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Implementing Chinese Student Support Services at a German Technical University

Eika Auschner

Hochschule Bielefeld – University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

Lili Jiang

EduNetwork GmbH, Germany

ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigate the challenges that Chinese students face at a German technical university, highlighting key obstacles such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited trust in institutional support. Through thematic analysis of qualitative data collected in 20 in-depth interviews with Chinese students enrolled at a German technical university and following a biographical narrative approach, the findings underscore the importance of tailored support measures. The proposed interventions focus on academic success, psychological well-being, and career preparation, providing a comprehensive framework for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment. These insights aim to enhance the integration and overall experience of Chinese students in Germany.

Keywords: Chinese students, Germany, international students, intercultural competence, overseas student integration

The twenty-first century has witnessed rapid growth in the number of Chinese students going abroad to study. In 2019 alone, the Chinese Ministry of Education recorded a total of 703,500 Chinese students who went abroad to pursue further education. The number increased by 6.25% compared with that in 2018, and China has been the largest country of origin for international students in the world (Statista, 2024). Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of students studying abroad dropped to 450,900 in 2020. Despite this decline, the figures were anticipated to return to prepandemic levels by 2023 (Statista, 2024).

Along with the trend of studying abroad, there has also been rapid growth in the number of Chinese students coming to Germany to study. In the academic

year of 2023/2024, approximately 42,200 Chinese students were enrolled in German universities, accounting for 13.1% of all international students (Statista, 2024). Owing to the large number of Chinese students at German universities, universities support the integration of Chinese students academically and promote a welcoming and inclusive environment on campuses (Heublein et al., 2022).

In July 2023, the German government published its strategy in China (Federal Foreign Office of Germany, 2023). In terms of Chinese expertise, it emphasizes the importance of developing independent expertise in China across various sectors, particularly through education. It calls for fostering this expertise in schools and universities with a focus on language skills and encourages collaboration between educational institutions and the business sector. Additionally, it advocates for increased exchanges between German and Chinese students and academics to enhance understanding through personal and academic connections.

On the other hand, German–Chinese relations currently take a “denisking” approach (Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2023), and many German universities are becoming increasingly concerned about the potential risks of espionage by their Chinese partners (Felden, 2023). Some universities, such as FAU in Erlangen and Nuremberg, have acted accordingly: they have ended cooperating with the China Scholarship Council (CSC) and will not accept any CSC scholarship holders from July 2023 onward (Forschung und Lehre, 2023). These developments have also led to a more challenging situation for Chinese students and scholars in Germany. Many of them struggle to navigate between different cultures, political systems, social norms, and academic environments while studying and researching in Germany. Universities should thus be aware of the political situation and its implications for students’ well-being. The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) suggests that German education institutions should adopt measures to better integrate Chinese students to avoid conflicts and benefit from the talent pool (Mao, 2020).

Despite the increasing importance of integrating Chinese students into German universities, many continue to face significant challenges in achieving successful academic adaptation, especially in the current context mentioned above. This paper explores the following research questions: What factors hinder Chinese students’ academic adaptation to German campus life, and what measures can German universities implement to improve the situation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Etymologically speaking, studying abroad is usually termed *liuxue* 留学 in Chinese. This is a Japanese loanword from *ryūgaku* 留学, which was first used to refer to young Japanese students who went to China to study and stayed on in the Tang dynasty (Liu, 2007). *Liuxue* or *ryūgaku* literally means “stay-study.” It emphasizes both the element of “study” and the element of “stay.” According to Wang, *liuxue* usually alludes to students staying overseas for a relatively long period of time, “to receive the fullest possible instruction and master a particular branch of knowledge or acquire a superior profession.” (Wang, 2007)

Owing to the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad, extensive literature has been published to understand the challenges these students face and to design support services that address their needs. These challenges are often categorized into three areas: 1) study-related problems, such as admission issues, academic pressure, and contact with lecturers; 2) integration difficulties, including language barriers and a lack of interaction with local students; and 3) nonuniversity-related problems, such as visa issues, insurance, and housing (DAAD & DZHW, 2019).

While much of the research on Chinese students has focused primarily on these categories, it is important to distinguish between two intertwined lines of research: academic adaptation and acculturation processes. Academic adaptation involves how students adjust to educational systems, including study-related challenges and academic performance, under different teaching methods and pedagogical expectations (Li, 2017; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021). In contrast, acculturation involves the broader process of cultural and social integration, including the challenges of language proficiency and the ability to build social connections with locals (Pho & Schartner, 2019; Yu & Moskal, 2018).

METHOD

In the winter semester of 2022–2023, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Chinese students studying various majors at a German technical university. In compliance with institutional guidelines for research involving participants, the university's International House granted ethical approval for the study. Verbal consent was obtained from each participant after they were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. The participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Interview Procedure

Participants were recruited through workshops and German language courses via a snowball sampling method. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants. To reduce anxiety and encourage openness, interviews were not audio-recorded; instead, extensive notes were taken. This approach helped participants feel more at ease, particularly those concerned about privacy or potential errors in their responses.

Participant Demographics

The study involved 20 Chinese students enrolled in various master's programs at a German technical university during the winter semester of 2022–2023. The participants' demographic characteristics were as follows:

The sample included 20 participants, comprising seven females and thirteen males, aged between 23 and 30 years. Most of the students were pursuing degrees

in technical fields, including Electromobility (6), Mechanical Engineering (7), Automotive Technology (5), and Culture of the Technological-Scientific World (2). At the time of the interviews, they had been in Germany for two months to two years. All participants had attained a minimum language proficiency level of C1 in German, a requirement for university admission. However, their self-reported comfort with using German in academic contexts varied significantly, with 80% expressing a lack of confidence in doing so.

With respect to the interview techniques, a biographical narrative method according to Rosenthal (1995) was applied. In this approach, the researcher should encourage the interviewees to shape their own perspective and express their memory processes. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to cultivate strong focus and active listening skills, enabling the interviewees to share their thoughts freely and openly.

Rosenthal divided the narrative interview process into two phases. First, the main narrative allows participants to form their own story or perspective. The researcher begins with a single open-ended question and does not interrupt until the participant completes their main narrative. For example, the researcher might ask, “We are interested in Chinese students studying in Germany; could you share your story with me? Take as much time as you need. I will just take notes and not interrupt.” In the second phase, the researcher asks “internal questions” on the basis of the themes the participant has already mentioned, followed by “external questions” addressing topics the researcher wishes to explore but which the participant has not yet touched upon. The aim of this second phase is to encourage the interviewee to expand on their story. An example of an internal question might be “Could you elaborate on the difficulties you faced studying in Germany?” If the participant mentioned difficulties but did not explain them any further (Jiang, 2022).

The aspects discussed in the interviews included the Chinese students’ motivation and predeparture preparation, their study experience, and intercultural communication issues. The interviews followed a semistructured format, using open-ended questions designed to capture the students’ experiences and perceptions.

Thematic analysis, guided by Mayring’s (2014) qualitative content analysis, was used to analyze the interview data. The process began with familiarization, where researchers thoroughly reviewed the transcripts to identify key ideas. Initial coding followed, where meaningful segments of text were labeled on the basis of their relevance to the research objectives.

Table 1: Sample Questions

Category	Sample Questions
Motivation and Preparation	“What motivated you to study in Germany?” “How did you prepare for your studies before arriving?”
Integration Experience on Campus	“What has your experience been like adapting to the German higher education system?” “Have you participated in any social activities or student support programs on campus? If so, how have they impacted your experience?”
Study Experience	“What challenges have you faced in your academic journey?” “How do you feel about your interactions with professors and peers?”
Suggestions for Improvement	“What support services would have helped you during your studies?” “How can universities better assist Chinese students?”

The codes were grouped into broader themes, such as motivations to study in Germany, challenges faced by students, intercultural communication experiences, expectations from universities, etc. Subthemes were developed to capture specific aspects within these themes, such as language barriers, knowledge gaps, cultural differences, pedagogical differences, etc. To ensure reliability, two researchers reviewed and refined the coding process, resolving any discrepancies through discussion. This systematic approach provided a nuanced understanding of the participants’ experiences.

RESULTS

Motivation

Eighty percent of the interviewed students had diverse motivations for choosing Germany as their study destination. The study utilized a thematic approach to analyze the motivations of Chinese students for choosing Germany as their study destination, employing the concept of push and pull factors as a guiding framework. To identify these factors, the interview questions specifically addressed participants’ reasons for leaving China and choosing Germany. For example:

Push factors: “What challenges or limitations did you perceive in pursuing higher education or employment in China?”

Pull factors: “What features of Germany make it an attractive destination for your studies?”

The participants’ responses were categorized on the basis of common themes, such as academic competitiveness, perceived career benefits, and Germany’s

educational reputation. Thematic coding was applied to group the responses into broader push and pull categories. This approach allowed for a detailed understanding of the external and internal motivations influencing their decisions. The most common push factors include a) the competitive environment for both education and employment in China; b) the increased value of holding an international degree; and c) the availability of support in the form of scholarships, information, and German language courses: “In China, the competition for universities and jobs is intense, and I felt that studying abroad would give me a unique edge” (Student 2).

As Student 5 mentioned, “The value of an international degree is undeniable. It opens doors not just in China but globally, which is why I chose to come to Germany” (Student 1).

The primary pull factors are a) Germany’s reputation for high-quality education and its long-standing university tradition, b) excellence in the technical and engineering fields, c) relatively affordable cost of living and the absence of tuition fees, and d) the opportunity to gain broader international experience: “Germany has a long-standing reputation for quality education. I knew that studying here would provide me with a strong foundation for my career” (Student 3). “Germany is known for its excellence in the technical and engineering fields. I wanted to be part of that tradition” (Student 9). “The cost of living here is much more affordable than in the U.S., and the fact that there are no tuition fees made studying here a lot more financially affordable” (Student 20). These findings also align with the reasons discussed in the literature mentioned earlier in this paper (Lee & Stewart, 2022; Jiao, 2025; Nghia, 2019; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Predeparture preparation

Ninety percent of the interviewed students had taken German language courses before coming to Germany, with many completing a one-year course in the country before beginning their studies. However, few had engaged in specialized training in German culture and society. Some admitted to having only basic knowledge of the country, which they had often acquired in geography or history lessons at school or through the media, particularly the internet. Many noted that the information they found in the media gave them only a vague understanding of Germany. Over 80% of the students reported that they had primarily searched for information about studying in Germany on Chinese websites. Additionally, while study abroad agencies assist with preparations, they are often commercialized and offer limited information.

Except for two students, the interviewees had little international travel experience and were often the first in their families to travel or study abroad. As these students are typically the “first generation of international mobility” in their families, their relatives cannot provide much advice about studying or living abroad (Jiang, 2022).

In short, most Chinese students are inadequately prepared for the transition to living in Germany. Cultural knowledge is an important part of intercultural

development. The lack of both the experience of living abroad and sufficient information about student life in Germany leads to numerous challenges.

Identified challenges during their studies

The main challenges identified in the literature that Chinese students face at German universities can be summarized into four categories: 1) language barriers, 2) knowledge gaps, 3) cultural differences, and 4) pedagogical differences (Li, 2017). Our interviews confirmed these four challenges.

Language barriers

In Li's research, this was highlighted as one of the major challenges faced by Chinese students during their integration process (Li, 2017). We also found that these language challenges significantly hinder not only academic performance but also social integration for Chinese students.

Owing to language difficulties, Chinese students are mostly challenged by communication problems with the university. Despite the various student support services provided by the university for international students, Chinese students normally find it quite uncomfortable to directly turn to the university for further assistance. The lack of direct dialog and communication with universities impedes many Chinese students from facing obstacles regarding their study and cultural adaptation in Germany.

Many of the Chinese students in our interviews found it difficult to reach out to or participate in the student support programs already offered by the university. Owing to their limited German language skills and the large cultural gap, many Chinese students find the language and cultural barriers quite daunting to overcome: "Even though the university offers many support services, I often hesitate to participate because I am not confident in my German. It feels like I'm always behind in understanding the language" (Student 19). As Student 8 expressed, "Sometimes I feel too shy to join activities or workshops. I'm afraid my German isn't good enough, and I do not want to stand out or make mistakes" (Student 8).

Even when some students were motivated enough to participate in some of the activities of the existing student support programs, many of them dropped out halfway through. Although many students achieved relatively good language test scores after intensive German courses, the German language skills of some Chinese students even declined during their stay in Germany. One explanation for this is that many Chinese students mainly stay within the Chinese community after entering the study programs, conversing only with their Chinese fellow students. As a result, their German is less fluent after one or two semesters. The vast majority do not participate in the German language courses offered by the university.

Chinese students who lack language skills also encounter difficulties understanding lectures, participating in class activities, and effectively communicating their ideas in assignments and exams. This can impede their

academic performance and hinder their overall learning experience. Gudykunst suggested that when communicating with strangers, individuals encounter high levels of both uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst 2013). This also applies to Chinese students. Many Chinese students find it difficult to find common topics to talk about with German students or to ask their German professors, which generates an intensive degree of anxiety and uncertainty, especially when they have to communicate in Germany.

Chinese students seem to be reluctant to participate in events and offers due to a lack of German (and English) proficiency. Although they need to have a C1 level (Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR)) for admission to German universities, many Chinese students seem to have difficulties communicating in German or stepping out of their comfort zone and using the language. The relatively poor German language skills of Chinese students remain the most limiting factor for their study success. The efforts to integrate Chinese students must thus focus on improving their language skills. While they are aware that it is important for them to be proficient in German, they are not taking part in the German courses offered by the university for several reasons, e.g., the lack of credit and the different didactic methods: “I know improving my German is important, but the university’s language courses don’t count toward my credits, so I feel like I should focus on the subjects that actually contribute to my degree” (Student 12). As Student 10 mentioned, “The way they teach German here is very different from what I’m used to in China. The methods feel too slow for me, and I don’t feel like I’m making progress as quickly as I want to” (Student 10).

Knowledge gap

In Li’s research, the knowledge gap is focused primarily on academic knowledge, highlighting the challenges Chinese students face when trying to adapt to educational standards and expectations in Germany (Li, 2017). Our research confirms Li’s findings and further emphasizes the academic challenges faced by Chinese students.

Many students struggle to fully grasp the content that is being taught in their courses. In many German classrooms, certain concepts, methods, or foundational knowledge are assumed to be understood by all students. Chinese students, especially those who have not been exposed to Western educational traditions or specific academic practices, may find it difficult to keep up with this implicit knowledge. This gap can make it harder for them to follow lectures, complete assignments, or participate in group discussions where a baseline understanding is expected. These academic knowledge gaps can impact both their academic performance and their confidence and participation in academic life.

However, in our research, we extend the concept of the knowledge gap to include political and media knowledge, which plays a critical role in the daily lives of Chinese students in Germany. While academic knowledge gaps affect their performance in the classroom, the gaps in political and media understanding have broader implications for their social integration and worldview: “I find it

difficult to join in group discussions because they talk about things that are new to me. It feels like everyone has a shared understanding of certain ideas or methods, but I don't" (Student 3). As Student 11 added, "It's not just about the academic subjects—when people discuss political issues or current events in Germany, I feel like I'm missing a lot of context. The way news is reported here is very different, and I don't always know how to engage" (Student 11).

In other words, many Chinese students continue to consume news primarily through Chinese social media platforms and official sources, which can perpetuate certain views and limit their understanding of Western political systems and societies. The open discussion of politics, civil rights, and governance in Germany might clash with their previous experiences, causing discomfort or confusion. Without much prior exposure to how Western democracies function, Chinese students may have a limited understanding of political pluralism, freedom of the press, or the role of civil society in countries such as Germany. This gap can hinder their participation in political or social discussions, both in academic settings and in everyday life.

Cultural differences

While some problems are common to all international students, Chinese students seem to experience these difficulties more intensively because of the great cultural distance between China and Germany in various ways. Although in Li's research, the knowledge gap was especially evident among students of the humanities and social sciences (Li, 2017), our interviews with students studying at a technical university also confirmed this issue.

Although the combination of instrumental and emotional support within the Chinese student community serves as an important support system that assists Chinese students in starting and continuing their studies and lives in Germany, there is a noticeable inward tendency among these insular support networks, and it cannot provide all the support that Chinese students need. For quite a few Chinese students we interviewed, staying within the Chinese community was not their deliberate choice, especially for students who had expected to establish contacts with Germans and other international students: "Before coming to Germany, I truly wanted to make friends with Germans and other internationals, but it's harder than I thought" (Student 17). Student 13 said, "I thought I'd be able to connect with German students, but in reality, I rarely talk to them. It's hard to know how to approach them, and sometimes I feel like I don't belong" (Student 13). As Student 9 shared, "The Chinese student community offers strong support but can feel isolating. Many do not intend to stay within it but struggle to connect beyond it. Familiarity is comforting, especially when facing challenges in building relationships outside the circle" (Student 9).

However, except for a few students who had taken initiative to approach local people, the majority had difficulties and experienced barriers when trying to fulfill these expectations. As mentioned above, they therefore stayed within their "Chinese comfort zone," although it was against their original wish before coming

to Germany. Many of them found it particularly challenging to integrate into campus life with other international and German students.

Pedagogical differences

Many students find their studies stressful, not only partially because of the lack of German or English language proficiency but also because of a completely new learning culture. Confirming Li's findings, while classes in China often take the form of teacher-centered lectures, the learning methods used in German classrooms are generally more diverse and interactive (Li, 2017). We also found that other factors hindering Chinese students' academic success in this regard include the following:

- A different educational system, which is difficult to adapt to, e.g., Chinese universities have fixed course plans for their students, whereas German universities are much more flexible, and students should have individual/independent study plans. When Chinese students first enter a Chinese university, they are put into different "classes," and each class has a stable cohort of students studying the same major in the same department for the entirety of the program (normally four years for a bachelor's degree and two to three years for a master's degree).
- A different student support system: e.g., at Chinese universities, students are normally arranged in one class with the same major for the whole period of study from the first semester. Students are also provided with an organized course schedule and a Fudao Yuan (in Chinese 辅导员), who is a counsellor or a tutor. He or she is in charge of and responsible for several classes, helping students with all kinds of problems, including psychological issues, career advice, and study grades, throughout their studies (Liu 2016). In Germany, students have more freedom to choose their own courses and arrange their campus life, but this requires more self-management and self-discipline skills. Becoming self-organized and being able to find one's own way around university is part of university education: "I adapted by staying organized, using planners, and familiarizing myself with university guidelines. These strategies helped me navigate the freedom and responsibilities of the German system more effectively" (Student 10).
- A different learning method: While the Chinese system often focuses on memorization and structured learning, the German system encourages critical thinking, independent research, and active class participation. This shift can leave Chinese students unprepared to handle coursework in Germany, particularly in regard to analytical tasks, open discussions, and problem-solving approaches that require more autonomy. For example, many Chinese students are observed to be quieter in class at German universities and to not ask questions to avoid the risk of making mistakes and being judged or leaving a negative impression on their fellow students and their professors. In addition, in China, students are encouraged to earn reputation and acknowledgment by giving well-planned talks instead of asking questions and "disturbing" the class: "I often stay quiet during lectures because I am afraid of asking the wrong question. In China, making

mistakes in front of others is something we try to avoid, so it's hard to break that habit here" (Student 4). Student 3 noted, "It's difficult for me to participate in open discussions because I'm used to structured learning. In Germany, they want you to share your opinions and engage critically, but I don't always feel confident enough to do that" (Student 3).

In addition to the four main categories, we identified two more challenges:

Job market integration

Owing to the difficulties mentioned above, many students also worry about eventually finding an internship or a job after graduation. On the basis of the interviews and daily contact with Chinese students, many actually have a relatively strong willingness to stay in Germany to work after graduation, at least for a few years. However, owing to the difficulties that they were unable to address properly during their studies, many of the graduates decide to return to China immediately for better career prospects, or they pursue work opportunities in English-speaking countries: "It's truly hard to find an internship here because many companies require strong German language skills. I worry that without an internship, it will be even harder to find a job after graduation" (Student 11). Student 18 also mentioned, "I want to stay in Germany after graduation, but the language barrier and unfamiliar job market make it overwhelming. It feels more practical to return to China, where I can use the skills, I have gained and feel more confident" (Student 18).

This, of course, is unfortunate for Germany and local society, which will lose international talent, especially graduates from technical universities. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, in 2018 alone, over 80% of Chinese graduates overseas chose to return to China to start their career path (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Lack of Trust in the University

As mentioned above, the university administration system in China is quite different from that in Germany, and many Chinese students are accustomed to a highly structured support system back home. In China, students are typically organized by major and study together throughout their academic journeys. They are supported by a Counsellor (辅导员 or Fudao Yuan), who oversees both their academic progress and daily life, and a Class Leader (班长 or Banzhang), who manages the needs of fellow classmates. Both the counselor and class leader provide continuous supervision and guidance from the start of a student's studies until graduation, fostering a strong sense of trust and security within the university environment.

When Chinese students study in Germany, many experience a sense of disorientation due to the lack of this familiar support structure. Without the continuous supervision they are accustomed to, students often struggle to adapt to the more independent university system in Germany. As a result, they may find it difficult to develop the same level of trust in the German university system and may feel less inclined to participate in the student support programs offered,

which further hinders their integration and adjustment: “In China, trust is built through our Counsellor and Class Leader. Coming to Germany, I didn’t know who to turn to. Without someone constantly there to help, it’s hard to develop the same sense of trust with the university” (Student 3).

In summary, although Chinese students are fairly motivated to study abroad in Germany, their lack of preparation and the barriers they face impedes their development of intercultural competence. In particular, their lack of knowledge and skills regarding language, German society and culture, the education system, and communication hinders their academic and job market integration. If both universities in Germany and China and Chinese students focus more strongly on intercultural competence development, these barriers could be reduced.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the challenges that Chinese students face at a German technical university, highlighting six primary issues: language barriers, knowledge gaps, cultural differences, pedagogical differences, limited career opportunities, and a lack of trust in the university system. These findings align with existing research while also offering new perspectives on the interconnected nature of these challenges (Li, 2017).

Language barriers and academic success

Consistent with studies by Clark and Yu (2020) and Zhong and Cheng (2021), language barriers emerged as a significant challenge, emphasizing the role of language proficiency in academic integration and social interaction. Despite meeting the formal German language requirements, participants reported difficulties in classroom participation, understanding lectures, and approaching international students’ services. This highlights the gap between formal proficiency levels and functional language use in academic settings. To address this, universities might explore the integration of language support programs into academic curricula, as suggested by Pho and Schartner (2019). At the university at which the research was carried out, a project with a similar motive was initiated.

Knowledge Gaps and Cultural Differences

The knowledge gaps identified in this study extend beyond academic preparation to include political, social, and cultural knowledge. This builds on findings by Li (2017) and Yu and Moskal (2018), who emphasize the challenges international students face when navigating unfamiliar cultural and institutional landscapes. The limited exposure of Chinese students to Western educational norms and societal structures points to the need for comprehensive prearrival orientation programs that focus not only on academic skills but also on cultural adaptability.

Pedagogical Differences and Adaptation

The shift from teacher-centered learning in China to the student-centered approaches prevalent in Germany presents unique challenges. This confirms the findings of Lomer and Mittelmeier (2021), who highlight the difficulties international students face in adapting to independent learning styles. The participants expressed discomfort with open discussions and group work, aligning with Gudykunst's (2013) theory of anxiety in intercultural communication. Tailored mentoring programs and workshops on active learning strategies could ease this transition and foster academic confidence.

Career Opportunities and University Support

Eighty percent of the participants stated that limited internship opportunities and high expectations of German skills in the German job market were significant barriers. These findings support Mao's (2020) call for stronger collaboration between universities and local industries to increase employability for international students. Universities could introduce initiatives such as targeted career workshops, employer networking events, and internship programs designed specifically for nonnative speakers, including Chinese students.

Trust in University Systems

The lack of trust in the university system highlights differences between structured support in Chinese universities and the relatively independent framework in Germany. While studies such as those by Liu and Xiaobing (2016) focus on the role of structured mentorship in Chinese institutions, this research extends the discussion by showing how the absence of such systems affects trust and engagement in a German context. Introducing culturally informed liaisons or expanding partnerships with student associations could bridge this gap.

In the push and pull model, the challenges faced by Chinese students can be understood as push factors that drive them to adapt to the new academic environment (Nikou & Luukkonen, 2023). However, these push factors need corresponding pull factors, including university support, to facilitate the adaptation process. Specifically, universities offer tailored resources to address the unique challenges of Chinese international students. Language support, such as German language courses and academic writing workshops, helps overcome language barriers. Academic tutoring and mentoring programs assist in bridging knowledge gaps caused by differences in education systems. Cultural adaptation initiatives, including intercultural workshops and student clubs, foster a sense of community and ease social integration. Additionally, career services tailored to Chinese students, such as internships and job placement support, increase their chances of employment. These targeted services enable students to adapt more effectively and thrive in their new academic environment (Nghia, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Overall, an analysis of the current situation of Chinese international students at a German technical university highlights significant challenges that hinder their academic and personal development. As the second-largest group of international students in Germany for the 2022–2023 academic year, their experiences reveal a number of key issues, including language barriers, knowledge gaps, pedagogical and cultural differences, and a lack of trust in the university and concerns about job prospects in Germany. Despite existing university support programs for international students, many Chinese students remain hesitant to take advantage of these resources.

To address these challenges effectively, this paper advocates the implementation of targeted measures designed to enhance the support system for Chinese students. By focusing on their academic success, psychological well-being, and future career opportunities, the proposed initiatives aim to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. Ultimately, the goal is to empower Chinese students to fully engage in their educational journeys, thereby facilitating their integration and growth within the German academic framework. Through these efforts, the university can better meet the unique needs of this student population and contribute to their overall success and satisfaction in their studies.

Importantly, these initiatives are not intended to replace existing support services for international students. Instead, they serve as a bridge to encourage Chinese students to engage with the regular programs offered to all international students. Future research could focus on the impact of the implemented measures on study success and cultural integration. It would also be helpful to compare the results to the situation at other German technical universities as well as to other receiving countries to derive specific measures and to support Chinese international students in the best possible way throughout their student journey.

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Author bios

Dr. EIKA AUSCHNER (corresponding author) is a Professor for International/Intercultural Management at HSBI - Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany. Her major research interests lie in intercultural competence development and the internationalization of higher education. Email: eika.auschner@hsbi.de

Dr. LILI JIANG is a co-founder of EduNetwork GmbH, a Germany-based company specializing in exchange programs and consultancy services that foster educational collaboration between China and Germany. Previously, she was the China Competence Coordinator at the International House of the Technical University of Braunschweig, Germany. Her research focuses on international mobility and intercultural communication. Email: ljiang1120@gmail.com
