

# ‘What Does it Take to be Employable Here?’ Intercultural Negotiating of Employability Among International Students in the UK

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## **Abstract:**

This article examines how international students from Global South countries negotiate employability in the UK through language, identity work, and intercultural adaptation. Drawing on qualitative interviews with students from six countries, the study explores how participants navigate high-stakes career environments by recalibrating their self-presentation, language use, and strategic timing. Rather than treating employability as a fixed set of skills, the paper frames it as a relational, discursively constructed process shaped by cultural habitus and institutional norms. The findings identify four key trajectories: linguistic recalibration, hybridised self-presentation, temporal misalignment, and policy-responsive adaptation. The article highlights both student agency and structural constraints, contributing to non-essentialist understandings of intercultural experience. It advocates for more responsive support systems that move beyond deficit-based framings of international students. This perspective offers insight into how language and power shape visibility, legitimacy, and opportunity within transnational higher education contexts.

**Keywords:** international students; employability negotiation; reflexive practice; cultural habitus; non-essentialism; language and power

