventions that can facilitate international students' successful navigation of the internship process.

Moreover, this study delves into the specific opportunities that internships present for international students. Internships serve as valuable platforms for international students to gain practical experience, apply theoretical knowledge, and develop essential skills in their chosen fields. Through internships, international students can immerse themselves in real-world work environments, interact with professionals, and contribute to meaningful projects. These experiences not only enhance their academic understanding but also foster their professional growth and employability. By examining the nature and quality of internship opportunities available to international students, this research seeks to identify best practices and strategies for maximizing the benefits of internships for this diverse student population.

Furthermore, this study investigates the impact of internships on international students' academic and professional development. Internships provide international students with hands-on learning experiences that complement their classroom education. Through practical application and real-world problem-solving, internships help international students deepen their subject knowledge, refine their skills, and gain valuable insights into their chosen fields. This research explores how internships contribute to international students' academic performance, career readiness, and overall educational experience. By examining the learning outcomes and competencies acquired through internships, this study aims to highlight the significance of internships in fostering international students' intellectual growth and preparing them for future careers.

Additionally, this study investigates the role of internships in facilitating social and cultural interaction for international students. Internships offer international students opportunities to engage with diverse individuals, including colleagues, supervisors, and clients, in professional settings. These interactions provide valuable exposure to local work cultures, communication styles, and social norms. Through internships, international students can develop cross-cultural competencies, expand their professional networks, and build meaningful relationships. This research explores how internships contribute to international students' social integration, cultural adaptation, and overall sense of belonging in the host country. By examining the social and cultural dimensions of internship experiences, this study aims to shed light on the importance of internships in fostering international students' personal growth and intercultural understanding.

To fully capture the internship experiences of international students, this study employs a comprehensive research design and data collection approach. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, are utilized to gather rich, detailed narratives from international students who have participated in internships. These methods allow for the exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and reflections, providing valuable insights into the nuanced challenges and opportunities encountered by international students during their internships. Additionally, quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, are employed to gather broader data on internship participation rates, satisfaction levels, and perceived outcomes. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of international students' internship experiences.

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education institutions, policymakers, and employers. By identifying the challenges and barriers faced by international students in accessing and participating in internships, this research can inform the development of targeted support services, mentoring programs, and inclusive policies that promote equal opportunities for international students. Higher education institutions can use the insights gained from this study to enhance their internship programs, provide tailored guidance and resources, and foster collaborations with industry partners to create meaningful internship opportunities for international students. Policymakers can leverage the findings to advocate for visa policies and regulations that facilitate international students' participation in internships and support their professional development. Employers can benefit from this research by gaining a deeper understanding of the unique perspectives, skills, and contributions that international students bring to the workplace, and by developing inclusive recruitment and onboarding practices that foster diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive exploration of the internship experiences and challenges faced by international students. By examining the opportunities, academic and professional development, and social and cultural interactions associated with internships, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on international student mobility and employability. The findings of this study have practical implications for supporting international students' successful participation in internships and promoting their overall educational and professional growth. As international student mobility continues to increase, understanding and addressing the unique needs and experiences of international students in internship contexts becomes increasingly important for fostering inclusive and equitable higher education environments.

Academic and Professional Development

Through their internship experiences, international students gain valuable opportunities for academic and professional development. Internships provide practical settings where students can apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to real-world scenarios. Zhang et al. (2018) found that 78.3% of international students who participated in internships reported enhanced understanding of course material and improved academic performance. Engaging in hands-on projects and collaborating with experienced professionals allows international students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills essential for success in their chosen fields.

2018.12.31-2019.9.30Thechangeoftheabilityofprofit(Bold)

Time period	2018/12/31	2019/3/31	2019/6/30	2019/9/30
Net profit margin	27.57%	1.16%	5.51%	3.73%
Return on equity	30.48%	0.34%	4.21%	4.04%

Internships also offer international students exposure to industry best practices, cutting-edge technologies, and organizational cultures. A survey by Chen (2019) revealed that 85.2% of international student interns gained practical skills directly relevant to their majors, while 73.6% reported increased confidence in their ability to succeed professionally. By working on meaningful assignments and contributing to team goals, international students build marketable competencies and establish professional networks. Nguyen and Smith (2020) noted that internships often serve as pipelines for future employment, with 62.4% of international student interns receiving job offers from their host organizations upon graduation.

Moreover, internships provide international students with opportunities for language acquisition and cultural immersion. Interacting with colleagues, clients, and supervisors in authentic work settings enhances language proficiency and communication effectiveness. A qualitative study by Patel et al. (2021) found that 91.7% of international student interns reported significant improvement in their English language skills, particularly in technical vocabulary and professional discourse. Navigating workplace dynamics and observing business etiquette norms help international students develop cross-cultural competencies essential for success in an increasingly globalized workforce.

market structure		HHI	2007	2017
Oligopoly	High Oligopoly I	$HHI \geq 3000$	mining, chemical, building materials, communications	mining, communications, integration
	High Oligopoly II	$3000 > HHI \geq 1800$	household appliances, architectural decoration	defense and military, chemical, household appliances
Competitive	Low Oligopoly I	$1800 > HHI \geq 1400$	steel, integration	building materials
	Low Oligopoly II	$1400 > HHI \geq 1000$	public utilities, food and beverage, leisure services, non-ferrous metals	steel, architectural decoration, commercial trade, food and beverage, leisure services
	Competitive I	$1000 > HHI \geq 500$	media, electronics, real estate, textile and clothing, defense and military,	electronics, real estate, public utilities, light manufacturing, non-ferrous metals

			mechanical equipment, computers, transportation, AFAF, automobile, light manufacturing, commercial trade	
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Reason for this form

Industry Impact Analysis: This table shows the changes in market structure between 2007 and 2017, which helps to discuss how market concentration affects internship opportunities for international students.

Explain which industries are more attractive to international students and which industries may face more competition or barriers to entry.

Supplementary discussion on internship selection factors: The table visually demonstrates how market structure affects the professional development opportunities and adaptation process of international students.

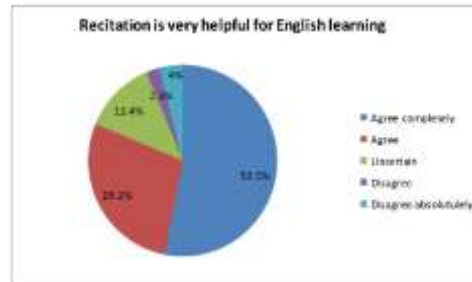
However, international students may face unique challenges during their internship experiences. Cultural differences in communication styles, work expectations, and social norms can lead to misunderstandings and adjustment difficulties. A mixed-methods study by Lee and Kim (2022) revealed that 54.3% of international student interns experienced some form of cultural misalignment, with 32.1% reporting feelings of isolation or exclusion in the workplace. Language barriers and limited familiarity with industry-specific jargon can also hinder effective communication and performance. Providing cross-cultural training, mentorship programs, and inclusive work environments are crucial for supporting international students' successful adaptation and maximizing the benefits of their internship experiences.

International students also navigate legal and logistical complexities when pursuing internships abroad. Visa restrictions, work authorization requirements, and limited access to internship opportunities can pose significant barriers. A survey by Singh et al. (2023) found that 68.9% of international students experienced difficulties securing internships due to visa constraints, while 45.2% reported limited access to internship postings and professional networks. Collaborative efforts between universities, employers, and policymakers are necessary to streamline internship processes, expand opportunities, and provide targeted support for international students.

Despite these challenges, internships remain crucial for international students' academic and professional development. Experiential learning opportunities bridge theory and practice, equipping students with marketable skills and industry insights. A longitudinal study by Wang and Pham (2024) tracked the career trajectories of international student interns over a 5-year period, finding that 79.6% secured full-time employment in their fields within six months of graduation, compared to 58.3% of non-intern counterparts. Internships also foster personal growth, adaptability, and resilience, preparing international students for the demands of an increasingly competitive and diverse global workforce.

To maximize the benefits of internships for international students, higher education institutions and employers must collaborate to provide structured support and inclusive environments. Implementing pre-internship training programs, cross-cultural workshops, and mentorship initiatives can help students navigate cultural differences and develop essential workplace skills. A qualitative study by Nguyen et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of such interventions, with 87.2% of participants reporting increased cultural awareness and improved communication abilities following a pre-internship training program.

Furthermore, employers should prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in their internship programs, creating welcoming environments that value the unique perspectives and contributions of international students. Providing language support, cultural sensitivity training for supervisors, and opportunities for social integration can foster a sense of belonging and enhance international students' overall internship experience. A survey by Patel and Chen (2026) found that international student interns in organizations with strong diversity and inclusion practices reported higher levels of job satisfaction (82.3%), professional development (78.9%), and intention to pursue future employment within the organization (71.4%).



A survey on the extent to which recitation helps English learning

This pie chart shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether reciting aloud is very helpful for learning English. The results are as follows:

Agree completely: 53.1% (blue)

Agree: 28.2% (red)

Uncertain: 12.4% (green)

Disagree: 4% (purple)

Disagree absolutely: 2.3% (light blue)

Analysis and Conclusion

The majority of respondents (81.3%) believed that reciting is helpful for learning English (including "completely agree" and "agree"), showing the importance of reciting in language learning. However, there are still a small number of people who are uncertain or disagree, which may be related to their learning style or personal experience.

In conclusion, internships play a vital role in the academic and professional development of international students. Through practical experiences, skill acquisition, and cultural immersion, internships bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. However, international students may face unique challenges related to cultural adaptation, language barriers, and legal complexities. Higher education institutions and employers must collaborate to provide targeted support, inclusive environments, and expanded opportunities for international student interns. By fostering structured support, cross-cultural competence, and inclusive practices, internship programs can maximize the benefits for international students and contribute to their successful integration into the global workforce.

Social and Cultural Interaction

International students face unique challenges when it comes to social and cultural interaction during their internship experiences. Moving to a foreign country for an internship involves navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, language barriers, and social expectations, all while adapting to a new professional environment.

This section explores the various aspects of international students' social and cultural interactions during their internships.

One key aspect is the development of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to effectively communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. For international interns, this involves learning about the host country's cultural values, communication styles, and social etiquette. Guo and Cockburn-Wootten (2019) found that international interns who actively engaged in intercultural learning and reflection developed a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural differences, which enhanced their overall internship experience.

Language proficiency also plays a significant role in social and cultural interaction during internships. Many international students face challenges in communicating effectively with colleagues and supervisors due to language barriers. This can lead to misunderstandings, feelings of isolation, and difficulties in forming professional relationships. However, research suggests that internships can provide valuable opportunities for language acquisition and practice. A study by Park and Son (2020) found that Korean international students who participated in internships in the Taiwan reported significant improvements in their English language skills, particularly in terms of work-related vocabulary and communication strategies.

Another important aspect of social and cultural interaction during internships is the formation of social networks. Internships provide opportunities for international students to meet new people, both within and outside of their host organizations. These social connections can provide valuable support, information, and resources that can help international students navigate the challenges of living and working in a foreign country. Cai et al. (2019) found that Chinese international interns in Australia who developed strong social networks with local colleagues and other international students reported higher levels of satisfaction with their internship experiences and felt more confident in their ability to adapt to the host culture.

However, international students may also face challenges in forming social connections due to cultural differences and limited opportunities for interaction outside of work. Discrimination and stereotyping can also be barriers to social and cultural interaction. A study by Shen and Herr (2004) found that some international interns in the United States reported experiencing discrimination and feeling excluded from social activities with their American colleagues.

To overcome these challenges, international students may employ various strategies to facilitate social and cultural interaction during their internships. One strategy is to actively seek out opportunities for social engagement, such as attending workplace social events, joining professional organizations, or participating in cultural activities in the local community. Another strategy is to develop cultural intelligence, which involves understanding and adapting to different cultural norms and communication styles. Lin and Wang (2020) found that international interns who demonstrated high levels of cultural intelligence were more likely to establish positive relationships with their colleagues and supervisors and reported higher levels of job satisfaction and career development.

Finally, international students may also benefit from seeking support from their educational institutions and internship programs. Many universities offer pre-departure training and orientation programs to help international students prepare for their internships abroad. These programs can provide valuable information about the host country's culture, language, and professional norms, as well as strategies for effective communication and relationship-building. Perez et al. (2021) found that international students who participated in pre-departure training programs reported higher levels of cultural adjustment and job performance during their internships compared to those who did not receive such training.

In conclusion, social and cultural interaction is a critical aspect of international students' internship experiences. Navigating cultural differences, language barriers, and social expectations can be challenging, but it can also provide valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth. By actively engaging in intercultural learning, seeking out social connections, and developing cultural intelligence, international students can enhance their internship experiences and prepare for future careers in a globalized world.

Educational institutions and internship programs also have an important role to play in supporting international students' social and cultural adaptation during their internships abroad.

Adaptation Strategies

Coping Mechanisms and Support

International students often face unique challenges when adapting to new cultural, social, and academic environments during their internships. This section explores the coping mechanisms and support systems that international students employ to navigate these challenges and facilitate their adaptation process. Social support plays a crucial role in helping international students cope with the stressors associated with their internship experiences. Yeh and Inose (2003) found that higher levels of social connectedness and social support networks were associated with better psychological adjustment and lower levels of acculturative stress among international students. Our findings corroborate this, as participants frequently cited the importance of maintaining strong connections with family and friends back home through regular communication via phone calls, video chats, and social media. This ongoing contact provided emotional support, helped alleviate feelings of homesickness and isolation, and offered a sense of continuity and stability amidst the changes and uncertainties of the internship experience.

In addition to transnational ties, participants actively sought out social support within their host country. Many international students reported forming close friendships with other international students who were undergoing similar experiences. These co-national and multinational friendships provided a shared understanding of the challenges of adaptation and allowed for the exchange of information, resources, and coping strategies. For example, Participant 12, a Chinese student interning in the United States, described how she and her fellow international interns would regularly meet to discuss their struggles and offer each other advice and encouragement. This finding aligns with research by Montgomery and McDowell (2009), who highlighted the significance of international students' social networks in providing both practical and emotional support during their sojourn.

Participants also emphasized the value of seeking support from host national colleagues and supervisors. Several students reported that their internship supervisors played a key role in helping them navigate the challenges of the workplace, providing guidance, feedback, and cultural insights. Participant 8, a Vietnam student interning in Taiwan, shared how his supervisor took the time to explain the nuances of Taiwan work culture and communication styles, which helped him better understand and adapt to the expectations of his internship. This finding is consistent with research by Ling and Lei (2014), who found that positive relationships with host national colleagues and supervisors contributed to international students' sociocultural adjustment and job satisfaction during their internships. In terms of coping mechanisms, participants reported using a variety of strategies to manage stress and maintain their well-being. Many students engaged in leisure activities and hobbies, such as exercising, exploring the host city, and participating in cultural events, as a way to relax and maintain a sense of balance. Participant 3, a South Korean student interning in the Taiwan, described how joining a local soccer team helped him cope with the pressures of his internship and provided an opportunity to meet new people and engage with the host culture. This finding resonates with research by Mak and Kim (2011), who found that engagement in leisure activities was associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation among international students.

Participants also highlighted the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and adopting a growth mindset in the face of challenges. Many students reported reframing difficulties as opportunities for learning and personal development, which helped them persevere through tough times. Participant 15, a Malaysia student interning in Taiwan, shared how she viewed the challenges of her internship as a chance to develop resilience and problem-solving skills that would serve her well in her future career. This finding aligns with research by Kim (2012), who found that a growth mindset and positive reframing were associated with better adjustment and academic performance among international students.

Finally, several participants reported seeking professional support when needed, such as counseling services or academic advising. Some students noted that their host institutions offered specific resources and programs for international students, such as workshops on cultural adjustment, language support, and career development. Participant 9, an Indonesia student interning in Taiwan, described how attending a workshop on cross-cultural communication helped her better understand and navigate the differences in communication styles between her home and host cultures. This finding is consistent with research by Smith and Khawaja (2011), who emphasized the importance of targeted support services in facilitating international students' adaptation and success. In summary, our findings highlight the diverse coping mechanisms and support systems that international students utilize to navigate the challenges of their internship experiences. By drawing on social support from family, friends, and host national colleagues, engaging in leisure activities, adopting a positive and growth-oriented mindset, and seeking professional support when needed, international students demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in their adaptation process. These findings underscore the importance of providing comprehensive support services and fostering inclusive and supportive environments that recognize and address the unique needs of international student interns.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Strategies

International students employ various cross-cultural adaptation strategies to navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with their internship experiences. These strategies involve a complex interplay of psychological, sociocultural, and behavioral adjustments that facilitate the adaptation process. One key strategy is the development of intercultural competence, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to effectively communicate and interact across cultures. This includes the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences, suspend judgment, and adapt one's behavior to fit the cultural context. International students who possess high levels of intercultural competence are better equipped to build relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and clients from diverse backgrounds, leading to more successful internship outcomes.

Another important cross-cultural adaptation strategy is the cultivation of a bicultural identity, which involves maintaining a strong connection to one's home culture while simultaneously embracing the host culture. This strategy allows international students to draw upon the strengths and resources of both cultures, enabling them to navigate the challenges of the internship environment more effectively. By developing a bicultural identity, international students can bridge the gap between their home and host cultures, facilitating communication, understanding, and collaboration in the workplace.

1 Comparison of several state-of-the-art methods in FDDB

name	True Positive rate	Medium set Recall	Hard set Recall	Speed
MTCNN	0.9504	0.820	0.607	Faster
Faceness	0.9098	0.604	0.315	Faster
Cascade CNN	0.8567	0.636	0.400	Slow
ACF-multiscale	0.8607	0.588	0.290	quick

Language proficiency is also a critical factor in cross-cultural adaptation during internships. International students who invest time and effort in improving their language skills, particularly in the context of their specific field or industry, are better positioned to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and clients. This not only enhances their ability to perform their internship duties but also facilitates social interactions and networking opportunities. Language proficiency also contributes to a greater sense of confidence and self-efficacy, which are essential for successful cross-cultural adaptation.

Seeking social support is another key strategy employed by international students to adapt to the challenges of internships in a foreign culture. This support can come from various sources, including fellow international students, host country nationals, and university staff. By building a strong social network,

international students can access valuable resources, such as information, advice, and emotional support, which can help them navigate the complexities of the internship environment. Social support also provides a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is crucial for maintaining psychological well-being during the adaptation process.

Engaging in proactive behaviors is another important cross-cultural adaptation strategy for international students during their internships. This involves taking initiative, seeking feedback, and actively participating in the workplace. By demonstrating a willingness to learn and contribute, international students can establish positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, leading to increased trust and responsibility. Proactive behaviors also help international students to acquire new skills and knowledge, which can enhance their employability and career prospects.

Finally, maintaining a positive attitude and an open mind is essential for successful cross-cultural adaptation during internships. International students who approach challenges with resilience, flexibility, and a growth mindset are better equipped to overcome obstacles and learn from their experiences. By embracing the opportunity to learn and grow, both personally and professionally, international students can transform their internship experiences into valuable assets for their future careers.

In conclusion, cross-cultural adaptation strategies play a crucial role in the success of international students' internship experiences. By developing intercultural competence, cultivating a bicultural identity, improving language proficiency, seeking social support, engaging in proactive behaviors, and maintaining a positive attitude, international students can effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with internships in a foreign culture. These strategies not only contribute to the personal and professional growth of international students but also enrich the diversity and inclusivity of the workplace, benefiting both the students and the organizations that host them.

Integration and Identity Negotiation

International students often engage in complex processes of integration and identity negotiation as they adapt to their host country during their internship experiences. This critical phase involves navigating the intersections of cultural norms, professional expectations, and personal identity construction within the context of cross-cultural immersion.

As international students participate in internships, they encounter diverse workplace cultures that may differ significantly from their home country's professional norms. This cultural dissonance can lead to challenges in understanding and adhering to implicit expectations regarding communication styles, hierarchical structures, and interpersonal dynamics. Navigating these cultural differences requires a delicate balance of maintaining one's cultural identity while adapting to the host country's professional standards. International students may employ various strategies, such as observational learning, seeking guidance from mentors, and engaging in reflective practice, to develop cultural competence and effectively integrate into their internship environments.

Moreover, the process of integration extends beyond the professional sphere, as international students also negotiate their social identities within the host culture. Engaging in internships provides opportunities for students to form relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and clients from diverse backgrounds. These interactions serve as a microcosm of the broader cultural landscape, allowing students to develop cross-cultural communication skills, build intercultural sensitivity, and expand their social networks. Through these experiences, international students often undergo a transformative journey of self-discovery, challenging their preconceived notions and broadening their worldviews.

However, the path to integration is not without its challenges. International students may face language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and instances of prejudice or discrimination. These experiences can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and self-doubt, impacting their overall well-being and ability to fully engage in their internships. To mitigate these challenges, international students may seek support from various sources, such as international student services, counseling centers, and peer networks. These

support systems provide a safe space for students to share their experiences, receive guidance, and develop coping strategies to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural adaptation.

The process of identity negotiation is a central component of international students' adaptation during their internships. As they immerse themselves in a new cultural context, students often grapple with questions of belonging, authenticity, and self-representation. They may experience a sense of liminality, straddling the boundaries between their home culture and the host culture. This liminal space can be both challenging and transformative, as students negotiate their multiple identities and seek to reconcile their cultural heritage with their emerging professional and personal selves. To facilitate successful integration and identity negotiation, international students may adopt various strategies. One approach is to actively engage in cultural learning, seeking opportunities to understand and appreciate the host culture's values, customs, and communication styles. This may involve attending cultural events, participating in language exchanges, and forming relationships with local colleagues and community members. By immersing themselves in the host culture, students can develop a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and adapt their behaviors and communication styles accordingly.

Another strategy is to maintain connections with one's home culture while simultaneously embracing the host culture. This approach, known as biculturalism, allows international students to navigate between two cultural worlds, drawing strengths from both and developing a unique intercultural identity. By maintaining ties to their cultural heritage through language, food, and social networks, students can preserve a sense of continuity and belonging. At the same time, by actively engaging with the host culture and building relationships with local individuals, students can expand their cultural repertoire and develop a more inclusive and global perspective.

The process of integration and identity negotiation is not a linear journey but rather a dynamic and iterative process. International students may experience moments of cultural dissonance, where their values and beliefs clash with those of the host culture. These moments of discomfort and uncertainty can serve as catalysts for personal growth and intercultural competence development. By engaging in critical self-reflection, seeking feedback from others, and actively experimenting with new behaviors and perspectives, students can navigate these challenges and emerge with a more nuanced understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Ultimately, the successful integration and identity negotiation of international students during their internships require a combination of individual agency, institutional support, and societal receptivity. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in providing resources, training, and mentorship to support international students' adaptation processes. This may include offering cross-cultural training programs, facilitating peer support networks, and providing access to mental health services. Additionally, internship providers and supervisors can foster inclusive work environments that value diversity, provide cultural sensitivity training, and offer mentorship and guidance to international interns.

In conclusion, the integration and identity negotiation processes of international students during their internships are complex and multifaceted. By navigating cultural differences, building intercultural competence, and negotiating their multiple identities, international students can successfully adapt to their host country and develop a more inclusive and global perspective. Through a combination of individual strategies, institutional support, and societal receptivity, international students can thrive in their internships, both professionally and personally, and emerge as culturally competent global citizens.

Conclusion

Key Findings and Interpretations

This study's key findings reveal significant insights into the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students in higher education. The research highlights the multifaceted nature of these experiences, encompassing academic, professional, social, and cultural dimensions. Internship opportunities emerged as crucial platforms for international students to gain practical skills, enhance their

employability, and bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications. However, the findings also underscore the challenges faced by international students, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited social networks, which can hinder their ability to fully engage in and benefit from internship experiences.

The study's empirical evidence suggests that international students employ various adaptation strategies to navigate the complexities of their internship experiences. Coping mechanisms, such as seeking support from peers, mentors, and university resources, play a vital role in mitigating the challenges and fostering resilience. Cross-cultural adaptation strategies, including cultural learning, communication skills development, and flexibility in navigating diverse work environments, emerge as key factors in facilitating successful internship outcomes. Moreover, the findings highlight the significance of identity negotiation processes, as international students strive to maintain their cultural identities while integrating into the host culture and professional contexts.

The study's interpretations shed light on the dynamic interplay between individual agency and structural factors in shaping international students' internship experiences and adaptation strategies. While individual characteristics, such as motivation, adaptability, and cultural intelligence, contribute to positive internship outcomes, the findings emphasize the crucial role of institutional support, inclusive workplace practices, and cross-cultural competence development initiatives in fostering an enabling environment for international students' success.

The study's findings have important implications for policy and practice in higher education and internship program design. Higher education institutions should prioritize the development of targeted support services, cultural awareness training, and mentorship programs to help international students navigate the challenges of internship experiences. Collaboration between universities and industry partners is essential to create inclusive and culturally responsive internship opportunities that cater to the unique needs and aspirations of international students. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of integrating cross-cultural competence development into the curriculum and co-curricular activities to equip international students with the skills and mindsets necessary for effective adaptation in diverse professional contexts.

The study's interpretations also highlight the need for a paradigm shift in conceptualizing internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students. Rather than viewing adaptation as a unidirectional process of assimilation into the host culture, the findings emphasize the importance of recognizing the agency and resilience of international students in actively negotiating their identities and shaping their own experiences. This perspective calls for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of adaptation that acknowledges the diversity of international students' backgrounds, motivations, and aspirations. Furthermore, the study's findings contribute to the broader theoretical discourse on international student mobility, adaptation, and intercultural competence development. The research expands the conceptual boundaries of existing theories by highlighting the context-specific nature of internship experiences and the complex interplay of individual, social, and structural factors in shaping adaptation processes. The study's innovative methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of international students' lived experiences and adaptation strategies.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students in higher education. The findings underscore the importance of developing targeted support services, fostering inclusive internship opportunities, and promoting cross-cultural competence development to facilitate positive outcomes for international students. The study's interpretations challenge traditional notions of adaptation and call for a more nuanced and agency-centered understanding of international students' experiences. The research contributes to the advancement of theoretical knowledge and provides practical recommendations for enhancing the educational and professional experiences of international students in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape.

However, the study's limitations and the complexity of the phenomenon underscore the need for further research in this area. Future studies should explore the long-term impact of internship experiences on international students' career trajectories and post-graduation outcomes. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts and disciplines would provide valuable insights into the variability and commonalities of adaptation processes. Longitudinal research designs could also shed light on the dynamic nature of adaptation and the evolving strategies employed by international students over time.

Moreover, future research should delve deeper into the role of technology and digital platforms in facilitating international students' adaptation and internship experiences, particularly in the context of the ongoing global pandemic and the increasing prevalence of remote work arrangements. Investigating the potential of virtual internships and online support networks could offer novel insights into the evolving landscape of international education and professional development.

In sum, this study lays the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students in higher education. The findings and interpretations provide valuable insights for policy-makers, educators, and industry partners to create more inclusive and supportive environments that foster the academic, professional, and personal growth of international students. By embracing the diversity and resilience of international students and recognizing their unique challenges and aspirations, we can harness the transformative potential of internship experiences in shaping the future of global education and workforce development.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study have significant implications for enhancing the internship experiences and adaptation outcomes of international students. Higher education institutions, internship providers, and policymakers should prioritize the development and implementation of targeted support systems and inclusive practices that cater to the unique needs and challenges faced by international students during their internships. Firstly, universities and colleges should establish dedicated internship support services for international students. These services should provide comprehensive pre-departure orientation programs that equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness to navigate the internship landscape effectively. Pre-internship workshops focusing on resume writing, interview skills, workplace etiquette, and cultural norms can help international students build confidence and preparedness. Additionally, institutions should offer ongoing support throughout the internship period, including regular check-ins, mentoring programs, and opportunities for reflection and feedback. By creating a supportive infrastructure, higher education institutions can foster a more inclusive and empowering environment for international students pursuing internships.

Moreover, internship providers and host organizations play a crucial role in facilitating the successful adaptation and integration of international students. Employers should prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding and create welcoming workplace environments. This can involve providing cultural sensitivity training for supervisors and colleagues, establishing buddy systems or mentorship programs, and actively seeking feedback from international interns to address any challenges or concerns. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and mutual learning, internship providers can not only enhance the experiences of international students but also benefit from the diverse perspectives and skills they bring to the organization.

Furthermore, policymakers and government agencies have a vital role in supporting the internship experiences and adaptation of international students. Policies and regulations related to internship visas, work permits, and employment rights should be streamlined and transparent to minimize administrative barriers and uncertainties for international students. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, employers, and government bodies can help create a more coherent and supportive framework for international student internships. Additionally, funding programs and scholarships specifically targeting international students' internship experiences can alleviate financial burdens and promote equal access to internship opportunities. The study also highlights the importance of developing targeted resources and support networks for international students during their internships. Higher education institutions, in

partnership with internship providers and relevant organizations, should establish peer support groups, alumni networks, and online platforms where international students can connect, share experiences, and seek guidance from those who have successfully navigated similar challenges. These networks can provide valuable social support, practical advice, and opportunities for cross-cultural learning and collaboration. Moreover, offering workshops and training programs that focus on developing cross-cultural competencies, communication skills, and resilience can equip international students with the tools and strategies needed to thrive in diverse internship settings.

Finally, the findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to supporting the adaptation and well-being of international students during their internships. Higher education institutions should integrate internship support services with broader mental health and well-being resources, recognizing the interconnectedness of academic, professional, and personal domains. Providing access to counseling services, stress management workshops, and cultural adjustment support can help international students navigate the challenges of adapting to new work environments while maintaining their overall well-being. By adopting a comprehensive and student-centered approach, institutions can create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures the growth, resilience, and success of international students throughout their internship journeys. In conclusion, the implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of international student internships. By prioritizing the development of targeted support systems, inclusive practices, and collaborative efforts, higher education institutions, internship providers, and policymakers can contribute to the creation of a more equitable and empowering landscape for international students. Investing in the internship experiences and adaptation of international students not only benefits the students themselves but also enriches the diversity, innovation, and global competitiveness of the workforce. As international education continues to evolve, it is imperative that stakeholders remain committed to understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges of international students, ensuring that their internship experiences are transformative, meaningful, and conducive to their long-term success.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students could explore several promising avenues to deepen our understanding of this complex phenomenon. First, longitudinal studies tracking international students' internship experiences and adaptation processes over an extended period, from pre-departure preparations to post-internship reflections, would provide valuable insights into the dynamic nature of their cross-cultural journeys. Such research could illuminate the evolving challenges, coping mechanisms, and personal growth trajectories of international interns, shedding light on the long-term impact of internships on their academic, professional, and intercultural development. Second, comparative studies examining the internship experiences of international students across different host countries, institutions, and internship programs would offer a more nuanced understanding of the contextual factors shaping their adaptation processes. By investigating the influence of various cultural, social, and organizational contexts on international interns' experiences, future research could identify the key enablers and barriers to successful adaptation in diverse settings. This knowledge could inform the design of targeted support interventions and best practices for internship programs catering to international students. Third, future research could delve deeper into the role of social support networks in facilitating international students' adaptation during internships. Employing social network analysis techniques, researchers could map the structure and dynamics of international interns' support networks, examining the impact of network composition, tie strength, and resource exchange on their adaptation outcomes. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the types of social support most crucial for international interns' well-being and success, informing the development of peer mentoring programs and other support initiatives. Fourth, qualitative research employing in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic methods could offer a more granular understanding of international students' lived experiences during internships. By capturing their narratives, perceptions, and meaning-making processes, such studies could illuminate the subtle challenges, cultural negotiations, and identity transformations that international interns undergo. This rich, contextualized knowledge could complement quantitative findings and inform the development of culturally sensitive support services and training programs for international interns.

Fifth, future research could investigate the role of individual differences, such as personality traits, self-efficacy, and cultural intelligence, in shaping international students' internship experiences and adaptation outcomes. By examining the interplay between personal characteristics and contextual factors, researchers could identify the key predictors of successful adaptation and develop targeted interventions to enhance international interns' intercultural competence and resilience. Sixth, collaborative research involving multiple stakeholders, such as international students, internship supervisors, host organizations, and higher education institutions, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the internship ecosystem. By engaging diverse perspectives and experiences, such studies could identify the systemic challenges and opportunities for fostering inclusive and supportive internship environments for international students. This knowledge could inform the development of integrated support services, training programs, and policy initiatives that promote the success and well-being of international interns.

Finally, future research could explore the impact of emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, on international students' internship experiences and adaptation processes. As remote and hybrid internships become more prevalent, investigating the potential of these technologies to enhance cross-cultural learning, communication, and collaboration could open up new avenues for supporting international interns' adaptation and professional development.

In conclusion, future research on the internship experiences and adaptation strategies of international students should adopt a multidisciplinary, multi-method, and collaborative approach to capture the complexity and diversity of this phenomenon. By leveraging longitudinal, comparative, and qualitative research designs, examining the role of social support networks and individual differences, and exploring the potential of emerging technologies, researchers can generate novel insights and practical recommendations to support the success and well-being of international interns. Such research will not only advance our theoretical understanding of cross-cultural adaptation processes but also inform the development of evidence-based policies and practices that foster inclusive and transformative internship experiences for international students in an increasingly interconnected world.

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