Independent College

Final Project

PROGRAMME	BA (Hons) in International Business
SUPERVISOR NAME	Mark Banchansky
ACTUAL WORD LENGTH	7925 words (Max 8000 words)
STUDENT NAME AND ID	Tatiana Otárola - 51789167
Title	How can Food and Beverage (F&B) businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students as employees and customers, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the local market?
REQUIRED SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME	To Moodle at or before 23:55 on 14/12/2025
DATE OF SUBMISSION	12/12/2025

I certify that:

• This project report is all my own work, and no part of this report has been copied from another source: Yes ☒ No ☐

• I understand that this report may be checked by electronic or other means for plagiarism and/or content created by generative AI and may be transferred and stored in a database for the purposes of data-matching/data-analysis to help detect plagiarism and/or content created by generative AI: Yes ☒ No ☐

• This report has not previously been submitted in part or in full for assessment to any other institution: Yes ☒ No ☐

• I consent to the inclusion of my report in the publicly accessible (open access) electronic database maintained by the library: Yes ☒ No☐

• I have emailed a back-up copy of this report to locker@independentcollege.ie: Yes ☒ No ☐

(Note that if no check boxes are selected, this Project will be regarded as NOT properly submitted, and may be subject to a late submission penalty)

For the report to count as a valid submission, the student must provide:

1 electronic copy via Moodle. There is no requirement for a hard copy .

Evidence of the Primary Research MUST be included in the appendix of the report. That includes a copy of questionnaires, interview schedules, or observation diaries. One interview transcript should be included as a full transcript and a summary of all other interviews must be kept as a backup by the student. See template on Moodle for what should be included in all aspects of the report. **All data must be anonymised.**

The text should be double-spaced throughout and single column format (A4) with 2cm for left and right-hand margins and 2.5cm at head and foot. Text should be justified, standard 12 point, footnotes 10 point, and in Calibri. Page numbers should be at the bottom-right. Do not use line and paragraph spacing. Keep formatting to a minimum and avoid underlining.

Harvard Referencing shall apply.

(Insert work here)



Independent College

.

How can food and beverage businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students as employees and customers, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the local market?

Final Project

Compiled by:
Tatiana Otarola Gutierrez

Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in International Business.

Dublin, December 2025

.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Mark Banchansky for his guidance, patience, and continuous support throughout this project.

After changing my topic from Semester-I, his advice helped me redirect my research toward a more meaningful and enjoyable subject, I am truly grateful for his availability and willingness to assist me, even outside his regular schedule.

I also wish to thank all the contestants who contributed to this research, as well as my friends America and Walter for their invaluable help in distributing surveys and reaching out to business owners and managers across the city, their support was essential to the success of this research.

Abstract

This research explored, how food and beverage (F&B) businesses in Limerick, can adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students, as employees and customers, and how this, can improve their competitiveness in the local market.

The study used a mixed methood, combining surveys with more than one hundred international students and 6 business owners, and interviews, with both groups to understand some answers in more detail.

The findings showed that international students play a key role in the F&B sector, helping businesses stay open, and contributing to cultural diversity and economic growth. Many students work part time and in busy hours, also bring new cultural ideas that can be seen in menus and customer service. At the same time, many challenges were reported, such as limited hours working, low training and no many opportunities for growth. In addition, owners mentioned visa rules and high turnover as difficulties.

Despite these issues, both groups agreed that students bring important skills, new ideas, and influence the F&B sector in Limerick. Many of them look for affordable prices, multicultural food and places where they feel welcome.

The study concluded that, better communication, fair work practices, visible inclusion, and flexible policies can make Limerick's F&B businesses more competitive, and sustainable. Partnership with universities and clearer information from the government about visa rules could also support better employment practices and help with their efficiency and competitiveness.

Overall, the research suggests that international students contribute socially, culturally and economically to Limerick and that their presence can be used as an advantage for Loacl F&B businesses.

Key Words

International Students, Limerick, Ireland, Food and Beverage Sector, F&B, Competitiveness, Business Adaptation, Employment, Retention, Marketing Strategies, Cultural Diversity, Policy Support.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction 8
1.1 Introduction 8
1.2 Research Purpose 8
1.3 Research Aims and Objectives 8
1.4 Research Questions 9
1.4 Rationale 10
1.5 Data Collection and Sources 10
1.7 Structure of the Project 11
Chapter 2 - Literature Review 12
2.1 Introduction 12
2.2 International Students as Employees in the F&B Sector 12
2.3 International Students as Consumers in the F&B Sector 13
2.4 Business Adaptation Strategies in Response to International Students 14
2.5 Policy and Institutional Support for International Students 15
2.6 Cultural and Economic Impact of International Students 15
2.7 Literature review and its connection to this research 17
2.8 Conclusion of the Literature Review 19
Chapter 3 - Methodology 19
3.1 Introduction 19
3.2 Theoretical Paradigm 20
C 3.3 Research Method 20
3.4 Research Sampling 21
3.5 Ethical Considerations 21
Chapter 4 - Results of the Surveys 21
4.1 Introduction 21
4.2 International Students Survey Results 21
4.3 Owners / Managers Survey Results 25
4.4 Comparative Surveys Students vs Owners 27
4.5 Conclusion of Survey´s results 28
Chapter 5 - Discussion 28
5.1 Introduction 28
5.2 International Students as Employees 28

5.3 International Students as Consumers 30
5.4 Business Adaptation Strategies and Competitiveness 31
5.5 Policy and Institutional Support 33
5.6 Cultural and Economic Impact 33
5.7 Answering the Main Research Question 34
Chapter 6 - Conclusion-Recommendations -Limitations 35
6.1 Conclusions 35
6.2 Recommendations 37
6.3 Limitations 39
7. References 40
8. Appendix 42
Appendix A: Application for Ethical Approval 42
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form 44
Appendix C: Literature Review Table 46
Appendix D: Survey for Students 48
Appendix E: Surveys for Owners 49
Appendix F: Questions Interviews for Students 50
Appendix G: Questions Interviews for Owners/Managers 50
Appendix H: Interview Transcript – Owner A 51
Appendix I: Interview Transcript – Student A 52
Appendix J: Requests for participation in the interviews 54
Appendix K: Results from Google Forms for Surveys 56
Appendix L: Data collected directly from HEA 56

List of Graphics

Graphic 1.Challenges faced by international student workers in the F&B sector.....22
Graphic 2. Key factors influencing students' choice of food establishments.....23
Graphic 3. Students' perceptions of business adaptations.....24

List of Tables

Table 1. Comparative results between surveys for students and F&B business 'owners.....27

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Limerick's food and beverage (F&B) sector has grown as the amount of international students living in the city (CSO, 2022). Many of these students work part time in restaurants, cafés, bars and supermarkets while studying, and they also represent a large and diverse customer group, because of this, they have become very important for keeping the sector running, both as employees and as consumers (Janta et al., 2011).

Their presence creates opportunities for businesses, such as greater labour availability, extended language skills and new cultural ideas that can influence menus and customer service (Pantelidis, 2009). However, also exist challenges, for example, some students have language difficulties, limited working hours and few opportunities for growth. As customers, they look for affordable prices and familiar food options that are not always provided for the businesses.

This research explored how F&B businesses in Limerick could improve their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract more international students to strengtthen their competitiveness in the local market.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyse, how international students as employees and consumers influence the F&B sector in Limerick, and how businesses respond. The focus is on business strategies and how they can be improved to support competitiveness, retention, and customer loyalty.

This research connected academic literature with real business situations in Limerick, Ireland to provide useful recommendations for business owners and managers in order to adapt their hiring, retention and marketing strategies, while atracting international students as consumers and employees.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

General Aim:

To explore how F&B´s businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students as clients and employees in order to improve their competitiveness in the local market.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify barriers and opportunities for hiring and retaining international students.
- To explore consumption preferences of international students in the F&B sector in LImerick.
- To evaluate business strategies that help to attract international students as workers and customers.
- To propose recommendations to improve business competitiveness using this demographic group in Limerick.

1.4 Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How can food and beverage businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students as employees and customers, in order to promote their competitiveness in the local market?

Sub-Research Questions

Theme 1: International Students as Employees: To analyze how international students participate in the F&B workforce and how businesses manage their recruitment and integration for their retention.

1. How do motivations and skills for students shape their employment experiences?
2. How do employers manage recruitment and integration for students as workers?

Theme 2: International Students as Consumers: To explore how international students influence menu diversification and marketing strategies in the F&B sector.

1. How do food preferences for international students influence menu diversification?
2. How do F&B marketing strategies align with their needs?

Theme 3: Business Adaptation Strategies: To examine the strategies F&B businesses use to engage international students and their effectiveness for inclusion and profitability.

1. What adaptation strategies are used to engage student employees and consumers?
2. How effective are these strategies for inclusion and profitability?

Theme 4: Policy and Institutional Support: To assess the role of policies and institutional support in facilitating student employment and integration in the F&B sector.

1. How do policies and institutional supports impact student employment and integration?
2. What barriers exist in policy communication and implementation?

Theme 5: Cultural and Economic Impact: To investigate the cultural and economic contributions of international students to Limerick's F&B sector.

1. How do non-Irish students contribute to cultural change in Limerick's F&B sector?
2. How does their presence improve business competiveness (efficiency and profitability)?

1.4 Rationale

International students are growing in Limerick and now is one of the largest group in this city (CSO, 2022). Their contribution to the F&B sector is important because they fill important gaps in this sector as workers and support businesses during busy periods, especially when it is difficult to recruit local employees (Janta et al., 2011). At the same time, they bring new food preferences and help to drive multicultural offerings that attract d ifferent clients (Liu & Mattila, 2017).

However, previous research mostly focuses on larger cities like Dublin, London, New York, where market conditions and student populations are quite different. It is difficult to understand how smaller cities such as Limerick can successfully adapt business strategies to include international students as a competitive advantage.

This study was focused on business practices and how they can improve in order to increase efficiency, staff retention and customer loyalty. The idea is to use the findings to support business owners, and managers who want to remain competitive in the F&B environment in a small student city as Limerick, Ireland.

1.5 Data Collection and Sources

This research targets three main participants groups in Limerick's F&B sector:

- **Business Owners and Managers:** to explore current hiring, retention, and marketing strategies and their perceptions of international student workers and customers.
- **International Students as Employees:** to understand employment motivations, challenges, and retention experiences.

- **International Students as Consumers:** to identify consumption preferences, patterns, and perceptions of inclusion in Limerick.

This study applies primary and secondary research methods:

1. **Primary Research:** Interviews and surveys with international students and F&B business owners/managers living and working currently in Limerick,
2. **Secondary Research:** Academic literature, government reports, and institutional data about student employment, consumption behaviors, and business adaptation in the F&B sector of LImerick.

This mixed method allows a triangulation between business perspectives, student experiences, and theoretical insights, in order to understand the interactions between these groups.¿ and how this can improve competitiveness for businesses in limerick.

1.7 Structure of the Project

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction:** Presents the situation of Limerick's F&B sector and the growing international student population, outlines the research purpose, aims and objectives, research questions, rationale, and provides an overview of the project structure.
- **Chapter 2 – Literature Review:** Reviews relevant academic literature on international students' influence as employees and consumers, business adaptation strategies, policy and institutional support, and the cultural and economic impact on the F&B sector.
- **Chapter 3 – Methodology:** This describes how the study was done, including the research design, sampling process, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. It explains why a mixed methods approach was chosen.
- **Chapter 4 – Results:** Presents and analyzes the data collected from interviews and surveys.
- **Chapter 5 - Discussion:** Link the findings to the literature and the research questions.
- **Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations:** Summarizes the main findings, discusses limitations, and provides recommendations for businesses and policymakers to promote inclusivity, competitiveness, and continuity in Limerick's F&B sectro.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section shows the main topics related to this research, focusing on how international students affect the F&B sector in Limerick, as workers and customers. Also, this part discusses how businesses answer to their needs in order to stay competitive. This section is divided into five themes that link directly with the research objectives.

The obejective is to describe the ideas from different authors, but also to explain how these ideas help this study understand business strategies in hiring, retention and marketing for the market in Limerick.

2.2 International Students as Employees in the F&B Sector

International students are normally employed in the hospitality and F&B sector because these jobs offer flexibility and do not always require high language levels or experience (Janta et al., 2011). The students are motivated for many reasons, but the main one is their financial status in Limerick, but also, opportunities to improve English and develop confidence in a new country (Wang & Davidson, 2008), this makes them very important for businesses that depend on flexible workers to manage shift variations and lack of staff in busy seasons.

However, many studies show that businesses have difficulties in integration, for instance, Pantelidis (2009) said that international students are considered temporary workers, because of this the effort that managers put into training is lower or even there is not training for this type of workers. Devine et al. (2007) also agrees with Pantelidis, arguing about how this leads to jobs with low pay, repetitive tasks and very few opportunities for progression and they said that cultural misunderstandings can also happen due to different communication styles or expectations in the workplace.

Another important point is that students have limitations due to visa rules, especially the number of weekly hours that they can legally work. These restrictions make harder all the organization for managers and limit the money students can earn (Lu & Adler, 2020). For those authors, even if a business sees potential in an employee, they cannot promote them or give more hours, because of migrations issues, so competitiveness is affected. This information is important in this research and will be used in

the surveys as part of the business strategies, in order to analyze, what practices help the industry to keep its stability and see if in Limerick they face the same issues.

Even with these challenges, the literature agrees that international students bring important advantages to the sector. For example, their availability during busy seasons like summer, keeps the businesses alive (Janta et al., 2011). Their skills with languages and cultural knowledge can also improve customer service for other international customers (Pantelidis, 2009). Businesses that recognise these advantages and offer better onboarding could keep talented staff longer and reduce turnover costs, improving efficiency.

All the authors mentioned that the investment in fair treatment, training and skill development of international students can improve service quality and reduce recruitment pressures for Food and Beverage sector businesses.

2.3 International Students as Consumers in the F&B Sector

International students spend a lot of money in restaurants, cafés, grocery shops, and takeaway services, their food options are influenced because of the price, convenience, social life and the need to feel connected to their home, so they look for places that make them feel welcome and comfortable, especially when they are far away from their home country. (Kim et al., 2016).

Liu and Mattila (2017) point out that international students are one of the main drivers for ethnic and multicultural food offerings in many cities and according to the last statistics (CSO, 2022) in Limerick there are more than 10 thousands of international students living in this city, and it is considered as a student hub for this reason, because students represent more than 30% of its population in total . Businesses in Limerick respond to their preferences adding items such as Asian, Latin American or halal options, this behaviour is explained by Lin and Chen (2019) who argue that this kind of menu diversification can attract both international and local customers who are curious about global foods.

In Limerick, the population has changed, especially with an increment in Brazilian and Asian communities (CSO, 2022). New food trucks and shops sell products from these regions to satisfy this demand (Hanlon

& Russell, 2024). Food is not only a need of nutrition, it is a link to personal identity (Hirschman, 1989). For many students, eating familiar dishes helps them feel less homesick and reduces cultural stress (Torres, 2019).

Nelson (2003), agrees that, when customers are not sure about a brand or product, they choose places with familiar elements. So, small adaptations such as adding a few recognised items can help businesses to increase trust and attract this population.

To sum up, the literature explained that international students shape F&B sector in multiple ways, but there are gaps as how businesses balance authentic cultural expression with commercialization, and how these dynamics affect integration businesses strategies.

2.4 Business Adaptation Strategies in Response to International Students

The competition in the F&B sector is strong, and businesses that want to succeed must adapt quickly to multicultural environments (Kizildag et al., 2020). Some restaurants already use strategies for international students such as discounts, food deals for groups, social media campaigns, staff who speak different languages and decorations or events celebrating cultural diversity, among others (Kizildag et al., 2020). Pantelidis (2009) agrees with Kizildag (2020), that using multilingual staff can improve service quality and reduce communication problems.

Another key strategy is social media, for instance, Raza & Lee (2024) said that international students trust a lot on platforms like Instagram and TikTok to decide where to eat, especially when they are new in a city, for that reason, businesses that do not implement the online world could lose visibility.

Also, Andrade (2006), mentioned that some collaborations with student groups, like culture nights, can help to build relationships and increase brand recognition. However, Torres (2019) informs that sometimes these events are only symbolic and does not mean real inclusion. For example, if a restaurant only offers one international dish but does not listen to students' feedback, the adaptation is only superficial and probably the customers will not come.

Woodard (2001), says that businesses with high cultural adaptability are stronger during economic uncertainty, because they attract a more diverse customer base. So, if the managers adapt their businesses to international students the industry can create long term stability and not only quick profits.

However, there is a gap of needing more evidence on how adaptation strategies can be move into competitive advantage and social inclusion in small cities like Limerick.

2.5 Policy and Institutional Support for International Students

Although this study does not focus on changing policies, it was seen that external systems influence how businesses operate, for instance, work hour restrictions for international students are one of the biggest challenges because when businesses need more workers on weekends or evenings, they cannot give extra hours to students even if they can or want to. (Dáil Éireann, 2024).

Healy and McGrath (2023) found that many employers do not fully understand visa rules, which causes confusion and may reduce willingness to hire international students. The Irish Council for International Students (2022) also reported difficulties such as getting a PPS number or long administrative delays.

These factors create barriers that businesses must manage. For example, managers may need to hire more part tiime workers or adjust schedules more often. Therefore, understanding these limitations helps businesses plan better and reduce operational stress.

2.6 Cultural and Economic Impact of International Students

International students play an important role in changing the food and beverage (F&B) sector because they bring new food habits and ingredients from their home countries. According to Lin and Chen (2019) and Hwang and Lee (2021), cultural differences influence food choices and inspire businesses to create new dishes. This process helps cultural exchange and supports diversity within the local Irish community.

International students also have a strong economic impact. Reports from HEA (2023) and OECD (2019) show that they support local economies not only through tuition fees, but also because they are spending money on housing, shops, and food services. In smaller cities such as Limerick, their presence throughout the year helps F&B businesses remain active during periods with fewer tourists (OECD, 2019).

Legrain (2006) said that the movement of students between countries supports innovation and long term economic growth, for example, in Limerick, this can be seen in supermarkets that offer a more variable range of international products, such as spices and ingredients from Latin America, South Asia, and Eastern Europe (CSO, 2022). This change reflects growing demand from international students and migrant communities living in the Irish city (CSO, 2022).

Food also supports social integration. Hwang and Lee (2021) mentioned that access to familiar food can reduce cultural distance and improve emotional well being for migrants. In a similar way, Lin and Chen (2019) suggest that local people who are exposed to international food can develop better understanding of different cultures. Some cafés and restaurants in Limerick work with student associations to organise cultural events that include food, music, and dance from different countries (OECD, 2019). These activities help creating positive relationships between international students and the local community and promote respect and inclusion (Andrade, 2006).

To conclude, international students have a strong cultural and economic influence on the F&B sector in Limerick. They support business growth, increase food diversity, and help create a more inclusive social environment. However, it is necessary to support business with appropriate policies that ensure that international students can continue their contribuition as both employees and consumers. Also, this study adds value because is focused specifically on the F&B sector in Limerick and highlights the local impact of this group that is not mentioned in the literature review, it shows more the impact on big cities as London in UK.

2.7 Literature review and its connection to this research

This section synthesizes the key insights from the literature reviewed and highlights how they relate to the current study, emphasizing gaps that the research aims in the context of Limerick's F&B sector.

2.7.1 International Students as Employees

- **Problem in the literature:** While studies recognize international students as a flexible and essential workforce, they often overlook employers' perspectives and the long-term implications of student employment in smaller cities as Limerick.
- **Evidence:** Research highlights cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers, with students frequently confined to low-skill roles and limited progression opportunities (Janta et al., 2011; Pantelidis, 2009).
- **Connection to this research:** By incorporating surveys and interviews with both students and business owners in Limerick, the study explores employer experiences, hiring practices, and retention strategies to identify inclusive and effective workforce practices specifically in this city.

2.7.2 International Students as Consumers

- **Problem:** Existing research emphasizes menu diversification driven by international student demand but rarely investigates whether these adaptations foster genuine cultural integration or are purely market-driven.
- **Evidence:** Studies show students influence food innovation and ethnic offerings, reflecting identity, comfort, and belonging (Liu & Mattila, 2017; Torres, 2019).
- **Connection:** The study evaluates how local businesses' marketing and menu adaptations attract student consumers, and whether these strategies contribute to inclusivity, customer satisfaction, and long-term competitiveness.¿ for the F&B sector in Limerick.

2.7.3 Business Adaptation Strategies

- **Problem in the literature:** Literature often describes adaptation efforts (e.g., multilingual staff, cultural training, and targeted marketing) but not too much of systematic evaluation of their effectiveness and impact on business performance.
- **Evidence:** Strategies such as cultural nights or menu diversification exist, but outcomes in terms of inclusion, profitability, and sustainability are underexplored (Kizildag et al., 2020; Pantelidis, 2009).
- **Connection to this research:** By assessing the perceived effectiveness of adaptation strategies in Limerick's F&B sector, the study identifies practices that support both business competitiveness and social inclusion.

2.7.4 Policy and Institutional Support

- **Problem in the literature:** Institutional support such as employability programs and university partnerships is recognized but underutilized or unevenly applied.
- **Evidence:** Policies enabling student work exist, but employer awareness and implementation remain inconsistent, and practical barriers persist (Andrade, 2006; Healy & McGrath, 2023).
- **Connection:** The study investigates how policies and institutional frameworks facilitate or delay international student employment and engagement in the F&B sector, offering insights to improve alignment between businesses, institutions, and students in this Irish city.

2.7.5 Cultural and Economic Impact

- **Problem:** Most studies focus on national or metropolitan-level impacts, abandoning medium-sized cities like Limerick.
- **Evidence:** International students contribute to culinary diversity, economic resilience, and cultural exchange (OECD, 2019; Lin & Chen, 2019). These authors talk about cities in UK, Poland and US.
- **Connection to this research:** By focusing on Limerick, the study provides a localized analysis of cultural and economic contributions, emphasizing the role of international students in sustaining the competitiveness and diversity of the city's F&B sector.

2.8 Conclusion of the Literature Review

Foreign students are an important part of the food and beverage (F&B) sector in Limerick and contribute to the development of the Irish city. As workers, they help businesses bringing different skills, languages, and flexibility. As customers, they influence food choices and increase demand for international and familiar dishes.

Businesses that understand these roles and adapt their hiring and marketing practices can improve their competitiveness in the local market. However, businesses cannot achieve this alone, it is necessary clear institutional support and suitable policies to help these students to contribute positively to the F&B sector in Limerick.

However, much of the existing research remains descriptive, focusing on large areas and do not talk about smaller urban contexts like Limerick. Also, employer perspectives are not presented, leaving unclear how businesses perceive and engage international students as both workers and consumers.

Few studies evaluate the long term impact or inclusiveness of adaptation strategies, and the connection between policy frameworks and everyday business practices are not still examinate. To fill those gaps, the study will combine surveys and interviews with international students and business owners in Limerick. Doing this, this work aims to move beyond descriptive toward a more integrated understanding of how international students influence, and are influenced by the local F&B sector in LImericck.

It will contribute to improve hiring, retention, and marketing strategies and also they will help to inform policies in order to improve the F&B sector for this Irish city.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research approach used in this study and describes the research design, the data collection tools, sampling methods, and ethical considerations in order to analyze how food and beverage (F&B) businesses in Limerick can improve their hiring, retention and marketing practices to attract international students.

3.2 Theoretical Paradigm

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how food and beverage (F&B) businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to attract international students as employees and customers.

The qualitative part uses interviews for students and Owners in Limerick to understand their experiences and opinions in this sector. This follows an interpretivist approach, because it explains how people see and understand their work and consumer experiences in the F&B sector.

The quantitative part uses surveys to find patterns and trends across a group of students and business owners. This is more deductive, based on what the literature says and the research questions.

Combining interviews and surveys, the research can look at both detailed personal experiences and general trends. This helps to give a better picture of how businesses and students interact, and gives useful information for improving strategies and competitiveness in Limerick's F&B sector.

C 3.3 Research Method

Primary data was collected through:

- **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with 3 international students and 3 business owners/managers. These interviews explored perceptions of employment, consumer habits, and business adaptation strategies, allowing deeper triangulation between perspectives.
- **Surveys:** 125 international students and 6 business owners/managers completed structured surveys to provide quantitative insights on spending behaviour, preferences, and business practices.

Surveys were chosen because they allowed access to a large number of participants in a short time. They also helped identify patterns linked to employment, spending behaviour and opinions about business strategies.

Interviews were included to get deeper insights and explanations behind the survey answers. They supported understanding of motivations, challenges and ideas that numbers alone cannot show.

Secondary data included academic literature, industry reports, and local demographic data relevant to Limerick's F&B sector and international student population.

3.4 Research Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to target stakeholders most relevant to the research question:

- International students currently working in or consuming products from the F&B sector.
- Business owners and managers operating restaurants, cafés, bars, and supermarkets in Limerick.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

These were implemented to protect participants and ensure research integrity:

- **Ethical Form A** submitted and approved by module leader.
- **Informed Consent:** Provided prior to interviews.
- **Electronic consent**: included in surveys to guarantee voluntary participation and anonymity.
- **Confidentiality and Data Protection:** Responses are anonymized and securely stored.
- **Member Checks:** The complete research work was shared with key participants who requested it. No formal feedback or verification of the findings was requested.
- **Referencing:** Harvard style used throughout to avoid plagiarism.

Chapter 4 - Results of the Surveys

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative surveys conducted with international students and F&B business owners in Limerick. The findings are organised according to the five key themes of the study and relate to the main research question. At this stage, results are presented descriptively. A deeper analysis and interpretation of these findings, together with the interview results, will be developed in the triangulation of the chapter of discussion.

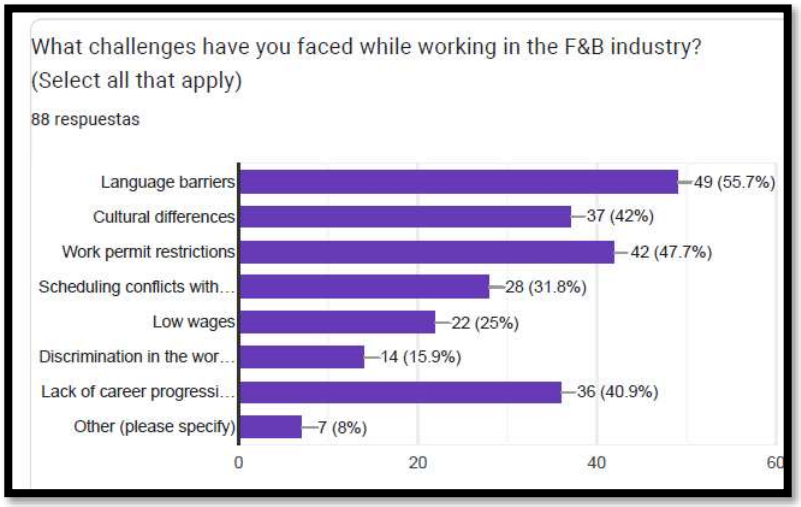
4.2 International Students Survey Results

This section presents the quantitative findings from the survey of international students in Limerick (n = 125) organized in the five themes of this research.

Theme 1: International Students as Employees

More than half of the international students (52.8%) reported currently working in the food and beverage sector in Limerick, indicating that the sector depends on student workers. These students work in restaurants, cafés, bars, fast-food and supermarkets, demonstrating that businesses rely on on flexible international workers in different roles.

Many students reported problems at work (see figure 1), for example, with language barriers (49 students), work permit restrictions (42 people), cultural differences (37 students), and lack of career progression (36 workers) as the most prevalent issues. Low wages (22) and discrimination (14) were also noted. However, 67% of respondents perceived their employers as supportive to some extent.



Graphic 1. Challenges faced by international student workers in the F&B sector

Training and integration practices are very weak, 52% specified that they learned the job alone, without support from their boss, while only 9.8% received full training. Without clear skill training, employees may have limited opportunities to grow and may leave the job sooner.

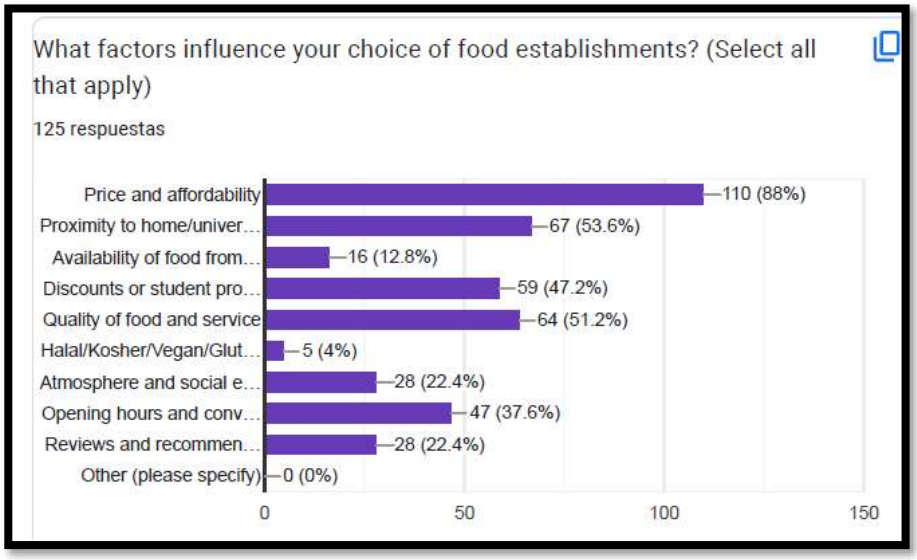
International students are very important workers in this sector. However, their working conditions are often not good. Many students must learn the job by themselves, and visa rules make their situation insecure. They usually do important jobs, but with low positions and few chances to getting t promoted.

Theme 2: International Students as Consumers

Students reported strong engagement with the local F&B economy. 63.2% eat out in restaurants 2–3 times per week, while 69.1% use takeaway/delivery services at similar frequency. Ethnic food stores are visited at least weekly by 57.3%, indicating multicultural preferences shaping demand.

Spending levels were moderate to high, 53.6% spent €50–€100 per week on food, and 76.8% spent less than €50 per week on beverages.

Price was the dominant decision factor (88%), followed by proximity to university or home (53.6%) and quality (51.2%). Student discounts were an important reason to considerate for students to 47.2%, reflecting economic sensitivity typical of student demographics (see figure 2).



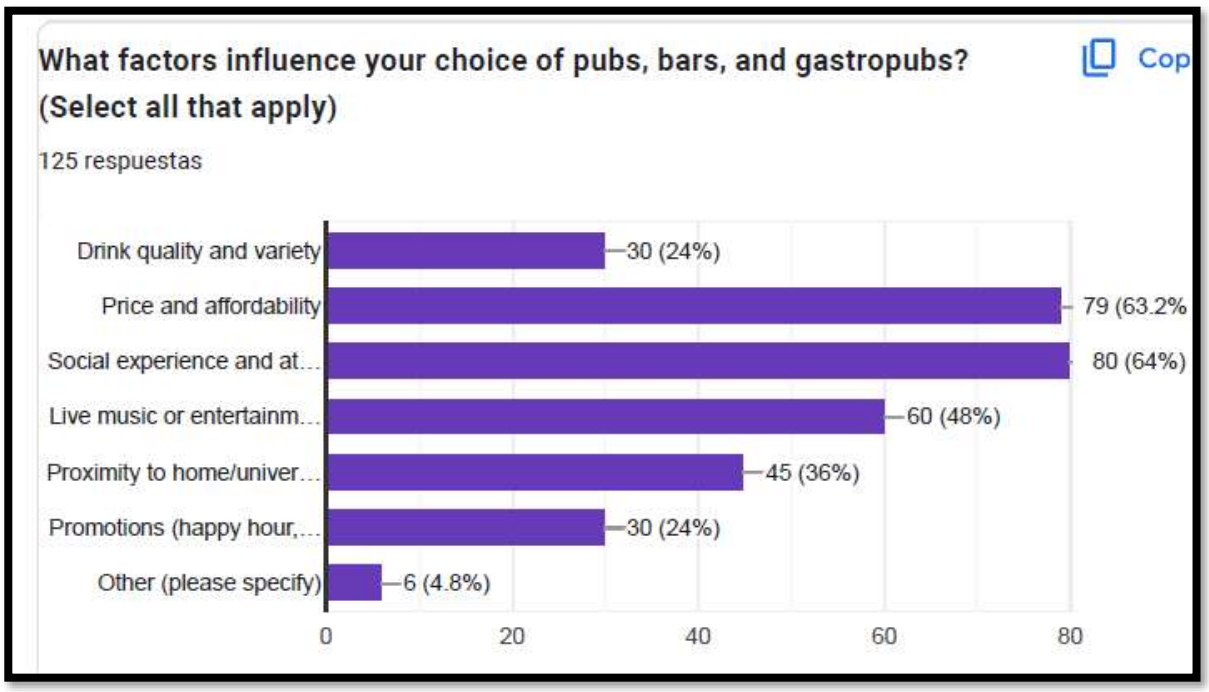
Graphic 2. Key factors influencing students' choice of food establishments

The international students are a very active group, and their consumption helps keeping businesses alive. However, they are sensitive to prices because most of them can only work 20 hours in Limerick, which limits their budget. Also, their cultural preferences create new opportunities for marketing strategies focused on menu diversification.

Theme 3: Business Adaptation Strategies (Student Perspective)

When asked whether F&B businesses in Limerick cater well to international students 44% agreed, 29.6% disagreed and 26.4% were unsure. This illustrates an ambiguous perception of inclusivity. Nevertheless, 62.4% noticed certain adaptations such as student pricing or menu adjustments.

Students strongly indicated that more discounts (57.6%) and more affordable pricing (48%) would increase their spending.



Graphic 3. Students' perceptions of business adaptations

Although some businesses try to adapt to this type of consumer, costumers say efforts are not enough, because of the poor communication.

Theme 4: Policy and Institutional Support

Opened responses revealed strong concerns over work hour limitations (20-hour rule), visa permitting and PPS difficulties, poor alignment of shifts with study commitments, lack of consistent onboarding or safety training and limited recognition of prior professional experience. Students also called for support in transition periods, flexible scheduling, and more career progression opportunities.

Policy gaps and weak support obstruct student integration into the labour market, limiting their ability to contribute fully to business productivity. Both employees and employers reported they cannot progress because of all those restrictions related to migration status, especially for students with stamp 2, for English schools and even for Universities.

Theme 5: Cultural and Economic Impact

Most of the students, approx. 91.2% believe they have a strong impact on the food and beverage sector in Limerick because they help businesses earning money, bringing more diversity to the workforce and support food diversification, creating new social and cultural experiences in restaurants, cafeterias among other.

About food consunption, many students eat outside very often. Around 63.2% of students said they eat in restaurants two or three times per week. Also, 69.1% of them use takeaway or delivery services with the same frequency. In addition, 57.3% of students visit ethnic or special food shops at least one time per week.

About spending, more than half of the students (53.6%) spend between €50 and €100 per week on food. For drinks, most of the students (76.8%) spend less than €50 per week, showing that they are careful with money.

The students come from different parts of the world such as Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. The high number of students visiting ethnic food shops reported 57.3% showing that international students help to increase multicultural food options in Limerick.

The results above also demonstrate that they play a very important role in the culture and economy of the food and beverage sector in Limerick. They help not only working or buying food, but also changing the identity and the competitiveness of the F&B businesses in the city.

4.3 Owners / Managers Survey Results

This section presents findings from business owners/managers in the F&B sector in Limerick (n = 6). Given the small sample size, findings are interpreted carefully, however, they provide valuable insights into employer practices and perceptions of the international student workforce.

Theme 1: International Students as Employees

All the businesses that took part of this research are currently employing international students, confirming their significant role in sustaining staffing capacity in Limerick. Most employers reported that 10–50% of their workforce consists of international students, with positions covering front of house, kitchen staff, customer service, cashier, and cleaning. Work permit restrictions were, identified as the main hiring challenge.

Businesses in Limerick depend a lot on non irish students to keep their establisments working, but they are limited by government rules, not by their own choices about staff.

Theme 2: International Students as Consumers

Owners observed demand changes linked to the international student population (66.7%). Many have introduced student discounts or promotions (50%) and some have added international menu items (33.3%). Asian and Mediterranean cuisines were noted as key areas of rising demand.

This population help change food trends and marketing strategies. They bring new ideas and help businesses to add new food products.

Theme 3: Business Adaptation Strategies

All owners indicated that they actively recruit international students. Promotion tools expected at students include, student discounts (80%), buy one and get one and the group meal offers (40%). Late-night hours or online delivery were less common adaptations.

Business strategies show interest in student customers, but they are still very basic and not deep in daily operations.

Theme 4: Policy and Institutional Support

All owners believe there should be greater government support for businesses employing international students. Specifically, easier work permit regulations (100%), increment of working hour allowances (50%) and training subsidies (50%).

So, There is a strong connection between what employer need and what students worry about in policy changes, showing a general issue in the local food and beverage market.

Theme 5: Cultural and Economic Impact

Most owners (66.7%) believe international students significantly contribute to F&B sector growth but also recognise them as highly price sensitive consumers. Price increases have been common across all surveyed businesses due to inflation and supplier cost rises.

So, the foreign students are an economically essential, however, the price controls the market and also influence both sales strategies and competitiveness in Limerick.

4.4 Comparative Surveys Students vs Owners

The comparative table summarises the key survey results from both international students and F&B business owners, highlighting how their perspectives align and differ across the five thematic areas of the study.

Theme	Students Perspective	Owners Perspective	Overall Meaning
Workforce role	Essential but vulnerable	Essential and valued	Students are primary labour force
Consumer role	Frequent and influential	Demand drivers	Strong purchasing power + cultural influence
Business adaptation	Insufficient and irregular	Adequate adaptation efforts	Perception gap
Policy influence	Restrictive, stressful	Operational barrier	Shared call for reform
Cultural/economic impact	Strong and positive	Strong but price-limited	Students reshape the market

Table 1. Comparative results between surveys for students and F&B business 'owners.

Students believe businesses aren't doing enough, while businesses believe students already benefit from specific strategies. This perception misalignment is a crucial finding that motivates further qualitative exploration that will be answered in the interviews of this research.

4.5 Conclusion of Survey´s results

The survey results from international students and food and beverage business owners in Limerick show that there is a strong relationship between them. Students have an important double role, as workers and also as active customers. In the same time, businesses depend on students to keep working and support new food trends.

However, the results also show some problems between students and businesses and they are mainly related to working conditions, prices, and how much businesses adapt their strategies to student needs. These results give a basic quantitative understanding of this relationship but a deeper analysis using the data of the interviews, will be presented in the next chapter through triangulation and discussion.

Chapter 5 - Discussion - Triangulation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discussed the findings of the research and compared the survey and interview results with academic literature. The discussion followed the main themes of the study and showed links between theory, student experiences, and business practices.

This section answered the main research question about how food and beverage businesses in Limerick can adapt hiring, retention, and marketing strategies to become more competitive.

5.2 International Students as Employees

Specific Objective 1: To identify barriers and opportunities when hiring and retaining international students.

SRQ.1: How do students' motivations and skills shape their employment experiences?

SRQ.2: How do employers manage recruitment and integration of student workers?

The results talked that international students are essential for staffing continuity in the F&B sector in Limerick, with over half of surveyed students working in this industry and owners confirming that 10–

50% of their workforce consists of international students, this reflects Janta et al. (2011), who explained that students are a flexible labour source for hospitality.

However, challenges were alsoreported, language barriers, visa restrictions, limited training, and a lack of career progression opportunities. These issues are the same as Pantelidis (2009) and Wang and Davidson (2008), who mentioned that international staff often receive correct support because they are seen as temporary employees. The interviews confirmed this, as students explained that they initially received back of house roles until they proved their communication skills.
Some participants also explained that their professional experience from their home countries was not taken in consideration or ignored at all, that caused frustration and loss of motivation for the workers. One student with prior HACCP and inspection training was assigned to basic roles, demonstrating what Wang & Davidson (2008) call skill overlooking.

Even though most students stated that employers were supportive, 52% reported no structured training align with Devine et al. (2007), who noted that poor guidance limits workplace integration. Investing in basic skill development could increase motivation and retention, reducing recruitment costs, as suggested by Flanagan (1972).

Also, the interviews showed that international students do not only do basic jobs, but they also bring other skills. Some students help with technology, talk with customers, and create content for social media. Owner B said that some students help with marketing and also with stock control when they have experience before.
This shows that international student workers can bring new ideas to the business when managers recognise and use their skills. This is similar to what Andrade (2006) said, that students develop work skills not only in university. When students feel included and trusted, they feel more motivated, as Student A explained. A good work environment helps students work better and stay longer in the job.

Overall, international students are very necessary for business operations, but having flexible schedules around their studies is very important for them. This flexibility helps students stay longer in the job. This shows that when managers are more understanding, businesses can become more competitive.

5.3 International Students as Consumers

Specific Objective 2: To explore consumption preferences of international students in the F&B sector in Limerick.

SRQ.1: How do students' food preferences influence menu diversification?

SRQ.2: How do F&B marketing strategies align with their needs?

International students also have an important role as customers. The survey results showed that students spend money often on takeaway and restaurant food every week. This is similar to what Kim et al. (2016) said, that food is important for feeling comfortable and part of a place.

Not only money was important for students. The atmosphere and cultural feeling were also important. Some students preferred quiet places with Latin or Mediterranean food, because these places make them feel more comfortable and connected to their culture.

Affordability was the most important factor when students decide where to buy food. Convenience and food quality were also important. Business owners said that students are very sensitive to prices, which is similar to what Woodard (2001) explains.

Students also said they want more multicultural food options. This supports Lin and Chen (2019), who say that having different types of food helps customers feel more satisfied and included.

Although many students observed adaptations such as student discounts and menu changes, almost 30% felt businesses do not fully meet their needs, This highlights a gap between business intentions and student expectations, reinforcing the importance of better communication and cultural awareness in marketing (Nelson, 2003).

The interviews also showed that emotions have a strong influence on how students choose where to eat. Student A said, that when they feel welcome and respected in a place, they want to come back more times and also recommend it to others. This is similar to what Hirschman (1989) explained, that food choices are connected with comfort and identity in a new country.

Because of this, good service, friendly staff and inclusive treatment are very important for marketing, because when students feel comfortable, they are more willing to spend money and stay loyal to the business. So, businesses that show cultural awareness can attract more international students and also help reduce homesickness and cultural stress, as Torres (2019) explained.

5.4 Business Adaptation Strategies and Competitiveness

Specific Objective 3: To evaluate business strategies targeting international students as workers and customers.

SRQ.1: What adaptation strategies are used to engage international student employees and consumers?

SRQ.2: How effective are these strategies for inclusion and profitability?

The results show that there are differences between students and business owners about how much businesses adapt. Students think that adaptation strategies are still limited, but business owners believe they are already doing a good job for international needs. For example, one local restaurant changed its menu after hiring a Latin American chef. This helped to attract both international and Irish customers, showing how cultural inclusion can help the business to be more competitive.

Social media was mentioned as the most common marketing strategy. Many businesses use Instagram and TikTok to reach students, which is similar to what Raza and Lee (2024) talked about young people using digital platforms.

A notable example of positive adaptation comes from Owner B, who introduced a Global Corner in the store based on suggestions from international student employees. This initiative increased customer attraction not only among international students but also local customers interested in trying new multicultural products, agreeing with Liu and Mattila (2017), who stated that menu and product innovation lead cultural diversity and can extend market reach and stimulate curiosity. It also supports

Lin and Chen (2019), who argued that familiarity and cultural recognition motivate customer loyalty among international students.

In addition, Owner B mentioned that students share promotions with their friends, which increases the business visibility and competitiveness despite the presence of larger supermarkets. This aligns with Woodard (2001), who notes that international students support local business sustainability due to their continuous consumption throughout the year.

However, not all businesses demonstrate this level of strategic adaptation. Some initiatives appear minimal or mainly promotional, which may not be enough to create a sense of belonging. Torres (2019) suggested that when adaptation is superficial, customers feel less included and may not return.

Another important result is that flexibility and empathy from employers help the business be more competitive. Owner A explained that many international students are young and far from home, so when managers understand their personal situation, students work better. This kind of supportive environment helps students stay longer in the job because they feel appreciated, as Tierney (2015) explained. When employees feel comfortable and valued, they usually give better service and recommend the business to their friends. This has positive effects on staff stability and customer satisfaction.

Overall, the results show that adaptation has a direct effect on competitiveness. Businesses that listen to students preferences, offer different food options, and show inclusion more clearly have better customers engagement and more stable staff. This is similar to what Kizildag et al. (2020) said about being flexible as an important factor for small hospitality businesses.
However, some small forms of exclusion exist yet, for example, some businesses do not like to give cash handling tasks to foreign staff. This can make the business look less inclusive than they want to be.

5.5 Policy and Institutional Support

Specific Objective 4: To assess the role of policies and institutional support in facilitating student employment and integration.

SRQ.1: How do policies and institutional supports impact student employment and integration?

SRQ.2: What barriers exist in policy communication and implementation?

Policy restrictions were seen as a big problem by both students and business owners. Visa limits and problems getting documents reduced the number of hours students could work and made it harder for businesses to organise work. These results were similar to what Healy and McGrath (2023) and Dáil Éireann (2024) said.

Also, some owners said they did not know immigration rules very well. This was similar to the Irish Council for International Students (2022), who said there is confusion about the rules in the labour market. Andrade (2006) suggested that better cooperation between universities and employers could help students integrate better. Also the participants in this study also shared this idea and said they were interested in stronger partnerships with universities to make work processes more fair and clear.

5.6 Cultural and Economic Impact

Specific Objective: To investigate the cultural and economic contributions of international students to Limerick's F&B sector.

SRQ.1: How do international students contribute to cultural transformation in Limerick's F&B sector?

SRQ.2: How does their presence enhance business sustainability and local economic resilience?

The data showed that many people believed international students contribute a lot to the economic and cultural development of the food and beverage sector in Limerick. This was mentioned by both students and business owners. These results were similar to what OECD (2019) and HEA (2023) said about international students being important for local income and businesses.

Multicultural food demand has led to new product offerings and culinary innovation, as also observed by Liu and Mattila (2017) and Hwang and Lee (2021). Students help shape community identity through food preferences and cultural exchange, which reinforces Lin and Chen (2019), who arguing that food reduces cultural distance and builds social inclusion. Multilingual staff for instance, often act as informal translators, helping customers from similar backgrounds and directly increasing sales, which turns cultural diversity into measurable economic value.

This research demonstrates that international students bring value beyond temporary labour, influencing consumption patterns and enhancing cultural diversity in Limerick.

5.7 Answering the Main Research Question

How can F&B businesses in Limerick adapt their hiring, retention and marketing strategies to attract international students and improve competitiveness?

This study showed that international students are both very important workers and also important customers for the food and beverage sector in Limerick. However, their contribution to business competitiveness is still not fully used. The findings showed that businesses become more competitive when they adapt their strategies in three connected areas, like hiring, retention and marketing.

Hiring: Businesses should recognise the experience and skills that international students already have, for instance, many of them worked before in food jobs, customer service, or safety control, but these skills are often ignored. When businesses give clear information about tasks and equal chances to work in different positions, students feel more respected and motivated. Fair hiring also gives a good image to the business and helps to attract more workers

Retention: Students stay longer and work better when managers show understanding and flexibility. When managers allow changes in schedules during exams or busy weeks, students feel more valued. When students feel supported, they are more loyal and more productive. This helps reduce staff turnover and saves time and money for the business.

Marketing: As customers, international students look for more than just cheap prices, they want friendly service, a good atmosphere, and food that reminds them of their culture, for instance. restaurants that offer multicultural food and a calm environment can attract both international and Irish customers promoting these ideas on social media and working with student groups can also help the business become more visible.

In conclusion, F&B businesses in Limerick can improve their competitiveness when they treat international students as partners, not only as workers or clients. Fair jobs, flexible schedules, and inclusive marketing help create loyal staff and loyal customers. This makes the business stronger and more successful in the local market.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion-Recommendations -Limitations

6.1 Conclusions

The results are important because they show that multicultural adaptation is not only about culture, but also about business. It is a good oportunity for companies. If businesses think more about student needs, they can get more loyal customers and become more competitive.

International Students as Employees: International students make the food and beverage sector stronger and more dynamic, but their full potential is not fully used. This is because their previous work skills are not always recognised, training is weak, and there are limits on working hours. If businesses use students skills better and give more support, competitiveness can increase.

International Students as Consumers: International students influence local food demand and create new oportunities for innovation. Businesses that respond to student preferences can build stronger customer loyalty and attract both local and international customers, which help the business be more competitive in the long term.

Business Adaptation Strategies and Competitiveness: The data showed a perception gap between business owners and students where owners think they are adapting very good, but students do not always feel included or recognized, making businesses less competitive because it reduces trust and loyalty.

Real competitiveness does not come only from marketing promotions, it comes from real inclusion, recognising student abilities, and innovation, because when businesses listen to student feedback, use their ideas, and show inclusion clearly, they can improve their reputation and make more profit.

Policy and Institutional Support: Policy and institutional barriers reduce efficiency and competitiveness. Aligning visa rules with student needs and improving cooperation between universities and local businesses would create fairer and more productive employment conditions.

Cultural and Economic Impact: International students bring cultural richness and economic stability to the food and beverage sector in Limerick. They help create new menu options, support multicultural events, and build connections between Irish people and international communities in the city.

From an economic point of view, the money that international students spend helps local shops, restaurants, and cafés stay active during the wohle year. This also help to make Limerick a more diverse and inclusive city and supports sustainable growth in the food and beverage sector.

General Conclusion: Overall, this reserch showed that this population are a key part of the success and competitiveness of the F&B sector in Limerick. They help businesses grow working, buying food, and sharing their culture. When businesses support students with fair hiring, good communication, and cultural inclusion, both students and businesses benefit.

However, visa rules and policy restirctions still limit how much this cooperation can grow. A more flexible and inclusive system could improve local employment, reduce costs for businesses, and make Limerick more attractive for international students and investment.

To stay competitive, food and beverage businesses in Limerick should not see international students only as temporary workers, but as long term partners in innovation, diversity, and community development and work together with schools and universities for better understandings of the migrations policies.

6.2 Recommendations

International Students as Employees

- Provide short and simple training sessions for all new staff to improve service and confidence, especially if their English is not good enough.
- Recognize students' professional backgrounds, offer part time roles in marketing, quality (HACCP knowledge), accounting or other where possible, reducing cost for the company and also allowing students to continue working in their area.
- Use flexible scheduling around class times and exams to reduce turnover and also give good reputation to the company due to all people will know they are helping students and they are good managers, so more people would like to work there and also buy food in that establishment.
- Encourage open communication to help students express challenges early.

International Students as Consumers

- Introduce student menus, combo deals, and loyalty cards to attract more students.
- Add multicultural or familiar dishes to menus and advertise them clearly, not only international students but also their families come to visit them and they are costumers looking for this familiarities and atmosphere.
- Make restaurants and cafés more welcoming using inclusive decoration or celebrating international holidays and multicultural events, this attract not only international students but also irish people very curious of the new styles.
- Train staff in cultural sensitivity and patience to improve customer experience to make them feel comfortable and also transmit that to their customers.

Business Adaptation Strategies and Competitiveness

- Involve international students in generation of ideas for marketing, social media, or menu innovation that might help to attract this kind of customers, especially because young students are linked to these marketing channels.
- Keep adaptation visible through social media and posters with student focused content.

- Create partnerships with student associations for events or feedback sessions, this is the easier access to international and Irish students.
- Develop an internal culture of inclusion, where employees' ideas are valued and rewarded, if they feel well that will lead innovation and a innovator business is always preferred, the new things are very attracted, especially in a small city as Limerick.

Policy and Institutional Support

- Policymakers should extend work hour flexibility to match international students' own holiday periods, not only the Irish/ Universities´ summer but also, english schools.
- Simplify visa and work regulations, offering clear guidelines for small businesses.
- Universities and colleges in Limerick should help to connect students with employers through local job boards or internships.
- Provide training or online information sessions for employers about legal hiring of international students.

Cultural and Economic Impact

- Businesses in Limerick should celebrate cultural diversity through food festivals or themed nights as the restaurant Olive Tree which is already doing some activities in order to attract students.
- Promote multicultural teamwork to improve communication and understanding among staff.
- Local authorities and tourism boards could highlight Limerick's diversity in marketing materials.
- Encourage students to share cultural recipes or marketing ideas to attract more global customers as the Global corner and also the recipes from the Latin American chef who is making different dishes every week not only from that region but also, receiving feedback from other continents.

To sum up, these recommendations try to make a better connection between international students and the food and beverage businesses in Limerick. If businesses are more flexible and include students in their plans, they can save money, keep good workers, and get more customers. Also, if the work rules change to give students more opportunities, it will help both students and employers. This research showed that working together, businesses, universities, and the government can make Limerick's food and beverage sector stronger, fairer, and more, successful for everyone.

6.3 Limitations

There were some limitations in this research that should be acknowledged, the first limitation is the size of the interview sample, and only a small number of international students and business owners were able to participate due to time restirctions during the data collection period. For example, only 125 international students of 34000 living and working in Limerick (CSO,2022).

Some business owners declined or were not available, which reduced the diversity of viewpoints included in the findings, only 6 owners or managers helped but they did not want to talk about this topic due to migration situations.

Moreover, the mode of data collection difered across participants. Several interviews were conducted face to face or online, allowing for deeper exploration of answers, while others were completed by email due to owners' limited availability.

Email responses did not allow for follow up questioning when certain topics required clarification or more detail, which may have restricted the depth of the qualitative data. However, when it was requested to clarify some information, they were very supportive in answering.

The sample for the student survy was mainly reached through international student networks in Limerick, meaning that results may not fully represent the entire international student community with different backgrounds and experiences.

Another limitation was that the study concentrated exclusively on Limerick, whhile this offers valuable insights for the local F&B sector in Ireland, the results cannot be generalised to other Irish cities with different economic profiles or student populations but it works as baseline for future investigations in other cities or specifically ethnic group.

Finally, this research analysed business practices at this moment, so itk was not possible to examine whether competitiveness increased after applying the recommended strategies, which could be explored in future studies.

Despite these limitations, the research provides relevant evidence that helps understand the essential role of international students in the F&B sector in Limerick and highlights practical ways for businesses to improve their competitiveness.

7. References

1. Andrade, M.S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), pp.131–154. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240906065589 (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
2. Central Statistics Office (CSO). (2022). Population and Migration Estimates. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/ (Accessed: 4 March 2025).
3. Dáil Éireann. (2024). *Immigration Policy*. Available at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-05-15/75/ (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
4. Devine, F., Baum, T., Hearns, N. and Devine, A. (2007). Cultural diversity in hospitality work: the Northern Ireland experience. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, pp.1. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/html/gdeszye2fb (Accessed: 5 March 2025).
5. Flanagan, R.J. (1972). Internal labor markets and manpower analysis. *Journal of Business*, 45(2), pp.129–143 Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/pdf/miu6nsut35 (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
6. Generation Gap. (2005). Managers, recent graduates must find happy medium. *Nation's Restaurant News*, 5 February. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/search/details/e4tva2mvsb (Accessed: 8 March 2025).
7. Hanlon, P and Russell, A. (2024). The delicious rise of Brazilian food in Ireland. RTE News, pp.1. Available at: https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/food/2024/1117/1481097-finding-feijoada-the-delicious-rise-of-brazilian-food-in-ireland/
8. HEA. (2023). *Trends in Irish Higher Education*. Available at: https://hea.ie/statistics/ (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
9. Henderson, T. (2011). New Economy Initiative wants international students to stay. *Crain's Detroit Business*, 6 June, pp.1 Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/html/55mfhc5huj (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
10. Higher Education Authority (HEA). (2023). *The Contribution of International Students to the Irish Economy*. Dublin: HEA. Available at: https://www.internationalstudents.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2021-12/ICOS%20International%20Student%20Report%202021_Final.pdf (Accessed: 25 March 2025).
11. Hirschman, E.C. (1989). Consumer behaviour theories as heroic quest', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 16, pp.639–644. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/pdf/uwfs4ei3cb (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
12. Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills: Sage. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/pdf/w6xvunhwnb , (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
13. Hwang, J. and Lee, J.S. (2021). Cultural distance and food preference. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 40, p.100911, pp.1. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100911 , (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
14. Janta, H., Ladkin, A., Brown, L. and Lugosi, P. (2011). Employment experiences of Polish migrant workers in the UK hospitality sector. *Tourism Management*, 32(5), pp.1006–1019. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.08.013 , (Accessed: 6 March 2025).
15. Kim, Y.J., Baek, T.H. and Kim, Y.K. (2016). Impact of international student communities on cultural and economic growth. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(3), pp.673–692. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540514528192 , (Accessed: 3 March 2025).

16. Kizildag, M., Okumus, F. and Altinay, L. (2020). Strategic agility and performance in hospitality SMEs. *Tourism Management*. V.78, p.104051, pp.1. **doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104051**
17. Lee, J.J. and Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, 53(3), pp.381–409. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3 , (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
18. Lin, Y. and Chen, M. (2019). Culinary preferences of Asian international students. *Appetite*, 133, pp.90–99. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.10.030, (Accessed: 3 March 2025).
19. Liu, Y. and Mattila, A. (2017). Understanding menu innovation in ethnic restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 64, pp.63–72. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.03.008, (Accessed: 6 May 2025).
20. Nelson, R. (2003). Risk management behaviour by the Northern Ireland food consumer. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 27(3), pp.223–230. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/html/yvzksetaer, (Accessed: 2 May 2025).
21. OECD. (2019). *International Students and Local Economies*. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/education/international-students-and-local-economies.htm, (Accessed: 4 May 2025).
22. Pantelidis, I.S. (2009). Chefs' attitudes toward training and employment of foreign staff. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 21(3), pp.364–377. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110910948331, (Accessed: 7 May 2025).
23. Raza, A and Lee, C. (2024). Ethnic foods serving cultural bridge or barrier. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, v. 102, p.1. September 2024. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102011 , Accessed: 9 May 2025).
24. Rienties, B., Beausaert, S., Grohnert, T., Niemantsverdriet, S. and Kommers, P. (2012). Understanding academic performance of international students: the role of ethnicity, academic and social integration. *Higher Education*, 63(6), pp.685–700. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9468, Accessed: 8 May 2025).
25. Tierney, W.G. (2015). Cultural inclusion and student engagement: understanding the link for student success. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 69(1), pp.50–67. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12050 , (Accessed: 2 May 2025).
26. Wang, Y. and Davidson, M. (2008). Foreign students in the hospitality workforce: a case study from Australia. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(3), pp.350–364. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110810866110 , (Accessed: 2 May 2025).
27. Woodard, S. (2001) 'International students can have impact on local economy', *New Orleans CityBusiness (1994-2008)*, 7 September. Available at: https://research.ebsco.com/c/377kli/viewer/pdf/w6xvunhwnb (Accessed: 3 March 2025).