

Cultural Adaptation Anxiety Among Chinese Students in Romanian Universities: A Case Study of Babeş-Bolyai University

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With the increasing educational exchanges between China and Romania, the number of Chinese students in Romanian universities has grown significantly. This study examines cultural adaptation anxiety among Chinese students at Babeş-Bolyai University, a prominent Romanian institution. Using surveys, in-depth interviews, and analysis, the research reveals that Chinese students often experience cultural adaptation anxiety, manifested in communication barriers, cultural conflicts, and lifestyle adjustments. Key factors affecting this process include language difficulties, cultural differences, social environment, and personal traits. To alleviate cultural adaptation anxiety, the study proposes strategies at the institutional, societal, and personal levels. Universities should enhance language training, organize cultural exchange activities, and establish psychological support systems. Societal initiatives should foster a supportive environment through media representation, social organizations, and governmental policies, creating a welcoming atmosphere for international students. Individually, students should engage in self-adjustment, improve intercultural communication skills, and build resilience. Implementing these strategies will not only help Chinese students better adapt to the Romanian academic environment, promoting personal growth, but also foster cultural exchange and understanding between China and Romania.

Keywords: Romanian universities, Chinese students, cultural adaptation anxiety, coping strategies, Babeş-Bolyai University, intercultural communication

Introduction

With globalization accelerating, student mobility across countries has increased significantly, and more Chinese students are opting to study abroad. Romania and other Eastern European countries, with their unique educational resources and cultural appeal, are attracting more Chinese students. This trend provides Chinese students with broader academic perspectives and life experiences, while also fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and Romania.

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The process of cultural adaptation in a foreign country often presents various challenges for international students. Due to differences in cultural backgrounds, values, and lifestyles, students typically undergo a period of cultural adaptation, during which anxiety is almost inevitable. This anxiety can stem from language barriers, academic pressure, a reconstructed social network, or uncertainties about future career prospects.

If not addressed promptly, cultural adaptation anxiety can adversely affect students' academic performance, quality of life, and mental well-being. Prolonged anxiety may lead to low academic efficiency, social withdrawal, and psychological issues. More severely, these issues can hinder cultural integration and social adaptation, potentially leading to deeper cultural conflicts and psychological distress.

Understanding cultural adaptation anxiety among Chinese students in Romanian universities holds significant practical and academic value. By uncovering the causes and influences of their psychological challenges, this research aims to provide targeted support and counseling services for international students. Additionally, these insights offer valuable references for universities and educational institutions to enhance policies and improve student management. In the long term, this study not only contributes to elevating the quality of international education but also promotes cultural exchange and integration between China and Romania.

Literature Review on Cultural Adaptation

Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Adaptation Abroad

Cultural adaptation, initially defined as the cumulative changes experienced by different cultural groups through sustained interaction, has been a research focus in various fields. Early Western studies on cultural adaptation concentrated on the psychological well-being of immigrants, setting a foundation for theoretical development. In 1921, Parks and Miller proposed a unidimensional model, which portrays cultural adaptation as a linear path from complete non-adaptation to full assimilation into the host culture. However, this model fails to consider bicultural identity or marginalized groups who feel alienated from both cultures, as well as the bidirectional nature of adaptation.

In response to these limitations, John W. Berry developed a two-dimensional model, classifying adaptation strategies into integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization. This model highlights how individuals can maintain their original cultural identity while integrating into a new culture, creating a balance between the two. Additionally, in 1960, Oberg introduced the concept of "culture shock", describing the psychological stress and adaptation challenges individuals face during intercultural encounters. Oberg outlined four stages of culture shock—initial excitement, crisis, recovery, and eventual adjustment—along with six dimensions of psychological experience: stress, confusion, exclusion, bewilderment, anxiety, and helplessness.

Domestic Perspectives on Cultural Adaptation

Chinese scholars have contributed their own interpretations of intercultural adaptation, often aligning with domestic contexts. Chen Guoming (2009) likened the adaptation process to a performance across cultural boundaries, involving mutual learning and adjustment by both parties. Other notable concepts include Huang Yonghong's (2009) theories on the bidirectional and reverse adaptation of cultures and Liu Junzhen's (2010) idea of maximizing cross-cultural effectiveness. This research leverages these intercultural adaptation frameworks to explore the unique adaptation pathways of Chinese students in Romania.

Methodology

Using questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and analytical methods, this study investigates the factors influencing

cultural adaptation anxiety among Chinese students at Babeş-Bolyai University. The research sample comprises approximately 50 students across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. The study's findings inform targeted strategies for alleviating adaptation anxiety, contributing new perspectives and methodological support to address this issue among international students.

Factors Affecting Cultural Adaptation

Language Barriers

Language difficulties present a primary challenge for Chinese students, as Romanian is not a widely spoken language. Many students experience frustration when they cannot fully express themselves or understand others, leading to misunderstandings and heightened feelings of isolation and helplessness.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences, including social customs, time management, and attitudes toward personal space, often puzzle Chinese students. These cultural contrasts can cause feelings of disorientation and uncertainty, compounding adaptation challenges.

Social Environment

The different societal and educational structures in Romania require students to establish new routines and social circles. This process can be demanding and time-consuming, and the unexpected difficulties encountered often result in feelings of frustration and anxiety.

Individual Factors

Individual traits, resilience, and cross-cultural communication skills also influence the adaptation process. Students who are outgoing and resilient may adapt more readily and integrate more fully, while those with limited communication skills may face greater challenges.

Results

The study collected quantitative and qualitative data, offering a comprehensive overview of Chinese students' adaptation experiences at Babeş-Bolyai University.

Language and Communication

The results indicate that only 10% of the students feel fully competent in Romanian, while a majority experience significant challenges in language usage, particularly in everyday interactions. Proficiency in English, though relatively high, is not sufficient to overcome the barriers posed by limited Romanian language skills.

Academic Adaptation

Half of the students found their courses highly challenging, with considerable difficulty in adjusting to a new teaching style that emphasizes independent learning and critical thinking. This divergence from Chinese academic expectations led to increased stress for many students.

Social Integration

Most students struggle with cultural differences, citing dietary habits, social etiquette, and time management as common issues. The limited ability to build stable friendships with local students further exacerbates social isolation.

Coping Strategies and Recommendations

Institutional Support

Babeş-Bolyai University should consider optimizing its curriculum and teaching methods, providing guidance tailored to the cultural backgrounds of international students. Assigning mentors to students and promoting interactions between local and international students could improve social integration and lessen feelings of alienation.

Societal Engagement

Media outlets could raise awareness of the positive contributions made by international students, while social organizations could offer volunteer and internship opportunities. Governmental policies should also provide scholarships and employment assistance to support students' integration into the local workforce.

Individual Self-adjustment

Chinese students should cultivate a positive attitude toward cultural challenges, enhancing resilience through counseling and emotional regulation strategies. Engaging in local activities and developing intercultural communication skills can significantly enhance their adaptation process.

Conclusion

The study underscores the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation anxiety among Chinese students in Romanian universities. By addressing language barriers, cultural differences, and social integration challenges, and implementing supportive strategies at the institutional, societal, and personal levels, Chinese students can better navigate their adaptation journey. These findings offer practical insights for improving international student support systems and contribute to the broader discourse on intercultural adaptation in educational contexts.

This study acknowledges certain limitations and presents ample scope for future research. The current research focuses primarily on Chinese international students at Babeş-Bolyai University. Although this institution holds some representativeness, the findings may not fully reflect the cultural adaptation anxiety experienced by Chinese students across all universities in Romania. Future studies could consider expanding the sample to include students from a broader range of universities, thereby enhancing the generalizability and breadth of the research. Additionally, due to constraints in time, manpower, and other resources, there may be limitations in data collection and analysis. Future research could adopt more diversified data collection methods, such as longitudinal surveys or online data mining, to acquire richer and more comprehensive data. It is hoped that more scholars will continue to focus on this field, contributing valuable insights and efforts to advance research on cultural adaptation among international students.

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