

## Federation University ResearchOnline

<https://researchonline.federation.edu.au>

Copyright Notice

This is the published version of:

Koeck, & Ottmann, G. (2018). Placement interviews at the interface of cultural diversity and standardised requirements. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 20(1), 108–121.

Available online: <https://journal.anzswwer.org/index.php/advances/article/view/153>

Copyright © 2018 Australian and New Zealand Social Work and Welfare Education and Research. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

See this record in Federation ResearchOnline at:

<http://researchonline.federation.edu.au/vital/access/HandleResolver/1959.17/182163>

# Placement Interviews at the Interface of Cultural Diversity and Standardised Requirements

Clara-Maria Koeck & Goetz Ottmann

Clara-Maria Koeck & Goetz Ottmann – Australian College of Applied Psychology

---

## Address for Correspondence:

clara.koeck@gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

Field education placements permit social work students to gain practical experience employing the knowledge and skills they acquired in the classroom. Access to field education placements is dependent upon placement interviews during which candidates have to display their professional and personal suitability. Placement interviews are challenging for all students. For international students, they are particularly challenging as they represent a litmus test as to whether they have achieved a sufficient degree of cultural adaptation. To date, little attention has been paid to the way placement interviews are experienced by international students. This article addresses this gap. The article is based on a qualitative study involving semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five international students focusing on the way placement interviews were experienced, how students felt prepared for them, and the degree to which language proficiency, cultural difference, social connectedness, discrimination, and Australian workplace culture represented a challenge. The findings suggest that international students need to be better informed about opportunities associated with field placement and the often implicit requirements and expectations associated with it. The authors argue that they would benefit from targeted educational resources ranging from English language tuition to interview role play.

**Keywords:** *Social work; Field education; Placement interviews; International students; Acculturation*

## INTRODUCTION

Students undertaking graduate or postgraduate (professional qualifying) studies towards an Australian social work degree are required to complete a total of 1,000 hours of field education. Admission to field education placements is not automatic but depends on successfully passing an interview conducted by the host agency. These interviews can be stressful for domestic and, particularly for international, students. Familiarity with the way they are conducted and with the expectations underpinning them can play an important role. This potentially puts international students at a disadvantage. To date, only a handful of studies have focused on how international students experience field education placement interviews. This article seeks to contribute to this embryonic body of knowledge. It explores the challenges and facilitators experienced by international students who were studying or had recently completed a course in Social Work or Community Services regarding their placement interviews. The article is based on a qualitative study involving semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five international students. It argues that placement interviews involve issues of culture and language in a transnational context that inevitably affect the performance of interviewees.

Field education placements provide exposure to a variety of areas of practice and form an obligatory component of social work education. Placements are not part of the services provided by academic institutions; rather, they are offered by public or private institutions working in an appropriate field. Placements permit students to apply the knowledge and skills they have previously acquired in the classroom. The decision as to whether a student is sufficiently advanced for placement rests with the academic institution. But access to a particular placement is controlled by the institution offering the placement. The decision is usually based on an interview focusing on whether the student is likely to meet the professional and personal requirements set out by the host organisation. While it is a challenge for all students to convince interviewers that they meet these requirements, international students face additional difficulties associated with their various levels of acculturation. That is, the social and cultural context in Australia differs, often considerably, from that of their country of origin and international students have to acquire a working knowledge of their host country within a comparatively short time frame (Cigularova, 2005; Tran, 2011).

In 2017, international students enrolled at Australian education institutions came from China (30%), India (11%), Malaysia (5%), Vietnam (4%), and Nepal (4%) (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Australia also hosts a growing number of students from Latin America, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa (Department of Education and Training, 2017; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.; Manroop, Boekhorst, & Harrison, 2013).

### Review of the literature

Field education placement interviews involving international students are an under-researched topic and only a handful of research-based articles could be identified (Harrison & Ip, 2013; Zunz & Oil, 2009). There is considerable overlap between job and field education interviews relative to the issues faced by applicants. As a result, the reviewed

literature also includes a small body of work focusing on job interviews within a cross-cultural setting. All reviewed articles take an Anglo-European cultural background as their dominant reference point. This also holds true for articles emanating from non-Anglo-European contexts (Wong & Phooi-Ching, 2000).

Most authors tend to agree that it is a responsibility of academic institutions to prepare students for their professional careers (Blackmore et al., 2014; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Harrison & Yip, 2013; Hatoss, 2006; Yates & Wahid, 2013). Preparing students for professional interviews forms an important step in this process (Manroop et al., 2013; Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, & Harms, 2013; Zunz & Oil, 2009). Authors focusing on the challenges faced by international students when entering a professional context highlight that educational efforts should focus, not only on English language proficiency (Gomes, 2015; Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2006), but also pay attention to social attitudes and cultural values, such as deferential interaction with persons of authority (Bye, Horverak, Sandal, Sam, & van der Vijver Jr., 2014; Horverak, Sandal, Pallesen, & Timmerman, 2013; Paulhus et al., 2013; Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2014). These authors argue that this type of instruction is crucial as the earlier-mentioned challenges prevent international students from leaving a self-confident “professional” impression, which is often associated with professional readiness by Australian interviewers (Guns, Richardson, & Watt, 2012). They advocate for a number of measures designed to help international students to overcome their “deficits” (Ling & Tran, 2015) ranging from language courses (Lee & Salamon, 2004) to workshops providing interview skills. The authors of this deficit-focused literature implicitly operationalise a theory of acculturation. Acculturation offers a variety of possible forms of relationship between different cultural groups (Berry, 1997, 2008) of which, however, only integration is considered to be desirable. Other forms (i.e., assimilation, separation, and marginalisation) entail serious disadvantages for a minority group and its members (Berry, 2008).

Another focal point particularly advanced within the literature focused on cross-cultural job interviews is that lower academic achievements of international students can be the result of unfair treatment, discrimination and covert racism (see, for instance, Bye et al., 2014; Fell & König, 2016; Pham & Tran, 2015). Authors highlight that interviews – or the way they are conducted and evaluated – may not be suitable for determining an applicant’s professional readiness and that international students should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their strength in a way that takes into account their cultural background (Fell et al., 2016; Manroop et al., 2013; Paulhus et al., 2013). Authors positing this argument foreground the role and responsibility of the individuals who conduct professional interviews coming to the conclusion that Australian educators and professionals should learn to better understand how people from different cultural backgrounds think and express themselves in order to avoid misconceptions and prejudice (Fell & König, 2016; Kokkoris & Kühnen, 2014; Sandal et al., 2014; Wong & Phooi-Ching, 2000). Underpinning this line of enquiry is an attempt to de-centre Anglo-European culture (including global corporate culture) with its overemphasis on English (Ata, 2015; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Hatoss, 2006; Pham Tran, 2015) and its oppressive dominant practices (e.g., interview methods) in order to decolonise local cultural practices and empower the subaltern subject.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on qualitative research (Hammersley, 2007) making use of in-depth interviews involving a purposive sample of five international students. A qualitative methodology was appropriate as the aim of this study was to collect experiential information highlighting cultural specificity (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). In-depth interviews are particularly suited to elicit rich information (Funston, 2014) and allowing researchers to form a holistic understanding (Berry, 1999) of the interviewee's view or situation (Berry, 1999; Goodman, 2001; Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell Jr., 1996). A snowball sampling method was used to recruit the participants. Snowball sampling provides an avenue to recruit a purposive sample without complex recruitment criteria within relatively short timelines (Bryman, 2016; Morgan, 2008).

Both authors have experience with social work education; one as a lecturer, the other as an international student who has experienced placement interviews and related difficulties. Their engagement with international students inspired and informed this study.

### Procedures

Information about, and an invitation to participate in, the study were distributed to students by email. In addition, information about the study was posted on relevant social media pages. Students who received this information passed it on to other students employing a snowball sampling method. Several students then contacted the researcher directly expressing an interest in the study. In order to be eligible to participate participants had to have experienced at least one placement interview in Australia for the purpose of completing a degree in a human services discipline over the course of the previous two years.

The sample consisted of two female and three male students. Two participants originated from South-America, one from West-Africa, and two from South-Asia. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' demographic information.

**Table 1.** Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Geographical region of origin	Degree completed or enrolled in in Australia in the course of which participant underwent placement(s)
Elizabeth	26	female	South Asia	Master of Social Work (Qualifying)
Michael	38	male	South America	Master of Social Work (Qualifying)
Monica	27	female	South America	Diploma of Community Services
Nick	26	male	South Asia	Master of Social Work (Qualifying)
Stephen	27	male	West Africa	Master of Social Work (Qualifying)

Interviews were conducted either in public spaces (Australian College of Applied Psychology Sydney as well as a community centre) or as Skype interviews, and were digitally recorded. The interviews were focused on topics such as participants' experience of placements in general, preparation for placement interviews, the setting of the interviews, the interview conversation, the cultural background and how it might impact on interview situations, eventual difficulties, and lessons learned by participants.

Interviews were transcribed and information that would allow others to identify the interviewees was removed or replaced (i.e., names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms). Transcribed interviews were made available to participants for member checking (Bryman, 2016).

### **Data analysis**

Transcribed interviews were thematically analysed. A two-step process developed by Minichiello, Aroni, and Hays (2008) was followed first making sense of each individual interview before reading them in the context of the other interviews. A coding table was developed by reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews. Although the interview data provided the key inspiration for developing the coding table, it is also true that the coding process was shaped by theoretical insights outlined in the reviewed literature. In this sense, an inductive/deductive approach was used to identify themes (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

### **Ethics Approval**

The project was approved by the Navitas Professional Institute Human Research Ethics Committee (NPI HREC) (EC00447) on 12 September 2016 (as amended on 7 October, 2016).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Motivation for studying in Australia**

Most participants chose to study in Australia in order to improve their chances in the international labour market and to secure a higher income. Other motivations included: learning English; curiosity; wanting to live in a society more open than that of their home country; to experience a more pleasant environment; and to acquire new skills they could employ in their own countries.

*Elizabeth: I can more develop, I have more opportunities over here, the money that I make over here is completely different, [...] more jobs over here, more beaches over here [laughs], the parks everywhere [...].*

*Nick: Some come for opportunities, but for me it is more out of curiosity and also the opportunities [to learn], so that I could maybe in the future take those skills to my country. So, that was the major reason.*

*Monica: So, yes, it was one of the reasons, I think: English - just learn English... because I wanted to have social work experience in international context.*

### **Experience of placement interviews**

Four of the participants had experienced one placement interview and one participant, two. All participants also had experience with job interviews in Australia. Placement interviews lasted from half an hour to two hours, sometimes culminating in a tour through the organisation.

Four placement interviews had been conducted by just one interviewer, one by two, and one by a panel of four interviewers. Five placement interviews had been conducted by women, one by a man. Participants reported that it made no difference to them whether the interview was conducted by a woman or a man.

Five placement interviews were informal in the way they were conducted; and participants reported that the climate of the placement interview had been friendly. All participants had successfully secured the placement(s).

Nick: *It was [a] free and comfortable atmosphere, [...] because she wasn't just asking [all] the questions [but] also inquired [...] if I had some queries, so it was also a kind of conversation. It was more comfortable than sitting in [...] a formal setting.*

One participant experienced a formal placement interview. This was perceived as much more stressful. There was also a sense that formal interviews were perceived as more important and taken more seriously:

Elizabeth: *My first one, it was more an informal interview, you know, a 'getting to know each other' sort of thing. [...] But my second one was a proper formal one, almost a one hour interview. It was really stressful [...].*

The majority of participants also had experience with interviews in their home country. They stated that interviews there had been more formal and less friendly.

While participants described the workplace culture in their country of origin as formal and characterised by hierarchical structures and thinking, they believed that the workplace culture in Australia, including workplace culture at the organisations where they had been placed, was more open, less formal and less hierarchical:

Elizabeth: *I find it more positive over here, the atmosphere, the higher authorities, the hierarchy, everyone is so friendly here, you know [...]. But over there, the hierarchies are really intimidating, you can't freely approach them.*

Nick: *I think workplace culture is more open in Australia because you have more informal communication and calling by [first] name. But back home it's more hierarchical, you don't really communicate with the boss. [...] With the boss you try not [even] to have eye contact [...].*

### **Preparedness for placement interviews**

Most participants stated that they had not known what to expect from a placement interview. For this reason, they had not prepared for these interviews. This had resulted in unpleasant surprises:

Elizabeth: *We have no idea what's happening and we just go for a placement [...]. But then [...] at some point you [feel] like: My God, this is not what I thought! Like, I wasn't told that this is gonna be this way because I went for a placement – I didn't go for a job! [...] You know, you need to prepare mentally as well when you go into something like that, I just went casually, just like that, so [...] if I had received more information] I think I would have been a bit more prepared.*

According to participants, this was caused by the fact they did not receive information or were not adequately prepared for placement interviews by their education institutions:

Monica: *We don't have preparation [...] for the work placement interview, and it's the same situation when you are going to have a job interview, [so] you are less likely to have that job. I think, definitely we need more support and get better prepared for that.*

Participants believed that better information and preparation from their study institutions would be very helpful and that support programmes (like workshops, etc., even courses) for better information and preparation should be set up, and, where already existing, expanded. These support programmes should be tailored to specific needs:

Stephen: *[...] because as an international student we have different level[s]... we have different exposure [...].*

Monica: *Workshop [would] be an option. You can do a role play with your trainer, with your classmates, and just expose yourself to a kind of real situation.*

### **Language proficiency and cultural difference**

All placement interviews had been conducted in English. While this was regarded as normal by the participants, they stated that, at the beginning of their stay in Australia, the use of English had constituted a problem:

Monica: *One of the biggest challenges, [perhaps] the biggest I have faced, was the English language. [As] I told you before I came here with really little English, like, nearly nothing, so English, the language, has been a big barrier for me.*

Participants stated that, even in their home country, proficiency in English was considered proof of higher education and *higher quality*.

Participants were unsure when asked what had been the bigger challenge for them in Australia: to adapt to the language, or to adapt to the culture:

Nick: *I don't know, I think it's both I would say, because language was really the biggest barrier when I was new here, but now it's easier, [...]; and the culture, yeah, it was hard before and is still hard [...], the [issue of] culture is more long-term than language, once you adapt to that language.*



## **Workplace Culture**

In general, participants believed that the Australian workplace culture differed from that in their home country and that this required them to adapt to the Australian environment:

*Monica: Yeah. Totally! Totally, because, we are Latinos, yes, our work place culture is, in the way we interact with other people, is totally different, [...] we need a lot of physical contact, we hug each other a lot, we like making jokes all of the time, yes, I had to change the way I behave back home in order to, you know, to behave according to the Australian context.*

For some participants, adapting to the workplace also involved changing their communication style:

*Monica: I would say any English speaker, they are like that – they go to the point: Okay, it is yes or no. [...] when I'm texting I am changing my mind to answer exactly what they are asking me for. Like, "Monica, get rid of your Spanish speaking thinking and just think as if you are talking with an English speaker" – that's it.*

Furthermore, participants stated that cultural adaptation was an unconscious process that was greatly furthered by the experience of the workplace:

*Nick: I think, we – not consciously, but I think we do it unconsciously [...] – when you start working then you unconsciously start changing yourself, you know, in a sort of way [...] maybe we try to adapt to that culture [...] maybe more unknowingly.*

However, several participants explained that their cultural heritage was only a challenge if accompanied by insufficient cultural and linguistic literacy and that, once the initial cultural and language hurdles were mastered, cultural heritage could be turned into opportunities within the workplace:

*Nick: One of the strong points I have is that I can relate to those [clients], because they are from the Indian subcontinent. So, being from [a similar cultural background] myself, I understand Hindi. Sometimes, that's the first point for me, I can communicate with the [clients] in Hindi if required.*

Indeed, many participants emphasised the importance of an openness when approaching other cultures and an understanding of different cultural contexts that is required within the workplace:

*Monica: I think apart from the language, it is more important to be able to adapt to the new culture because I was working with people from Nepal, Indonesia, Australia, Greece, and Mexico and Colombia; that's why I've been saying that to be able and willing to understand the new [cultural environment] is really important, sometimes more important than your language skills.*

## **Social connectedness**

Overall, participants would have liked to have more contact with Australian people but believed that Australians were rather reserved. As a result, most participants stated that they lived among people from their home country or from a country with a similar culture:

Monica: *Here, people are living more in an individualistic way, so they [stay] more in their places, they don't like to share much with other people. And for me it's really important being around people, talking with people, share different things, having dinner, food – food is really important for us! Because it is the best excuse for getting people together. [...] Somehow, I feel really alone here; I had the experience [of] an extremely loneliness here in Australia.*

Stephen: *[I'm] more than two years in Australia now. [...] I can categorically tell you: I don't have any Anglo-Australian friend[s]. [...] All my friends are international students [...].*

While some participants stated that they missed their own culture and/or what is connected with it, e.g., strong family ties or mutual support between friends and neighbours, they also felt that ties with the family back home could be something of a burden, partly because of the stress caused by the high expectations held by their family with regard to their academic and professional success and partly because of the (moral) obligation to send money back home – something that participants could hardly afford to do.

### **Racism and discrimination**

Some participants reported that their names or the colour of their skin led some people to assume that they have a lower standard of education. Others stated that they had been mistaken for refugees and had experienced some of the prejudices against refugees. Some participants also stated that some Australians believe that international students take “their jobs”:

Stephen: *I just feel [it's] a perception: “Look at these guys: they are coming over here, they are coming and want to take our jobs.”*

Yet, participants believed that the chance of being discriminated against by Australians was smaller than that of being discriminated against by people from their home country:

Nick: *You tend to get more discriminated from someone from the background you have, [...] from the same background, from your country, you generally get more discriminated [against].*

Elizabeth: *When we come as new graduates and we ask for their help, they actually don't want to, because it's sort of, like, digging their own grave sort of thing – that's what they think.*

Participants reported that placement interviews had been mostly conducted by Australians. They believed that they had not been discriminated against in the course of their placement interview(s) because of their language or culture and reported only a few cases of discrimination within the wider workplace context:

Elizabeth: *I remember one incident that I had [...], the first time that I went for a part time job, for an interview in [a fast food restaurant], and that guy was like “You know, you are from a different place and you wouldn't know how things work over here.”*

Participants thought that discrimination did not exist in the field of social work, but some believed this profession to be an exception:

Elizabeth: *In social work, fortunately, I think I'm in a field where people actually believe in human rights and ... you know, believe in gender equality, and people are not with [negative] assumptions, you know, and that sort of things; but when you enter a different field it's different.*

### **Financial and regulatory pressures**

International students are allowed to work up to 40 hours per fortnight when studying in Australia. Two participants commented on the fact that the visa restrictions faced by international students are too constraining – to a point where they negatively affect their stress levels, health and wellbeing. This, in turn, affects their ability to prepare for and perform during field education placement interviews.

Stephen: *[Y]ou are also an international student and, you know... sometimes it really matters, [...] it matters a lot [...] ... I think if I gonna say it the way it is: there is a kind of job you can't get as an international student in Australia, so... there is some job you can't get... as an international student... like... there is a limit to the kind of job you can get...*

*[...] I think the restrictions also play part ... you know... is just ... the way they just ask: "Are you Australian or not? Are you permanent resident or not?" Like, that plays a lot of role.*

Elizabeth: *[I]t's because of the visa issue, because after I finished my placement I applied for a job [...and I was offered a job for 21 hours per week]. – "I can't do 21, I can only do 20 hours, can you shift one hour?" And then they were like "No ... can you ask the Immigration [Department] and ...?", and I was like "Okay, let me talk to Immigration! Because it's just one hour!"*

*I called immigration: such a good job, I didn't wanna lose it, and then I called immigration and then they were so rude to me! [...] I asked them: "See, it's a good job, and I have finished my education, I'm about to finish, I have finished my placements, and this is a place that I wanna work, and it's just ... is it possible because they cannot alter the contract, is it possible if they give you a letter saying it's just one hour?" I also offered them saying I can do one hour voluntary work, I do not want money for it, even that. And then [Immigration Department] was like, "Elizabeth, if you work even two minutes more than 20 hours it is illegal, do you understand?!"*

*[...] We are paying [so much] money to be in this country; I have paid – I have no idea how much I have paid for the visa – I have paid so much money to come here and then you have things like 20 hours work rights – you can't even make the money back!*

### **DISCUSSION**

International students are conscious of the fact that placements form an integral part of their studies. This does not mean, however, that they are aware of the importance of educational field placements and placement interviews. More importantly still, they are to a certain extent unaware of the fact that placements can lead to ongoing employment and that placements can decisively influence a student's professional career – issues that most domestic students are keenly aware of. Also, better prepared students tend to be allocated more complex work and more responsibility. This, in turn, allows them to draw the greatest possible professional advantage from their field education. Often unaware of this, international students tend to be less discerning about field education placements

and rarely prepare for placement interviews. Bearing this in mind, international students would benefit from detailed information regarding their placements and the interviews that precede them. In fact, international students expect their educational institutions not only to point out to them suitable organisations for undertaking their placements but also to adequately inform and prepare them for placement interviews in programmes especially tailored to this purpose (see also Roberts, Boldy, & Dunworth, 2015).

Language tuition (potentially paid) should be made available in preparation for placement interviews. International students should be given extra training opportunities to gain an impression of the interview process. Furthermore, international students need to gain awareness of the fact that, while interviews can take a relaxed and informal format, their answers are nevertheless carefully monitored and appraised. The informal workplace culture they encounter in many human services organisations can be deceiving leading them to think that interviews that appear informal are somehow less important than more formal *proper* interviews. This should be pointed out to them in the course of the preparation in order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the seriousness of placement interviews. Volunteering with a potential employer could be promoted as a means to get acquainted better with Australian workplace culture.

International students sometimes feel socially excluded. Unable to connect easily with Australian society, they stay in close contact with their families (Shanka et al., 2006) and form a “parallel society” with their co-nationals (Gomes, 2015). This undermines their proficiency in English as well as their ability to “read” the local culture. For this reason, activities and events furthering social integration of international students should be promoted and facilitated.

Many international students lack the required time and opportunity to complete the necessary cultural adaptation phase in the host country. As a result, cultural attributes imported from their country of origin may undermine their ability to showcase their professional suitability during the interview process. It is interesting to note that, while participants were aware of this cultural disconnect during the interview process, they did not regard it as important. While participants had experienced racist events outside the work setting, they believed that they had not been discriminated against during their social work placement interview(s) because of their language or culture. They also regarded Australians as less likely to discriminate against them than people from their own cultural background.

Academic institutions should consider supporting international students, especially at the beginning of their studies and during specific, sometimes critical, phases by having them accompanied by students who are already more advanced and ready to take up the function of a buddy or mentor. There are a number of international examples for an application of the buddying system, and they appear to have generated positive results (Ryan, Dowler, Bruce, Gamage, & Morris, 2016). Information regarding employment legislation in general and protection from discrimination in particular is provided both by the Australian government (Fair Work Commission, 2017) and by the Australian Workers' Union (Australian Workers' Union, 2017). Yet, international students and graduates are often

unaware of their rights (Ryan, Dowler, Bruce, Gamage, & Morris, 2016). These issues should be given more attention in preparing these students for the workplace.

Visa regulations and organisational guidelines are often at odds with the financial or educational needs of international students. For example, for students based in Sydney, the allowable 40 hours per fortnight barely covers their accommodation expenses. Moreover, students find that the 40-hour rule limits their employment options considerably as many organisations stipulate that applicants must be ready to work more than 20 hours per week. Visa restrictions create boundaries around international students who live and study in Australia. If they afford enough opportunities for international students, they can facilitate life. However, if they are framed too tightly, they make it difficult to a point where international students are no longer able to withstand the pressures they are facing (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Rosenthal, Russel, & Thomson 2008; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). This has direct repercussions for the students' wellbeing, academic performance, and also the quality of their placement interviews. It may well turn out that more flexibility in terms of rules and regulations governing the lives of international students is required in order to secure Australia's position as a leading provider of tertiary education.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The present study has several limitations. The research underpinning this study was subject to considerable time restraints. This made it necessary to merge what are, ideally, successive steps of analysis. However, as data analysis involved two researchers, we trust that the potential impact of this has been mitigated. A second limitation, related to the first, concerns data saturation. Five participants is clearly a small sample and did not generate data saturation. However, we are confident that the interviews brought to light important key themes encountered by many international students. Nevertheless, further research is required to explore further the issue of professional placements with international students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Placement interviews represent a considerable challenge for international students. They have to cope with an unfamiliar environment communicating in an unfamiliar language dealing with a much more informal workplace culture, often without sufficient information or preparation. This article highlights some of the challenges that international students encounter when facing a field education placement interview in a human services discipline. International students are largely underprepared when entering the Australian workforce. Unaware of the wider implications of a placement interview, international students are often unable to take fully advantage of the opportunities available to them. The lack of language proficiency and difficulties creating new social networks involving Anglo-Australians and resulting social isolation were highlighted as key issues. While incidents of racism and discrimination were experienced in everyday life, participants did not believe that they were discriminated against (in interviews) based on language proficiency and cultural background. This article argues that international students need to be better informed about placement opportunities and the often implicit requirements of a field placement. In addition, international students would benefit from targeted educational resources

ranging from English language tuition to interview role play that could potentially improve their ability to succeed in the Australian human services sector.

## REFERENCES

- Ata, A. W. (2015). Knowledge, education, and attitudes of international students to IELTS: A case of Australia. *Journal of International Students*, 5(4), 488–500.
- Australian Workers' Union. (2017). Employment legislation. Retrieved from <https://www.awu.net.au/employment-legislation>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34.
- Berry, J. W. (2008). Globalisation and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(4), 328–336.
- Berry, R. S. Y. (1999, September). *Collecting data by in-depth interviewing*. Paper presented at British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex at Brighton. Retrieved from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172.htm>
- Blackmore, J., Gribble, C., Farrell, L., Rahimi, M., Arber, R., & Devlin, M. (2014). *Australian international graduates and their transition to employment: Final report*. Deakin University, Melbourne. Retrieved from [https://www.deakin.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/365194/international-graduates-employment.pdf](https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/365194/international-graduates-employment.pdf)
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bye, H. H., Horverak, J. G., Sandal, G. M., Sam, D. L., & van de Vijver, F. Jr. (2014). Cultural fit and ethnic background in the job interview. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 14(1), 7–26.
- Chalmers, D., & Volet, S. (1997). Common misconceptions about students from South-East Asia studying in Australia. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 16(1), 87–99.
- Cigularova, D. K. (2005). Psychosocial adjustment of international students. *Colorado State University Journal of Student Affairs*, 14, 17–24.
- Department of Education and Training. (2017). *International student data 2017*. Retrieved from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2017.aspx>
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (n.d.). Latin American regional organisations. Retrieved from <http://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/pages/latin-american-regional-organisations.aspx>
- Fair Work Commission. (2017). Legislation and regulations. Retrieved from <https://www.fwc.gov.au/about-us/legislation-regulations-0>
- Fell, C. B., & König, C. J. (2016). Cross-cultural differences in applicant faking on personality tests: A 43-nation study. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 65(4), 671–717.
- Forbes-Mewett, H., & Sawyer, A.-M. (2016). International students and mental health. *Journal of International Students*, 6(3), 661–177.
- Funston, A. (2014). *Jade's story: Using in-depth research interviews to produce narratives which illuminate students' complex and challenging higher education transitions*. Sage Research Methods Cases. London, UK: Sage.
- Gomes, C. (2015). Negotiating everyday life in Australia: Unpacking the parallel society inhabited by Asian international students through their social networks and entertainment media use. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(4), 515–536.
- Goodman, H. (2001). In-depth interviews. In B. A. Thyer (Ed.), *The handbook of social work research methods* (pp. 308–320). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guns, A., Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G. (2012). How do life goals and motivations of international students studying in Australia impact their achievement outcomes? *Proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the Asia Pacific Educational Research Association Joint International Conference*, Sydney 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2012/Guns12.pdf>
- Hammersley, M. (2007). The issue of quality in qualitative research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 30(3), 287–305.
- Harrison, G., & Ip, R. (2013). Extending the terrain of inclusive education in the classroom to the field: International students on placement. *Social Work Education*, 32(2), 230–243.

- Hatoss, A. K. (2006). Globalisation, interculturality and culture teaching: International students' cultural learning needs in Australia. *Prospect*, 21(2), 47–69.
- Horverak, J. G., Sandal, G. M., Pallesen, S., & Timmerman, M. E. (2013). Hiring rankings of immigrant job applicants: Immigrants' acculturation strategies and managers' personality trait perception. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 14(3), 493–510.
- Kokkoris, M. D., & Kühnen, U. (2014). "Express the real you": Cultural differences in the perception of self-expression as authenticity. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(8), 1221–1228.
- Lee, J., & Salamon, W. (2004). Communications breakdown. *Meanjin*, 63(2), 160–167.
- Ling, C., & Tran, L. T. (2015). Chinese international students in Australia: An insight into their help and information seeking manners. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(1), 42–56.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.fhi360.org/resource/qualitative-research-methods-data-collectors-field-guide>
- Manroop, L., Boekhorst, J. A., & Harrison, J. A. (2013). The influence of cross-cultural differences on job interview selection decisions. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(18), 3512–3533.
- Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., & Hays, T. (2008). *In-depth interviewing* (3rd ed.). Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson.
- Morgan, D. (2008). Snowball sampling. In L. Given, L. (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 816–817). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Paulhus, D. L., Westlake, B. G., Calvez, S. S., & Harms, P. D. (2013). Self-presentation style in job interviews: The role of personality and culture. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(10), 2042–2059.
- Pham, L., & Tran, L. (2015). Understanding the symbolic capital of intercultural interactions: A case study of international students in Australia. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 25(3), 204–224.
- Roberts, P., Boldy, D., & Dunworth, K. (2015). The views of international students regarding university support services in Australia: A case study. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 122–137.
- Rosenthal, D., Russel, J., & Thomson, G. (2008). The health and well-being of international students at an Australian University. *Higher Education*, 55, 51–67.
- Ryan, R., Dowler, B., Bruce, S., Gamage, S., & Morris, A. (2016). *The wellbeing of international students in the City of Sydney: July 2016*. Retrieved from [http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/277682/Research-into-the-Wellbeing-of-International-Students-in-the-City-of-Sydney\\_Final\\_27-July-2016.pdf](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/277682/Research-into-the-Wellbeing-of-International-Students-in-the-City-of-Sydney_Final_27-July-2016.pdf)
- Sandal, G. M., van de Vijver, F., Bye, H. H., Sam, D. L., Amponsah, B., Cakar, N., ... Sun, C. T.-L. (2014). Intended self-presentation tactics in job interviews: A 10-country study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(6), 939–958.
- Sandhu, D., & Asrabadi, B. (1994). Development of an acculturative stress scale for international students: Preliminary findings. *Psychology Reports*, 75, 435–448.
- Shanka, T., Quintal, V., & Taylor, R. (2006). Factors influencing international students' choice of an education destination – A correspondence analysis. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 15(2), 31–46.
- Telbis, N. M., Helgeson, L., & Kingsbury, C. (2014). International students' confidence and academic success. *Journal of International Students*, 4(4), 330–341.
- Tran, L. T. (2011). Committed, face-value, hybrid or mutual adaptation? The experiences of international students in Australian higher education. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 79–94.
- Tutty, L. M., Rothery, M. A., & Grinnell, R. M., Jr. (1996). *Qualitative research for social workers*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wong, I. F. H., & Phooi-Ching, L. (2000). Chinese cultural values and performance at job interviews: A Singapore perspective. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 63(1), 9–22.
- Yates, L., & Wahid, R. (2013). Challenges to brand Australia: International students and the problem with speaking. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 32(6), 1037–1050.
- Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. In B. M. Wildemuth (Ed.), *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science* (pp. 308–319). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Zunz, S. J., & Oil, K. R. (2009). Field note: A preliminary look at international students in MSW field placements at nonurban US campuses. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45(1), 131–137.