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Bridging Classroom Mandarin and Workplace Communication: Challenges and Adaptive Strategies among Student Interns in a Chinese Company

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Abstract:

This study examines how Mandarin Language Education students navigate the transition from classroom learning to workplace communication during internships in a Chinese company in Indonesia. Its main contribution is an integrated, empirically grounded account that links the Mandarin communication barriers interns encounter to the competence-related and contextual factors behind them and to the social, linguistic, nonverbal, and digital strategies used to manage them, an integration rarely addressed within a single analytic framework in prior Mandarin education research. A descriptive qualitative case study design was used. All 12 interns placed at the company completed a Likert-scale questionnaire providing descriptive supporting data on general tendencies in barriers, factors, and strategies; five were then purposively selected, based on placement division, internship duration, and experience using Mandarin at work, for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, guided by DeVito's noise typology, communicative competence, and Tarone's communication-strategy taxonomy. Findings show that semantic noise (technical vocabulary and grammatical-

register difficulties) and psychological noise (anxiety and low confidence) were more salient than physical noise. These challenges were linked to a classroom-workplace vocabulary gap, limited company language training, division-specific tasks, and communication situations with supervisors or coworkers. Interns responded through clarification, help-seeking, paraphrase, circumlocution, gesture, translation applications, and generative AI, used adaptively rather than as fixed techniques. The findings highlight the need for internship-oriented Mandarin preparation integrating technical vocabulary, pronunciation, contextual cross-cultural awareness, and critical use of digital translation tools

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Mandarin language proficiency is becoming increasingly relevant for university graduates entering workplaces involving Chinese companies and Chinese employees. Chinese investment in Indonesia remains substantial and is largely associated with mineral downstreaming, including industrial areas in Central Sulawesi (BKPM, 2026). At the same time, Mandarin language education in higher education is expected not only to develop academic competence but also to help students use the language functionally in professional situations. Research on Mandarin language learning and career readiness indicates that students view language competence as an important form of capital for entering the workforce, although the relevance of classroom learning to workplace needs still needs to be strengthened (Ardyna et al. 2025; Mery et al. 2025). In this context, internships provide an important setting for examining how knowledge acquired in the classroom is applied when students encounter authentic communication demands.

This study focuses on students majoring in Mandarin Language Education who undertook internships at PT Baoshuo Taman Industry Investment Group (PT BTIIG), Morowali. The company involves Indonesian and Chinese employees in operational and administrative activities, requiring interns to use Mandarin to understand instructions,

manage documents, coordinate with others, and complete daily tasks (ANTARA News Sulteng, 2026). These demands differ from classroom communication in several concrete ways: classroom Mandarin instruction typically follows a planned syllabus, relies on standardized textbook vocabulary and register, allows time for preparation and correction, and treats errors as low-stakes opportunities for learning, whereas workplace messages must be understood quickly, often contain division-specific technical terminology and document-level registers that coursework does not cover, and occur within professional relationships in which delays or misunderstandings carry real-world consequences. Research on student interns has also shown that adapting to formal communication styles, interdepartmental interaction patterns, and workplace expectations constitutes an important part of learning experiences beyond the university campus (Wibowo & Citalada, 2025).

To examine these experiences, this study integrates three frameworks with distinct analytical functions. First, (DeVito, 2016) typology of noise is used to identify semantic, psychological, and physical barriers. Semantic barriers are operationalized through lexical, grammatical-register, phonological, orthographic, and message-interpretation difficulties. Second, the concepts of communicative competence proposed by Hymes (1972) and Canale & Swain (1980) are used to explain limitations in linguistic and sociolinguistic competence as students transition from academic contexts to workplace contexts. Third, Tarone (1981) taxonomy of communication strategies is used to identify paraphrase, circumlocution, appeal for assistance, clarification, gesture, code-switching, and avoidance. Because workplace communication is also increasingly mediated by technology, the use of digital dictionaries, translation applications, and generative artificial intelligence is treated as an additional contextual strategy rather than being forced into Tarone's classical categories.

Previous studies have examined Mandarin learners' difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and oral skills (Apriza et al. 2024; Weifen, 2020), student interns' adaptation to workplace communication cultures (Wibowo & Citalada, 2025), as well as Indonesia-China business communication and communication within multinational companies (Alindra et al. 2025; Girsang et al. 2024; Putra et al. 2025). Recent studies have also indicated that AI-based support can facilitate non-native speakers' participation in multilingual communication and that the effectiveness of machine translation depends on users' ability to evaluate its output against the actual context (Phanthaphoommee et al. 2026; Qin et al. 2025). Beyond the Mandarin-education literature, a broader and more recent body of work has examined how novice professionals learn to communicate on the job. Research on work-integrated learning (WIL) shows how internship placements are designed to bridge academic preparation and workplace competency demands, while also noting that language-specific communication needs are rarely a central focus of WIL design (Curto-Reverte et al. 2025). Studies on internship communication indicate that the growing digitalization of workplaces reshapes how interns build professional

communicative competence beyond the forms taught in the classroom (Ishak & Min, 2025) . At the same time, literature reviews on Mandarin in multinational business settings describe register, hierarchy, and technical-vocabulary demands that resemble those reported in the present study, while noting a persistent shortage of Mandarin-proficient staff who can manage these demands (Alindra et al. 2024) . However, these two bodies of research have largely proceeded on separate tracks: WIL and internship-communication studies seldom examine a specific target language such as Mandarin in depth, while Mandarin-education research has mostly documented classroom-based vocabulary, grammar, and oral-skill difficulties without tracing how these difficulties are reconfigured once students must act on them under workplace time pressure, register expectations, and hierarchical relationships. Research directly connecting Mandarin learning experiences in higher education with the barriers, contextual factors, and adaptive strategies actually employed by students when carrying out administrative tasks in Chinese companies therefore remains limited.

This research gap is important for language education because successful internship performance is determined not only by the ability to recall vocabulary or grammatical structures but also by the ability to manage comprehension difficulties, interpret professional contexts, and select appropriate communication resources. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated examination of the classroom-to-workplace transition: the forms of communication barriers that emerge, the competence-related and contextual factors associated with these barriers, and the social, linguistic, nonverbal, and digital strategies employed by students. The study addresses three research questions: (1) What Mandarin communication barriers do student interns experience in administrative activities? (2) What communicative competence and contextual factors are associated with these barriers? and (3) What strategies do students use to overcome them? The findings are expected to provide an empirical basis for strengthening Mandarin language instruction that is more oriented toward internship readiness and future workplace needs.

From a pedagogical perspective, internship experiences can be viewed as feedback for instructional design. If students are able to complete classroom tasks but continue to experience difficulties when handling documents, spontaneous instructions, or division-specific terminology, the issue should not be attributed solely to individual deficiencies. Such data also provide information about the types of exposure that have not yet been sufficiently incorporated into the curriculum. Therefore, this study does not position the workplace as the sole benchmark for evaluating instructional quality. Instead, it treats the workplace as an authentic context that reveals which competencies can already be transferred and which require additional pedagogical support before students enter internships.



Method (منهج)

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The case was bounded by the experiences of Mandarin Language Education students who undertook internships and performed administrative tasks at PT Baoshuo Taman Industry Investment Group (PT BTIIG), Morowali, in 2026. An exploratory questionnaire was completed by 12 student interns to map the patterns of communication barriers, contributing factors, and strategies. Five respondents were then purposively selected as interview participants based on variations in internship placement divisions, experience using Mandarin in the workplace, a minimum internship duration of one month, and willingness to participate. The questionnaire was positioned as descriptive supporting data rather than as a basis for statistical generalization.

Code	Internship Division/Section	Internship Duration
AL	Logistics Warehouse	4 months
JS	Logistics 2	4 months
JP	General Affairs (Cards& Repairs)	4 months
TI	Jetty/ Logistics Warehouse	1 month
S	General Affair (Exit Entry)	1 month

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the five participants. The questions focused on concrete experiences in which students failed to understand or convey messages, the factors they associated with these difficulties, and the actions they took to restore communication. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. A closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire was used to provide contextual information on the interview patterns, such as the frequency of difficulties with technical vocabulary, anxiety, and the use of clarification, gestures, and translation applications.

The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. For RQ1, the data were classified using DeVito (2016) noise typology. For RQ2, the data were examined through the framework of communicative competence proposed by Hymes (1972) and Canale & Swain (1980), supplemented by contextual factors emerging from learning experiences, company support, task characteristics, and communication situations. For RQ3, Tarone (1981) taxonomy served as the initial analytical framework, while the use of translation applications or AI was retained as a contextual category when it emerged consistently across the data. Questionnaire percentages were used only to indicate tendencies among the 12 respondents and were consistently interpreted alongside the interview evidence.

To ensure traceability between the data and their interpretation, the researcher developed a case matrix containing information on participants, types of barriers, communication situations, strategies selected, and supporting evidence from the

questionnaire. This matrix helped distinguish patterns occurring across multiple participants from experiences specific to individual cases. In this way, examples related to supervisors' communication styles, the use of particular applications, or avoidance were not automatically treated as general characteristics of all participants.

The credibility of the findings was maintained through cross-participant comparison, triangulation between interview and questionnaire data, repeated reading of interview transcripts, and documentation of coding decisions. Transferability was supported by providing sufficient descriptions of the workplace context and participant characteristics, while dependability was strengthened through an auditable analytical trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All participants provided informed consent. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes, and internal company information unrelated to the academic objectives of the study was excluded.

Result (نتائج) and Discussion (مناقشة)

The data indicate that the transition from classroom communication to workplace communication primarily gives rise to semantic noise. Difficulties with technical administrative vocabulary were reported by 67% of the respondents (8/12), while 83% (10/12) reported difficulties in understanding language structures or forms when receiving and conveying workplace messages. The interviews revealed that these difficulties were mainly related to equipment vocabulary, item codes, logistics terminology, document registers, and spoken expressions that were more colloquial than those presented in university coursework. AL, for example, noted that the most difficult situations occurred when supervisors used technical vocabulary that she had never encountered in class. JS likewise identified differences between terms learned from textbooks and the forms used by speakers in everyday conversations. These findings extend previous reports of vocabulary and grammatical difficulties in Mandarin learning contexts (Apriza et al. 2024; Weifen, 2020), as the problem was not simply a lack of knowledge of linguistic forms but rather a mismatch between students' academic repertoires and workplace repertoires.

A concrete illustration of this repertoire mismatch emerged in JS's account of everyday workplace vocabulary. Having learned only the term *beizi* (杯子, "cup") in her translation coursework, she did not understand when a native colleague asked her, "Ni daile shuibei ma?" ("Did you bring your water cup?"), because the term *shuibei* had never appeared in her classroom materials; she was able to respond only after a senior colleague explained the term to her. A related example concerned place-specific vocabulary: JS reported that she did not initially know that *matou* (码头) referred to the company's jetty area, which made translating documents that referenced this location considerably more difficult until she learned the term through repeated exposure at work. Examples such as these indicate that the semantic barrier identified in this study was less a general vocabulary deficit than a mismatch between the standardized,

textbook-oriented lexicon emphasized in coursework and the localized, task-specific lexicon required on site.

Regarding the grammatical-register dimension, the interview evidence needs to be interpreted carefully. The questionnaire data indicate a high level of difficulty with language structures; however, the qualitative examples more frequently describe register complexity and document specific terminology than purely grammatical errors. JS described the language used in official documents as “higher than that in textbooks” and emphasized that codes or equipment names were difficult to interpret without contextual knowledge. Phonological barriers also emerged when students had to understand native speakers’ speech at a fast pace or produce tones accurately. TI explained that differences in tones could prevent interlocutors from immediately understanding an intended meaning that was otherwise lexically correct. In one such episode, TI recounted an instance in which she believed she had produced the correct tone, only to be met with a co-worker’s response of, “kamu bilang apa?” (“what did you say?”), an experience she described as embarrassing and one that temporarily reduced her willingness to initiate further speech. Meanwhile, difficulties in reading unfamiliar Hanzi continued to occur in technical documents, although they were more moderate because students had already acquired basic orthographic knowledge through their university coursework.

Whereas semantic noise stemmed mainly from a lexical and register mismatch between academic and workplace repertoires, psychological noise emerged as a second, related but analytically distinct barrier, arising less from what students did not know and more from how uncertain they felt about applying what they did know under real-time workplace pressure. A total of 83% of respondents (10/12) reported a lack of confidence, while 75% reported anxiety or nervousness when communicating with supervisors or Chinese colleagues. These conditions often emerged after students realized that their academic proficiency was insufficient to handle the speed, register, or consequences of workplace communication. AL summarized the situation by stating that she was “clearly anxious and lacked confidence ... also confused about what to say.” A similar pattern of nervousness was reported by TI, who as the only Mandarin speaker in her section and consequently a focal point for both Indonesian and Chinese colleagues described herself as “bener-bener nervous” (“really nervous”) whenever she anticipated being approached, at times avoiding eye contact rather than initiating a conversation she feared she could not sustain. Within the framework of communicative competence, such anxiety cannot be completely separated from limitations in linguistic repertoires and experience using the language in professional situations (Canale & Swain, 1980). In contrast, physical noise was relatively low: only 33% of respondents (4/12) considered the workplace environment to hinder communication. This finding is consistent with the office-based nature of administrative work, in which disruptions were more likely to take the form of surrounding activity and distractions than production-related noise.

The different functions of the questionnaire and interviews are also important when

interpreting the findings. Questionnaire percentages indicate how widely a particular experience was reported, whereas interviews demonstrate how the barriers operated in concrete situations. Therefore, the figure of 83% reporting difficulties with language structures does not automatically mean that all participants experienced the same type of grammatical error. Instead, the interviews showed that the difficulties could involve formal registers, the structure of instructions, or the relationship between terminology and workplace actions. This distinction prevents the quantitative supporting data from being interpreted as inferential results and maintains the study's focus on participants' communication experiences.

The impact of communication barriers did not always result in work related errors, but the data indicate that their consequences should nevertheless be considered. Five of the 12 respondents (42%) reported experiencing errors in documents, record-keeping, or tasks that had to be repeated. Since the majority of respondents did not report such consequences, this figure cannot be used to claim that miscommunication generally reduces internship performance. However, several narratives indicate that misunderstanding terms, codes, or instructions could increase the time required for checking and increase students' reliance on mentors. From an educational perspective, such risks explain why workplace language training needs to treat pragmatic accuracy whether a message can be acted upon correctly as part of communicative competence, rather than focusing solely on linguistic form.

The factor most consistently associated with communication barriers was the gap between learning content and workplace needs. All respondents (12/12) agreed that the grammar and vocabulary taught in university courses were insufficient for administrative needs during their internships, while 92% considered Mandarin instruction in general to have not fully prepared them for real workplace communication. This finding does not imply that university learning was ineffective. Rather, the data indicate that the basic competencies acquired through coursework served as a foundation, but this foundation did not sufficiently cover division-specific technical vocabulary, document registers, natural speech rates, and communication practices within hierarchical relationships. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing the need for stronger connections between Mandarin learning and career readiness (Mery et al. 2025).

Workplace support also played a role. Participants considered mentors or spokespersons to be highly helpful when messages were not understood, but formal support in the form of company language training was perceived as limited. AL mentioned that basic level training was available, but its content did not address the technical needs of her division. In the questionnaire, 58% of respondents associated their communication barriers with limited language guidance or training. In addition, the type of work shaped the vocabulary required: students assigned to warehouses and the jetty encountered logistics, equipment, and port related terminology, whereas students in

General Affairs encountered terminology related to services, immigration, and travel. S, who was placed in the Exit-Entry section of General Affairs, reported frequent unfamiliarity with immigration related terms concerning passport and visa status despite feeling reasonably confident in everyday conversational Mandarin, indicating that division placement, rather than general language proficiency, determined which technical vocabulary interns most urgently needed. Thus, a single set of general vocabulary is insufficient for all internship placements.

Communication situations involving supervisors and colleagues also shaped how barriers were experienced. A total of 83% of respondents stated that the way instructions were delivered was sometimes difficult to understand because of differences in communication styles. However, the qualitative data do not support the generalization that all Chinese employees share a single communication pattern. JP's case showed that repeated clarification, which she regarded as a form of caution, was not always positively received by her supervisor, whereas other participants relied on clarification to prevent errors. A specific episode illustrates this dynamic. When JP's supervisor instructed her to help translate a request concerning canteen equipment repair, she understood the general instruction but, because the specific vocabulary was unfamiliar, asked for reconfirmation before proceeding. The supervisor responded with visible irritation, told her not to continue, and sought out the canteen's designated translator instead even though, by JP's account, her understanding of the message had in fact been correct. JP interpreted the episode not as evidence that clarification is unwelcome in general, but as a sign that under time pressure, some supervisors equate repeated confirmation with insufficient competence. This finding both echoes and refines Wibowo & Citalada (2025) report that Gen Z interns must adapt to unfamiliar workplace communication cultures: rather than a general "Chinese" communication style, the present data point to individual supervisors' expectations and the perceived stakes of a task as the more immediate factors shaping how communication strategies were received. Therefore, this issue is better understood as a negotiation of expectations within particular workplace relationships rather than as a uniform characteristic of national culture. This interpretation is important to ensure that intercultural preparation does not become stereotypical, but instead trains students to interpret hierarchy, task objectives, and interlocutors' preferences contextually (Girsang et al. 2024; Putra et al., 2025).

Students did not respond to communication barriers through a single strategy. The most consistently used strategies were requesting clarification or repetition (100%, 12/12) and seeking assistance from mentors or colleagues (83%). These strategies indicate that workplace communication competence is not solely individual but also depends on the ability to make use of social resources. Paraphrase and circumlocution were each reported by 58% of respondents, while 75% used gestures, facial expressions, or pointing to objects. In the interviews, gestures were often used when students understood the work context but could not immediately retrieve the appropriate Mandarin vocabulary.

Interviews further clarified how these strategies were applied in practice. AL described her paraphrasing technique as restating a supervisor's instruction in simpler terms and waiting for confirmation before acting, typically phrased as "Oh, maksudmu ini ya?" ("Oh, do you mean this?"), so that any misunderstanding could be caught before a task was carried out incorrectly. TI combined paraphrase with pointing: unable to recall the Mandarin term for a crane operator's license, she pointed to the relevant entry on a computer screen while confirming, "Tadi yang diminta itu jumlahnya ini kah?" ("Is this the quantity that was requested earlier?"), using the on-screen text as a shared reference point rather than relying on the spoken term alone. This pattern is consistent with Tarone (1981) compensatory communication strategies, but the data also show that strategy selection was influenced by hierarchy and task consequences.

Technology based strategies were even more prevalent than code switching. A total of 92% of respondents used translation applications or dictionaries, whereas code switching into Indonesian or English was reported by only 33%, as a shared language with Chinese colleagues was not always available. Participants selected different tools for different purposes: JP used Pleco to recognize Hanzi and GPT for longer sentences; JS combined ChatGPT and Google Translate and then checked the results with a senior colleague; and TI used DeepSeek in certain situations because, based on her experience, its vocabulary was closer to the language used by her colleagues. These variations indicate that applications were not used passively. Students evaluated the appropriateness of the output, compared sources, and sought human confirmation when they considered the results uncertain.

Interviews also indicated that this technology use was frequently bidirectional rather than intern initiated alone. JP, for example, reserved Pleco specifically for decoding unfamiliar Hanzi characters and turned to GPT only when she needed to construct or interpret a complete sentence, while her supervisor reciprocated by using Google Translate to explain tasks to her when a misunderstanding occurred. A similar pattern appeared in TI's workplace, where foreign co-workers, upon noticing her confusion, would proactively type an unfamiliar term into a translation application or a messaging app rather than waiting for her to ask treating digital tools as a shared communication resource that both interns and their Chinese colleagues drew on, rather than as a strategy used by interns alone.

These findings are relevant to the development of AI-assisted multilingual communication. Qin et al. (2025) showed that AI support can help non-native speakers participate more confidently in real-time communication, while Phanthaphoommee et al. (2026) emphasized the importance of users' ability to validate machine translation output against the actual context. In the present study, technology functioned as an additional layer alongside social and linguistic strategies rather than as a substitute for communicative competence. This is broadly consistent with Ishak & Min (2025) observation that increasing workplace digitalization is reshaping how interns build

professional communicative competence beyond what is taught in the classroom, although the bidirectional pattern identified here in which Chinese co-workers themselves initiated digital mediation extends this observation by showing that such digitally mediated competence is co-constructed rather than developed by interns in isolation. Therefore, classical communication strategy taxonomies need to be interpreted contextually when applied to a generation of students with access to digital translation tools and generative AI.

Avoidance strategies also emerged, although more selectively (33%). AL tended to avoid conversations with individuals in higher hierarchical positions when she perceived a high risk of making mistakes, while TI reported having avoided eye contact when she was uncertain about understanding small talk. Avoidance, therefore, was not a primary strategy but a situational strategy used when students perceived that attempting to communicate could increase social risks.

One finding that deserves particular attention is that a strategy that is theoretically helpful is not necessarily received in the same way by every interlocutor. JP's experience showed that repeated confirmation could be perceived by the student as carefulness but as delayed execution by a particular supervisor. This does not diminish the value of clarification strategies; rather, it indicates that students need to learn how to formulate clarification efficiently, for example, by repeating the core instruction, pointing to an object, or confirming only the part that carries a high risk of error. Thus, effective communication strategies are not simply a list of techniques to be applied, but involve the ability to judge when, with whom, and in what form a particular strategy is most appropriate.

The use of technology also highlights the need for evaluative literacy. Students do not always have sufficient knowledge to determine whether a machine translation is accurate in terms of terminology, particularly when texts contain codes, equipment names, or administrative registers. JS's practice of checking application outputs with a senior colleague and TI's practice of selecting an application based on its compatibility with local usage demonstrate forms of experience-based evaluation, but such practices may not be shared by all participants. Therefore, instruction should not merely recommend particular applications. Students need to be trained to identify high risk situations, compare outputs, protect sensitive information, and recognize when human confirmation is safer than accepting automated output. This emphasis positions technology as a support for communication decision making rather than a shortcut that replaces the process of understanding messages.

Table 2. *Synthesis of Findings and Educational Implications*

Dimension	Key Evidence	Interpretation	Learning Implications
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Semantic barriers	Technical vocabulary 67%; structure/register 83%; difficulties with tones and Hanzi emerged in interviews	Academic repertoires do not always correspond to workplace repertoires	Pre-internship materials based on division-specific vocabulary and documents
Psychological barriers	Lack of confidence 83%; anxiety/nervousness 75%	Anxiety is associated with linguistic uncertainty and workplace consequences	Authentic communication simulations and practice with natural speech rates
Contextual factors	100% considered course materials insufficient for administrative needs; needs varied across divisions	The gap is not only linguistic but also contextual and organizational	Placement-specific needs analysis and coordination between study programs and companies
Interactional and multimodal strategies	Clarification 100%; assistance 83%; gestures 75%	Students orchestrate social, linguistic, and visual resources	Practice in communication repair, clarification, and communication problem-solving
Digital strategies	Applications/dictionaries 92%; use of Pleco, Google Translate, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek	Technology expands students' repertoire of communication strategies	Training in critical and responsible use of AI/translation tools and output verification

The findings suggest four realistic adjustments for the study program. First, pre-internship preparation should be preceded by a needs assessment for each division so that vocabulary instruction does not remain limited to general business Mandarin. Second, oral skills training should incorporate variations in speech rate, tone production in spontaneous interactions, clarification, and communication repair when messages are not understood. Third, students should practice with documents, short messages, forms, and administrative scenarios that resemble workplace activities so that they do not encounter professional registers for the first time after placement. Fourth, the use of digital translation tools and AI should be taught as part of responsible communication strategies: students should compare outputs, check terminology against workplace contexts, and seek confirmation when the consequences of an error are high.

From a curricular perspective, this preparation can be organized into three layers.

The first layer consists of core competencies applicable to all students, such as pronunciation, clarification strategies, professional communication ethics, and the critical use of digital translation tools. The second layer consists of placement-based modules, such as logistics, General Affairs, immigration, or administrative service vocabulary. The third layer consists of reflection during the internship, including recording new terminology, cases of miscommunication, successful strategies, and mentor feedback to be discussed after students return to campus. This before-during-after internship cycle allows workplace experience to function as a source for updating instructional materials rather than merely as an additional activity outside the learning process. Intercultural preparation should likewise be based on situations and case reflection rather than lists of stereotypes about national communication styles.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study shows that student interns' Mandarin communication barriers were dominated by semantic noise (technical vocabulary, document registers, and tone) and psychological noise (anxiety and low confidence), while physical noise played a minor role. Both barriers intensify when classroom-based competence meets the speed and stakes of authentic administrative tasks, but they differ in origin: semantic noise reflects a mismatch between academic and workplace vocabulary, whereas psychological noise reflects uncertainty about applying that knowledge under real-time pressure. These barriers were closely tied to gaps between university course content and division specific workplace needs, limited formal language training within the company, and variation in communication styles across supervisors and colleagues.

Interns managed these barriers adaptively, combining clarification, mentor assistance, paraphrase, circumlocution, gesture, translation applications, and generative AI; technology consistently supplemented rather than replaced social and linguistic resources. Three practical implications follow for Mandarin language education and internship preparation. First, pre-internship instruction should be supplemented with division specific technical vocabulary modules (e.g., logistics, general affairs, immigration) rather than relying on general business Mandarin alone. Second, oral skills training should prioritize listening to natural speech rates, tone accuracy, and rapid, efficient clarification, since these were the competencies-interns found least prepared for. Third, the critical and responsible use of translation applications and generative AI should be taught explicitly as a communication strategy, including comparing outputs, verifying technical terminology, and recognizing when human confirmation is required. As this study involved only five interview participants and 12 questionnaire respondents at a single company, its findings are not intended for statistical generalization; future research covering more internship sites, direct observation, and cross industry comparison would help establish how far these patterns extend.

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