

AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGEMENT FOR CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The internationalization of Chinese higher education has increased the need for systematic support services that address international students' academic, administrative, linguistic, psychological, sociocultural, and daily-life needs. This academic article aims to synthesize relevant concepts, theories, policies, and research and propose an international student support services management model for Chinese universities. The analysis employed thematic content analysis by identifying recurring issues, coding related findings, grouping them into categories, and synthesizing their relationships. The first topic examines the concept, scope, and importance of international student support services management. The second analyzes academic, language, administrative, sociocultural, psychological, and practical challenges experienced by international students. The third reviews international and Chinese research and identifies gaps, particularly the fragmentation of existing services and the limited availability of comprehensive management models. The fourth proposes four interconnected model components: (1) strategic policy, leadership, and organizational coordination; (2) integrated and student-centred service delivery; (3) well-being, inclusion, and intercultural integration; and (4) digital services, quality assurance, and continuous improvement. The analysis indicates that effective support depends not merely on service availability but also on accessibility, responsiveness, cultural appropriateness, interdepartmental collaboration, multilingual communication, and student participation. The proposed model can guide Chinese universities in improving service coordination, student adjustment, academic achievement, well-being, satisfaction, and sense of belonging. Further empirical research is recommended to validate the components and evaluate the model across different university contexts.

Keywords: International Students; Support Services; Service Management; Student-Centred Services; Intercultural Adjustment; Chinese Universities; Higher Education Internationalization; Management Model

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INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has become an important strategy for strengthening academic cooperation, intercultural understanding, and the global competitiveness of universities. Chinese universities have increasingly expanded their international education programs and enrolled students from diverse cultural, linguistic, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity enriches university communities; however, it also creates new responsibilities for university administrators. International students require more than academic instruction because they must adapt simultaneously to a new educational system, language, culture, social environment, and set of institutional regulations. Consequently, the effectiveness of international student education depends substantially on the quality and coordination of the support services provided throughout the student journey.

International students may experience academic difficulties, language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, social isolation, psychological stress, and limited access to institutional information. Ward et al. (2001) explain through cross-cultural adaptation theory that individuals entering an unfamiliar culture undergo both psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Psychological adjustment concerns emotional well-being, stress, and personal satisfaction, whereas sociocultural adjustment involves the ability to communicate, establish relationships, and function effectively in the host environment. Therefore, international student support should not be limited to orientation or administrative assistance. It should include academic advising, Chinese-language support, counselling, intercultural activities, health and safety services, accommodation assistance, career guidance, and opportunities for interaction with Chinese students and the wider community.

Student integration theory also provides an important foundation for managing international student support services. Tinto (1993) argues that students' persistence and academic success are influenced by their academic and social integration into the university. Students who develop meaningful relationships with teachers, peers, advisors, and institutional personnel are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and remain committed to their studies. For international students, integration may be more challenging because differences in language, learning practices, communication styles, and social expectations can restrict their participation. Chinese universities should therefore establish proactive support systems that connect students with academic departments, international student offices, counsellors, peer mentors, and student organizations from the beginning of their studies.

The management of international student support services in Chinese universities remains complex because services are often distributed across several administrative units. Admission, visa administration, academic affairs, student development, accommodation, healthcare, counselling, and career services may be managed separately. Without effective coordination, students may receive fragmented information, experience delays, or be uncertain about which office is responsible for a particular problem. Martirosyan et al. (2019) found that effective international student support should combine academic and social services, particularly academic advising, language development, orientation, counselling, cultural programs, and student engagement activities. These findings suggest that universities need an integrated management model that clearly defines responsibilities, establishes coordination mechanisms, and provides accessible services based on students' actual needs.

The development of such a model is also consistent with China's national expectations for the quality management of international student education. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2018) established the *Quality Standards for Higher Education of International Students in China (Trial)* as a national framework for internal and external quality assurance. The standards emphasize institutional responsibility, educational quality, standardized management, student services, and the integration of international students into the university environment. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these principles may vary

according to universities' policies, administrative capacities, technological infrastructure, staff competencies, and international student populations. A systematic model is therefore necessary to translate national quality expectations into coordinated institutional practices.

An international student support services management model should be student-centred, inclusive, responsive, and evidence-based. It should integrate eight major areas: (1) pre-arrival information and admission support; (2) registration, visa, and administrative services; (3) academic advising and language support; (4) health, safety, and psychological well-being; (5) accommodation and daily-life assistance; (6) cultural and social integration; (7) career development and employment preparation; and (8) digital information, feedback, and service quality assurance. The model should also establish clear management structures, interdepartmental collaboration, professional development for staff, multilingual communication channels, student participation, and continuous assessment mechanisms. These elements would enable universities to identify students' needs, respond promptly to problems, and improve services systematically.

This academic article aims to examine the importance and current challenges of international student support services management, synthesize relevant theories and research, and propose a comprehensive management model suitable for Chinese universities. Its scope covers institutional support provided to international students from the pre-arrival stage through enrolment, study, graduation, and career preparation. It focuses particularly on management structures, service processes, personnel responsibilities, technological support, interdepartmental coordination, student participation, and quality evaluation.

The proposed model is expected to benefit university administrators, international education offices, academic departments, student affairs personnel, and policymakers. It can provide a systematic framework for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating international student services; reduce service fragmentation; strengthen academic and sociocultural adjustment; and enhance student satisfaction, well-being, and educational success. In the long term, effective support services can strengthen the quality and reputation of international education in Chinese universities and contribute to the sustainable internationalization of Chinese higher education.

CONCEPTS AND IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGEMENT

1.1 Concept and Scope of International Student Support Services Management

International student support services management refers to the systematic planning, organization, implementation, coordination, and evaluation of university services designed to respond to international students' academic, administrative, psychological, social, cultural, and daily-life needs. Its purpose is to help international students adjust successfully to the university and host-country environments while achieving their educational and professional goals. These services should be provided continuously, beginning with pre-arrival preparation and admission and continuing through enrolment, study, graduation, and career preparation.

The scope of international student support services includes admission guidance, visa and residence procedures, orientation, academic advising, language development, accommodation, healthcare, counselling, financial information, safety services, intercultural activities, career development, and alumni relations. Martirosyan et al. (2019) emphasize that universities should integrate academic and social services because international students' academic achievement is closely connected to their language ability, social relationships, cultural adjustment, and access to institutional resources.

From a service-quality perspective, effective support services should demonstrate reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and accessibility. Parasuraman et al. (1988) explain that service quality is influenced by the difference between service users' expectations and their

perceptions of the services received. Applied to international student management, universities should regularly investigate student needs, communicate service procedures clearly, respond promptly to problems, and continuously improve service delivery based on student feedback.

1.2 Importance of International Student Support Services Management

Effective support services are important because international students encounter challenges that are different from or more complex than those experienced by domestic students. These challenges may include unfamiliar teaching methods, language difficulties, cultural differences, loneliness, academic pressure, discrimination, and uncertainty regarding institutional regulations. According to Ward et al. (2001), international students experience both psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Universities must therefore provide services that promote emotional well-being, cultural understanding, social participation, and the practical ability to function effectively in the host environment.

International student support services also contribute to student retention and academic success. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory proposes that students are more likely to continue their studies when they become academically and socially connected to their institutions. Academic advising, peer mentoring, language assistance, faculty support, student organizations, and intercultural activities can help international students develop a sense of belonging and strengthen their commitment to the university. At the institutional level, effective support services enhance student satisfaction, educational quality, and university reputation. They also reduce service duplication, communication problems, administrative delays, and conflicts among responsible departments. Therefore, Chinese universities should manage international student services through an integrated system characterized by clear policies, defined responsibilities, interdepartmental collaboration, qualified personnel, digital information systems, student participation, and continuous quality evaluation.

SUPPORT NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

2.1 Academic, Language, and Administrative Challenges

International students enter Chinese universities with diverse educational backgrounds, language abilities, learning experiences, and academic expectations. Differences in curriculum structures, teaching approaches, classroom participation, academic assessment, research supervision, and graduation requirements may make it difficult for students to adjust to the Chinese higher education system. Some students may also experience difficulties understanding lectures, communicating with teachers, completing academic writing, using Chinese academic databases, and interpreting university regulations.

Language is one of the most important factors influencing international students' academic adjustment. Even when degree programs are delivered in English, international students generally require Chinese-language competence to communicate with university personnel, access local services, build relationships with Chinese students, and manage their daily lives. Gao and Hua (2021) indicate that learning language and culture is a central part of international students' educational experiences at Chinese universities. Language development should therefore be integrated into academic, administrative, and sociocultural support rather than treated as a separate classroom activity.

Hussain and Shen (2019) found that international students in China experienced academic, sociocultural, and language-related difficulties, including understanding their academic programs, communicating with professors and staff, interpreting degree requirements, and accessing instructions provided in Chinese. They also identified university support, peer support, psychological motivation, pre-departure preparation, and campus orientation as important factors in students' academic adaptation. Similarly, Mshenga and Sun (2024) reported that international students encountered differences in academic standards, teaching methods,

assessment practices, and language use when adapting to university life in China. Chinese universities should consequently provide structured pre-arrival information, multilingual orientation, academic advising, language support, research and writing assistance, and clear explanations of assessment and graduation requirements. A coordinated service system should also allow students to access admission, registration, visa, academic, and financial information through a central service centre or integrated digital platform.

2.2 Sociocultural, Psychological, and Daily-Life Challenges

Studying in another country requires students to adjust not only academically but also socially, culturally, emotionally, and practically. International students may encounter unfamiliar social norms, communication styles, food, accommodation arrangements, healthcare systems, transportation, digital services, and legal requirements. Limited interaction with Chinese students and local communities can lead to social isolation and restrict opportunities for language learning and cultural understanding.

Ward et al. (2001) explain that cross-cultural adjustment consists of psychological and sociocultural dimensions. Psychological adjustment concerns students' emotional well-being, life satisfaction, stress, loneliness, and ability to cope with change. Sociocultural adjustment refers to their ability to communicate, establish relationships, participate in local society, and perform daily tasks in the host environment. International students who lack adequate social networks and institutional assistance may experience homesickness, anxiety, uncertainty, or a weak sense of belonging.

Research conducted in Chinese universities shows that international students may have difficulty making friends, participating in student organizations, understanding campus culture, and communicating with local students and university staff (Hussain & Shen, 2019). Cultural and linguistic differences may also affect students' willingness to seek counselling or disclose personal problems. Universities should therefore provide culturally responsive counselling, peer mentoring, intercultural activities, student clubs, health services, emergency assistance, and opportunities for meaningful interaction between international and Chinese students.

Support services should also respond to students' practical needs, including accommodation, food, medical treatment, personal safety, insurance, residence permits, financial information, and career development. These services must be accessible, multilingual, confidential, and responsive. Regular needs assessments and student feedback should be used to identify emerging problems and improve service provision. Addressing these interconnected challenges can enhance international students' well-being, academic achievement, social integration, satisfaction, and overall educational experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAPS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGEMENT

3.1 International Research on Student Support Services

International research consistently demonstrates that university support is an important factor influencing international students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, social integration, satisfaction, and intention to continue their studies. Support services are most effective when they address students' academic, linguistic, social, cultural, psychological, and practical needs in an integrated manner.

Cho and Yu (2015) examined the relationships among university support, university identification, school-life satisfaction, and psychological stress. Their structural equation modelling results indicated that perceived university support played an important role in improving international students' satisfaction and psychological well-being. The findings suggest that students benefit not only from the availability of services but also from their perception that the university values their well-being and responds appropriately to their needs.

Martirosyan et al. (2019) analyzed international student services at 20 universities with high international enrolment in the United States. The study identified several major categories of services, including academic advising, tutoring, language development, orientation, counselling, social activities, cultural programs, family assistance, and career development. The researchers concluded that universities should combine academic and social support to strengthen international students' adjustment, engagement, retention, and academic success.

These studies demonstrate that international student support should be understood as a comprehensive institutional responsibility rather than the responsibility of a single international student office. Effective service management requires cooperation among academic departments, student affairs offices, counselling centres, language centres, healthcare units, accommodation services, career centres, and information technology departments. However, much international research has been conducted in Western higher education settings. Therefore, its findings must be carefully adapted to the educational policies, cultural environment, administrative structures, and student needs of Chinese universities.

3.2 Research in Chinese Universities and Identified Knowledge Gaps

Research conducted in Chinese universities has primarily focused on international students' academic adaptation, language barriers, cultural adjustment, and personal experiences. Hussain and Shen (2019) studied the academic adaptation of international students at Chinese universities and identified three major categories of challenges: academic, sociocultural, and language-related challenges. Their findings also indicated that university support, peer support, psychological motivation, pre-departure preparation, and campus orientation helped students manage these difficulties. The research highlighted the importance of balancing the challenges experienced by students with appropriate institutional support.

Mshenga and Sun (2024) examined international students' adaptation at Zhejiang Normal University. They found that differences in academic standards, teaching approaches, assessment methods, and language use influenced students' ability to adjust to university life. Their study recommended improved academic guidance, language assistance, cultural orientation, and institutional services that respond directly to international students' experiences.

Although these studies provide valuable information, several knowledge gaps remain. First, much of the existing research focuses on students' problems and adjustment experiences rather than on how universities should systematically manage support services. Second, many studies use qualitative case-study designs or examine a limited number of universities, reducing the extent to which their findings can represent the diversity of Chinese higher education institutions. Third, existing studies frequently examine individual aspects—such as academic adaptation, language learning, psychological well-being, or cultural integration—without integrating them into a comprehensive management framework.

Furthermore, limited research explains the relationships among institutional policy, leadership, organizational structure, personnel competency, interdepartmental coordination, digital service systems, student participation, and quality assurance. There is also insufficient evidence concerning which components should be included in a comprehensive international student support services management model for Chinese universities and how those components should be implemented and evaluated.

Therefore, further study is needed to identify the principal factors of international student support services management and synthesize them into a systematic, contextually appropriate model. Such a model should integrate administrative, academic, linguistic, psychological, sociocultural, welfare, career, and technological services. It should also define management responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, service processes, performance indicators, student feedback procedures, and continuous improvement strategies. Addressing these gaps would contribute to both educational administration theory and the practical improvement of international student services in Chinese universities.

PROPOSED COMPONENTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGEMENT MODEL

Based on the theoretical concepts and research findings reviewed, an international student support services management model for Chinese universities should comprise four interconnected components.

4.1 Strategic Policy, Leadership, and Organizational Coordination

Chinese universities should establish a clear institutional policy for international student support that is consistent with the university's mission and internationalization strategy. Senior administrators should define service standards, allocate sufficient personnel and financial resources, and establish responsibilities for all departments involved in international student education. The policy should affirm that supporting international students is a university-wide responsibility rather than the responsibility of the international student office alone. The organizational structure should include a central international student support unit responsible for coordinating admission, academic affairs, student affairs, accommodation, healthcare, counselling, career services, and information technology. A cross-departmental committee may be established to facilitate communication, solve complex student problems, monitor policy implementation, and prevent service duplication. Briggs and Ammigan (2017) propose a collaborative programming and outreach model in which international student offices work systematically with student affairs and other campus units to address students' academic, social, and cultural needs. This approach can be adapted to Chinese universities by clearly defining departmental responsibilities and establishing formal referral and information-sharing procedures.

4.2 Integrated and Student-Centred Service Delivery

The model should provide coordinated services throughout the international student life cycle, beginning with pre-arrival preparation and continuing through admission, registration, study, graduation, career preparation, and alumni engagement. Major services should include multilingual admission information, visa and residence assistance, orientation, academic advising, Chinese-language development, tutoring, research support, accommodation, healthcare, insurance, financial information, and career guidance. Service delivery should be student-centred, meaning that programs and procedures are designed according to students' actual needs rather than administrative convenience. Arkoudis et al. (2019) found that international students' experiences are influenced by whether universities adequately address their educational and social needs. Therefore, universities should involve international students in service planning through surveys, advisory committees, focus groups, and student representatives. Services should also be flexible enough to respond to differences in students' countries of origin, educational levels, language abilities, academic disciplines, and personal circumstances. A coordinated referral system should allow students to access multiple services without repeatedly submitting the same information. The university should also appoint academic advisors, international student counsellors, and peer mentors who can guide students and connect them with appropriate support units.

4.3 Well-Being, Inclusion, and Intercultural Integration

International student support should promote students' psychological well-being, physical health, personal safety, cultural adjustment, social relationships, and sense of belonging. Universities should provide culturally responsive counselling, mental health education, crisis intervention, healthcare referrals, anti-discrimination mechanisms, and confidential channels through which students can request assistance. Sakız and Jencius (2024) emphasize that effective mental health support for international students should include culturally competent professionals, diverse service approaches, confidentiality, faculty participation, and suitable service environments. Chinese universities should therefore train counsellors, teachers, advisors, and administrative staff in intercultural communication and the identification of students who

may require additional support. Preventive services, such as stress-management workshops and early-warning systems, should be provided alongside problem-focused counselling. Intercultural integration should be promoted through peer mentoring, mixed student organizations, language exchange, community engagement, cultural events, and collaborative learning activities involving international and Chinese students. These activities should encourage meaningful and sustained relationships rather than occasional cultural performances. Creating an inclusive campus environment can reduce social isolation, strengthen mutual understanding, and improve international students' sense of belonging.

4.4 Digital Services, Quality Assurance, and Continuous Improvement

An integrated digital platform should provide international students with convenient access to university information and support services. The platform may include multilingual information, online registration, visa reminders, appointment scheduling, academic advising, emergency contact channels, accommodation requests, health information, career resources, and service-status tracking. Students should be able to access essential information through computers and mobile devices. Veerasamy and Ammigan (2022) demonstrate that effective virtual service delivery requires student-centred communication, accessible online advising, collaboration among university units, staff readiness, and flexible service arrangements. Chinese universities should therefore combine face-to-face and digital services to ensure continuity during emergencies and to serve students who cannot immediately access campus offices. Quality assurance should include clear service standards, measurable performance indicators, student satisfaction surveys, complaint-management procedures, and regular service evaluations. Indicators may include response time, service accessibility, student participation, problem-resolution rates, academic progression, retention, well-being, and overall satisfaction. Evaluation findings should be reported to university administrators and used to revise policies, improve personnel competencies, redesign service processes, and allocate resources. Continuous improvement ensures that the model remains responsive to changes in students' needs, university conditions, technology, and national higher education policies.

CONCLUSION

This academic article analyzed concepts, theories, policy principles, and previous research related to international student support services management. The analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis. First, information concerning international students' needs, challenges, adjustment, and university support was identified from the reviewed literature. Second, the information was coded and grouped according to recurring themes, including academic assistance, administrative services, language development, psychological well-being, cultural adjustment, social integration, digital services, and service quality. Third, relationships among these themes were examined to determine the management mechanisms required for effective implementation. Finally, the themes were synthesized into the proposed international student support services management model for Chinese universities.

The analysis revealed that international students' needs are multidimensional and interconnected. Academic difficulties may be associated with language barriers, unfamiliar administrative procedures, limited social relationships, cultural differences, and psychological stress. Consequently, providing isolated services through separate departments may not adequately address students' problems. The results indicate that effective support services require an integrated management system that connects academic, administrative, social, cultural, psychological, welfare, career, and technological services throughout the international student life cycle.

The proposed model consists of four principal components. The first component is strategic policy, leadership, and organizational coordination. It emphasizes institutional commitment, clearly defined responsibilities, sufficient resources, interdepartmental collaboration, and

centralized coordination. The second component is integrated and student-centred service delivery, covering pre-arrival information, admission, registration, visa assistance, academic advising, language development, accommodation, healthcare, and career preparation. The third component is well-being, inclusion, and intercultural integration, which includes culturally responsive counselling, student safety, peer mentoring, intercultural activities, and opportunities for meaningful interaction between international and Chinese students. The fourth component is digital services, quality assurance, and continuous improvement, involving integrated information platforms, service standards, feedback systems, performance indicators, and regular evaluation.

The interpretation of the results suggests that the success of the model depends not only on the availability of services but also on their accessibility, responsiveness, coordination, cultural appropriateness, and continuity. Universities may provide numerous programs, but these programs will have limited effectiveness if students do not know about them, cannot access them easily, or receive inconsistent information from different departments. Therefore, communication systems, multilingual information, staff competency, referral procedures, and student participation are essential mechanisms connecting all four components.

The analysis also indicates that international students should be active participants in service management. Their needs and experiences should be regularly examined through satisfaction surveys, focus-group discussions, student advisory committees, complaints, and service-utilization data. The findings obtained from these channels should be interpreted together with academic progression, retention, response time, problem-resolution rates, participation, and student well-being. This information can help administrators identify service gaps, improve policies, allocate resources, and develop appropriate interventions.

In conclusion, an international student support services management model for Chinese universities should be comprehensive, student-centred, inclusive, digitally supported, and continuously evaluated. Its implementation can reduce fragmented administration, improve coordination among university departments, and strengthen international students' academic achievement, adjustment, well-being, satisfaction, and sense of belonging. However, because the proposed model is based on conceptual and thematic synthesis, further empirical research should examine its components, validate its structure, and evaluate its suitability across different types of Chinese universities.

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