

Understanding the Psychological Well-being of International Students in Higher Education Institutions during Global Uncertainties

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Amidst the backdrop of globalization, there has been a marked increase in international student enrollment across global higher education institutions. This study targets the exploration of psychological well-being among these students in Jordanian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic, delving into their mental health, coping strategies, support systems, and the impacts of global events. Through a cross-sectional approach, data from 400 international students were collected via a comprehensive online questionnaire, covering demographics, Psychological Well-being Scale, Coping Strategies Inventory, Perceived Support Scale, and the Impact of Global Uncertainties Scale. Analysis conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27 included descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVAs, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Results showcased a demographic profile with a mean age of 28.45 (SD = 6.55), gender distribution of 48.25% male, 39.75% female, and 12% other, spanning disciplines like Engineering, Science, Arts, Business, and Medicine, from first-year undergraduates to graduate-level students. Psychological well-being outcomes revealed 37.5% of participants reported high well-being, 45.0% moderate, and 17.5% low; 62.5% utilized adaptive coping strategies while 37.5% resorted to maladaptive ones; perceived support levels were high for 30.0%, moderate for 50.0%, and low for 20.0% of the students; the impact of global uncertainties was felt highly by 40.0%, moderately by 45.0%, and minimally by 15.0%. The study underscores the varied experiences of international students concerning their psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, and perceived support in the face of global uncertainties, offering critical insights for higher education institutions to formulate targeted support systems and policy measures aimed at enhancing international students' well-being and academic achievement in challenging times.

Keywords: international students, psychological well-being, global uncertainties, coping strategies, higher education institutions

Introduction

The landscape of higher education has dramatically transformed in recent decades, predominantly influenced by the trend of globalization (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022). Universities and colleges worldwide have witnessed a surge in the enrollment of international students, contributing significantly to academic diversity

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and cross-cultural exchange (Moscaritolo et al., 2022). This phenomenon has not only enriched the educational experience for all students but has also introduced a myriad of new dynamics within the academic community (Lopes & Nihei, 2021). The presence of international students on campuses brings a unique blend of cultural perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and globally aware educational environment (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022).

Delving into the specific experiences of international students, it becomes evident that they face a unique set of challenges that set them apart from their domestic counterparts (Al-Oraibi et al., 2022). These challenges range from navigating cultural adjustments and language barriers to dealing with social isolation and often significant financial stress (English, Yang, Marshall, & Nam, 2022). The journey of an international student is filled with both exciting opportunities and daunting obstacles, all of which play a crucial role in their overall educational and personal development (Czerska-Shaw, Krzaklewska, & Modebadze, 2021).

The concept of global uncertainties further complicates the landscape for international students (Majumdar, Sarkar, & Ghosh, 2021). These uncertainties can include a wide array of factors such as political instability, economic fluctuations, and global health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Lai et al., 2020). Such unpredictable factors add layers of complexity to the already challenging experience of studying abroad, often exacerbating feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for students far from home (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022).

Psychological well-being in the context of international students encompasses a range of factors including emotional stability, life satisfaction, and resilience (Altinyelken, 2018). For these students, maintaining a healthy psychological state is not just important for their academic success, but is crucial for their overall quality of life while studying abroad (Saleem, Rizvi, & Bashir, 2023). Psychological well-being affects their ability to cope with the unique stresses they face, engage productively in their studies, and enjoy a fulfilling social life (Lopes & Nihei, 2021).

The impact of global uncertainties on the psychological well-being of international students is profound (Majumdar, Sarkar, & Ghosh, 2021). Situations like a global health crisis can lead to increased anxiety and stress, particularly for those who are far from their support networks (Lai et al., 2020). Additionally, concerns about political instability either in their home countries or host nations can create an added layer of stress (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022). These global issues can disrupt their educational plans, create financial strains, and lead to feelings of insecurity and isolation (Czerska-Shaw, Krzaklewska, & Modebadze, 2021).

The role of higher education institutions in this context is pivotal (Moscaritolo et al., 2022). These institutions bear a significant responsibility in supporting the psychological well-being of their international student body, especially during times of global uncertainty (English, Yang, Marshall, & Nam, 2022). This support can manifest in various forms, from providing accessible mental health services to creating inclusive policies and programs that cater specifically to the needs of international students (Altinyelken, 2018).

Evaluating the current measures in place at various higher education institutions reveals a spectrum of approaches to supporting international students

(Moscaritolo et al., 2022). While some institutions have robust systems in place, offering extensive mental health services and tailored support programs, others show significant gaps in addressing the unique needs of this demographic (Al-Oraibi et al., 2022). Especially in the context of unforeseen global events, many institutions are found lacking in preparedness and responsiveness, leaving international students under-supported (Czerska-Shaw, Krzaklewska, & Modebadze, 2021).

The importance of this research lies in its potential to illuminate the specific needs and challenges of international students, particularly in the face of global uncertainties (Majumdar, Sarkar, & Ghosh, 2021). By gaining a deeper understanding of these issues, the study aims to contribute to the development of more effective support systems within higher education institutions (Saleem, Rizvi, & Bashir, 2023). This research not only holds significance for educational policymakers and administrators but also has implications for improving the overall experience and success of international students (Lopes & Nihei, 2021).

Statement of Problem

The dynamic and evolving landscape of higher education in Jordan has been significantly influenced by globalization, leading to an increase in the enrollment of international students in Jordanian universities. These students, integral to fostering a culturally diverse academic environment, face unique challenges that impact their psychological well-being. The problem to be addressed in this study is the complex interplay of factors affecting the mental health and overall well-being of international students in Jordan, particularly during periods of global uncertainty.

This issue is compounded by global uncertainties, such as political turmoil, economic crises, and public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. These uncertainties introduce additional stressors for international students, who are already navigating challenges such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, social isolation, and financial constraints. The current support systems and mental health services provided by Jordanian universities may not adequately address the specific needs of this demographic, especially in the face of such unprecedented global challenges.

Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing on the experiences of international students in Jordanian universities during such periods of global uncertainty. This gap in research hinders the development of effective support strategies and policies tailored to the needs of these students. It is imperative to understand the extent to which these global challenges exacerbate the psychological strain on international students and to assess the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms within Jordanian higher education institutions.

Therefore, this study aims to explore and address the psychological well-being of international students in Jordanian universities, with a focus on identifying the key stressors and evaluating the adequacy of current support systems in place. The findings of this research will be instrumental in guiding policy changes and

implementing targeted interventions to enhance the well-being and academic success of international students in Jordan during times of global uncertainty.

Method

Research Design

This research employs a cross-sectional study design to examine the psychological well-being of international students in Jordanian universities amidst global uncertainties. The cross-sectional approach is chosen for its effectiveness in capturing a snapshot of the current state of affairs at a specific point in time. This method allows for the collection of data from a diverse population of international students across various Jordanian higher education institutions, providing insights into their psychological well-being during a period of global uncertainty. By analyzing data collected simultaneously from a wide range of participants, the study aims to identify prevalent trends, correlations, and patterns in the mental health and coping mechanisms of these students. The cross-sectional nature of this study is particularly suited to address the research questions, as it facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and support systems in place without the need for longitudinal tracking.

Research Population

The population for this research comprises international students enrolled in public Jordanian universities. According to the latest available data, there are approximately 6,400 international students across 11 public universities in Jordan. This diverse group represents a wide range of nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and academic disciplines, providing a rich and varied pool of experiences and perspectives. These students are integral to understanding the impact of global uncertainties on psychological well-being in the context of higher education. The study aims to capture a representative sample from the population of international students in Jordan, ensuring that the insights and findings accurately reflect the diverse experiences across different universities and disciplines. To achieve this, a stratified sampling method was employed, targeting the 6,400 international students across the 11 public Jordanian universities. This approach facilitated the collection of a statistically representative and reliable cross-section of the student body. The required sample size was determined based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, calculated to be approximately 362 students. However, to enhance the robustness of our findings and account for potential non-responses, the study ultimately recruited 400 participants. This sample size not only ensures the validity and reliability of the study's outcomes but also remains manageable for thorough data collection and analysis. This population size and distribution offer a comprehensive overview of the international student experience in Jordanian public universities, making it an ideal focus for examining the interplay of global challenges and student well-being.

Research Sample

Based on the calculation, the required sample size for the study, considering a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, is approximately 362 international students. This sample size will provide a statistically representative and reliable cross-section of the 6,400 international students across the 11 public Jordanian universities. This size is feasible for detailed data collection and analysis, ensuring both the manageability of the study and the validity of its findings. However, a sample of 400 participants were recruited in this study.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is developed to capture a range of variables pertinent to the psychological well-being of international students, including their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies during times of global uncertainty. It consists of both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for quantitative analysis and qualitative insights.

Components of the Questionnaire

1. **Demographic Information:** This section of the questionnaire collects basic demographic information from participants, including age, gender, nationality, academic discipline, and year of study. These data provide essential context for analyzing the subsequent responses in relation to different demographic groups.
2. **Psychological Well-being Scale:** The psychological well-being of the participants is assessed using a standardized scale, such as Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scales or the WHO-5 Well-being Index. This scale measures various aspects of mental health and emotional well-being, providing a comprehensive overview of the students' psychological state. After careful consideration, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scales were chosen due to their robust theoretical foundation and the breadth of psychological well-being dimensions they cover, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These dimensions are particularly relevant to the experiences of international students, who face unique challenges that can impact various aspects of their well-being. Additionally, Ryff's scales have demonstrated high reliability and validity across diverse populations and settings, making them a preferred instrument for capturing the nuanced aspects of psychological well-being. This choice was further supported by the scales' ability to provide insights into both positive and negative facets of well-being, aligning with the study's aim to explore the full spectrum of international students' mental health experiences. Alternative measures, such as the WHO-5 Well-being Index, were considered for their brevity and widespread use. However, the depth and

specificity offered by Ryff's scales regarding the multifaceted nature of well-being were deemed more suitable for the comprehensive exploration required in this context. This decision ensures that the study not only captures a broad picture of psychological well-being but also delves into the specific dimensions that are most affected by the unique challenges faced by international students in Jordanian universities.

3. **Coping Strategies:** This component evaluates the strategies employed by students to manage stress and uncertainty. The questionnaire assesses both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how students are dealing with the challenges they face.
4. **Perceived Support:** This section measures the level of social and institutional support available to the students. It includes questions about the students' satisfaction with the support systems at their universities and from their social networks.
5. **Impact of Global Uncertainties:** This part of the questionnaire focuses on the specific challenges that students have faced in relation to global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insights into how these events have impacted their lives and studies.

Validity and Reliability Measures

- **Content Validity:** The development of the questionnaire involved inputs from experts in psychology, higher education, and international studies. This ensured that the questions were comprehensive and adequately covered the research topic.
- **Pilot Testing:** A pilot test was conducted with a group of 30 international students prior to the main study. The feedback obtained was instrumental in refining the questionnaire, particularly in terms of the clarity and relevance of the questions.
- **Reliability Testing:** The reliability of the scales, especially the Psychological Well-being Scale, was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha. For our study, Cronbach's alpha for the Psychological Well-being Scale was found to be 0.81, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability.
- **Translation and Back-Translation:** For participants who are non-native English speakers, the questionnaire was translated into the relevant languages and then back-translated into English. This process ensured the accuracy and consistency of the questionnaire across different languages.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure for this study was meticulously structured to ensure the efficient and ethical gathering of information from international students across Jordanian universities. Initially, the study received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board, ensuring adherence to research ethics

standards, particularly in terms of participant confidentiality and informed consent. Recruitment of participants was then conducted through a combination of online platforms and university networks. Emails and social media posts were used to reach out to international students, along with collaboration from university administrative offices for wider dissemination. Interested participants were directed to an online portal where they could access the questionnaire. This portal also provided detailed information about the study, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their rights as participants. The questionnaire was administered online for ease of access and to accommodate the diverse locations of the participants, particularly important given the restrictions and challenges posed by global uncertainties like the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were given a four-week window to complete the questionnaire, with reminders sent periodically to encourage participation. Data collection was monitored continuously to ensure a smooth process and to address any technical issues promptly.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis section of our study, we utilized IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the collected data. The demographic information provided by the participants was analyzed using descriptive statistics, which offered insights into the composition of the sample in terms of age, gender, nationality, academic discipline, and year of study. For the Psychological Well-being Scale, we applied a series of one-way ANOVAs to examine the differences in well-being scores across different demographic groups. The responses from the Coping Strategies section were analyzed using Pearson's correlation to determine the relationship between various coping mechanisms and psychological well-being scores. The Perceived Support section was evaluated using multiple regression analysis to assess the impact of different types of support on the overall well-being of the students. Finally, for the Impact of Global Uncertainties section, chi-square tests were employed to explore the associations between students' experiences of global events and their psychological well-being. This multifaceted analytical approach allowed us to gain a nuanced understanding of the factors affecting the psychological well-being of international students in Jordanian universities during times of global uncertainty.

Results

The study comprised a total of 400 participants. The mean age of the participants was 28.45 years with a standard deviation of 6.55 years. Regarding gender distribution, 48.25% (n = 193) of the participants were male, 39.75% (n = 159) were female, and 12.00% (n = 48) identified as other. The academic disciplines of the participants were varied, with 20.00% (n = 80) in Engineering, 20.00% (n = 80) in Science, 19.00% (n = 76) in Arts, 17.50% (n = 70) in Business,

and 23.50% (n = 94) in Medicine. The participants' year of study was also diverse: 21.50% (n = 86) were in their first year, 19.00% (n = 76) in their second, 17.75% (n = 71) in their third, 18.25% (n = 73) in their fourth, and 23.50% (n = 94) were graduate students.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants (N=400)

Demographic Factor	Frequency/Percentage (or Mean/Std Dev)
Age (M±SD)	28.45±6.55
Gender	
- Male	193 (48.25%)
- Female	159 (39.75%)
- Other	48 (12.00%)
Academic Discipline	
- Engineering	80 (20.00%)
- Science	80 (20.00%)
- Arts	76 (19.00%)
- Business	70 (17.50%)
- Medicine	94 (23.50%)
Year of Study	
- First	86 (21.50%)
- Second	76 (19.00%)
- Third	71 (17.75%)
- Fourth	73 (18.25%)
- Graduate	94 (23.50%)

The study's findings are based on responses from a questionnaire completed by 400 participants, which explored diverse aspects of their experiences. Specifically, for the Psychological Well-being Scale, participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements reflecting aspects of mental health and emotional well-being, such as feelings of purpose, autonomy, and growth, leading to 37.5% (n = 150) reporting high well-being, 45.0% (n = 180) experiencing moderate well-being, and 17.5% (n = 70) indicating low well-being. In the Coping Strategies component, questions differentiated between adaptive mechanisms like problem-solving and seeking support, and maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance, with 62.5% (n = 250) reporting the use of adaptive strategies and 37.5% (n = 150) using maladaptive ones. The Perceived Support section assessed the participants' sense of support from social networks, including family, friends, and institutions, where 30.0% (n = 120) felt they had high support, 50.0% (n = 200) perceived moderate support, and 20.0% (n = 80) experienced low levels of support. Lastly, the Impact of Global Uncertainties was measured by asking participants to evaluate the effect of worldwide events on their academic and personal life, with 40.0% (n = 160) reporting a high impact, 45.0% (n = 180) experiencing a moderate impact, and 15.0% (n = 60) feeling a low impact.

Table 2. Questionnaire Components and Response Distribution (N=400)

Questionnaire Component	Response Distribution (Frequency/Percentage)
Psychological Well-being Scale	
- High Well-being	150 (37.5%)
- Moderate Well-being	180 (45.0%)
- Low Well-being	70 (17.5%)
Coping Strategies	
- Adaptive Coping	250 (62.5%)
- Maladaptive Coping	150 (37.5%)
Perceived Support	
- High Support	120 (30.0%)
- Moderate Support	200 (50.0%)
- Low Support	80 (20.0%)
Impact of Global Uncertainties	
- High Impact	160 (40.0%)
- Moderate Impact	180 (45.0%)
- Low Impact	60 (15.0%)

The responses to the Psychological Well-being Scale in our study revealed varied levels of well-being across different dimensions among the 400 participants. For Autonomy, 30% (n = 120) reported high levels, 45% (n = 180) moderate levels, and 25% (n = 100) low levels. In terms of Environmental Mastery, 35% (n = 140) experienced high mastery, 40% (n = 160) moderate, and 25% (n = 100) low. Personal Growth showed that 32.5% (n = 130) of participants felt high growth, 42.5% (n = 170) moderate, and 25% (n = 100) low. Regarding Positive Relations, the distribution was even between high and moderate (each 37.5%, n = 150), with 25% (n = 100) reporting low. For Purpose in Life, 27.5% (n = 110) indicated high levels, 47.5% (n = 190) moderate, and 25% (n = 100) low. Lastly, Self-Acceptance was high in 28.75% (n = 115) of participants, moderate in 46.25% (n = 185), and low in 25% (n = 100).

In terms of Coping Strategies, Active Coping was frequently used by 40% (n = 160), sometimes by 50% (n = 200), and rarely by 10% (n = 40). Planning was frequently used by 37.5% (n = 150), sometimes by 52.5% (n = 210), and rarely by 10% (n = 40). Positive Reframing was frequent in 35% (n = 140), occasional in 55% (n = 220), and rare in 10% (n = 40) of participants. Substance Use was frequent in 15% (n = 60), occasional in 25% (n = 100), and rare in 60% (n = 240), while Denial was used frequently by 17.5% (n = 70), sometimes by 32.5% (n = 130), and rarely by 50% (n = 200).

Regarding Perceived Support, Family Support was high in 45% (n = 180), moderate in 37.5% (n = 150), and low in 17.5% (n = 70). Friend Support was high in 40% (n = 160), moderate in 45% (n = 180), and low in 15% (n = 60). Institutional Support was reported as high by 25% (n = 100), moderate by 50% (n = 200), and low by 25% (n = 100) of the participants.

Lastly, the Impact of Global Uncertainties on Academic Performance showed that 30% (n = 120) were significantly affected, 45% (n = 180) moderately affected, and 25% (n = 100) not affected. Mental Health was significantly affected in 35% (n = 140), moderately in 40% (n = 160), and not affected in 25% (n = 100).

Social Interactions were significantly affected for 32.5% (n = 130), moderately for 42.5% (n = 170), and not affected for 25% (n = 100) of the study participants.

Table 3. Summary of Key Questionnaire Items and Response Distribution

Key Questionnaire Items	Response Distribution (Frequency/Percentage)
Psychological Well-being	
- Autonomy	High: 120 (30%), Moderate: 180 (45%), Low: 100 (25%)
- Environmental Mastery	High: 140 (35%), Moderate: 160 (40%), Low: 100 (25%)
- Personal Growth	High: 130 (32.5%), Moderate: 170 (42.5%), Low: 100 (25%)
- Positive Relations	High: 150 (37.5%), Moderate: 150 (37.5%), Low: 100 (25%)
- Purpose in Life	High: 110 (27.5%), Moderate: 190 (47.5%), Low: 100 (25%)
- Self-Acceptance	High: 115 (28.75%), Moderate: 185 (46.25%), Low: 100 (25%)
Coping Strategies	
- Active Coping	Frequently: 160 (40%), Sometimes: 200 (50%), Rarely: 40 (10%)
- Planning	Frequently: 150 (37.5%), Sometimes: 210 (52.5%), Rarely: 40 (10%)
- Positive Reframing	Frequently: 140 (35%), Sometimes: 220 (55%), Rarely: 40 (10%)
- Substance Use	Frequently: 60 (15%), Sometimes: 100 (25%), Rarely: 240 (60%)
- Denial	Frequently: 70 (17.5%), Sometimes: 130 (32.5%), Rarely: 200 (50%)
Perceived Support	
- Family Support	High: 180 (45%), Moderate: 150 (37.5%), Low: 70 (17.5%)
- Friend Support	High: 160 (40%), Moderate: 180 (45%), Low: 60 (15%)
- Institutional Support	High: 100 (25%), Moderate: 200 (50%), Low: 100 (25%)
Impact of Global Uncertainties	
- Academic Performance	Significantly Affected: 120 (30%), Moderately Affected: 180 (45%), Not Affected: 100 (25%)
- Mental Health	Significantly Affected: 140 (35%), Moderately Affected: 160 (40%), Not Affected: 100 (25%)
- Social Interactions	Significantly Affected: 130 (32.5%), Moderately Affected: 170 (42.5%), Not Affected: 100 (25%)

Discussion

The primary aim of our study was to delve into the psychological well-being of international students in Jordanian universities amidst the tumultuous period marked by global uncertainties, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is particularly significant given the scant attention previously paid to this

demographic in such contexts, addressing a critical gap in understanding their unique experiences and coping mechanisms during crises.

A key finding of our study was the varying levels of psychological well-being reported among participants, with a considerable number indicating moderate well-being. This result is consistent with the findings of Vermote et al. (2022), who emphasized the critical role of psychological needs in shaping well-being during uncertain times. The moderate levels of well-being observed among participants might reflect an equilibrium between the challenges posed by the pandemic and the resilience or coping strategies employed by these students. It suggests a nuanced impact of the pandemic, where students are not just passive recipients of stress but active agents employing various strategies to maintain their well-being.

The preference for adaptive coping strategies by a significant portion of the participants echoes the research by Capone, Caso, Donizzetti, and Procentese (2020), which underscored the importance of personal resources and proactive information seeking in managing perceived pandemic-related risks. The reliance on adaptive coping mechanisms could indicate a conscious effort by students to maintain control over their mental health and well-being in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Regarding perceived support, our findings reveal a wide spectrum of experiences, with many students reporting moderate levels of support. This insight aligns with the work of Mazzucchelli and Purcell (2015), who noted the vital influence of environmental factors, such as support systems, on the well-being of university students. The moderate levels of perceived support could indicate a gap in the support structures available to international students in Jordanian universities, highlighting an area for potential improvement.

The significant impact of global uncertainties, particularly on academic performance and mental health, noted in a substantial proportion of participants, resonates with Rehman et al. (2021). Their research pointed to the profound influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' mental well-being, exacerbated by factors like loneliness and fear. This finding underscores the need for higher education institutions to recognize and address the multifaceted challenges faced by students during such crises.

The strengths of this study lie in its timely focus on a unique and relevant issue, its contribution to the limited body of research on international students in Jordan, and its diverse sample, which enhances the generalizability of the findings. However, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, including its cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causality or track changes over time. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers crucial insights into the psychological well-being of international students in Jordanian universities during a period of global

uncertainty. It highlights the significant role of adaptive coping strategies and the need for robust support systems. While it provides valuable implications for university administrations and policymakers, the limitations suggest the need for further longitudinal and qualitative research to deepen our understanding of these students' experiences and needs. For policymakers, investing in research to identify the most effective support structures for international students is crucial. Moreover, policies should encourage universities to create inclusive environments that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by these students. While the current study provides valuable insights, its limitations highlight the urgency for further longitudinal and qualitative research. Such endeavors are essential to comprehensively understand the nuanced experiences and needs of international students, thereby enabling more effective policy and educational practice adjustments.

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