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International Student Development Through Service-Oriented Overseas Internships: A Qualitative Framework Analysis of Hair-and-Beauty Student Reflections

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ABSTRACT

International internships connect outward mobility, work-integrated learning, intercultural adaptation, and career development, yet vocational students in customer-facing service occupations remain under-examined. This secondary qualitative study analysed structured, de-identified case summaries derived from the required post-internship reflection reports of 14 Taiwanese hair-and-beauty students who completed placements in Canada or Australia. Experienced internship scholars reviewed the source reports and verified the summaries, which were organised using six a priori domains adapted from an earlier international-internship study. A hybrid deductive-inductive qualitative Framework Method supported comparison within and across cases and domains. Four interpretive themes were developed: embodied professionalism in customer-facing beauty work; adaptation as communicative, affective, and everyday-life labor; translating mobility into graduate capital and career agency; and, from prompted recommendations, a three-stage support ecology. The summaries linked professional learning with service routines, aesthetic preferences, clarification, emotional self-management, and everyday life stability. These connections support an interpretation of intercultural learning as situated service participation, while the condensed data do not establish the detailed interactional processes involved. Career relevance depended on students' ability to identify and articulate experience as evidence of capability; subsequent employment was not assessed. The study identifies connected responsibilities for preparation before departure, support during placement, and reflection and career translation after return.

Keywords: aesthetic labour; career agency; hair-and-beauty education; intercultural communication; international internships; international students; qualitative framework analysis; work-integrated learning

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INTRODUCTION

International education increasingly includes internships, practicums, and other forms of outward mobility through which students cross borders temporarily to learn in workplaces. In this study, *international internship students* refers to students enrolled in Taiwan who travelled abroad for supervised professional placements rather than degrees in the host country. Their experiences nevertheless belong within international student scholarship because they involved intercultural adaptation, workplace participation, well-being, and the conversion of mobility into developmental and career resources (Carrica-Ochoa & Brown, 2024; Duffy & Li, 2026; Gilbert *et al.*, 2026; Lin *et al.*, 2025; Xu *et al.*, 2025).

Hair-and-beauty education makes these processes especially visible. Practice requires interpreting client preferences, working with hair and skin diversity, explaining products, protecting privacy, managing touch and distance, regulating emotion, and sustaining trust under time pressure. Mobility therefore makes communication embodied and aesthetically consequential, revealing how intercultural communication operates through bodies, appearance, emotion, and service relationships.

Here, a *service-oriented overseas internship* is a placement in which learning depends substantially on direct interaction with customers or service recipients, who encounter technical decisions, verbal explanations, bodily conduct, timing, and emotional display together. Such placements expose intersections among vocational knowledge, intercultural difference, and relational accountability.

Taiwan's Ministry of Education supports overseas professional internships through its Dream-Building Study Abroad programme. The policy links mobility with practical experience, international outlook, and career guidance, but the achievement of these aims depends on how students encounter host workplaces and everyday life (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2025). Chen's (2025) analysis of Taiwanese design students undertaking internships in Japan and Lin *et al.*'s (2025) study of short-term overseas mobility among Taiwanese preservice teachers both identify reflective interpretation and institutional support as important conditions for professional and intercultural learning. Kharel *et al.*'s (2026) systematic review likewise emphasises alignment among curriculum design, industry relationships, and post-programme support in vocational education and training. Evidence remains limited, however, for students whose work requires embodied aesthetic and affective labour.

This study addresses that gap through four questions:

1. How do students interpret the movement from classroom preparation to overseas professional practice?
2. How is intercultural adaptation experienced in customer-facing hair-and-beauty work?
3. How do students make sense of internship experience in relation to future professional agency?
4. What support conditions do students identify across the internship trajectory?

The study contributes an account-based interpretation of intercultural learning in aesthetic service work, specifies career translation as the process of articulating mobility-related experience as graduate capital, and connects policy aims with support before, during, and after placement. Its claims concern how students represented these experiences in the available textual material rather than directly observed service interactions or measured developmental effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International internships, work-integrated learning, and policy

Work-integrated learning (WIL) connects academic study with authentic professional activity and can support professional identity and employability when workplace tasks, supervision, curriculum, and reflection are coherently linked (Billett, 2009; Downs *et al.*, 2024; Kharel *et al.*, 2026). International placements add linguistic, cultural, and practical uncertainty. Their educational value is therefore not guaranteed by travel or placement completion; it depends on opportunities to participate, seek guidance, interpret difficulty, and connect experience with future action (Hermann & Fauskanger, 2025; Lin *et al.*, 2025).

Table 1 compares Taiwan's programme with selected international schemes. Despite different eligibility and funding arrangements, each organises mobility as an educational project whose aims reach students through role clarity, living costs, language preparation, host supervision, and post-placement recognition.

Table 1

Selected Policy Architectures for Overseas Internship and Mobility

Policy or programme	Core emphasis	Design implication for service-oriented internships
Taiwan Ministry of Education Dream-Building Study Abroad programme	Institutionally organised overseas professional practice, subsidy, reporting, and career guidance	Policy aims require coordination among the sending institution, project leadership, host site, and students across the full placement trajectory.
Erasmus+ traineeships	Skills, employability, foreign-language learning, intercultural teamwork, and curriculum recognition	Workplace learning should be integrated with study and supported as more than an isolated trip.
United Kingdom Turing Scheme	International placements, provider responsibility, access, living-cost support, and safeguarding	Funding design and realistic destination costs affect equitable participation and learning readiness.
Australia New Colombo Plan	Structured Indo-Pacific mobility, internships, mentoring, language learning, and institutional projects	Partnership quality, risk management, and meaningful work tasks require advance planning and monitoring.
Japan Tobitate initiative	Public-private support, student initiative, overseas learning, and alumni networks	Alumni learning and career networks can extend developmental value beyond return.

Note. The comparison summarises official programme documents current at the time of revision (Department for Education, 2026; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.; European Commission, 2026; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n.d.; Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2025).

Policy often treats funding, exposure, and workplace access as inputs from which development follows. WIL research instead asks what students are prepared and permitted to do, how they receive feedback, and how experience connects with curriculum and reflection. For international interns, participation also depends on accommodation, transport, legal status, language, social connection, and host communication. Mobility may therefore be enabled while mechanisms of learning remain under-specified.

Recent international student research adds an institutional dimension to these conditions. Gao (2026), drawing on accounts from doctoral students and university staff in the United States, found that the availability of language services did not ensure engagement: promotion, follow-up, and alignment with student needs mattered. Bi's (2025) interview study likewise linked students' experiences of inclusion to culturally responsive materials, varied ways of demonstrating learning, and support beyond the classroom.

Although these studies concern degree programmes, they suggest examining how preparation and continuing support become usable within the specific demands of overseas placements.

Embodied, aesthetic, and affective intercultural service work

Intercultural competence is often described through attitudes, knowledge, skills, and contextually appropriate action (Deardorff, 2006). In service work, however, language and culture are not disembodied abilities. Hair-and-beauty practitioners interpret bodies, styles, boundaries, and comfort while working in close physical proximity. Aesthetic labour concerns the mobilisation of embodied appearance, style, and dispositions valued by organisations and customers (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Witz *et al.*, 2003). Emotional and affective labour involves managing feeling and expression to produce reassurance, confidence, and trust; in hairstyling, this relational work is shaped by continuing worker-client dependence (Cohen, 2010; Hochschild, 1983).

These ideas sharpen the meaning of intercultural communication in this field. A misunderstanding may concern accent or vocabulary, but it may also concern touch, privacy, gender interaction, aesthetic preference, or the emotional repair of uncertainty. Recent service research similarly shows that multilingual encounters require clarification, non-verbal support, and culturally responsive repair (Kurniawan *et al.*, 2026), while study-abroad emotions shape how students interpret themselves and others (Carrica-Ochoa & Brown, 2024). Hair-and-beauty communication is therefore accomplished through speech, observation, gesture, technical action, emotional regulation, and negotiated aesthetic judgement.

These distinctions prevent aesthetic labour from being reduced to appearance. Practitioners work on another person's embodied presentation while displaying competence, tact, and an appropriate professional self. Cultural difference enters both what clients request and how interns respond. Intercultural learning thus appears in acts of noticing, confirming, adapting, and repairing, not only broad claims of cultural awareness.

Two recent studies help specify why communication cannot be reduced to vocabulary. Anjum and Jinquan's (2026) longitudinal study of intercultural friendships at a Chinese university describes changes in the meanings of nonverbal practices as relationships developed. Munyanyi's (2026) analytic autoethnography connects unfamiliar English pronunciation with listening effort, participation hesitation, and confidence. These studies concern friendship and doctoral education, respectively; they sensitise the present analysis to relational and affective dimensions of communication without supplying evidence about the hair-and-beauty students' own service encounters.

Reflection, graduate capital, and career translation

Reflection can help students connect experience, feeling, interpretation, and future action (Barton & Ryan, 2020). Yet international experience does not automatically become employability. Tomlinson's (2017) graduate capital model distinguishes human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological resources that graduates mobilise within particular labour-market contexts. Recent research likewise emphasises capital convertibility, tailored career support, and curriculum-embedded skill development rather than treating mobility as a self-evident advantage (Duffy & Li, 2026; Nguyen & Sharma, 2024; Pham *et al.*, 2024; Xu *et al.*, 2025).

In this study, *career translation* is neither an additional capital nor an employment outcome. It is the reflective and pedagogical process through which students identify mobility-related learning and express it as credible evidence across technical and service competence, intercultural understanding, professional relationships, occupational identity, and confidence or resilience. Indicators in the structured summaries included naming skills and gaps, connecting incidents to identity and future pathways, and imagining presentation through a portfolio, curriculum vitae, or interview.

Required reflections read by programme staff are situated accounts, not transparent measures of development; they may reproduce institutional expectations or socially desirable narratives. Their value lies in how students represented and made sense of experience, including criticism, ambivalence, and

proposed improvements (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023). This distinction informs the bounded qualitative design.

Trotter and McAloney (2025) connect mobility programmes with critical curiosity and continuing reflection on assumptions and experience. Their account supports examining what students learn to question, as well as what they report gaining. An additional qualification comes from Siddiqui's (2026) interviews with Asian international graduate students in the United States, which locate constrained agency within supervisory power, racialised expectations, and working conditions. These perspectives caution against equating career agency with confidence or willingness to endure difficulty. In this study, agency concerns students' represented options and proposed actions; the material does not establish their freedom to enact those options.

METHOD

Programme and placement context

The study examined students enrolled in a Taiwan-based applied programme in hair, beauty, styling, and cosmetology-related education who completed internships in Canada or Australia through the Taiwan Ministry of Education's Dream-Building Study Abroad programme. The placements required students to apply classroom-based techniques while responding to customer needs, workplace routines, aesthetic expectations, and intercultural communication demands.

Routine programme delivery included pre-departure preparation, placement monitoring and visits, direct liaison between faculty members and host employers, and responsive counselling when students encountered workplace, communication, or everyday-life difficulties. These activities are reported only to situate the educational setting. Teacher journals or fieldnotes, counselling records, LINE or other messaging records, placement-visit notes, employer communications, and programme-administration documents were not included in the analytic corpus, coded as research data, or used for triangulation or corroboration.

Data source and corpus construction

The study used 14 existing end-of-internship reflection reports retained through the Taiwan Ministry of Education's Dream-Building Study Abroad platform and the institution's internal programme files. Produced during Taiwan academic years 109–113 (2020–2025), the reports were submitted as normal programme-completion documents rather than elicited specifically for research. The corpus predominantly represented women and final-year students; placements lasted either two months or one year. No interviews, surveys, research observations, or follow-up contacts were conducted.

Relevant material was extracted from the source reports, direct identifiers and potentially identifying contextual details were removed, and structured case-level summaries were prepared. During corpus preparation, report passages were selected for relevance to the organising domains and condensed into case-linked paraphrases; selection did not depend on recurrence or a frequency threshold. A passage could inform more than one field when its meanings overlapped. Scholars with more than ten years of experience in supervising overseas internships were invited to review the student reflection reports and verify each structured entry against the corresponding de-identified source text. Wording was revised wherever condensation omitted, misplaced, or extended the original meaning. The resulting matrix contained one case per row and six textual domains: (a) internship motivations and expectations, (b) language and cultural adaptation, (c) workplace learning challenges, (d) daily-life experiences and personal growth, (e) professional and career implications, and (f) suggestions for programme and policy improvement. These domains formed an *a priori* organising framework adapted from Chen (2025). They guided extraction and charting but were not treated as themes generated from the present material. No residual seventh domain was created, so the focusing effect of the six-domain framework is acknowledged as a limitation.

The six domain-specific summaries constituted the analytic material. Administrative fields were used only for corpus management and broad description, not to infer employment effects; the duplicative one-paragraph summary field was excluded. Results distinguish researcher interpretation from English translations of selected sentences in the Chinese expert-prepared summaries. The first-person wording of these summaries is retained, but the excerpts are not verbatim quotations from student-authored reports. Case and domain labels identify their position in the analytic matrix.

Qualitative framework analysis

The material was analysed using a hybrid deductive-inductive qualitative Framework Method (Gale *et al.*, 2013; Goldsmith, 2021). This method suited an applied case-by-domain corpus because it supports systematic comparison without converting textual meaning into numerical indicators. Each case was first read horizontally across the six domains to preserve connections among expectations, workplace learning, intercultural adaptation, everyday life, career reflection, and programme feedback. Each domain was then read vertically across cases to identify convergence, variation, tensions, and less common experiences.

The six *a priori* domains provided the initial charting frame, but data-near codes were developed within the current material. Codes addressed actions, meanings, challenges, coping responses, and future orientations rather than merely reproducing column headings. Related codes were compared within cases, across cases, and across domains. This stage examined how a single experience could carry several meanings; for example, a service encounter could involve language learning, embodied judgement, affective labour, and workplace belonging.

Patterned relationships among the codes were progressively integrated into four higher-order interpretive themes. The themes were not copied from the six domains, predetermined by the research questions, or selected according to frequency. Their value rested on their capacity to explain how students connected overseas mobility with service professionalism, intercultural and everyday-life adaptation, career agency, and institutional support. Candidate themes were reviewed for coherence, distinction, and grounding across complete case rows, with divergent and ambivalent material retained where it complicated the dominant interpretation. The invited scholars' role was limited to reviewing the source reports and verifying the structured summaries. Subsequent coding and theme development were led by the principal investigator; the procedure was not designed as an independent-coding or inter-rater reliability exercise.

No frequencies, percentages, binary presence scores, statistical tests, or inter-rater reliability coefficients were used to establish theme importance. Because the reflection template explicitly invited suggestions for improvement, the presence of a suggestion was not treated as a finding; analysis instead addressed the content, conditions, and educational implications of those recommendations. The same distinction between prompted completion and substantive meaning was applied throughout the matrix.

Reflexivity and trustworthiness

The invited scholars' extensive experience in supervising overseas internships enhanced contextual sensitivity during source review and verification. Because professional familiarity could also reinforce established programme assumptions, programme-support records were not used as independent evidence, and interpretive claims were restricted to the de-identified textual corpus. Trustworthiness was supported through preservation of the case-by-domain structure, repeated within- and cross-case reading, an explicit distinction between organising domains and final themes, attention to divergent material, and documentation of analytic decisions. The institutional setting and possible social desirability were treated as influences to be acknowledged rather than biases that could be eliminated.

Ethics and data governance

The reports were existing programme-completion documents rather than materials collected through research recruitment. The study involved no recruitment, participant recontact, intervention, or new

data collection. The National Cheng Kung University Human Research Ethics Committee granted the project an exemption from IRB review (HREC [Exempt] No. 115-0301; 11 May 2026). The analytic corpus contained no student-identifying information: direct identifiers and potentially identifying combinations of contextual details had been removed before research use. No additional research-specific consent was sought under the exempt protocol. Research use did not affect students' grades, graduation eligibility, internship assessment, or other rights.

Under the approved protocol, the analysis was restricted to existing de-identified educational documents. Access is restricted to the principal investigator and authorised research personnel. Project data are stored on the principal investigator's research computer, encrypted cloud storage, or password-protected storage and will be retained until 31 May 2030; electronic records will then be deleted, and any retained paper records securely destroyed. Reporting uses case codes and omits potentially identifying combinations of personal and placement characteristics.

AI-assisted data preparation

As specified in the research protocol, ChatGPT (OpenAI) assisted second-pass de-identification, draft summarisation, and preliminary organisation of already de-identified reflection-report text. No direct identifiers were entered. The summaries were checked against the de-identified source text, including by the invited scholars, and revised as necessary. Coding and theme development were researcher-led. AI also assisted manuscript revision and English translation of the summary excerpts; the distinction between summary wording and original student text is maintained throughout.

RESULTS

Four interpretive themes integrated meanings across the six organising domains. Each includes three labelled excerpts translated from expert-prepared case summaries, followed by interpretation. These excerpts expose the analytic material but cannot reveal what condensation omitted from the original reports.

Theme 1: Embodied professionalism in customer-facing beauty work

The summaries distinguished knowing a technique from performing it reliably while attending to customers, colleagues, and salon routines:

> C01, workplace learning: “This made me realise that workplace competence is not a single technique, but the result of speed, courtesy, quality, and teamwork being tested together.”
>
> C12, language and cultural adaptation: “Through interacting with customers from different cultural backgrounds, I learned to focus on their needs rather than rely only on my own aesthetic judgement.”
>
> C13, workplace learning: “In technical work and customer communication, I had to confirm details repeatedly. If gaps in language or cultural understanding were not corrected promptly, service quality could be affected.”

Customer interaction connected professional routines with aesthetic and relational concerns. C09 associated professional practice with protecting privacy and maintaining safety and cleanliness during busy periods. C13 described becoming more attentive to variation in hair texture, make-up styles, styling needs, and aesthetic preferences, while C12 represented the experience as a shift from relying on personal aesthetic judgement towards centring the customer's stated needs. C05's attention to cultural difference and gender interaction concerned respectful and appropriate service conduct. C10 connected consultation and product explanation with customer relationships and brand image. Together, these summaries support an interpretation of professionalism as the coordination of technical, aesthetic, organisational, and communicative responsibilities. They do not describe particular episodes of touch or bodily proximity in sufficient detail to reconstruct how those interactions unfolded.

These excerpts connect coordinated performance, customer-centred aesthetic judgement, and clarification. Other summaries locate this work under pressure: C03 contrasted workplace speed with classroom practice, C04 emphasised initiative, and C14 described competing customer, supervisor, and time demands. Some longer placements also involved sustained observation of service standards and professional roles. This contrast does not establish an effect of placement duration.

Theme 2: Adaptation as communicative, affective, and everyday-life labour

Accents, terminology, telephone calls, and rapid instructions made communication consequential for service quality. The summaries linked communicative strategies with the conditions needed to sustain participation:

> C03, language and cultural adaptation: "Sometimes I needed translation tools, gestures, and help from classmates to understand, but this also made me more willing to take the initiative to check my understanding."
>
> C11, daily life and growth: "Fortunately, peer support and a regular routine helped me through the unease and taught me to look after my psychological well-being overseas."
>
> C10, daily life and growth: "Only after attending to budgeting, rest, and self-regulation was I ready for daily service work."

C03's summary links assisted understanding with initiative, while C11 and C10 connect participation with relational support and daily-life organisation. Other cases describe vocabulary notes, rehearsed expressions, observation, and colleague assistance. C04 and C08 reported greater willingness to interact, and C13 associated careful inquiry with respect. These accounts position clarification as a practical response to uncertainty rather than equating adaptation with flawless language performance.

Rent, transport, food, and unfamiliar routines demanded continuing attention. C09 associated daily-life management with workplace capacity, while C14 connected emotional stability with peer support and routine. Taken together, these accounts suggest that confidence coexisted with strain and depended partly on manageable living conditions. They do not provide a detailed sequence of emotional change or evidence of emotional repair within a particular customer encounter.

Theme 3: Translating mobility into graduate capital and career agency

Career implications varied between expanding options, consolidating fundamentals, and presenting experience to employers:

> C04, career implications: "In the future, I hope to continue developing my foreign-language skills, portfolio, and service experience so that I have more choices."
>
> C06, career implications: "After graduation, I hope first to gain salon experience and establish a solid foundation before considering longer-term professional development."
>
> C12, career implications: "When seeking work back in Taiwan, I can also organise my overseas experience as part of my curriculum vitae and portfolio."

C04 and C06 illustrate contrasting prospective routes, while C12 identifies a means of making experience legible to employers. Other summaries widen these possibilities: C08 identifies networks and overseas employment, and C10 considers management, branding, advisory service, and entrepreneurship. C03 and C09 use identified language limitations to direct further learning. Career agency therefore includes reconsideration and sequencing, as well as increased ambition.

C05 identifies professional image and service etiquette as career resources, while C11 connects coping with criticism and pressure to job-seeking confidence. Together, these accounts illustrate the prospective translation of experience into technical, linguistic, cultural, identity, and psychological resources. They do not demonstrate whether employers recognised those resources or whether proposed actions were realised.

Theme 4: From prompted recommendations to a three-stage support ecology

The reflection prompt required improvement suggestions; their presence was therefore not itself a finding. Their substantive content connected support needs across the placement trajectory:

> C13, programme recommendations: "I suggest including examples of different hair textures, skin tones, cultural aesthetics, and customer communication in pre-departure courses so that students are prepared earlier for diverse service settings."
>
> C07, programme recommendations: "I suggest that the school and internship organisation maintain regular contact so that students can report work or adjustment problems early, preventing small problems from accumulating into stress."
>
> C12, programme recommendations: "I suggest that the school arrange post-return presentations, curriculum vitae preparation, and interview workshops to help students translate international internships into capabilities employers can understand."

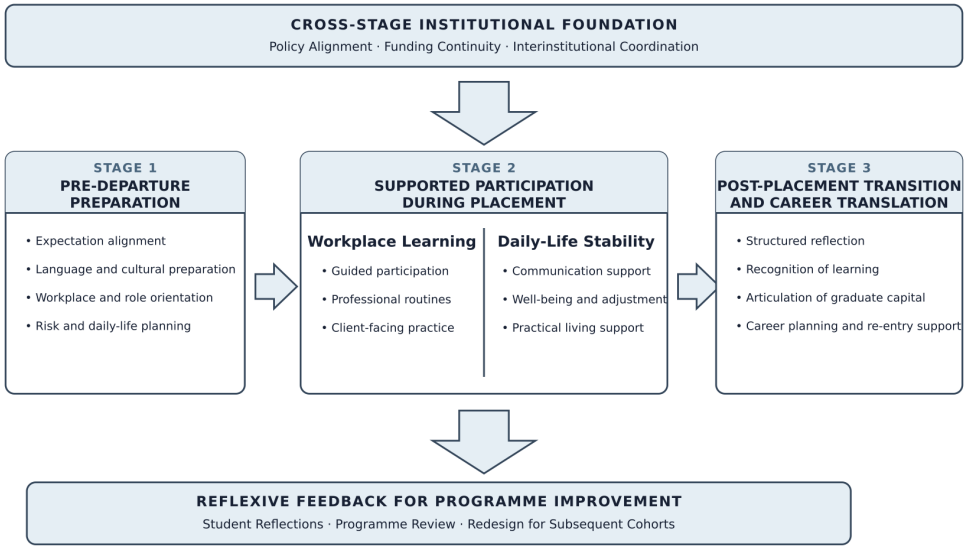
These excerpts illustrate preparation, continuing contact, and career translation. Additional pre-departure recommendations included service English (C01), task and living information for short placements (C03), and gender-sensitive service etiquette (C05). During placement, students sought emotional support (C11), an emergency contact (C09), and financial support responsive to living costs (C01 and C06). These accounts connect workplace participation with both educational and everyday-life conditions.

Post-placement recommendations extended beyond portfolio preparation to management and entrepreneurship (C10), visa information and matching (C04), and employment regulations and alumni exchange (C08). The stages were interpreted as interdependent: preparation informed workplace entry, responsive support addressed difficulties during participation, and return-stage guidance helped students articulate learning for further action. This is a proposed programme relationship, not a tested causal pathway.

Figure 1 translates this interpretation into a three-stage developmental pathway. It does not suggest that the recommendations arose spontaneously or that each component was equally salient. Rather, it organises the substantive content of the prompted recommendations into pre-departure preparation, supported participation during placement, and post-placement career translation, underpinned by cross-stage institutional support and a reflexive process of programme review.

Figure 1

A Three-Stage Developmental Pathway and Support Ecology for Service-Oriented Overseas Internships



Note. The numbered stages represent temporal phases of the proposed support pathway, not a one-to-one map of the four higher-order themes. Workplace learning and daily-life stability are nested within Stage 2; the institutional foundation and feedback process operate across stages. Arrows show proposed programme logic, not causal effects. Feedback represents prospective programme refinement rather than additional analytic data.

DISCUSSION

The four themes collectively address the research questions without reproducing the six a priori organising domains or forming a one-to-one sequence with the questions. Professionalism and adaptation jointly concern the movement from classroom preparation into customer-facing practice: the summaries connect technique with consultation, clarification, aesthetic judgement, hygiene, privacy, emotional self-management, and everyday-life stability. Career agency concerns students' identification of learning needs and possible future action, while the support ecology organises the substantive content of prompted recommendations across the placement trajectory. These relationships are interpretive connections within the corpus, not evidence that the research questions predetermined the themes or that overseas placement caused developmental or employment outcomes.

Reframing intercultural communication through embodied service

The contribution of the hair-and-beauty setting lies in the connection it makes between intercultural learning and the practical responsibilities of aesthetic service. The summaries associate customer needs with technical routines, privacy, clarification, and the adjustment of aesthetic preferences. Aesthetic and emotional labour provide concepts for interpreting these connections (Cohen, 2010; Deardorff, 2006; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Witz *et al.*, 2003). However, the present data do not document the sequence of particular touch-based encounters, negotiations of bodily distance, or episodes of emotional repair. These are relevant dimensions of the occupational context and directions for further investigation, rather than interactional mechanisms established by this analysis. The evidence more directly supports students' reported efforts to clarify needs and manage uncertainty, which can be considered alongside research on

emotion, cultural novelty, and multilingual service communication (Carrica-Ochoa & Brown, 2024; Kurniawan *et al.*, 2026; Wilczewski *et al.*, 2025).

The findings also qualify an understanding of adaptation as frictionless assimilation. Several summaries describe clarification, observation, checking, and adjusted conduct as responses to uncertainty. In a customer-facing workplace, such practices may support service accuracy and accountability; their effects on customer trust were not independently assessed. Language preparation should therefore include opportunities to practise asking, confirming, and revising in culturally varied service scenarios, with that recommendation understood as an educational implication rather than an intervention tested in this study.

Comparison with Anjum and Jinquan (2026) also highlights a methodological boundary. Their longitudinal evidence addresses changing relationships, whereas the present end-of-placement summaries cannot establish a comparable sequence. The contribution here is a service-specific configuration of responsibilities, rather than a demonstrated progression in nonverbal competence. Munyanyi's (2026) account further helps interpret why requests for repetition may coexist with professional knowledge. This suggests preparing interns and hosts to treat clarification as part of competent participation, without assuming that the same phonological or identity processes occurred in the present cases.

Career translation as a bridge to graduate capital

The findings also clarify career translation. Tomlinson's (2017) model explains resources that may support graduate employability; career translation identifies the process through which students learn to name, organise, and communicate such resources. In this study, reflection connected service technique, cultural understanding, confidence, networks, and occupational identity with portfolios, interviews, and future choices. This process remains institutionally mediated: mobility may generate cultural or identity resources without ensuring that they can be converted into locally recognised career advantage (Duffy & Li, 2026). Without post-placement reflection and tailored career support, valuable experience may remain difficult for students or employers to recognise (Pham *et al.*, 2024; Xu *et al.*, 2025).

Viewed alongside Trotter and McAloney (2025), accounts of discovering limitations or reconsidering a preferred career can represent reflective learning rather than unsuccessful mobility. The contrast between expanding overseas ambitions and consolidating basic salon experience therefore matters analytically. Siddiqui (2026) adds a necessary caution: individual effort does not remove institutional and workplace constraints. The present accounts do not demonstrate the racialised labour processes documented in that study, but they support retaining a distinction between naming possible futures and possessing the conditions to pursue them. Career guidance should address both.

From policy promise to lived support

The results provide a critical reading of the Dream-Building policy. Its aims of practical experience, international outlook, and career guidance are plausible, but students' accounts indicate the infrastructure those aims presuppose. Service learning can be constrained by unclear roles, communication difficulty, living costs, transport, emotional strain, or weak post-placement articulation. Subsidy design, cost information, accommodation guidance, accessible contact, and host coordination are therefore educational conditions rather than peripheral administration. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that non-academic and pastoral conditions shape international students' capacity to persist (Gilbert *et al.*, 2026) and that vocational outcomes depend on curriculum-industry alignment and post-programme support (Kharel *et al.*, 2026). The support ecology translates broad policy goals into responsibilities that can be planned and reviewed across the internship trajectory.

The three-stage interpretation also makes support a matter of delivery rather than provision alone. Gao's (2026) findings suggest that a contact point or language resource requires clear communication and follow-up to become accessible. Bi (2025) suggests that learning activities should recognise students' different backgrounds and forms of expression. Applied to this programme, these comparisons support preparation with varied customer scenarios, accessible check-ins during placement, and flexible ways to

articulate learning after return. These are proposed applications of the combined evidence; the present study did not evaluate their effectiveness.

The analysis also qualifies claims about student voice. Because the template solicited improvement suggestions, responding did not in itself constitute partnership or policy participation. Treating the content seriously, however, can create a route from evaluation to programme learning. Institutions can review the recommendations alongside programme responsibilities, explain which changes are feasible, and invite returned students to refine preparation for later cohorts. Such feedback loops would move students from required respondents towards contributors to programme design without overstating what the present documents demonstrate.

Limitations and future research

The study concerns 14 cases from one programme, with placements in Canada or Australia, so transfer to other disciplines, programmes, or national settings requires caution. The formal analytic corpus consisted of structured, case-level summaries derived from mandatory institutional reflection reports rather than the reports in their complete narrative form. Source checking during corpus preparation does not make a condensed summary equivalent to an original passage. Condensation may reduce narrative sequence, nuance, silence, and contradiction, and the available summaries cannot establish fine-grained interactional processes such as the timing of touch, the negotiation of bodily distance, or emotional repair. The six a priori domains also focused attention on matters established in advance and may have constrained meanings outside that framework.

Required prompts and anticipated faculty readership may have encouraged socially desirable, achievement-oriented, or institutionally familiar accounts. The analysis addressed this risk by distinguishing prompt completion from substantive meaning, retaining criticism and ambivalence, and limiting claims to how students represented their experience; these procedures do not remove the limitation. The invited scholars' longstanding experience in overseas-internship supervision enhanced contextual sensitivity during source verification but may also have privileged established programme assumptions. Reflexive documentation and exclusion of programme-support records from the evidence base increased transparency, but researcher interpretation remained constitutive of the findings. Finally, this study cannot demonstrate causal development, employer recognition, or subsequent employment outcomes.

Future research should analyse complete reflections alongside interviews conducted after assessment, supervisor perspectives collected under an appropriate protocol, and longitudinal evidence of how graduates use mobility-related capital. Comparative work could examine whether embodied aesthetic service fields generate different forms of intercultural learning from teaching, design, hospitality, or engineering placements. Participatory research could also involve students in reviewing how reflection templates and support systems frame what can be said.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative framework analysis examines how Taiwanese hair-and-beauty students represented overseas internships as professional learning, intercultural adaptation, and a resource for future career agency. The summaries connect technical routines and aesthetic preferences with customer communication, emotional self-management, and everyday-life stability. They support an interpretation of learning as situated service participation while leaving the detailed organisation of embodied interactions unresolved. Career translation concerns the articulation of experience as graduate capital, not demonstrated employment effects.

Students' required recommendations should not be treated as spontaneously occurring evidence. Their substantive content can nevertheless be organised into a coherent three-stage support pathway. Preparation before departure, coordinated care during placement, and structured reflection and career support in the post-placement transition connect policy aspirations with lived conditions. International

internship programmes should therefore be evaluated not only by mobility completion, but also by the quality of the support that enables students to participate, interpret, and translate experience.

Author Contributions

Hsiao-Lin Fang was the lead contributor to this study, contributing to the internship programme context, field-based educational interpretation, data organisation, and manuscript review. Chia-Yi Pan provided industry-expert guidance, practical internship knowledge, service-industry perspectives, and professional interpretation of workplace learning. Tin-Kai Chen served as corresponding author and contributed to research design, qualitative analysis, manuscript organisation, literature integration, writing, revision, and submission coordination.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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AI-Use Disclosure

As specified in the research protocol, ChatGPT (OpenAI) supported second-pass de-identification, draft summarisation, and preliminary organisation of already de-identified reflection-report text under the six a priori domains. No direct identifiers were entered. The data-preparation procedure included source checking and researcher-led coding and theme development, as described in the Method. During manuscript revision, ChatGPT also assisted literature identification, drafting, English translation, language editing, and consistency checks. AI-generated summaries are not represented as verbatim student quotations. The authors retain responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy, interpretation, integrity, and ethical reporting.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The de-identified structured case summaries are not publicly available because they remain subject to ethical and institutional data-governance restrictions. Enquiries may be directed to the corresponding author.

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