

Article

Working While Studying Abroad: Cultural Embeddedness of International Students' Employment in Hungary

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Abstract

Student employment has become an increasingly common feature of higher education, yet research on international students has predominantly approached paid work as an economic necessity. This article examines student employment as a culturally embedded social practice among international students in Hungary, focusing on employment patterns and cultural value orientations. The study applies a mixed-methods design, combining a focus group interview with an online questionnaire survey conducted among international students at a Hungarian university ($N = 61$). Cultural value orientations were measured using Hofstede's Values Survey Module, and differences between working and non-working students were analyzed using inferential statistical methods. The results show that international students' employment is dominated by flexible, low-entry-threshold jobs, particularly platform-based delivery work, while study-related or professional positions remain less common and are associated with higher income levels. Employment participation was significantly related to gender and academic year, with male students and those in higher years of study being more likely to work. Regarding cultural value orientations, a statistically significant difference between working and non-working students emerged only along the masculinity–femininity dimension, with working students displaying more performance-oriented values. The findings highlight that international student employment is associated with both structural constraints and culturally grounded value orientations.

Keywords: student employment; Hofstede's cultural dimensions; higher education

1. Introduction

Existing research has extensively documented the prevalence, determinants, and academic consequences of student employment (Beerkens et al. 2016; Hovdhaugen 2015), as well as its role in shaping employability trajectories (Nilsson and Ripmeester 2016; Tomlinson 2015). Studies focusing specifically on international students have highlighted structural barriers such as language proficiency, legal status, and limited access to professional employment opportunities (Hernández-Torrano et al. 2024), yet these analyses predominantly frame student employment as a functional or economic phenomenon. More recent labor studies literature has drawn attention to the expansion of platform-based and flexible forms of work, which increasingly attract students due to low entry thresholds and temporal flexibility (Wood et al. 2019). However, these contributions rarely differentiate between domestic and international students, nor do they sufficiently examine how cultural value orientations shape students' engagement with such employment forms.



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Policy-oriented reports similarly acknowledge the growing intersection between digital labor platforms and student work, but tend to address student workers as a homogeneous group (International Labor Organization 2018).

Consequently, little empirical research has explored student employment as a culturally embedded social practice among international students, particularly within Central and Eastern European higher education contexts. Moreover, the role of cultural value orientations in differentiating working and non-working international students remains under-theorised. By integrating student employment research with Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework and applying a mixed-methods approach, the present study addresses this gap by examining how employment during studies is associated with culturally grounded value orientations among international students in Hungary.

In Hungary, student employment has become an increasingly salient feature of higher education, closely linked to the expansion and internationalization of the tertiary education system following EU accession. Participation in higher education has expanded substantially since the 1990s, while the number of international students has risen from approximately 12,000 in the early 2000s to more than 45,000 by the 2024/2025 academic year (Csoba 2013; Központi Statisztikai Hivatal 2006, 2024). Parallel to these developments, employment during studies has become widespread: national surveys indicate that more than half of students engage in paid work alongside their studies, with flexible, low-entry-threshold jobs dominating over study-related or professional positions (Bauer et al. 2016; Szemerszki 2023). While moderate, study-related employment may enhance employability, intensive or non-related work can negatively affect academic progress, with participation patterns shaped by gender, social background, and academic stage (Berde and Remsei 2023; Passaretta and Triventi 2015; Triventi 2014; Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017).

For international students in Hungary, student employment is embedded in additional layers of structural and cultural constraints. Language barriers, legal uncertainty, and limited access to formal employment channels often push international students towards flexible and platform-based forms of work. While such employment can provide short-term income and temporal flexibility, it frequently serves a subsistence function rather than supporting long-term professional integration (Jackson and Collings 2018; Córdón-Lagares et al. 2022; Crossman and Clarke 2010). These dynamics underline that student employment cannot be understood solely as an economic activity, but rather as a socially and culturally embedded practice shaped by institutional and normative contexts.

To capture this cultural embeddedness, the present study draws on the cultural dimensions model developed by Geert Hofstede, which conceptualizes cultures along value dimensions influencing work-related attitudes and behaviors (Hofstede 1980; Hofstede et al. 2010). Hofstede's framework has been widely applied in organizational and educational research, including studies on academic integration and learning outcomes, yet its application to student employment remains limited. Rather than treating cultural dimensions as fixed national characteristics, this study applies Hofstede's framework as a heuristic tool to explore relative value differences within a culturally heterogeneous student population. In the Hungarian context, this approach allows student employment to be interpreted not merely as a response to financial necessity, but as a culturally mediated social practice.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the limited empirical evidence on the cultural embeddedness of student employment among international students in Central and Eastern Europe, the present research is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of paid employment do international students engage in while studying in Hungary?

RQ2: Are there differences between working and non-working international students in terms of cultural value orientations?

To address these questions, the study applies a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design combining a focus group interview and a questionnaire survey conducted among international students at a Hungarian university.

This study aims to contribute to the literature in several ways. First, it conceptualizes international student employment not only as an economic activity but as a culturally embedded social practice shaped by both structural constraints and individual value orientations. Second, rather than comparing national cultural profiles, the study applies Hofstede's framework at the individual level within a culturally heterogeneous student population, allowing the exploration of value differences between working and non-working students. Third, the article provides empirical evidence from a Central and Eastern European higher education context, which remains underrepresented in research on international student employment. Given the limited empirical evidence in this field, the study adopts an exploratory approach, aiming to identify potential associations between student employment and cultural value orientations rather than to test causal hypotheses.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, in which qualitative data collection preceded and informed the quantitative phase. This design was chosen to first explore international students' employment experiences in depth and subsequently examine the identified patterns using a structured survey. In the first phase, qualitative data were collected through a focus group interview with international students. The aim of this stage was to explore participants' experiences with student employment, perceived labor market barriers, and cultural adaptation in the workplace. The qualitative discussion also helped identify recurring themes related to job types, language barriers, and perceived institutional constraints. Insights from this exploratory phase directly informed the development of the questionnaire instrument used in the second phase of the research. Several survey items measuring employment attitudes, perceived barriers, and adaptation-related beliefs were derived from themes emerging during the focus group discussion. In the second phase, a quantitative online questionnaire survey was conducted among international students at Széchenyi István University. The survey allowed the systematic examination of employment patterns and the comparison of cultural value orientations between working and non-working students. This sequential design ensured that the survey instrument was grounded in the lived experiences of international students while enabling the statistical analysis of patterns identified during the qualitative phase.

The qualitative phase consisted of a focus group interview conducted on 27 October 2025 among international students enrolled at Széchenyi István University (Győr, Hungary). Eight participants (22–28 years old) took part in the interview, with a balanced gender composition (four male and four female students), and cultural backgrounds. To ensure cultural heterogeneity, participants were purposively selected from different national backgrounds: students from Morocco (two participants), Azerbaijan, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Slovakia, and Romania. The focus group was moderated using a semi-structured interview. The questions addressed the following topics: whether participants had prior work experience in their country of origin; whether they were currently employed and, if so, in what type of position; how they searched for employment opportunities during their studies; what experiences they had with Hungarian employers; whether they considered knowledge of the Hungarian language to be important for employment in Hungary; whether they had experienced any form of discrimination in the labor market; and whether they had encountered significant cultural differences in their workplaces. In addition to

these predefined questions, the discussion generated several themes raised spontaneously by participants. These topics later informed the development of the questionnaire used in the quantitative phase of the research. Participants discussed the risks associated with language barriers during employment contract negotiations, the possible absence of written contracts in some employment situations, perceived gender differences in employment opportunities, and differing views regarding responsibility for adapting to cultural differences in employment relationships. These insights were subsequently incorporated into the survey instrument as items measuring perceived employment barriers, legal vulnerability, and workplace adaptation experiences.

The discussion was conducted in English and lasted approximately 90 min. The qualitative findings highlighted the dominance of platform-based and online work, the role of language barriers, and perceived legal vulnerability, and directly informed the development of the questionnaire used in the quantitative phase.

Building on the qualitative findings, an online questionnaire survey was conducted between 26 October and 19 November 2025. The questionnaire was distributed exclusively among international students enrolled at Széchenyi István University, ensuring institutional homogeneity of the sample. A total of 63 responses were collected; after data cleaning, two cases were excluded, resulting in a final analytical sample of 61 respondents. The regional composition of the survey sample reflects the diverse geographical background of international students enrolled at the university. Respondents originated from several world regions, with the largest group coming from the India–Pakistan–Bangladesh region ($N = 14$, approximately 23% of the sample). Students from Central and Eastern Europe represented the second largest group ($N = 12$, about 20%). Further participants originated from Sub-Saharan Africa ($N = 9$, 15%), North Africa ($N = 7$, 11%), East Asia ($N = 7$, 11%), and West Asia and the Middle East ($N = 7$, 11%). Smaller groups of respondents came from North America ($N = 3$), Russia ($N = 2$), and Central and South America ($N = 1$). The regional distribution indicates a highly heterogeneous sample, encompassing students from multiple cultural regions. This diversity is particularly relevant for the analysis of cultural value orientations, as the study examines differences within an internationally mixed student population rather than focusing on a single national group.

Respondents were divided into two groups based on employment status: students who had engaged in paid work during the three months preceding the survey (“working students”, $N = 30$) and those who had not (“non-working students”, $N = 31$). The purpose of this grouping was to identify within-sample differences rather than to conduct cross-national comparisons.

The study involved human participants and was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Széchenyi István University under approval code SZE-ETT-79, issued on 22 October 2025. Participation in both the focus group interview and the questionnaire survey was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The data were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was recorded. The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. No generative artificial intelligence was used in the research design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the results.

2.2. Measures

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of a self-developed scale comprising 14 items designed to measure international students’ attitudes toward employment, perceived barriers, and adaptation-related beliefs. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale,

and seven items were reverse-coded. Following reliability analysis, one item was removed, resulting in acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$; McDonald's $\omega = 0.73$). Exploratory factor analysis using the minimum residual method with varimax rotation yielded a two-factor structure representing (1) employment attitudes and adaptation beliefs and (2) perceived barriers and discrimination experiences.

Cultural value orientations were measured using the Hofstede Values Survey Module 2013. As the VSM measures several conceptually independent cultural dimensions rather than a single latent construct, the instrument was not treated as a unified scale and overall internal consistency was not interpreted as a reliability indicator. Instead, the analysis focused on the calculation of the individual cultural dimension indices following the methodological guidelines of the VSM. During the questionnaire implementation in the online survey platform, item Q19 was inadvertently omitted, which prevented the calculation of the Long-Term Orientation (LTO) dimension. Consequently, the analysis was limited to five cultural dimensions: Power Distance (PDI), Individualism–Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity–Femininity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Indulgence–Restraint (IVR). Although the original instrument does not include reverse-coded items, two items (Q16 and Q18) showed reversed correlations in the present sample. As the aim of the study was not to compare national cultural scores but to examine relative differences within a heterogeneous international student sample, the omission of the LTO dimension does not affect the interpretation of the remaining indices used in the analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and inferential statistical tests. All statistical analyses were performed using the jamovi statistical software package (version 2.7). Group differences between working and non-working students were examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with gender, academic year, and length of prior work experience included as control variables. Due to partial violations of normality assumptions, Welch's independent samples *t*-tests were complemented by non-parametric Mann–Whitney U tests. Effect sizes were estimated using Cohen's *d*. Qualitative data from the focus group interview were analysed using thematic content analysis. Reported job types were categorised and descriptively compared with self-reported income categories to identify patterns of segmentation within student employment.

3. Results

3.1. Sample Characteristics

The final analytical sample consisted of 61 international students enrolled at a Hungarian university. Based on employment status during the three months preceding the survey, respondents were divided into two groups: working students ($N = 30$) and non-working students ($N = 31$). The gender distribution differed markedly between the two groups. Among male respondents ($N = 31$), 22 reported engaging in paid work, whereas only 9 out of 30 female respondents reported working during their studies. These descriptive differences indicate a higher prevalence of student employment among male international students. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the sample, showing that male students were substantially more likely to engage in paid work during their studies than female students.

Table 1. Sample characteristics by employment status.

Variable	Total (N = 61)	Working (N = 34)	Non-Working (N = 27)
Gender, N (%)			
Male	31 (50.8%)	22 (64.7%)	9 (33.3%)
Female	30 (49.2%)	12 (35.2%)	18 (66.7%)
Academic year, mean (SD)	1.97 (1.37)	2.18 (1.57)	1.70 (1.03)
Age group, N (%)			
18–25 years	40 (65.6%)	21 (34.4%)	19 (31.1%)
26–35 years	18 (29.5%)	11 (18%)	7 (11.5%)
35–50 years	3 (4.9%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.6%)

3.2. Reliability Analysis and Factor Structure of the Self-Developed Scale

The self-developed scale measuring student employment attitudes, perceived barriers, and adaptation-related beliefs originally consisted of 14 items. Following reliability analysis, one item was removed, resulting in acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.730$; McDonald's $\omega = 0.734$). Item-level analyses indicated that no further item removal would have led to a substantial improvement in reliability. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the minimum residual method with varimax rotation. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 191$, $df = 78$, $p < 0.001$) and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure (KMO = 0.586). The analysis yielded a two-factor solution explaining 32.3% of the total variance. The first factor accounted for 18.4% of the variance and comprised items related primarily to individual employment attitudes and adaptation beliefs, while the second factor explained 13.8% of the variance and included items referring to perceived barriers and discrimination experiences. Table 2 shows the results of reliability analysis in details, already taken out Question nr. 7 from the sample.

Table 2. Reliability analysis on the questionnaire.

	Item-Reliability	
	If Item Dropped:	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
WSA1 (It is necessary to work while studying at a university.)	0.675	0.693
WSA2 (It is possible to work at a foreign country without knowing the local language.)	0.696	0.712
WSA3 F (I only want to start working after graduation.)	0.682	0.700
WSA4 F (It is an obstacle to be a woman when searching for a job abroad.)	0.689	0.705
WSA5 (It is easy to get a platform or online job.)	0.687	0.704
WSA6 (Getting a job abroad is only the question of dedication: you can get one if you really want to.)	0.673	0.688
WSA8 (It is my duty to adopt to local rules when I am working in another country.)	0.706	0.723
WSA9 f (It is an obstacle to be a man when searching for a job abroad.)	0.672	0.691

Table 2. *Cont.*

Item-Reliability	If Item Dropped:	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
WSA10 F (It is an obstacle to have a different religion than the locals when working abroad.)	0.700	0.719
WSA 11 F (I got rejected a lot while searching for a job abroad.)	0.711	0.726
WSA12 F (I experienced discrimination while working abroad.)	0.715	0.731
WSA13 (It is my duty as a foreign employee to prepare for cultural differences in a foreign workplace.)	0.700	0.715
WSA14 F (It is the company's duty to prepare for cultural differences when applying foreign workforce.)	0.706	0.726

Note: F = reversed item.

To examine the structure of the self-developed scale measuring employment attitudes, perceived barriers, and adaptation-related beliefs, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted using the minimum residual extraction method with varimax rotation.

Prior to the analysis, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 191$, $df = 78$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was appropriate for factor analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy reached 0.586, suggesting a moderate but acceptable level for exploratory analysis. The analysis resulted in a two-factor solution, explaining 32.3% of the total variance. The first factor accounted for 18.2%, while the second factor explained 14.1% of the variance. The first factor primarily captures general attitudes toward employment during studies and individual responsibility for labor market integration. Item loading on this factor include statements such as “It is necessary to work while studying at a university” (0.563), “Getting a job abroad is only a question of dedication” (0.685), and “It is my duty to prepare for cultural differences” (0.434). These items reflect beliefs related to personal agency and adaptation to the host country's labor market. The second factor represents perceived barriers and discrimination experiences in employment. High loadings were observed for items such as “I got rejected a lot while searching for a job” (0.780), “I experienced discrimination while working abroad” (0.606), and “It is the company's duty to prepare for cultural differences” (0.576). These items capture perceptions of structural barriers and difficulties encountered during employment. Overall, the factor structure suggests that the scale differentiates between employment-related attitudes and perceived structural barriers, supporting the conceptual distinction underlying the questionnaire. Table 3 presents the rotated factor loadings, showing that items related to employment attitudes load primarily on the first factor, while items referring to perceived barriers and discrimination experiences load on the second factor.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis on questionnaire.

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
WSA1	0.563		0.655
WSA2	0.438		0.803
WSA3 F	0.441		0.748
WSA4 F	0.520		0.729

Table 3. *Cont.*

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
WSA5	0.506		0.725
WSA6	0.685		0.530
WSA8	0.490	−0.352	0.637
WSA9 F	0.453	0.374	0.655
WSA10 F		0.362	0.842
WSA 11 F		0.780	0.391
WSA12 F		0.606	0.633
WSA13	0.434		0.791
WSA14 F		0.576	0.667

Note: ‘Minimum residual’ extraction method was used in combination with a ‘varimax’ rotation. F = reversed item.

3.3. Characteristics of Student Employment

To examine factors associated with student employment, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with employment status as the dependent variable. Gender and academic year showed statistically significant main effects. Male students were significantly more likely to engage in paid work than female students, $F(1, 57) = 9.43, p = 0.003$. Academic year also had a significant effect, $F(1, 57) = 4.71, p = 0.034$, indicating that students in higher years of study were more likely to work during their studies. In contrast, the length of prior work experience did not emerge as a significant covariate, $F(1, 57) = 0.01, p = 0.920$. As shown in Table 4, both gender and academic year had statistically significant effects on employment status, indicating that male students and students in higher years of study were more likely to engage in paid work.

Table 4. ANCOVA results predicting student employment.

Predictor	df	F	p
Gender	1.57	9.43	0.003
Academic year	1.57	4.71	0.034
Working experience (years)	1.57	0.01	0.92

Among working students, no statistically significant gender difference was found in reported income levels ($t = -0.398, p = 0.693$), although female students reported slightly higher earnings on average.

3.4. Types of Student Employment and Income Categories

Content analysis of the open-ended responses revealed that the majority of working students were engaged in low-entry-threshold and flexible forms of employment. Platform-based delivery work (e.g., courier or rider positions) was the most frequently reported job type. Administrative and assistant roles were also relatively common, including part-time administrative work and research assistant positions. Employment in hospitality and physical labor was reported less frequently, while a small number of respondents indicated holding higher-skilled or professional positions, such as data engineering, design, online marketing, teaching, or stock trading.

When job types were examined in relation to reported monthly income categories, a segmented income structure emerged. Platform-based delivery jobs were predominantly associated with middle income categories (approximately 50,000–300,000 HUF per month).

Administrative and assistant positions showed substantial heterogeneity, spanning from lower to higher income categories. Research-related and professional positions were typically associated with medium income levels, whereas the highest income category was reported exclusively by respondents engaged in knowledge-intensive, technology-related work.

3.5. Cultural Value Orientations and Group Differences

Aggregate dimension scores indicated a coherent cultural profile within the sample. Power Distance values were generally low, suggesting a preference for egalitarian organisational relations. Scores on the Individualism–Collectivism dimension were situated in the collectivist range, while the Masculinity–Femininity dimension showed an overall dominance of feminine values. Uncertainty Avoidance scores were relatively high, indicating sensitivity to structured and predictable environments, whereas Indulgence scores suggested a moderate orientation toward enjoyment and self-expression.

We analysed cross-sectional survey data ($N = 61$) assessing cultural value orientations with Hofstede's VSM-based indices. Respondents were grouped by current employment during studies (Working $N = 30$ vs. Non-working $N = 31$). Item responses were recoded to numeric Likert scores and used to compute five Hofstede-style dimension indices at the respondent level, Power Distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR), following standard VSM index formulas (constants omitted because they do not affect between-group comparisons). Group differences were summarised as mean index scores with 95% confidence intervals, and tested using Welch's two-sample t -tests for each dimension. Working participants displayed higher MAS scores on average than non-working participants (mean difference = 28.52; Hedges' $g = 0.55$; $p = 0.036$). No statistically significant differences were observed for PDI ($p = 0.579$), IDV ($p = 0.879$), UAI ($p = 0.935$), or IVR ($p = 0.209$).

4. Discussion

The present study examined student employment among international students in Hungary as a culturally embedded social practice shaped by both structural constraints and value orientations. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods and applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework at the individual level, the analysis contributes to a growing body of research that seeks to move beyond purely economic interpretations of student employment.

4.1. Employment Patterns and Structural Constraints

The dominance of flexible, low-entry-threshold jobs—most notably platform-based delivery work—among international students in Hungary is consistent with recent international findings on student labor market participation. Previous studies have shown that international students are disproportionately represented in precarious and platform-based employment due to language barriers, limited local networks, and regulatory uncertainty (Lomer and Mittelmeier 2021; Riaño and Pigué 2016). The qualitative findings of the present study reinforce these insights by highlighting how perceived legal vulnerability and limited access to information channel international students toward forms of work that minimize interaction with formal institutional actors. The observed segmentation of income levels across job types further aligns with earlier research distinguishing between employment as a short-term subsistence strategy and employment as a pathway to skill accumulation and labor market integration (Cordón-Lagares et al. 2022; Jackson 2023). While a small group of students in the present sample was able to access knowledge-intensive positions with higher

earnings, the majority relied on flexible service work, underscoring the uneven distribution of employment opportunities within the international student population.

4.2. Determinants of Student Employment

The finding that male students and students in higher academic years are more likely to engage in paid work during their studies corresponds with patterns identified in both national and international research. Prior studies have consistently shown that student employment increases with academic progression, reflecting growing autonomy, improved time management, and closer proximity to labor market entry (Beerkens et al. 2016; Triventi 2014). Gender differences in student employment participation have also been widely documented, often reflecting broader gendered divisions of labor and sectoral segregation within student job markets (Berde and Remsei 2023). Notably, prior work experience did not significantly predict current employment status in the present sample. This finding supports earlier arguments that student employment decisions are shaped less by cumulative labor market capital and more by situational opportunity structures, institutional context, and immediate financial pressures (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Nilsson and Ripmeester 2016).

4.3. Cultural Value Orientations and Employment: The Role of Masculinity–Femininity

A key contribution of the study lies in its analysis of cultural value orientations. While the overall cultural profile of the sample was characterised by low power distance, collectivist tendencies, high uncertainty avoidance, and predominantly feminine values, statistically significant differences between working and non-working students emerged only along the masculinity–femininity (MAS) dimension. Working students exhibited higher masculinity scores, indicating stronger performance orientation and achievement-related values. This finding is broadly consistent with previous research linking paid employment during studies to stronger career orientation, competitiveness, and work centrality (Jackson and Collings 2018; Tomlinson 2015). From a Hofstedeian perspective, masculinity is closely associated with ambition, material success, and performance-driven behavior, which are often linked to participation in work contexts (Hofstede et al. 2010). Similar associations between employment participation and performance-oriented attitudes have been observed in studies of international student employability and career self-concepts (Marginson 2018).

At the same time, the interpretation of this result requires caution. An important contextual factor is that male students were overrepresented among working respondents in the present sample. This imbalance may partly influence the observed difference in MAS scores between working and non-working students. Given that masculinity scores tend to be higher among men in many empirical applications of Hofstede's framework, the observed difference in MAS values may partly reflect the gender composition of the working group rather than a direct effect of employment itself. In this sense, gender may act as a confounding factor, contributing to the association between employment status and masculinity-oriented values. This limitation highlights the need for careful interpretation and underscores that the present findings should be understood as indicative of an association rather than a causal relationship.

The absence of significant differences in the other cultural dimensions suggests that orientations related to hierarchy, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and indulgence are more stable and less sensitive to short-term life-course experiences such as student employment. This finding supports earlier critiques of overly deterministic interpretations of cultural dimensions and reinforces the view that certain value orientations are more deeply embedded and less malleable at the individual level (McSweeney 2016; Taras et al. 2010).

4.4. Implications for Higher Education and Policy

The findings also carry implications for higher education institutions and policymakers. First, universities hosting international students should strengthen institutional support for accessing regulated student employment, for example through career services specifically tailored to international students and partnerships with local employers offering study-compatible positions. Second, the results highlight the importance of language-integrated employment opportunities, suggesting that universities could support part-time positions where English is accepted while simultaneously facilitating language learning in workplace contexts. Third, clearer institutional guidance regarding legal employment conditions and contractual rights may help reduce the perceived legal vulnerability reported by several students. Such measures may contribute to a more equitable integration of international students into local labor markets.

4.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on a relatively small, single-institution sample of international students, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The exploratory nature of the study and its cross-sectional design also preclude causal inference: it remains unclear whether employment during studies shapes cultural value orientations or whether pre-existing values influence students' propensity to work. In addition, the relatively modest sample size requires cautious interpretation of the statistical analyses, particularly regarding the ANCOVA model and the comparison of multiple cultural dimensions. The results should therefore be understood as indicative of exploratory patterns rather than as definitive statistical generalizations.

Second, cultural value orientations were measured using Hofstede's Values Survey Module, a framework that has been subject to extensive criticism, particularly regarding its origins in national-level analysis and the risk of ecological fallacy (McSweeney 2016; Taras et al. 2010). Although the model was applied here as a heuristic tool at the individual level, alternative socio-cultural frameworks may offer complementary perspectives. In particular, Schwartz's theory of basic human values provides a well-validated individual-level value framework suitable for heterogeneous populations (Schwartz 1992; Schwartz et al. 2012), while Bourdieu-inspired approaches conceptualise student employment as a socially structured practice shaped by habitus and unequal access to economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1990). Furthermore, methodological adjustments applied to the VSM index calculation—specifically the omission of constant terms and the inability to compute the Long-Term Orientation (LTO) dimension due to the missing questionnaire item—may limit direct comparability with national-level VSM scores reported in other studies, although these adjustments do not affect the interpretation of the within-sample comparisons that constitute the primary focus of this study.

Third, the interpretation of the masculinity–femininity dimension requires caution, as male students were overrepresented among working respondents. In addition, the gender imbalance between working and non-working respondents may partly influence the observed differences in masculinity–femininity scores, suggesting that the results may reflect gender composition effects as well as employment-related value orientations. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of recall and social desirability biases. Future research employing larger, multi-institutional samples, longitudinal designs, and alternative cultural frameworks would help to further clarify the complex relationship between student employment and cultural value orientations.

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