



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Educational Institutions: A Comparative Analysis of Approaches in Different Countries

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 27(01), 2800-2805

Publication history: Received on 07 June 2025; revised on 25 July 2025; accepted on 27 July 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.27.1.2677>

Abstract

The article explores the specific features of different countries' approaches to cross-cultural adaptation in educational institutions. The purpose of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of cross-cultural adaptation methodologies in educational establishments across various countries, to identify the main factors that determine their effectiveness, and to formulate well-founded recommendations. A systems analysis of publications devoted to adaptation models, institutional strategies, and empirical data on the experiences of international students is used as the methodological foundation. The theoretical framework of the study is composed of the classic acculturation concepts of J. Berry and M. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. The results obtained indicate that the success of the adaptation process is conditioned by the synergy of active institutional initiatives — linguistic, academic, and socio-psychological support — and the individual characteristics of students. The comparative analysis revealed differences between assimilation strategies and approaches aimed at integration and the encouragement of multiculturalism. Particular attention is given to the advanced practices of leading host countries for international students, such as Canada and Australia, as well as to systemic shortcomings in the support infrastructure of states with less developed practices of international educational activity. The scientific novelty of the work lies in a holistic assessment of contemporary national adaptation models and the identification of their convergent and divergent features, which is of interest to university administrators, international education specialists, practicing psychologists, and researchers in intercultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Adaptation; International Students; Academic Mobility; Educational Institutions; Comparative Analysis; Acculturation Models; Institutional Support; Intercultural Competence; Internationalization Of Education; Psychological Well-Being

1. Introduction

The processes of globalization and the internationalization of the education system have led to an unprecedented rise in international academic mobility. The United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Canada remain the largest host countries, accounting for almost half of all international students. This phenomenon imposes on host institutions the complex task of organizing effective cross-cultural adaptation, on which academic success, psychological well-being, and overall satisfaction with the educational experience abroad directly depend [1, 11].

Despite the existing body of research on the adaptation of international students, a missing element remains – a comparative analysis of national strategies and institutional policies. Most studies are limited to examining the learning experience within a single country or even a single institution, which does not allow the identification of both universal and specific factors of success. The relevance of the present study lies in the need for a systematic understanding of best practices and characteristic challenges of the adaptation process in heterogeneous cultural-educational environments.

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The aim of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of cross-cultural adaptation methods in educational institutions of different countries, to identify the main factors determining their effectiveness, and to formulate well-grounded recommendations.

The scientific novelty of the work consists in a holistic assessment of contemporary national models of adaptation and the identification of their convergent and divergent features, which is of interest to university administrators, international education specialists, practicing psychologists, and researchers in intercultural communication.

The research hypothesis is that the educational systems of countries with a proactive state policy of multiculturalism and structured institutional support (for example, Canada, Australia) provide a higher level of successful sociocultural and psychological adaptation of international students compared with countries where assimilation models predominate or where a systemic approach is absent.

The results of the analysis will not only generalize global experience but also formulate practical recommendations for educational institutions striving to create an inclusive and supportive environment for students from different countries.

2. Materials and Methods

Contemporary research on the cross-cultural adaptation of international students increasingly relies on macro-analytical reviews and the synthesis of existing empirical data. Thus, in their study on student adaptation in China, Cao C., Meng Q. [1] identify in detail the catalytic factors—language readiness, social support, and institutional programmes—and systematise their impact on academic and sociocultural adaptation. The OECD report provides a panoramic view of global mobility trends, indicating the rapid redistribution of flows from Asia to Europe and North America, as well as the growing role of dual-degree programmes and short-term exchanges in shaping the profile of the intercultural student [11].

Questions of validity and universality of adaptation assessment methods compel scholars to revise diagnostic instruments. Idemudia E. S., Karing C., Ugwu L. E. [2] extend the East Asian acculturation framework to a multicultural context, demonstrating that the classical scales of integration, assimilation, and marginalisation require reconsideration when applied to African and Latin American groups. In turn, Donato K. et al. [8] advocate the use of organic data (social media, mobile traces, interactions in learning management systems) for dynamic monitoring of adaptation, which opens possibilities for more rapid and targeted interventions in student support.

The role of communication technologies in the adaptation process is highlighted by Zhang K. et al. [3], who investigated the influence of WeChat use on self-efficacy in social interactions and, consequently, on the success of students' sociocultural adaptation in China. The authors show the mediating role of social self-efficacy: active use of the platform increases students' confidence in interpersonal contacts, which accelerates acclimatisation to the new cultural environment. Strawbridge T. [9] demonstrates that the typology of students' social networks directly correlates with the rate of secondary language (L2) acquisition and affects the effectiveness of co-editing curricula to meet the needs of foreign participants.

Detailed case studies of the Canadian experience show how national and institutional characteristics transform the challenges of adaptation. Legusov O., Jafar H. F. [4] record changes in the profile of college students: whereas previously the majority came from China and India, countries of the Middle East and Latin America are now increasingly represented, which sets new tasks for multicultural services and the development of instructors' interethnic competence. Worae J., Edgerton J. D. [10], drawing on a survey of students at a Canadian university, note a shortage of coordinated entry support programmes and recommend the introduction of senior-junior mentoring as a key factor in reducing feelings of isolation and cultural shock.

The study of psychosocial aspects of adaptation has developed rapidly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mulaudzi I. C. [7] emphasises that first-year students face a complex set of stressors, including uncertainty regarding academic requirements and the loss of social reference points, which requires the implementation of pre-adaptation programmes even before arrival on campus. Allen R. E. et al. [6] provide data from a two-year longitudinal study of the dynamics of students' mental health during and after lockdowns: anxiety decreased with the resumption of in-person classes, yet a high level of depressive symptoms persists among those who lost social-network support during distance learning.

It is worth noting that the study by Molvinger K. et al. [5] focuses on the influence of Olympiads on students' skills and personal characteristics.

Thus, the literature analysis revealed several contradictions. First, some authors emphasise the predominant role of institutional programmes and supervisory practices, whereas others focus on students' autonomous social networks and digital platforms, creating a gap between macro- and micro-level studies. Second, methodological debates on the validity of acculturation instruments are inconsistent with proposals to use organic real-time data, revealing a lack of integration between traditional and digital approaches.

The following issues are the least covered:

- Cross-disciplinary research linking academic events (Olympiads, projects) with the dynamics of adaptation.
- Regional differences beyond China and Canada: few studies on student adaptation in Europe, Australia, African countries, and Latin America.
- The role of teacher preparation for intercultural classes and the effectiveness of different mentoring models.
- The effects of distance and hybrid learning on long-term adaptation and mental health.
- Addressing these gaps will align the disparate approaches and create a more integrated picture of cross-cultural adaptation in educational institutions.

3. Results and Discussion

The conducted study allows for a systematic representation of cross-cultural adaptation according to key parameters and reveals three typical national strategies that differ in the degree of involvement of governmental institutions, the scale of institutional practices, and the content of support programmes for international students. These models demonstrate how, at different stages – from the development of state policy to practical implementation – diverse student adaptation trajectories are formed, differing in the depth of social and professional integration.

The first, integration-oriented model, is characteristic of Canada and Australia: here international students are regarded not merely as a source of economic benefit but also as potential for augmenting the civic community. Governmental programmes provide open and predictable mechanisms for extending student visas, obtaining work permits and subsequent residence permits, which stimulates educational institutions to create comprehensive services – from assistance with visa issues and housing search to professional mentorship and events for familiarisation with the local culture [2].

The second, academically-oriented model, is typical of Germany, France and the United Kingdom and emphasises predominantly the scientific-academic aspect of talent attraction: introductory courses on educational standards, language training and navigation of university procedures are primary, whereas social integration remains largely the responsibility of the student. Although specialised support programmes exist, for example DAAD in Germany or Campus France, they are less closely linked to migration opportunities and the provision of work rights after study [6, 7].

The third, assimilation-fragmentary model, is characteristic of a number of Asian and East-European countries where the international education market has emerged relatively recently. A unified national strategy is virtually absent, and support institutions depend on the internal resources of universities. Emphasis is placed on formal admission and registration procedures, whereas psychosocial and cultural aspects of adaptation remain in the background, and students are expected to conform maximally to local norms with minimal reciprocal adaptation from the host community [5, 10].

Further, a comparative analysis of institutional support strategies is conducted, in which not only the set of services but also their quality, coverage and innovativeness are assessed (see Table 1).

Table 1 Comparative characteristics of institutional support programmes for international students (compiled by the author based on [2, 3, 6, 11]).

Support category	Integration-oriented model (Canada, Australia)	Academically-oriented model (Germany, United Kingdom)	Fragmentary model (examples)
Orientation programmes	Comprehensive, multi-day, encompassing everyday, cultural, academic, and legal aspects. Mandatory sessions on multiculturalism.	Predominantly academic focus: course structure, requirements, campus orientation.	Brief, formal, mostly concerning registration and timetable.

Language support	Courses in English as a Second Language at all levels, language tandems with domestic students, writing centres.	Robust programmes for learning the state language, but less support for those studying in English in non-English-speaking countries.	Basic courses, often insufficient for effective communication.
Academic support	Workshops on academic writing, time management, and examination preparation; tutoring and mentoring system.	Developed system of academic advising, access to research supervisors.	Limited to consultations with individual instructors.
Psychological assistance	Accessible and confidential psychological counselling services with staff trained to address intercultural issues.	Standard psychological support services, not always adapted to the specific problems of international students such as culture shock and nostalgia.	Practically absent or difficult to access.
Social integration	Actively functioning international clubs, buddy/host family programmes, regular intercultural events, volunteer projects.	Student unions and clubs, but the initiative for integration rests on the student.	Events are episodic, often organised by the students themselves.
Career support	Seminars on job search and resume writing, job fairs, consultations on obtaining a post-graduation work permit (PGWP).	General career centres, weak integration with immigration legislation.	Practically absent.

The data presented in the table clearly demonstrate that the effectiveness of the adaptation process is not achieved through isolated, albeit carefully considered, measures. To ensure successful student inculturation, a comprehensive, multi-level support mechanism is required, encompassing all stages of the student’s stay in the country.

Below, in Figure 1, the main factors and predictors of successful adaptation in educational institutions will be presented.

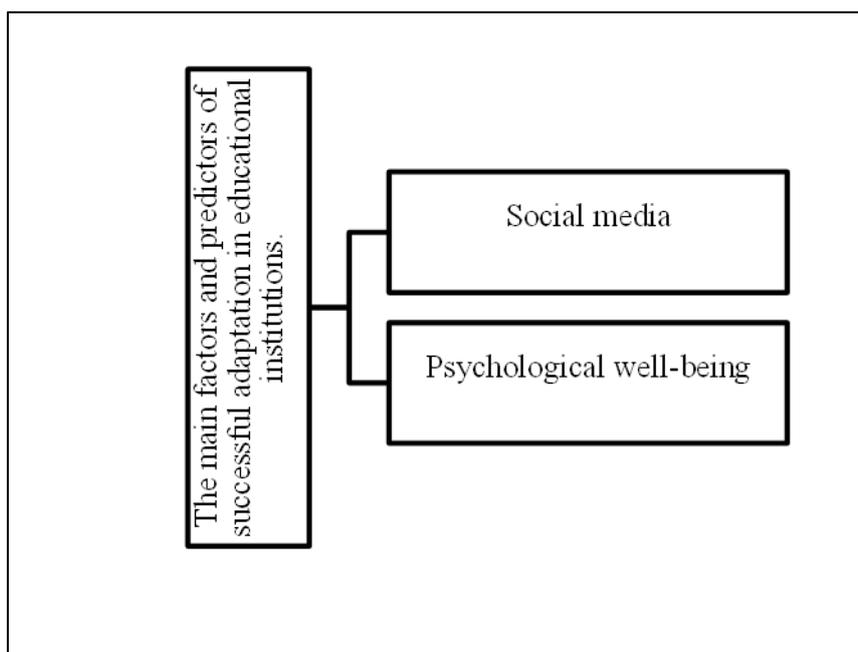


Figure 1 Main factors and predictors of successful adaptation in educational institutions (compiled by the author based on [4, 8, 10])

Let us now examine in greater detail the factors depicted in Figure 1. We shall begin with social networks; in this context, a well-developed system of social interactions represents one of the most reliable predictors of successful adaptation. Both intra-group ties among compatriots (bonding social capital), which provide emotional support and alleviate nostalgic experiences, and intercultural contacts (bridging social capital), which facilitate rapid language acquisition and deeper cultural integration, play an important role. Empirical data indicate that international students who maintain friendly relations with members of the host society show higher levels of satisfaction with their stay and lower indicators of stress [1]. As illustrated by Figure 2 on the basis of the model of J. Berry, it is the integrative behavioural strategy, which implies maintaining contacts with both groups, that ensures the optimal psychological state of adapting students.

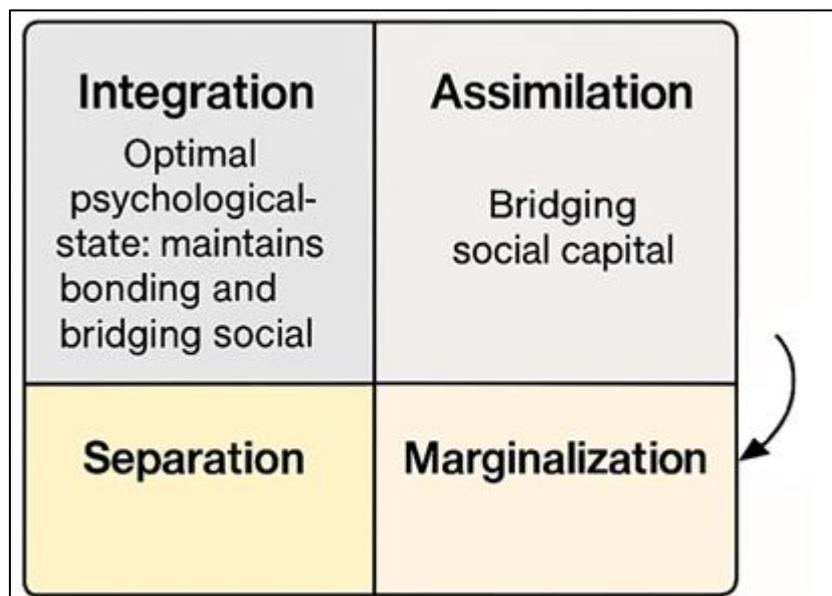


Figure 2 Model of acculturation strategies and social connections (compiled by the author based on [3, 9, 10])

Psychological well-being. The intensity of psychological distress is considered an indicator of successful adaptation. A comparative analysis of empirical data reveals an extremely high prevalence of depressive and anxious states among international students in various countries.

National adaptation strategies are interpreted as integrated systems in which state ideology (multiculturalism vs. assimilation), economic interests, and historically established educational paradigms jointly determine a specific institutional landscape. The author's hypothesis on the superiority of an integration-oriented model is confirmed by empirical data: states such as Canada form a comprehensive support ecosystem in which various components (from introductory orientation weeks to extensive immigration programs) act in synergy. However, even in the most advanced models, limitations persist. Thus, an excessive concentration of students from one country in individual universities contributes to the formation of closed ethnic enclaves and slows their inclusion in the university community, as demonstrated by the example of WeChat use [4]. Consequently, even the most carefully designed institutional strategies require supplementation with specific measures aimed at stimulating genuine intercultural interaction.

As a result of the analysis, it becomes clear that there is no universal approach to successful adaptation. At the same time, the comparative study confirms that the greatest results are achieved by systems that demonstrate proactivity, provide comprehensive support in all aspects of student life, and focus on integration rather than forced assimilation, while respecting the cultural identity of students and promoting mutual cultural enrichment.

4. Conclusion

The conducted study provided a comprehensive comparative examination of the methods of cross-cultural adaptation of international students in higher education institutions across various countries. Based on a systematic review of specialized publications for the period 2021–2025, key model types, applied strategies, and determinants of success in this process were identified.

The results confirm the assumption that the effectiveness of student adaptation is largely determined by the specifics of national and institutional policy. Countries that employ a proactive integration-oriented approach (for example, Canada and Australia) demonstrate the highest indicators of adaptation success by constructing a holistic ecosystem of support. This ecosystem encompasses academic programs, socio-psychological initiatives, provision of living conditions, and career development guidance, ensuring the harmonious integration of foreign students into the host community. Conversely, academically focused and fragmented models, often used in several European countries, shift the primary responsibility for adaptation to the students themselves, which results in higher stress levels and decreased satisfaction with the educational process.

It was established that universal predictors of successful adaptation include: established social networks both within one's own national diaspora and with representatives of the host country; the psychological well-being of participants; and the subjective assessment of the effectiveness of support institutions.

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