



Analyzing The Influence of Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Chinese-Russian Joint Education Program Among the University Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

With the expanding cooperation between China and Russia, particularly within the framework of the "Belt and Road" initiative, the development of effective Chinese-Russian joint educational programs has gained increasing significance. As more Chinese undergraduates participate in these programs, understanding the dynamics of their cross-cultural adaptation has become essential for optimizing educational outcomes. This study employs a qualitative research approach—comprising in-depth interviews, participant observations to investigate the impact of cross-cultural adaptation on students enrolled in four Chinese universities engaged in Chinese-Russian joint education initiatives. A total of 25 students were purposively sampled to explore how individual factors influence their ability to navigate intercultural environments. Through thematic analysis of the collected data, the study identifies key challenges and facilitating factors shaping students' adaptation processes. The findings reveal that cross-cultural adaptation significantly affects students' social integration, academic performance, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the research highlights the critical role of institutional support, intercultural exchanges, and personal resilience in fostering more effective adaptation. Based on the results, the study offers practical recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural competence within the curriculum and extracurricular activities, aiming to better prepare students for the complexities of international cooperation and multicultural engagement. The insights provide valuable references for policymakers, educators, and institutions involved in Chinese-Russian joint educational initiatives, emphasizing the need to tailor strategies that bolster intercultural adaptability and holistic student development.

Keywords:

Cross-cultural adaptation, Chinese-Russian joint education, qualitative research, intercultural competence, student experiences, educational strategy,

intercultural exchange, student development, multicultural integration, international cooperation

I. INTRODUCTION

The collaboration between China and Russia in higher education traces back to the 19th century, exemplified by the initial deployment of Russian language educators in Chinese universities in 1862. This historical engagement laid a foundation for ongoing academic exchanges, further reinforced by China's adoption and adaptation of Soviet-era educational models, which continue to influence contemporary practices (Mensin, 2021).

In recent years, the increasing alignment of China-Russia diplomatic relations has propelled bilateral cooperation across diverse sectors, including culture, economy, and education. The rising popularity of Russian language study among Chinese students reflects this trend, leading many Chinese universities to establish Russian majors and joint education initiatives. These collaborative programs have entered an accelerated development phase, emphasizing mutual understanding, friendship, and educational innovation through strategic partnerships.

Supported by strong government initiatives, the expansion of Chinese-Russian joint education programs has attracted significant interest from students, driven by resource sharing, academic exchanges, and employment prospects. These programs are fostering new institutional linkages, facilitating deeper academic and cultural interactions between the two nations (Zhao, 2022).

As China continues to propose innovative strategies for enhancing Russian language education, aligning curricula with socio-economic needs and supporting global partnerships, there is a focused effort on fostering high-caliber, adaptable Russian language professionals. Over the past five years, the emphasis on



“quality development” within China's Russian language education system has gained prominence, aiming to cultivate versatile talents capable of engaging in international exchanges (Hong, 2022).

The scholarly community has increasingly directed attention to the study of Chinese-Russian joint educational endeavors, particularly on issues related to cross-cultural adaptation. Existing research, although valuable, has primarily concentrated on program development, curriculum design, and language proficiency. A comprehensive understanding of how students navigate bi-cultural environments and adapt to cross-cultural challenges remains limited. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how individual factors and pedagogical strategies influence students' cross-cultural adaptation, employing qualitative methods such as interviews, observations involving 25 students from four Chinese universities engaged in joint programs.

Previous research highlights both the achievements and persistent challenges of these programs. For example, Xi (2019) identified issues such as the shortage of specialized textbooks, qualified teachers, tailored content, and high costs, which hinder effective talent cultivation. Zou et al. (2022) emphasized that aligned curriculum structures between Chinese universities and their Russian partner institutions facilitate smoother academic transitions, creating a relatively stable foundation for students' intercultural adaptation. Nonetheless, understanding the nuanced experiences of students during this process remains an area requiring further exploration.

This research aims to analyze how cultural and personal factors shape students' adaptation experiences, with a focus on identifying barriers and facilitators within the context of Chinese-Russian joint education. Findings from this study aspire to inform strategies that enhance cross-cultural competence, ultimately supporting students' seamless integration and contributing to the continuous development of Sino-Russian educational cooperation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Development and Context of Sino-Russian Joint Educational Initiatives

Since the mid-1980s, China has actively promoted international cooperation within higher education, formalized through policies supporting Chinese-foreign joint programs (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1985). These initiatives aim to

foster academic exchange, student mobility, and intercultural understanding, grounded in legal frameworks such as the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-foreign Educational Cooperation (The State Council, 2003).

In recent decades, the rise of collaborative programs between Chinese and Russian institutions has been driven by mutual strategic interests and governmental support, resulting in an expanding network of joint campuses and curricula at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Guo et al., 2022). These programs feature diverse training modes, including “4+0” and “2+2” models, offering students opportunities to engage in bicultural learning environments while remaining primarily based in China. Such structures aim to cultivate international competencies, though their effectiveness in fostering cross-cultural adaptation remains under-explored (Zou et al., 2022).

Research indicates that the rapid development of Chinese-Russian joint education has contributed substantially to talent cultivation, yet questions remain regarding the challenges students face in adapting to unfamiliar cultural and academic contexts. For instance, studies highlight issues such as curriculum alignment, teaching quality, and resource availability, which influence students' adaptation processes (Xi, 2019; Feng, 2022). Nevertheless, there exists a gap in empirical investigations into students' subjective experiences and the influence of personal factors on cross-cultural integration within these programs.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Insights into Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process whereby individuals develop the skills to interact effectively in diverse cultural settings, responding at cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels (Anderson, 1994). Key determinants include macro-level factors, such as socio-political relations and institutional policies, as well as micro-level aspects like language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, and social support (Guo et al., 2021).

Recent research employing qualitative methods—such as interviews, observations has explored how students navigate intercultural challenges. For example, Zhong et al. (2020) examined Chinese students studying in the UK, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships and institutional support in facilitating adaptation. Similarly, studies by Ammigan et al. (2022) and Wilczewski and Alon (2023) reveal that social self-efficacy, language skills, and peer interactions



critically influence students' ability to acclimate. Their findings underscore the significance of emotional and social resources in promoting successful cross-cultural adjustment.

Within the context of Sino-Russian programs, existing literature suggests that curriculum similarity, such as aligned bridging courses, provides a stable foundation for academic adaptation (Zou et al., 2022). However, challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, and individual resilience persist. Zhang and Ting (2024) highlight the mediating role of social self-efficacy, with digital communication platforms like WeChat fostering social integration and intercultural adaptation.

Despite these advances, research remains limited regarding the nuanced influence of individual traits and practical coping strategies on students' adaptation journeys. Most previous studies utilize quantitative or mixed methodologies; there is a pressing need for in-depth qualitative investigations to capture students' lived experiences and identify targeted interventions that facilitate cross-cultural competence development.

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The evolution of Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education reflects a broader trend toward internationalization and intercultural exchange. However, numerous challenges demand attention: curriculum mismatches, management discrepancies, cultural misunderstandings, and psychological stressors (Gao, 2024; Cao & Meng, 2022).

Research suggests that fostering students' practical skills, social confidence, and intercultural awareness can significantly improve adaptation outcomes (Hang & Zhang, 2022; Lai & Jung, 2024). Longitudinal and case study approaches are valuable in assessing the progression of adaptation over time and in various intercultural contexts (Lu & Jiang, 2024).

In summary, although scholarly efforts have shed light on structural and institutional factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation, there remains a substantial gap in understanding individual-level influences—such as motivation, personality traits, and coping mechanisms—that shape students' adaptation

experiences. Addressing this gap through qualitative, experiential research will offer vital insights for optimizing the design and implementation of Chinese-Russian joint educational programs.

III. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of university students enrolled in Chinese-Russian joint education programs in Jilin Province, China. The selection of qualitative methodology aligns with the research objectives and questions, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities surrounding cross-cultural adaptation rather than establishing causal relationships, making predictions, or generalizing to a broader population. The guiding research question for this study RQ: What are the main problems faced by undergraduate students in terms of cross-cultural adaptation in the Chinese-Russian joint education program in Jilin province, China?

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research is appropriate for this investigation because it facilitates the exploration of participants' perspectives, attitudes, and lived experiences in a rich and detailed manner. The primary goal is to interpret the subjective meanings that students associate with their adaptation experiences within a specific cultural and educational context. The study emphasizes understanding processes and perceptions rather than measuring attributes quantitatively.

The sample is drawn from four universities in Jilin Province that host Chinese-Russian joint education programs. A purposive sampling strategy is employed 4 universities in Jilin Province and select 25 final-year students who have participated in the program for a substantial period. This sampling aims to ensure diversity in experiences and perspectives, providing comprehensive insights into the multifaceted nature of cross-cultural adaptation. The focus on final-year students allows for capturing reflections on their entire adaptation journey in the program.

A total of 25 individuals aged between 20 and 25 years participated in this study. A summary of participants' demographics is shown in Table 4.1



Table 3.1
Participants' Demographics

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Names of Universities	Chinese-Russian Joint Education Program
1	Student A	23	Female	China	University A	Architecture
2	Student B	22	Male	China	University A	Architecture
3	Student C	24	Male	China	University A	Architecture
4	Student D	23	Male	China	University A	Architecture
5	Student E	24	Male	China	University A	Architecture
6	Student F	23	Female	China	University A	Architecture
7	Student G	22	Female	China	University A	Architecture
8	Student A	24	Male	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
9	Student B	20	Male	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
10	Student C	23	Female	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
11	Student D	21	Female	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
12	Student E	21	Male	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
13	Student F	23	Male	China	University B	Energy and power engineering
14	Student A	23	Female	China	University C	Automation
15	Student B	24	Female	China	University C	Automation
16	Student C	22	Male	China	University C	Automation
17	Student D	22	Male	China	University C	Automation
18	Student E	23	Female	China	University C	Automation
19	Student F	24	Male	China	University C	Automation
20	Student A	22	Male	China	University D	Visual Communication
21	Student B	23	Female	China	University D	Visual Communication
22	Student C	24	Male	China	University D	Visual Communication
23	Student D	23	Male	China	University D	Visual Communication
24	Student E	22	Male	China	University D	Visual Communication
25	Student F	23	Female	China	University D	Visual Communication

Data will be collected through main instruments: semi-structured interviews, observations. These methods are selected to gather comprehensive, multi-dimensional data that facilitate a nuanced understanding of students' cross-cultural adaptation processes.

3.2 Data Processing and Analysis

The collected data will undergo systematic processing and interpretation. Interview transcripts will be subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories related to adaptation experiences. Observational notes will be coded to supplement, interview findings will provide contextual support and triangulation for the data.

The analysis will involve iterative coding, categorization, and synthesis of the data to address the research questions thoroughly. By employing these

techniques, the study aims to uncover deeper insights into the current state of cross-cultural adaptation among students, identifying key challenges and facilitators within this specific educational context.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological rigor will be maintained through data triangulation across multiple sources, member checking with participants, and detailed documentation of the analytical process. These strategies help ensure the accuracy, consistency, and depth of interpretation, thereby strengthening the overall validity of the research outcomes.

IV. Findings and Results

RQ was used to explore the main problems faced by undergraduate students in terms of cross-cultural adaptation in the Chinese-Russian joint education



program in Jilin province, China. To identify the main challenges faced by students in the Chinese-Russian joint education program, data from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed. Four interrelated themes emerged, revealing systemic and individual barriers to adaptation. Table 4.2 shows a

summary of themes identified through the interview themes supporting the RQ. The themes that emerged supporting the RQ were (a) Academic pressure, (b) Cultural and habit differences, (c) Language barriers, (d) Problem of making friends.

Table 4.2

Themes identified through interview for the RQ

Theme	Student in program Architecture	Student in program Visual Communication	Student in program Automation	Student in program Physics
Academic pressure	5	4	3	4
Cultural and habit differences	4	4	5	3
Language barriers	7	3	5	6
Problem of making friends	2	2	1	3

Through a multidimensional lens, the study investigates various factors, including students' academic performance, motivation levels, and participation in class; patterns and purposes of teacher-student language interaction; the learning environment's quality, instructional effectiveness, and vocabulary instruction strategies; as well as lesson planning, teaching transitions, and approaches to

grammar instruction. Additionally, it examines the use of teaching materials, design of assignments, and student feedback mechanisms. These combined observations aim to pinpoint the essential elements influencing students' adaptation across cultural boundaries. Table 4.3 presents the observation checklist used to support the findings related to RQ.

Table 4.3

Observation checklist to supporting the RQ

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Date:2024.9.15

University:University A

No	Subject	What is the context?	Feedback	Rate 0-5 0=very poor 1=poor 2=average 3=satisfactory 4=good 5=excellent
1	The student	learning performance	performance in this lesson; strong understanding ability; clear expression	3
		motivation	actively participate in class discussions show a high degree of interest and commitment to learning.	4
		classroom activities	discussion activities organized by teachers are very effective; students actively participate	2



2	The language	teacher's language level	accurate pronunciation, rich professional knowledge and fluent expression.	5
		student's language level	oral expression ability needs to be improved, and they need to strengthen their vocabulary and grammar practice	2
		language purpose	in the process of communication, the language is accurate and the expression is clear, which achieves the expected communication purpose.	3
		language use context	students use language properly in simulated business negotiations and have a strong ability to adapt to the environment.	3
		observe the students' answer	students perform well in classroom Q&A, answer questions accurately and think quickly.	2
3	The learning	the learning environment	the classroom atmosphere is relaxed and active, students actively participate, and the learning effect is obvious.	2
		the learning effect	a little understanding and mastery, need improvement.	2
		compare the learning situation of different students	show different characteristics and levels in the learning process, some knowledge learn fast, some confused	2
		the status of vocabulary in language teaching	expansion and consolidation of vocabulary needs to be strengthened to help students use vocabulary better.	2
4	The lesson	the preparation of the class	students and teacher are well prepared, the teaching content is organized, and the teaching objectives are clear.	4
		the beginning of the lesson	teachers can attract students' attention, introduce classroom content, and stimulate students' interest. Student start interesting in class	5
		the transition between different stages and stages of the class	teacher's transition between different stages is smooth, and there is a clear connection, which maintains the consistency of the classroom.	4
		the explanation of grammar	detailed and clear explanation of grammar knowledge helps students understand and master the grammar rules.	3
		the interruption of the class process	no obvious interference in the classroom process, the teaching order is good, and the learning effect is not disturbed.	3
		end of the class of the lesson	summary and review of this lesson is organized, which consolidates the students' learning achievements.	3
5	The materials	the content of blackboard writing	clear and readable, consistent with the content of the class.	4



	and resources	classroom task analysis	analyzed in detail, so that the students can clarify the objectives and requirements of the task.	3
		assessment of tasks	teachers evaluate the completion of students' tasks to help students understand their academic performance and progress.	3
		use of teaching materials	use of textbooks, provide diversified learning resources, and enrich the classroom teaching content. The suitable and rich in resources to meet the learning needs of students.	2
		class notes situation	take notes carefully, but the way of sorting needs to be improved.	2
6	The assignment	content	reasonably designed, help students consolidate the knowledge they have learned and improve their ability.	3
		objectives	comply with the teaching plan	3
		requirements	requirements are clear	2
		students' understanding	some question student confuse	2
		students' feedback	students gave positive feedback on this assignment,	2
		students' emotional reactions	student showed a normal emotional response.	3

Theme 1: Academic pressure

Theme 1 that was identified by participants was the academic pressure. Students reported experiencing significant stress due to the structural differences between the Chinese and Russian education systems embedded in the joint program. The unfamiliarity with new academic content, alongside the demand to meet Russian academic expectations, contributed to their initial struggle. Participants highlighted challenges in adjusting to distinct teaching styles, evaluation standards, and course structures, which differed considerably from their previous academic backgrounds. This transition period often resulted in heightened academic burden.

Classroom observations in Chinese-hosted preparatory courses revealed a mismatch between training methods and future academic demands. Although these courses were designed to mirror Russian pedagogical practices—such as engaging in group discussions and writing analytical essays—many students continued to depend on passive learning strategies. For instance, during a mock

“Russian-style” lesson at University A, only a small number of students participated in active speaking. In professional courses taught in Russian, students frequently relied on teaching assistants to provide Chinese translations. While this translation support facilitated their comprehension of academic content, it significantly limited their opportunities to practice and develop Russian language proficiency.

Out of 25 participants, 16 participants reported they have the academic pressure and difficult.

Student E of University B said that,

“In China, we are used to the teacher’s detailed explanation and a large number of after-class homework, but in Russia, teachers pay more attention to guidance and inspiration. The amount of homework is relatively small but the difficulty is higher. This change made me very confused at first. I felt that my learning methods and rhythm were messed up, and the academic pressure followed.”



Theme 2: Cultural and habit differences

Theme 2 was identified by participants was the cultural and habit differences. Students encountered considerable difficulty adapting to cultural distinctions between China and Russia, which were reflected in everyday practices, social expectations, values, and communication styles. These disparities often resulted in discomfort or a sense of isolation. Although the curriculum included modules on "Russian culture," classroom observations revealed that the content focused primarily on surface-level topics such as national holidays, geography, and historical facts, while overlooking essential aspects of everyday social behavior. For example, in a "cross-cultural communication" course at University C, instruction emphasized rote memorization of standard Russian greetings, yet failed to address more complex cultural dynamics such as approaches to managing interpersonal conflict.

Out of 25 participants, 16 participants reported they have the problem of cultural and habit differences. For example, Student E from University A described significant challenges in adjusting to Russian social customs. He explained that in China, it is common to greet others warmly with handshakes and enthusiastic expressions. In contrast, he found Russian social behavior to be more reserved, with a noticeable preference for personal space. This contrast led to discomfort during interactions with Russian peers and instructors, and at times, his friendly demeanor was misinterpreted as overly forward or inappropriate.

Student E of University C also pointed out the difficulties of Chinese students in adapting to Russian eating habits and routines. She mentioned that Chinese students may be more used to eating staple foods such as rice and noodles, while Russia mainly eats bread, meat and dairy products. In the process of adapting to the cultural differences between China and Russia.

Theme 3: Language barriers

Theme 3 that was identified by participants was the language barriers. Beyond academic stress and cultural differences, linguistic challenges emerged as a critical concern for students in the Chinese-Russian joint education program. For those who are not native speakers, limited proficiency in the instructional

language poses significant difficulties. Students often struggle to follow lectures, complete coursework, and engage in meaningful communication with faculty and classmates. These challenges frequently result in feelings of frustration, reduced confidence, and a sense of being overwhelmed by the academic environment.

Student A from University D said when talking about the language barrier,

"When I first arrived in Russia, the biggest difficulty was language. Because I am not familiar with Russian enough, I often can't understand the teacher's explanation in class, and it is difficult to complete my homework. This makes me feel very depressed and helpless."

Theme 4: Problem of making friends

Theme 4 was identified by participants was the problem of making friends. Establishing social connections in an unfamiliar cultural context proved challenging for many students. Language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar social norms often hindered their ability to build meaningful interpersonal relationships. As a result, several participants reported experiencing feelings of loneliness and social isolation, which further impacted their overall adaptation and emotional well-being during the program.

Student C of University C also reported that, "

Finding people with similar interests and values was tough, and I often felt isolated in my room. The hardest part was feeling like an outsider. Even when I tried to engage in conversations, I sometimes felt like my opinions weren't valued because of my accent or cultural background. It was disheartening because I just wanted to be accepted and included."

The research explored the core challenges faced by undergraduate students during their cross-cultural adaptation within the context of the Chinese-Russian joint education program in Jilin Province, China. The qualitative analysis revealed a range of interrelated themes, illustrating the complexity of students' adaptation experiences. Academic pressure emerged



as a central challenge, reflecting the demanding nature of the joint curriculum and students' efforts to simultaneously meet the academic expectations of both Chinese and Russian institutions. Cultural and habitual differences further complicated daily life and social interactions, requiring students to adjust to unfamiliar norms and practices. Language barriers significantly hindered students' ability to comprehend academic content, communicate effectively, and participate in both academic and social contexts. Additionally, difficulties in forming friendships highlighted the emotional and interpersonal struggles students encountered while attempting to integrate into a new cultural environment.

V. Conclusion

The research explored the core challenges faced by undergraduate students during their cross-cultural adaptation within the context of the Chinese-Russian joint education program in Jilin Province, China. The qualitative analysis revealed a range of interrelated themes, illustrating the complexity of students' adaptation experiences. Academic pressure emerged as a central challenge, reflecting the demanding nature of the joint curriculum and students' efforts to simultaneously meet the academic expectations of both Chinese and Russian institutions. Cultural and habitual differences further complicated daily life and social interactions, requiring students to adjust to unfamiliar norms and practices. Language barriers significantly hindered students' ability to comprehend academic content, communicate effectively, and participate in both academic and social contexts. Additionally, difficulties in forming friendships highlighted the emotional and interpersonal struggles students encountered while attempting to integrate into a new cultural environment.

Analysis indicates that cross-cultural adaptation among undergraduates involved in the Chinese-Russian joint education programs in Jilin Province is a multifaceted and intricate process influenced by various elements. While certain students encounter considerable challenges in adjusting to the new cultural and academic environment, others are able to successfully adapt and even excel. The policies and support initiatives provided by universities and educational authorities play a vital role in promoting smoother adaptation. Nevertheless, obstacles and difficulties persist, highlighting the necessity for continued support and resource allocation to assist students in overcoming these barriers effectively.

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