

Original Paper

A Study on the Cross-cultural Academic Adaptation of Southeast Asian Students Pursuing a Master's Degree in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in China

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Abstract

Amid accelerating globalization, the issue of cross-cultural academic adaptation among Southeast Asian students pursuing a master's degree in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in China has intensified. However, current research has insufficiently considered diverse factors affecting academic adaptation. This study employed questionnaires and interviews to analyze the academic adaptation of 83 Southeast Asian students in China, using SPSS24.0 and the Random Forest algorithm to examine six dimensions: study motivation, study attitudes, academic competence, academic self-efficacy, study mode, and academic environment. Results reveal their strong study motivation, particular value on degree and academic achievements, and generally positive study attitudes. Despite their confidence and capabilities in comprehending course content and conducting academic research, there remains room for improvement in independent assignment completion and participation in academic exchanges. Most students rate their academic self-efficacy positively. Though generally satisfied with the teaching approaches and materials, some struggle with the course and examination adaption. Feedback on the academic environment and institutional resources is generally positive. The feature importance analysis highlights study motivation, academic environment, and study attitude as pivotal in Chinese language acquisition. This study offers insights for schools and teachers to enhance international students' cross-cultural academic adaptability and improve teaching and educational management.

Keywords

Southeast Asian TCSL master's students, cross-cultural adaptation, academic adaptation, teaching insights

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous deepening of educational exchanges between China and Southeast Asia, the number of Southeast Asian students studying in China has shown sustained growth, with a particularly notable increase in the number of master's students. This trend has injected new vitality into international Chinese education, but it also poses numerous challenges. Among these challenges, it is worth noting that Southeast Asian students studying in China face difficulties in cross-cultural academic adaptation due to various factors such as uneven political and economic development, religious beliefs, social customs, traditional practices, educational systems, and individual differences. However, academic concerns are among the foremost issues that international students care about (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Under the "academic culture shock", master's students will encounter difficulties in adapting to courses, research training, and academic exchanges when studying in Chinese institutions. In this context, this study examined the adaptability and influential factors of cross-cultural academic adaptation of 83 Southeast Asian students pursuing a master's degree in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in China (hereafter referred to as TCSL master's students). This study offers feasible means of enhancing their cross-cultural academic adaptability and provides effective guidance for optimizing teaching approaches and educational management.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Academic Adaptation

There is yet no consensus regarding the definition of academic adaptation. Existing studies define academic adaptation from two perspectives: ability and process. Firstly, from the ability perspective, academic adaptation is defined as an individual's tendency to overcome learning difficulties and achieve good learning outcomes. This view considers academic adaptation as a stable trait that can assist individuals in addressing various challenges encountered in the learning process (Xu, 2004; Zhou et al., 1991). Early research emphasized an individual's coping ability when faced with learning difficulties and the tendency to achieve desirable learning outcomes (Zhou et al., 1991). Xu (2004) further affirmed that academic adaptation is a type of academic competence. Secondly, from the process perspective, academic adaptation is considered a dynamic process that involves students proactively adjusting their learning strategies, study methods, and reviewing techniques in response to changes in external conditions such as the academic environment and teaching approaches. This viewpoint argues that academic adaptation is a continuous process of adaptation, adjustment, and balance, to achieve harmony between the internal and external academic environment. For instance, Tian (2002), and Chen (2004) et al. have stressed the dynamic process of academic adaptation, regarding that students need to actively adjust their learning states to accommodate the ever-changing learning academic environment.

Although researchers may slightly differ in their definitions of "academic adaptation", they all agree that its core processes are "assimilation" and "accommodation" which involve individuals, when faced

with new learning stimuli, adjusting their cognitive structures to adapt to the new academic environment, thus achieving a transformation from a learning state of “imbalance” to “balance”. Therefore, this study defines academic adaptation as the series of spontaneous adjustments made by international students studying in China based on their environment and their own needs for learning Chinese, aiming to maintain the balance of academic environment and achieving their objectives in learning Chinese.

2.2 Cross-cultural Academic Adaptation

Cross-cultural academic adaptation refers to the strategies and processes of avoiding and overcoming psychological and conceptual confusion to achieve academic goals in a cross-cultural context (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Research on cross-cultural academic adaptation has primarily explored the influence of personal factors such as age and cognitive level, as well as social factors such as classroom atmosphere, course content, and examinations on the academic adaptation of international students (Gao, 2014; Wang, 2015; Ya, 2013; Zhao, 2013, etc.). From the perspective of personal factors, Li (2019), through a study on ASEAN students studying in Guangxi, China, found differences in language acquisition, understanding of the course content, and adaptation to teaching methods and course assessment among students of different nationalities, genders, duration in China, and language proficiency. These findings provide important references for further enhancing the cross-cultural academic adaptability of international students. Wang and Sun (2019) found that there exist gender differences in cross-cultural adaptation in exploring Central Asian students' cross-cultural adaptation issues, with males showing higher levels of cross-cultural adaptability. Additionally, they identified a V-shaped relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and age, indicating that younger and older students tend to have relatively lower adaptability, while those of middle age present relatively higher adaptability. Meanwhile, motivation to study abroad is also one of the significant factors influencing cross-cultural adaptability among Central Asian students. From the perspective of social factors, Greenfield (1994) explored the importance of positive attitudes of school teachers and administrators towards international students, noting that such attitude helps reduce the difficulties international students face in the process of cross-cultural academic adaptation. Ramburuth (2001) also argued that the choice of learning strategies and variations in learning styles can significantly affect the learning outcomes of international students. on Zheng (2013) provided some pedagogical insights on this basis regarding influential factors of cross-cultural academic adaptation. He suggests that teachers should address two potential problems learners might encounter: the lack of knowledge and experience to effectively construct knowledge structure; and ineffective learning due to communication barriers.

Moreover, some studies have begun to emphasize the impact of nationality on international students' cross-cultural adaptation. For instance, Qian (2015) conducted a quantitative and interview analysis of Southeast Asian students' cross-cultural adaptation from four dimensions: motivation to study abroad, socio-cultural adaptation, academic adaptation, and social networks. He found that Southeast Asian students are generally positively cross-culturally adapted through statistical analysis. However, they

have problems in participating in Chinese socio-cultural activities and social networks, which directly results in their insufficient social support. Chen and Gong (2018) surveyed over 100 African students studying in China, focusing on their cross-cultural academic adaptation, study motivation, academic self-efficacy, learning strategies, etc. The results revealed their low satisfaction concerning the learning atmosphere and teaching models because of the increased pressure during their studies resulting from Chinese teachers' too-rapid teaching pacing. The study also found a significant positive correlation between student's proficiency in Chinese, study motivation, and cross-cultural academic adaptation.

In summary, although existing literature has explored the cross-cultural adaptation of international students from multiple perspectives, there have been relatively few specialized studies on Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China concerning the subjects of research. Regarding the study content, while existing literature has explored the impact of personal factors such as age and cognitive level, as well as social factors such as classroom atmosphere, course content, and examinations on students' academic adaptation, there is no consensus on how factors such as academic self-efficacy, study attitude, and academic competence influence cross-cultural academic adaptation of international students. In this context, this study focuses on Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China, exploring their cross-cultural academic adaptation from six dimensions: study motivation, study attitude, academic competence, academic self-efficacy, study mode, and academic environment. The research questions are as follows:

- (1) What is the current state of cross-cultural academic adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China?
- (2) What factors will affect the cross-cultural academic adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China?

3. Research Method

3.1 Subjects

The subjects in the study are comprised of 83 Southeast Asian learners (42 males; 41 females) aged between 20 and 26, the majority of whom have been in China for less than 6 months (as shown in Table 1). The subjects' Chinese proficiency levels are determined based on the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) certificates obtained within the past six months, which is an international standardized Chinese proficiency test designed for non-native speakers of Chinese. The subjects' Chinese proficiency levels are rated at HSK6, which is considered an advanced level. All subjects have no auditory or speaking impairments and have signed informed consent.

Table 1. The Background Information of Subjects

Nationality	Number	Age	Gender	
			Male	Female
Vietnamese	36	21 and older	12	14
Thai	19	21 and older	14	15
Singaporean	7	21-26	3	4
Indonesian	4	21 and older	2	2
Malaysian	9	21-26	5	4
Cambodian	4	21-26	2	2
Laotian	4	21-26	2	2

3.2 Research Materials

3.2.1 Research Facilities

All subjects used personal computers for online testing. During the testing, subjects from all groups completed the five-point Likert scale on WJX. The filling was guided online by a researcher majoring in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language via Tencent Meeting.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

All subjects completed the Questionnaire on the Cross-cultural Academic Adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL Master's Students in China (as shown in Appendix 1). The cross-cultural academic adaptation was assessed in terms of six dimensions: study motivation, study attitude, academic competence, academic self-efficacy, study mode, and academic environment. "Study motivation" refers to the process in which individuals make efforts to learn a foreign language or achieve goals for certain motives (Ellis, 1999). "Study attitude" refers to the attitude and perspective that learners present in their learning process (Cowell, 2006). "Academic competence" means individuals' capacity to acquire, comprehend, and apply new knowledge or skills during the learning process, which is crucial for adapting to dynamic environments and solving new problems (Gagné, 1999). "Academic self-efficacy" measures an individual's confidence in utilizing their skills to accomplish a task (Duane, 2002). "Study mode" means the individual's preferred and stable study methods during the learning process, reflecting the cognitive, perceptual, and behavioral characteristics of learners when dealing with learning tasks (Herman, 1962). "Academic environment" includes both material conditions and non-material conditions such as teaching modes and strategies, learning atmosphere, and interpersonal relationships that support learning processes (Wu, 2000). Subjects expressed no objections to all concepts. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) for measurement. In this 5-point scoring system, the mean value of each dimension represents the subject's adaptation to it. Scores equal to or less than 1.5 represent complete maladaptation; scores greater than 1.5 but less than or equal to 2.5 represent relative maladaptation; scores greater than 2.5 but less than or

equal to 3.5 represent moderate adaptation; scores greater than 3.5 but less than 4.5 represent relative adaptation; and scores greater than 4.5 represent complete adaptation.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, this study conducted reliability and validity tests. Internal consistency tests show that the questionnaire has moderately high consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.958$). Regarding structural validity, the KMO test for the scale items yields a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measurement of 0.837, and the Bartlett chi-squared statistic is 2465.667 with a one-sided $p<0.01$, "rejecting the hypothesis of zero correlations among all variables", i.e., the correlations among all variables are not 0, indicating the data's validity.

3.3 Research Procedures

All subjects completed the survey within two days. On the first morning, all subjects completed a background information survey. In the afternoon, the researcher randomly selected 4 students to pre-assess their questionnaires and made modifications to ensure the accuracy and comprehensibility of the questionnaire statements (10 minutes). On the second morning, all subjects completed the survey questionnaire, and in the afternoon, they were interviewed.

3.4 Data Analysis

To investigate the cross-cultural academic adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China and its influential factors, this study employed an approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative research initially conducted descriptive statistics, analyzed the survey results using the statistical software SPSS 24.0, and then identified that there are significant correlations among all of the influential factors through Pearson correlation analysis. Subsequently, the study utilized the random forest algorithm (Breiman, 1996) to analyze the feature importance of the factors on the academic adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China, aiming to evaluate the key roles of various features in classification problems. In the experiment, the training set ratio was set at 0.3, and the obtained feature importance values only reflected the order of importance, without involving specific numerical calculations. The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews served as qualitative analysis, providing supporting evidence for the quantitative analysis results.

4. Research Results

4.1 The Current State of Academic Adaptation

To address Research Question 1, the study first conducted descriptive statistics of the six dimensions of academic adaptation. By gathering and analyzing data, the study obtained the subject's self-assessment in these dimensions, such as average values, standard deviations, and the numbers and percentages of subjects falling into different score scales. Subsequently, correlational statistics were employed to explore the correlation among dimensions of academic adaptation.

4.1.1 Study Motivation

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding study

motivation, the average values are all higher than 4, showing their strong study motivation.

Table 2. The Research Results of Study Motivation

Study Motivation	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores>3.5	
			Number	Percentage
1. I learn Chinese for my interest in Chinese language and culture.	4.240	0.576	77	92.770
2. I learn Chinese for future job opportunities.	4.350	0.528	81	97.590
3. I learn Chinese for a degree and academic achievements.	4.520	0.571	80	96.390

The correlational analysis of factors, as seen in Table 3, shows that subjects believe the need for future employment is closely related to their interest in the Chinese language and culture ($R=0.482$, $p<0.001$), while obtaining a degree and academic achievements are closely linked to job opportunities ($R=0.323$, $p=0.003$). Therefore, their study motivation is likely to come from their need for job opportunities, which is also reflected in their pursuit of academic qualifications and achievements.

Table 3. 1-3 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation				
		1. I learn Chinese for my interest in Chinese language and culture.	2. I learn Chinese for future job opportunities.	3. I learn Chinese for a degree and academic achievements.
1. I learn Chinese for my interest in Chinese language and culture.	Pearson	1	0.482	0.172
	Correlation			
	Significance level (two-tailed)		0.000***	0.120
	Number of cases	83	83	83
2. I learn Chinese for future job opportunities.	Pearson	0.482	1	0.323
	Correlation			
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***		0.003**
	Number of cases	83	83	83

3. I learn Chinese for a degree and academic achievements.	Pearson Correlation Significance level (two-tailed)	0.172	0.323	1
		0.120	0.003**	
	Number of cases	83	83	83

Notes. *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

4.1.2 Study Attitude

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding study attitude, the average value is 4, showing their overall positive study attitude.

Table 4. The Research Results of Study Attitude

Study Attitude	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores > 3.5	
			Number	Percentage
4. I can listen carefully to teachers.	3.950	0.795	55	66.270
5. I can come to class on time.	4.040	0.689	65	78.310
6. I can actively participate in classroom activities.	3.920	0.784	54	65.060
7. I can actively participate in after-class discussions.	3.890	0.765	54	65.060

The correlational analysis of factors, as seen in Table 5, indicates that the Pearson correlation coefficients of the factors are all greater than 0.75 ($p < 0.001$), signifying a strong correlation. Specifically, the highest correlation is found between “listen carefully to teachers” and “actively participate in after-class discussions” ($R = 0.914$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that these two factors may play a more central role in study attitude. Moreover, significant positive correlations exist between “carefully listening to the teacher” and “come to class on time” ($R = 0.805$, $p < 0.001$), “actively participate in after-class discussions” ($R = 0.874$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, strong correlations are observed between “come to class on time”, “active participation in classroom activities” ($R = 0.751$, $p < 0.001$), and “actively participate in after-class discussions” ($R = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, these four factors are interconnected and influence each other. A learner who attentively listens in class is also more likely to be punctual, and actively engage in classroom activities and after-class discussions. Such a proactive study attitude contributes to better knowledge absorption, enhanced learning outcomes, and the ultimate realization of their study objectives.

Table 5. 4-7 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation					
		4. I can listen carefully to teachers.	5. I can come to class on time.	6. I can actively participate in classroom activities.	7. I can actively participate in after-class discussions.
4. I can listen carefully to teachers.	Pearson	1	0.805	0.874	0.914
	Correlation				
	Significance level (two-tailed)		0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
5. I can come to class on time.	Pearson	0.805	1	0.751	0.794
	Correlation				
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***		0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
6. I can actively participate in classroom activities.	Pearson	0.874	0.751	1	0.899
	Correlation				
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***		0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
7. I can actively participate in after-class discussions.	Pearson	0.914	0.794	0.899	1
	Correlation				
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83

4.1.3 Academic Competence

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding academic competence, the average value is 3.73, indicating room for improvement in the academic adaptation of international TCSL master's students in China.

Table 6. The Research Results of Academic Competence

Academic Competence	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores>3.5	
			Number	Number
8. I can comprehend the course content.	3.900	0.790	53	63.860
9. I can complete my Chinese assignments independently and on time.	3.750	0.853	42	50.600
10. I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor (e.g., thesis, research design, course paper).	3.920	0.768	55	66.270
11. I participate in academic exchanges regularly (e.g., academic conferences, salons, lectures).	3.570	0.886	33	39.760
12. I can volunteer to discuss with my lecturers.	3.510	0.755	33	39.760

According to the correlational analysis of factors presented in Table 7, “I can comprehend the course content” appears to be strongly correlated with “I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor” ($R=0.759$, $p<0.001$), “I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor” ($R=0.870$, $p<0.001$), “I participate in academic exchanges regularly” ($R=0.775$, $p<0.001$), and “I can volunteer to discuss with my lecturers” ($R=0.757$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that the subject’s competence to comprehend course content is closely correlated with their abilities to complete assignments independently, conduct research, participate in academic exchanges, and interact with teachers.

Table 7. 8-12 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation							
			8. I can comprehend the course content.	9. I can complete my Chinese assignments independently and on time.	10. I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor (e.g., thesis, research design, course paper).	11. I participate in academic exchanges regularly (e.g. academic conferences, salons, lectures).	12. I can volunteer to discuss with my lecturers.
8.I can comprehend the course	Pearson Correlation	1		0.759	0.870	0.775	0.757
	Significance			0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***

content.	level					
	(two-tailed)					
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
9. I can complete my Chinese assignments independently and on time.	Pearson Correlation Significance level (two-tailed)	0.759	1	0.786	0.756	0.731
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
10. I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor (e.g., thesis, research design, course paper).	Pearson Correlation Significance level (two-tailed)	0.870	0.786	1	0.752	0.684
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
11. I participate in academic exchange activities regularly (e.g., academic conferences, salons, lectures).	Pearson Correlation Significance level (two-tailed)	0.775	0.756	0.752	1	0.897
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
12. I can volunteer to discuss with my lecturers.	Pearson Correlation Significance level (two-tailed)	0.757	0.731	0.684	0.897	1
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83

Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
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**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), significant correlation.

4.1.4 Academic Self-efficacy

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 8. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding academic self-efficacy, the average values are all above 4, indicating their high academic self-efficacy.

Table 8. Academic Self-efficacy

Academic Self-efficacy	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores>3.5	
			Number	Number
13. I believe I can solve problems in my studies.	4.020	0.662	70	84.340
14. I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class.	4.050	0.810	66	79.520
15. I believe I can get good academic grades.	4.060	0.669	67	80.720
16. I like choosing challenging learning tasks.	4.050	0.896	64	77.110
17. I apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life regularly.	4.020	0.715	67	80.720

The correlational analysis of factors, as displayed in Table 9, indicates that there is a significant positive correlation among the five facets of academic self-efficacy. Specifically, factor 13 “I believe I can solve problems in my studies” correlates strongly with factor 14 “I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class” ($R=0.566$, $p<0.001$), factor 15 “I believe I can get good academic grades” ($R=0.657$, $p<0.001$), factor 16 “I like choosing challenging learning tasks” ($R=0.656$, $p<0.001$), and factor 17 “I apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life regularly” ($R=0.642$, $p<0.001$). This demonstrates that the subject’s confidence in their problem-solving capacity is closely connected to their ability to master knowledge on time in class, achieve good academic grades, choose challenging tasks, and apply learned Chinese to daily life. Additionally, factor 14 “I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class” also shows strong correlations with factor 15 “I believe I can get good academic grades” ($R=0.625$, $p<0.001$), factor 16 “I like choosing challenging learning tasks” ($R=0.770$, $p<0.001$), and factor 17 “I apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life regularly” ($R=0.608$, $p<0.001$). This further illustrates the close correlation between the subject’s capability to grasp knowledge in class and their academic confidence, willingness to embrace challenges, and capacity for practical application. Moreover, factor 15 “I believe I can get good academic grades” also shows a significant correlation with factor 16 “I like choosing challenging learning tasks” ($R=0.748$, $p<0.001$), and factor 17 “I apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life regularly” ($R=0.609$, $p<0.001$).

indicating that the subject's academic confidence is not only related to their willingness to choose challenging tasks but also to their ability to apply learned knowledge practically.

Table 9. 13-17 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation		13. I believe I can solve problems in my studies.	14. I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class.	15. I believe I can get good academic grades.	16. I like choosing challenging learning tasks.	17. I apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life regularly.
13. I believe I can solve problems in my studies.	Pearson	1	0.566	0.657	0.656	0.642
	Correlation					
	Significance level (two-tailed)		0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
14. I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class.	Pearson	0.566	1	0.625	0.770	0.608
	Correlation					
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***		0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
15. I believe I can get good academic grades.	Pearson	0.657	0.625	1	0.748	0.609
	Correlation					
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***		0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
16. I like choosing challenging learning tasks.	Pearson	0.656	0.770	0.748	1	0.759
	Correlation					
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***		0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83

	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83
17. I apply the Chinese I learn in class level to my daily life regularly.	Pearson Correlation	0.642	0.608	0.609	0.759	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	83

**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), significant correlation.

4.1.5 Study Mode

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 10. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding study mode, the average value of the four factors is 3.81, indicating room for improvement in their adaptation to study mode.

Table 10. Study Mode

Study Mode	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores>3.5	
			Number	Number
18. I can adapt to the teacher's teaching approach.	4.040	0.706	64	77.110
19. I think the teaching materials currently used are good.	3.980	0.749	59	71.080
20. I like the current course schedules.	3.670	0.912	41	49.400
21. I can adapt to the current test formats.	3.550	0.887	46	55.420

The correlational analysis of factors displayed in Table 11 indicates that the subject's adaptability to the teaching approaches is closely associated with their satisfaction and assessment of teaching materials, course schedules, and test formats. Additionally, there is a significant positive correlation between Factor 19 "I think the teaching materials currently used are good", and both Factor 20 "I like the current course schedules" ($R=0.685$, $p<0.001$), and Factor 21 "I can adapt to the current test formats" ($R=0.590$, $p<0.001$). This underscores the tight link between positive evaluations of teaching materials and the recognition of and adaptation to course schedules and test formats. Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between Factor 20 "I enjoy the current I like the current course schedules", and Factor 21 "I can adapt to the current test formats" ($R=0.663$, $p<0.001$), suggesting a connection between the subject's preferences for course schedules and their adaptability to test formats.

Table 11. 18-21 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation					
		18. I can adapt to the teacher's teaching style.	19. I think the teaching materials currently used are good.	20. I like the current course schedules.	21. I can adapt to the current test formats.
18. I can adapt to the teacher's teaching style.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.809	0.662	0.571
	Significance level (two-tailed)		0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
19. I think the teaching materials currently used are good.	Pearson Correlation	0.809	1	0.685	0.590
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***		0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
20. I like the current course schedules.	Pearson Correlation	0.662	0.685	1	0.663
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***		0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83
21. I can adapt to the current test formats.	Pearson Correlation	0.571	0.590	0.663	1
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83

**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), significant correlation.

4.1.6 Academic Environment

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 12. In the self-assessment of all subjects regarding the academic environment, the average values of factors on the academic environment are all above 4.0, showing their high evaluation of this dimension.

Table 12. Academic Environment

Academic Environment	Average	Standard Deviation	Scores > 3.5
			Number

22. The school's teaching facilities can meet my learning needs.	4.400	0.540	81	97.590
23. The school library helps me a lot in my studies.	4.390	0.514	82	98.800
24. The school has a good academic atmosphere.	4.240	0.508	80	96.390
25. The school has many online learning resources.	4.310	0.539	80	96.390

The correlational analysis of factors displayed in Table 13 indicates that the condition of teaching facilities and library resources in institutions is closely related to the degree to which they help students' learning. Additionally, there is a significant positive correlation between Factor 22 and both Factor 24 "The school has a good academic atmosphere" ($R=0.402$, $p<0.001$), and Factor 25 "The school has many online learning resources" ($R=0.363$, $p=0.001$). This suggests that the adequacy of teaching facilities positively impacts students' perceptions of the academic environment and the availability of online resources. Moreover, Factor 23 "The school library helps me a lot in my studies" also correlates significantly with Factors 24 and 25, indicating that library support transcends the provision of physical resources and may indirectly contribute to fostering a conducive academic atmosphere and facilitating the use of online resources. Lastly, the positive correlation between Factors 24 and 25 implies that rich online learning resources often coincide with a stimulating academic atmosphere, both of which are vital elements of an efficient academic environment.

Table 13. 22-25 Two-tailed Significance Level on the Correlational Analysis of Factors

Correlation						
			22. The school's teaching facilities can meet my learning needs.	23. The school library helps me a good lot in my studies.	24. The school has a good academic atmosphere.	25. The school has many online learning resources.
22. The school's teaching facilities can meet my learning needs.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.584	0.402	0.363	
	Significance level (two-tailed)		0.000***	0.000***	0.001**	
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	
23. The school library helps me a lot in my studies.	Pearson Correlation	0.584	1	0.434	0.395	
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***		0.000***	0.000***	
	Number of cases	83	83	83	83	
24. The school has	Pearson Correlation	0.402	0.434	1	0.433	

a good academic atmosphere.	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83
25. The school has many online learning resources.	Pearson Correlation	0.363	0.395	0.433
	Significance level (two-tailed)	0.001**	0.000***	0.000***
	Number of cases	83	83	83

**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), significant correlation.

4.2 Analysis of Feature Importance

To address Research Question 2, the study employed Pearson correlation analysis, finding that significant correlations exist among various factors. The Random Forest algorithm necessitates that the data have been adapted. In the 5-point Likert scale rating system, results with scores above 3.5 represent adaptation and the aggregate scores exceeding 87.5 represent overall individual adaptation. Hence, after excluding datasets with aggregate scores below 87.5, 69 data sets remained for analysis of the feature importance among the influential factors in six dimensions. Furthermore, building upon the obtained influential factors, a weighted superimposition was conducted on all the data to calculate the values for the six dimensions, which then proceeded to a comprehensive analysis of the feature importance, and finally, an assessment of the relative significance of the six dimensions of influential factors was conducted.

Table 14. The Results of the Analysis of Feature Importance

		Feature Importance of each factor	Feature Importance of each dimension
Study Motivation	1. I learn Chinese for my interest in Chinese language and culture.	0.633	
	2. I learn Chinese for future job opportunities.	0.290	0.552
	3. I learn Chinese for a degree and academic achievements.	0.078	
	4. I can listen carefully to teachers.	0.623	
Study Attitude	5. I can come to class on time.	0.096	0.100
	6. I can actively participate in classroom activities.	0.108	

	7. I can actively participate in after-class discussions	0.173	
	8. I can comprehend the course content.	0.525	
	9. I can complete my Chinese assignments independently and on time.	0.215	
Academic Competence	10. I can conduct research under the guidance of my supervisor (e.g., thesis, research design, course paper).	0.129	0.037
	11. I often participate in academic exchanges (e.g. academic conferences, salons, lectures).	0.084	
	12. I can volunteer to discuss with my lecturers.	0.047	
	13. I believe I can solve problems in my studies.	0.604	
	14. I believe I can grasp the course content on time in class.	0.107	
Academic Self-efficacy	15. I believe I can get good academic grades.	0.132	0.073
	16. I like choosing challenging learning tasks.	0.091	
	17. I often apply the Chinese I learn in class to my daily life.	0.066	
	18. I can adapt to the teacher's teaching style.	0.553	
	19. I think the teaching materials currently used are good.	0.089	0.050
Study Mode	20. I like the current course schedules.	0.230	
	21. I can adapt to the current test formats.	0.128	
	22. The school's teaching facilities can meet my learning needs.	0.732	
Academic Environment	23. The school library helps me a lot in my studies.	0.129	0.189
	24. The school has a good academic atmosphere.	0.088	
	25. The school has many online learning resources.	0.052	

According to the feature importance analysis presented in Table 14, interest in the Chinese language and culture (0.632) is identified as the most significant motivator for learning Chinese within the dimension of study motivation. The need for future job opportunities and academic achievements are

also part of study motivations but are comparatively less important. Listening carefully to teachers (0.623) is considered the most critical study attitude, with punctuality, active participation in class activities, and engagement in after-class discussions also regarded as essential attitudes, albeit to a lesser significance. With regards to academic competence, comprehension of course content (0.525) is deemed highly important, while independently completing assignments on time, conducting research under a supervisor's guidance, participating in academic exchanges, and actively discussing with teachers are also viewed as components of academic competence, but their importance is relatively lower.

In terms of academic self-efficacy, the data indicates that believing in one's ability to solve problems in studies (0.604) is the most important source of self-efficacy. This finding aligns with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which argues that an individual's belief in their capabilities is a key determinant affecting their choice of behaviors and persistence. Other abilities such as timely mastery of knowledge, achieving good grades, choosing challenging tasks, and applying knowledge in daily life are also recognized as sources of self-efficacy but carry lower importance. For study mode, adapting to the teacher's teaching style (0.553) is seen as a critical factor. This underscores the significance of teacher-student interaction and the impact of teaching styles on student's study. Preferences for teaching materials and course design, as well as approaches to coping with exams, are also considered part of study mode but are ranked lower in importance, indicating that they exert a smaller influence on academic adaptation. Concerning the academic environment, the extent to which the school's teaching facilities meet students' needs (0.732) stands out as the most important environmental factor. Additionally, the school library, learning atmosphere, and online resources are acknowledged as important environmental factors, but with less significance.

Overall, this analysis suggests that study motivation, academic environment, and study attitude play a pivotal role in learning Chinese as a second language. Academic self-efficacy, study mode, and academic competence also exert influence, although their importance is relatively lower when compared to the former trio. These results can provide valuable references for both teachers and learners, aiding them in better understanding the learning process and optimizing teaching strategies and learning methods.

4.3 Interview

4.3.1 Study Motivation

Firstly, 81 subjects (97.590%) stated that their reason for learning Chinese is future employment, which indicates a certain degree of the instrumental motive of international students. This motive may mainly stem from the background of globalization and the enhancement of China's comprehensive strength, as the mastery of Chinese provides international TCSL master's students in China with broader space and more opportunities for future employment. Their instrumental motive further influences their emphasis on academic performance and qualifications ($M=4.52$). One interviewee pointed out,

I believe mastering Chinese is very important for my future career development. As China becomes

increasingly connected with the world, mastering Chinese will give me more job opportunities and growth potential. (Subject 8)

Furthermore, 77 subjects (92.771%) also mentioned that they learn Chinese because of their interest in the Chinese language and culture. This indicates that interest may be one of their primary drivers for studying Chinese. Excerpts of interviews are as follows,

I am very interested in Chinese culture and history. And it's the main reason for me to learn Chinese. I hope that by learning Chinese, I can better understand traditional Chinese culture and modern society. (Subject 39)

I believe learning Chinese is not just mastering a language skill but also a cultural experience. I hope that by learning Chinese, I can better understand Chinese society and culture, promoting exchanges and friendship between China and foreign countries. (Subject 5)

4.3.2 Study Attitude

Among the 83 Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China, more than 65% of them believe they can actively participate in classes and engage in after-class discussions. This reflects that they have a certain degree of self-discipline, able to attend classes on time, interact actively, and maintain a serious study attitude. For example, three interviewees mentioned:

I usually go to the classroom early because I think punctuality is respect for teachers and classmates. And attending classes helps me get into a better learning state. (Subject 2)

I enjoy discussing with teachers and classmates in class. I think it can help me better understand knowledge and improve my oral skills. (Subject 23)

I will actively discuss with classmates after class, and exchange ideas about what I didn't understand in class and assignments. (Subject 57)

However, 18 subjects (21.687%) showed a relatively negative study attitude. This kind of variation is related to their personal background, study habits, etc.

I think my study attitude is all right, but sometimes I do slack off. (Subject 7)

My study habits are not very good, and sometimes I get distracted during class. (Subject 66)

Overall, the study attitudes of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China are generally positive. However, due to the diversity in cultural backgrounds, there are significant individual differences in their efforts, self-discipline, and study attitude.

4.3.3 Academic Competence

53 subjects (63.86%) have high confidence and competence in comprehending the course content and conducting academic research.

I don't think it's a problem for me to understand the course content because I had been learning Chinese for some time before coming to China, so I can keep up with the teacher's pacing. (Subject 15)

When conducting academic research, I will actively search for relevant information and analyze it. I believe it's an important way to enhance my academic competence. (Subject 44)

In exchanges with international TCSL master's students in China, it was found that some students need

to discuss with classmates to complete assignments, while others need to browse relevant content online for their assignments. 30 subjects (36.145%) said that they could not keep up with the teacher's pacing, that they were not good at Chinese, and that their English, as a medium, wasn't so good, sometimes leading to difficulties in understanding the content. There are significant variations in their performance in participating in academic exchanges and interacting with teachers.

Excerpts of the interviews are as follows:

I can understand most of the course content, but sometimes the teacher speaks too fast and I can't keep up. (Subject 11)

I don't like to participate in academic exchanges because I feel a bit nervous. But I will try to communicate more with teachers and ask for advice. (Participant 45)

4.3.4 Academic Self-efficacy

70 subjects (84.337%) believe that they can resolve problems in their studies. They are confident in their ability to comprehend the course content promptly, excel academically, and apply the Chinese acquired during courses to daily life. This assessment is closely related to their interest in the Chinese language, the practicality of the course content, the high relevance of the teaching methodology to the content, and interactive teaching practices. Interviewees stated,

I frequently apply the Chinese that I've learned in class to my daily life. I feel learning is useful in this way. (Subject 16)

I believe in my ability to overcome challenges encountered in my studies, as I can promptly grasp the course content. (Subject 63)

I feel that I have got good grades, and it boosts my confidence in my academic competence. (Subject 79)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that despite an overall high academic self-efficacy among these students, a certain percentage of them still face challenges with their academic adaptation. Given their unique state, these students face dual challenges of language and culture which may result in confusion or difficulties in academic adaptation for some students. Moreover, variations in learning styles and strategies among different students can also influence their academic self-efficacy.

I think my adaptability is all right, but I still feel a little helpless at certain times, such as when faced with concepts that are difficult to comprehend. I will feel confused and lack of confidence. (Subject 26)

I think I need to improve in some aspects. Sometimes I will hesitate to choose challenging academic tasks. (Subject 82)

4.3.5 Study Mode

64 subjects (77.110%) have expressed their satisfaction with the teaching methods and materials, yet 19 students (0.229%) have shown maladaptation to or dissatisfaction with the current course schedule and test format. This evaluation predominantly derives from individual differences, various personal needs, and their unfamiliarity with the Chinese educational model. Students valuing the enhancement of language skills wish for an increase in intensive reading or spoken language class hours; others who

have an affinity for Chinese culture regard the cultural course offerings as a little insufficient.

I hope the school can increase the hours of intensive reading courses because I want to pass the HSK exam as soon as possible and improve my reading skills. (Subject 1)

Speaking skills are very important for me. I hope the school can offer more spoken language classes so that I can have more opportunities to practice spoken Chinese. (Subject 55)

The differences in their mindset and educational philosophies also influence their acceptance of the frequency of group assignments and closed-book test formats, leading to relatively large disparities in their views on study mode.

I don't fit into the group work assignments because I feel they take up a lot of time and it is difficult to reach a consensus when opinions differ. (Subject 28)

I find closed-book exams too challenging because I get nervous easily, and then I will forget what I've learned. I hope the school can adopt more flexible assessment methods, such as open-book exams or oral tests. (Subject 47)

4.3.6 Academic Environment

According to the interviews, it was found that the international TCSL master's students in China are generally satisfied with the hardware facilities and learning resources provided by the schools (97.590%). This positive assessment can be attributed to the high-quality hardware facilities and learning resources, which not only meet student's learning needs but also support their academic research and personal development. The school is also active in creating a favorable learning atmosphere and cultural environment, enabling students to integrate into campus life and enhance their educational experience. The interview transcripts are as follows:

The natural and cultural environment of the school is great, making my study and life here very enjoyable. (Subject 3)

The classroom facilities are adequate, and the library resources are rich. It is very useful for my study. (Subject 62)

5. Enlightenment

For Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China, the dual challenges of language and culture are accompanied by the necessity to adapt in several dimensions, including study motivation, study attitudes, and academic competence. Drawing upon the prior analysis of the current state of their academic adaptation and feature importance, the subsequent text will explore how to improve their cross-cultural academic adaptation from the standpoint of the school and the teacher.

5.1 *Suggestions for Schools*

5.1.1 Improving Course Schedules and Assessment Methods

The status of academic adaptation and the results of feature importance analysis reveal that Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China experience substantial difficulties in adapting to course schedules and test formats. Schools, therefore, must tailor their training programs and course designs to

align with their cultural background and learning needs. Firstly, the school should cater to their individual needs by offering diversified elective courses with an emphasis on practical teaching such as internships for teaching Chinese and Chinese culture investigation, thus enhancing both Chinese language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation through practical engagement. Regarding their maladaptation in test formats, schools should carry out a comprehensive review and evaluation of the existing curriculum system. And they should reform and optimize academic evaluation, giving equal importance to learning processes and outcomes. Meanwhile, it is necessary to value students' feedback to improve academic assessments. All above is crucial to establishing a sound and complete system of academic evaluation. Building upon these academic evaluation reforms, the introduction of academic counseling services and support from mentors and friends will significantly increase international students' recognition and satisfaction with their studies in China.

5.1.2 Upgrading Hardware Facilities to Meet Student's Needs

The analysis of feature importance indicates that teaching facilities provided by schools are considered the most crucial environmental factor in meeting students' learning needs, which reflects students' high dependency on teaching infrastructure in cross-cultural academic environments. In the self-assessment of academic adaptation, the average values of teaching facilities, library resources, etc., exceed 4.0, signifying that schools are performing relatively well in these factors. However, there is still a minority of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China who perceive the infrastructure and learning resources as requiring improvement. Consequently, schools should attach great importance to the improvement and updating of teaching facilities. In line with the specific characteristics of the disciplines and the student's needs, there should be timely updates and upgrades to instructional equipment, such as modern multimedia classrooms, and specialized rooms for the instruction of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and Chinese characters, and cultural experience halls. Moreover, as libraries serve as vital hubs for students to learn and research, they should regularly refresh their collections and enrich their offerings in Chinese and Southeast Asian language resources, and provide convenient book lending and online reading services to meet the diverse reading demands of students. Dedicated learning spaces and cultural exchange zones for international students would offer platforms for interaction with Chinese peers, fostering a favorable and enjoyable atmosphere for learning and research.

5.2 Suggestions for Teachers

5.2.1 Improving Teaching Modes to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness

Given the varied foundational knowledge levels among international students and the disparities in educational models and study methods between their home countries and China, some Southeast Asian students in China face challenges in completing their academic tasks. For these students, academic adaptation is a dynamic and continuous process rather than a static outcome. To alleviate the academic pressures they experience, it is essential that teachers provide support through various measures. The first measure is to adopt more flexible teaching approaches. Teachers should continually innovate

instructional models by incorporating diverse teaching activities, such as case-based teaching, seminars, and role-playing, to stimulate their learning interest and enthusiasm. Moreover, teachers can encourage active participation in class activities to foster student's autonomous learning capability and critical thinking through group discussions and debates. The second measure is to establish a virtuous cycle of teacher-student interaction and timely feedback. Teachers can promote emotional exchanges with students through comprehensible, illustrative, and visualized teaching approaches, along with equal-footed dialogue. Meanwhile, the guidance on optimizing learning strategies rather than just imparting knowledge can fully mobilize students' intrinsic motivation and ignite their genuine learning desire.

5.2.2 Enriching Cultural Activities to Enhance Academic Self-efficacy

According to the feature importance analysis, students' assessment of their problem-solving abilities directly impacts their study confidence and motivation. Consequently, the enhancement in their self-efficacy hinges upon helping them develop a positive perception of their academic competence. To this end, teachers can organize a series of cultural activities, such as cross-cultural expansion training, academic exchange sessions or seminars involving Chinese and international students, and Chinese corner activities. These are designed to facilitate communication in Chinese among Southeast Asian TCSL master's students, enabling them to confidently engage in various campus activities and to appreciate the joy and practicality of the Chinese language. Teachers can also encourage students to actively participate in class discussions and activities planning and to select challenging learning tasks, such as Chinese writing competitions or debates. During this process, teachers should provide timely feedback and recognition of their progress. These tasks can cultivate their problem-solving and stress-management skills, which in turn boosts their self-efficacy.

6. Conclusion

As educational exchanges between China and Southeast Asia increasingly strengthen, there has been a steady increase in the number of Southeast Asian students pursuing a master's degree in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in China. This paper focuses on the cross-cultural academic adaptation issues faced by this group, identifying a range of challenges across aspects such as study motivation, study attitude, academic competence, academic self-efficacy, study mode, and academic environment. In terms of study motivation, most students display a keen interest in Chinese and Chinese culture and recognize the importance of Mandarin for their future career prospects. Although their overall study attitude is positive, there is room for improvement in punctuality, attendance, and classroom participation. Regarding academic competence, some students struggle with understanding course content and completing assignments independently. In terms of academic self-efficacy, while most students are positive about their academic competence, a notable proportion still face academic adaptation challenges. On learning modes, there is maladaptation or dissatisfaction among some students with the current course schedules and test formats. The academic environment is generally

well-regarded, though a minority of students express dissatisfaction with the instructional strategies and the school's academic atmosphere. Among them, study motivation, academic environment, and study attitude are key factors influencing students' academic adaptation. To address these challenges, the paper puts forth targeted suggestions. Schools should refine their course schedules and assessment methods, and upgrade facilities to better meet student's needs; teachers should improve instructional approaches, enhance educational performance, and enrich cultural activities to foster students' intrinsic motivation and bolster their self-efficacy. Overall, the cross-cultural academic adaptation of Southeast Asian TCSL master's students in China is a complex and multidimensional issue that requires collaborative efforts from schools, teachers, and students to foster comprehensive development and enhance adaptability.

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