

Psychological Adaptation Differences and Strategies Among International Students: An Inquiry and Practice from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: The globalization process has spurred the rapid development of international education, with the total number of international students worldwide exceeded 6 million by 2023. However, psychological adaptation challenges in cross-cultural learning have become a critical bottleneck affecting its progress. Through literature analysis and questionnaire surveys (sample N=200), this study systematically examines the manifestations and causes of differences in psychological adaptation among international students. The findings reveal that cultural differences, language proficiency, and lack of social support are the primary influencing factors. Based on Berry's cross-cultural adaptation model, this study proposes targeted strategies, including layered language training, cultural adaptation workshops, and mental health early warning mechanisms, providing theoretical insights and practical recommendations for international education institutions.

Keywords: International Students; Differences in Psychological Adaptation; Cross-Cultural Adaptation Strategies; Mental Health Intervention

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization, the number of international students continues to grow, bringing increasing attention to their psychological adaptation challenges. When studying abroad, international students must navigate significant differences in language, culture, and lifestyle while coping with

academic, social, and other pressures—all of which profoundly impact their psychological adjustment. Notably, substantial variations exist in how different international students adapt psychologically. A deeper investigation into these differences and the exploration of effective coping strategies are crucial for promoting their mental well-being and holistic development. This study adopts a quantitative approach (questionnaire survey) from an interdisciplinary perspective to examine the multifaceted causes of psychological adaptation disparities among international students and proposes integrated intervention strategies.

2. Survey on the Psychological Adaptation of International Students

2.1 Survey Participants

This study targeted international students studying at universities or institutions in Heilongjiang Province. A total of 200 data of international students in China were collected. Among them, 55% were male and 45% were female (Figure 1). 35% of participants were from Southeast Asian countries, and 25% were from African countries (Figure 2). The major distribution was mainly in engineering (45%) and business (30%) (Figure 3). The stratified random sampling method was used to ensure the diversity of the sample.

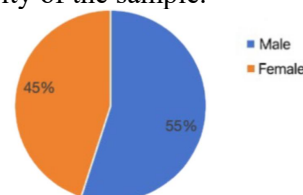


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

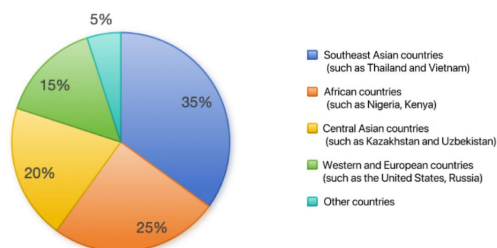


Figure 2. Nationality Distribution of Survey Respondents

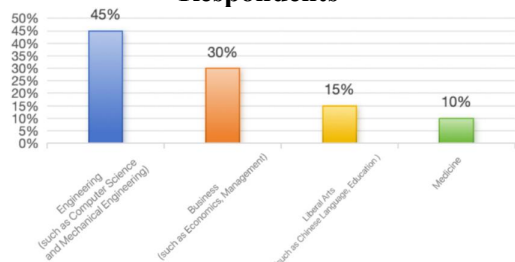


Figure 3. Distribution of Survey Respondents' Majors

2.2 Survey Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research method. Data were collected through the self-developed "Questionnaire on the Psychological Adaptation of International Students". The questionnaire design referred to Berry's cross-cultural adaptation model and relevant literature, covering dimensions such as cultural adaptation, mental health, and social support [1]. The specific implementation process is as follows:

- **Questionnaire Design:** It contains 20 questions, including multiple-choice, multiple-answer, and open-ended questions.
- **Data Collection:** Distributed through online platforms (Wenjuanxing) and offline classrooms, a total of 200 valid questionnaires were recovered, with a recovery rate of 92%.
- **Data Analysis:** Calculate the proportion of each option (such as the frequency of stress, choice of coping methods).

2.3 Analysis of Survey Results

2.3.1 Quantitative Manifestations of Psychological Adaptation Differences

(1) Stress and Coping Methods

35% of the students "often" felt stressed (Figure 4), but only 10% chose "seek professional psychological counseling". More students relied on informal support, such as listening to music (70%) and venting to friends (60%) (Figure 5). This result confirms the core role of social support in cross-cultural adaptation but also highlights the problem of

insufficient utilization of mental health services [2].

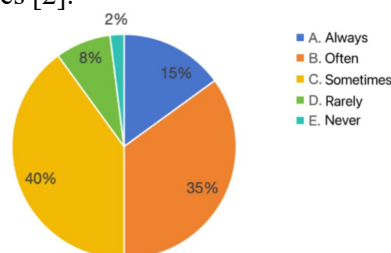


Figure 4. Frequency of Stress Experienced by Survey Respondents

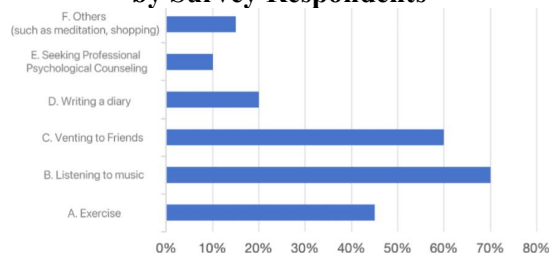


Figure 5. Ways Survey Respondents Cope with Stress

(2) Emotional Regulation Ability

55% of the students self-evaluated their emotional regulation ability as "good" or "very good" (Figure 6), which was closely related to the high proportion of "optimistic and positive" (65%) and "outgoing and cheerful" (50%) in their personality traits (Figure 7). This indicates that a positive personality is an important protective factor for psychological resilience.

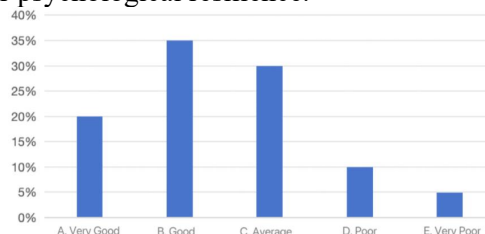


Figure 6. Emotional Regulation Ability of Survey Respondents

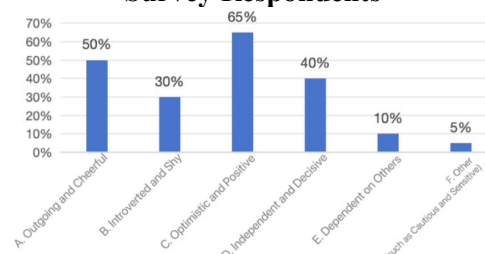


Figure 7. Personality Traits of Survey Respondents

2.3.2 Interactive Influence between Cultural Adaptation and Social Integration

(1) Cultural Conflict and Adaptation

45% of the students believed that there was "some conflict, but it was acceptable" in

cultural conflict (Figure 8), and 50% of these students were "mostly adapted" to the living habits. The data verifies the effectiveness of the "integration strategy" in Berry's model-that is, retaining one's own culture while accepting the new culture [1].

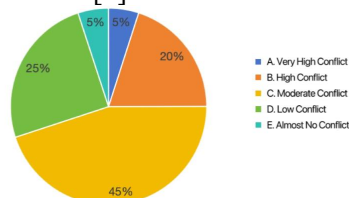


Figure 8. Degree of Cultural Value Conflict Experienced by Survey Respondents

(2) Language Ability and Social Interaction
Cross-analysis showed that 30% of those with language difficulties had "Have a limited number of friends" in their social circles, which was significantly higher than 10% of those individuals without language difficulties ($\chi^2=12.5$, $p=0.002$) (Table 1). This confirms that insufficient language ability can hinder cross-cultural social integration and lead to increased feelings of isolation [3].

Table 1. Cross-Analysis of Language Difficulty and Social Circle(N=200)

Degree of language difficulty	Have a limited number of friends (%)	Other social circumstance (%)
Individuals with Language Difficulties(n=80)	30%	70%
Individuals without language difficulties(n=120)	10%	90%
Results of the chi-square test	$\chi^2=12.5$, $p=0.002$	

2.3.3 Contradictory Situation of Mental Health Services

(1) Low Service Utilization Rate

70% of the students did not use psychological counseling services. The main reasons were "Belief That It Is Not Needed" and "Lack of Awareness of the Service" (Figure 9). This phenomenon may be related to cultural shame and insufficient service promotion [4]. It is necessary to optimize the service design through the "social support" dimension in Berry's model [1].

(2) Differentiated Service Evaluation

Among the students who had used the service, only 10% rated it as "very good", and 40% thought it was "average" (Figure 10), indicating that the pertinence and effectiveness of the existing services still need

to be improved.

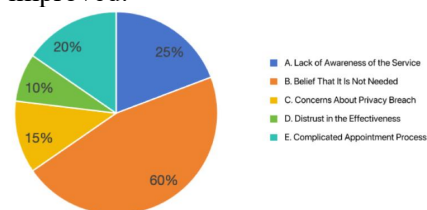


Figure 9. Reasons for Non-Utilization of Psychological Counseling Services by Survey Respondents

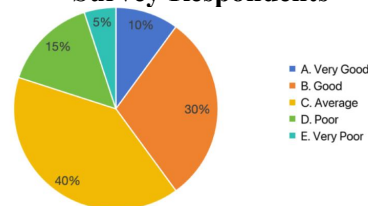


Figure 10. Evaluation of Psychological Services by Survey Respondents

3. Manifestations of Psychological Adaptation Differences among International Students

3.1 Emotional Fluctuations and Mental Health Problems

Some international students can quickly integrate into the new environment, maintain a positive and optimistic attitude, and demonstrate strong psychological resilience. They can actively face challenges and have relatively stable emotions. However, another group of students are constantly troubled by negative emotions. Emotions such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness frequently occur [5]. For instance, some students feel isolated due to their inability to adapt to the social norms in the new cultural environment. They remain in a low-mood state for a long time, which seriously affects their learning and quality of life. The survey shows that approximately 12.5% of international students experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression to varying degrees during their study abroad (Figure 11), highlighting the seriousness of mental health issues among international students.

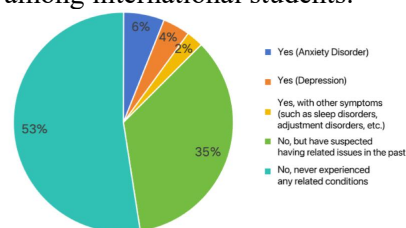


Figure 11. Mental Health Status of Survey Respondents

3.2 Differences in Learning Adaptation Ability

In terms of learning, some international students, with strong self-learning abilities and good learning habits, can quickly adapt to foreign teaching models and course requirements. They are adept at leveraging various learning resources, actively participate in classroom interactions, and achieve excellent academic performance. However, some students encounter numerous difficulties in their studies. Due to language barriers and cultural differences, they struggle to understand professional knowledge and keep up with the teaching progress. This leads to a blow to their learning confidence and may even result in an aversion to learning [6].

3.3 Variations in Social Integration Levels

Students with higher levels of adaptation actively expand their social networks by taking the initiative to build deep friendships with both local students and other international peers. They respect the differences of diverse cultural backgrounds and thrive in multicultural exchanges. Conversely, some students are passive in social situations. Due to factors such as poor language expression and unfamiliarity with cultural customs, they find it difficult to integrate into the local social circle and have a low participation rate in social activities. This further exacerbates their feelings of loneliness and discomfort.

4. Factors Affecting Psychological Adaptation Differences among International Students

4.1 Cultural Differences and Cultural Adaptation Ability

Cultural differences are one of the main challenges in the psychological adaptation of international students. Cultures across countries and regions differ significantly in values, beliefs, social norms, and related dimensions [5]. For example, Western cultures emphasize individualism, while Eastern cultures focus on collectivism. Such differences may cause confusion and conflicts for international students in interpersonal communication and value judgment. In addition, individuals' cultural adaptation

abilities differ. Students with strong cross-cultural communication skills and an open-minded attitude tend to adapt to new cultural environments more quickly. In contrast, those with weaker cultural adaptation abilities may experience culture shock and develop various psychological problems [7].

4.2 Language Ability and Communication Barriers

Language is an essential tool for international students' study and life. Good language proficiency helps them better understand course content and communicate with others. Students with stronger language skills are more confident in learning and social interactions and have relatively less psychological stress. Conversely, students with insufficient language skills have difficulty keeping up with the teaching pace in class and feel frustrated and lonely in social situations due to communication difficulties, which seriously affects their psychological adaptation [8].

4.3 Personal Personality and Psychological Resilience

Outgoing, optimistic, and cheerful international students are usually more proficient at initiating interactions with others. When facing difficulties, they can actively seek solutions and have strong psychological resilience. In contrast, introverted and sensitive students may be more passive in new environments. They tend to isolate themselves when encountering problems and have relatively weak psychological adjustment abilities. Personal psychological resilience also plays a crucial role. Students with strong psychological resilience can better cope with stress and setbacks and maintain a good psychological state [9].

4.4 Differences in Social Support Systems

The support from family, school, and society is vital for the psychological adaptation of international students. Emotional support and encouragement from family can enhance students' self-confidence and sense of security. Comprehensive support services provided by schools, such as psychological counseling and academic tutoring, can also help students solve practical problems and relieve psychological stress [10]. Moreover, the

tolerance and friendliness of the social environment affect the psychological feelings of international students. If society has an open and accepting attitude towards international students, they will find it easier to integrate into local life and have a better psychological adaptation [6].

5. Strategies to Promote the Psychological Adaptation of International Students

5.1 Strengthen Cross-Cultural Education and Training

Schools should offer systematic cross-cultural education courses to help international students understand the cultural background, customs, and values of the host country, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural awareness and communication skills. Through activities such as cultural lectures and cultural experience events, students can experience and understand the differences among cultures in practice, reducing the psychological impact caused by cultural conflicts. For example, establish cultural adaptation workshops, organize international students to visit local historical and cultural attractions, and participate in traditional festival celebrations to increase their sense of identity with local culture.

5.2 Enhance Language Support and Tutoring

Provide diverse language training courses and develop personalized learning plans based on students' language proficiency and learning needs. Besides classroom teaching, make use of online learning platforms and language exchange partners to create more language practice opportunities for students [11]. At the same time, enhance academic English instruction to help students apply language skills effectively in professional contexts and better adapting to learning requirements.

5.3 Improve the Mental Health Service System

Schools should establish and improve mental health service institutions for international students, staffed with professional psychological counselors to provide students with timely and effective psychological counseling services. Conduct mental health education activities, such as mental health

lectures and psychological development training, to enhance students' mental health awareness and self-adjustment ability. Additionally, a mental health early-warning mechanism can be established to promptly identify and intervene with students who have mental problems.

5.4 Create a Favorable Social Environment

Schools and communities should actively organize various social activities to build communication platforms for international students, promoting interaction and cooperation between them and local students as well as other international students [12]. Encourage students to participate in community organizations and volunteer activities to expand their social circles and enhance their sense of belonging. For example, establish an international students' union and organize various cultural, sports, and academic exchange activities, enabling students to make friends and share experiences during these activities.

6. Conclusion

The differences in psychological adaptation among international students are complex issues influenced by multiple factors. Paying attention to the psychological adaptation problems of international students is not only crucial for their personal growth and development but also of great significance for improving the quality of international education. This study innovatively combines Berry's model with empirical data, revealing the mechanisms of interaction among language, culture, and social support. Through strategies such as strengthening cross-cultural education, enhancing language support, improving the mental health service system, and creating a favorable social environment, the psychological adaptation of international students can be effectively promoted. This helps them better integrate into the new environment, enhancing their study-abroad experience and overall well-being. In the future, further in-depth research on the characteristics and laws of international students' psychological adaptation is needed. It is necessary to continuously optimize and improve relevant strategies to safeguard the mental health of international students.

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