Applied Project Submission Form

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The Financial Challenges Faced by International Students Working Part-Time as Servers in Dublin: An Exploration of Income Variability, Cost of Living, and Visa Restrictions

by

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Under the supervision of

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Abstract

This thesis explores the financial challenges faced by international students working part-time as servers in Dublin, focusing on income variability, the high cost of living, and visa restrictions. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews to understand the financial pressures students experience. Findings show that students struggle with unreliable income from tips and high living costs, with over 50% of their income spent on rent. Visa restrictions further complicate financial stability by limiting work hours to 20 per week, creating a gap between income and expenses. Financial stress significantly affects students' emotional well-being and academic performance, as many report anxiety and difficulty focusing on studies. The research also reveals a lack of sufficient financial support systems for students, with recommendations for increased flexibility in visa regulations, more accessible financial support, and better financial management tools. The study highlights the need for policies that address these challenges, ensuring international students can focus on their academic success without the overwhelming burden of financial insecurity.

List of Acronyms used

- CCPC - Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
- EMN - European Migration Network
- EU - European Union
- HE - Higher Education
- IR - International Relations
- N/A - Not Applicable
- NCH - National Concert Hall (used as a specific example in the interview)
- SSE - State Sponsored Employment
- Stamp 2 - Work and Study Visa for International Students in Ireland
- UK - United Kingdom
- US - United States

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of research

The target audience of this research are the financial challenges that await international students, working as servers part time in Dublin, Ireland. It is a personal subject to me because I'm an international student who travelled the same territory. Without money for the start of a year, and with only being able to have a variable income from working in a partnership with four to five other students (Stamps 2 visa) managing finances is a major problem. Another element of the situation is that Dublin is so expensive. The aim of this research is to understand how these students manage their finances, accommodating among academic commitments and work constraints Physically as well as financially. Combining these factors of the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry, with work hours being active and as well as basing one's income on tips, makes it an untenable situation.

To address these challenges affirmatively, it is crucial to know, not only to benefit student welfare but also to implicate future policy decisions that might help alleviate financial burden on international students. This research aims to find strategies that international students adopt for financial management and to learn how they manage financially in a high-cost urban environment.

1.2 Rationale for the study

This study is based on the fact that the International students who work part time in Dublin International under visa restrictions face the financial problems. The existing research will include student finances, but the focus is not on international students in the hospitality sector specifically when it comes to the struggle of having a fluctuating income and high living costs.

Main research question: What are the financial management challenges faced by part-time working international students in waiter jobs in Dublin, and how do these challenges impact their academic and personal lives?

1.3 Statement of the research objectives (Sub research questions)

- How does income variability affect students' ability to plan their monthly budget?
- How do students prioritize their expenses?
- How do Stamp 2 visa restrictions affect the ability to work?
- Which financial resources are most helpful to students?

- How do financial concerns affect academic performance?

1.4 Information gathering & data collection technique used

This study is going to be carried out using a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from interviews. The survey will also attempt to gather broad statistical information about the financial challenges of international students in order to shed light on areas such as income variability, cost of living and the effect of visa restrictions. Interviews will allow a more detailed study into students' personal experiences and the affect that financial instability has on their emotional and psychological health.

1.5 Expected Outcomes of the study

The focus of this study is to understand how international students who work as servers in Dublin manage their finances with income variability and high living costs. Outcomes which are expected are to identify efficient financial management strategies, to describe the effect of visa restriction, and to provide solutions for the support system to reduce the financial burden from students.

1.6 Chapter by chapter Overview

- **Chapter 1: Introduction –** This chapter introduces the research topic, outlines the rationale for the study, and explains the methodology used.
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review –** A review of existing literature on the financial challenges faced by international students, focusing on income variability, the cost of living, work restrictions, and available support systems.
- **Chapter 3: Methodology –** This chapter details the mixed-methods approach used to collect and analyse data, including the survey design and interview process.
- **Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and Discussion –** Presentation and analysis of the survey and interview results, with an in-depth discussion on the financial challenges faced by international students.
- **Chapter 5: Conclusion –** A summary of key findings, recommendations for policy and practice, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theme 1: Income Variability and Financial Stability

The financial stability of international students working as servers in Dublin is significantly affected by the variable nature of the income they earn. Said variability is caused by waiters' income depending largely on tips and the fact that labour hours are often restricted, which means they cannot always work the maximum 20 hours allowed by visa Stamp 2 during the schooling period (EMN, 2024). Other factors affecting them is the seasonality of the hospitality industry and the fluctuations in client behaviour, which further complicate a student's chances of making a realistic financial plan (Esmaeily, 2024).

Different studies have explored a number of strategies to deal with irregular income issues. Synovus (2024) proposes the 50/30/20 rule as an effective approach to distribute an individual's income: 50 % goes to basic needs, 30% to discretionary expenses and 20% to savings. This strategy allows students to prioritize their expenses and set up an emergency fund to cover unforeseen expenses, which approach is also supported by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC, 2024). The CCPC highlights the importance of using financial tracking tools and preparing monthly budgets based on fluctuations in income.

In turn, Colorado State University (2024) suggests a more conservative strategy based on the minimum expected income rather than the average income, which guarantees a student's ability to cover essential expenses even in low-income periods. These practical strategies are of particular relevance for workers of the hospitality industry, as relying on tips increases the uncertainty of their total income (The Tidewater News, 2024).

Esmaeily (2024) and The Tidewater News (2024) agree that tips, although comprising a significant portion of a student's income, are highly unstable and depend on external factors such as high tourist seasons and client behaviour. Esmaeily (2024) notes that such reliance may cause financial stress, while The Tidewater News (2024) emphasizes the emotional effect that financial uncertainty has on workers, which can limit their capacity to plan their finances and attain financial stability.

Relevant literature also points out the importance of categorizing expenses and prioritizing essential expenditures as a key tool for handling irregular income. Colorado State University (2024) recommends dividing expenses into three categories, fixed, variable and periodic, a practice that allows students to better manage their budgets and avoid accruing debt in low-

income periods. Those recommendations are in line with the observations of Synovus (2024) and Kubin and Wentworth (2014), which propose additional strategies such as establishing emergency funds and prioritizing economic stability over discretional spending.

As a whole, the studies reviewed provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by international students earning variable income, and propose practical strategies to address those issues. However, there is a gap in financial literature regarding the manner of implementing those strategies in the every-day life of international students working as servers, particularly in a context such as Dublin, where the cost of living is high and working conditions are unstable. This project will attempt to address that gap by exploring the manner in which students face and manage their financial situation, providing an approach centred around their specific experiences.

2.2 Theme 2: Cost of living in Dublin

Irish immigration policies impose considerable restrictions on international students through visa Stamp 2, which limits the chance to work to only 20 hours per week during their schooling period, thus not only affecting students' ability to generate sufficient income but also exposing them to financial hardship (European Migration Network, 2024). In practice, many students never get to work the full 20 hours allowed by law due to the lack of available shifts or the fluctuating demand of the hospitality industry, where they generally work as waiters. This causes financial uncertainty and complicates their financial planning (Gilmartin *et al*., 2024).

The Cawley (2018) article perfectly depicts the life of an international student living in Dublin. It clearly describes the financial challenges faced when seeking housing and the financial restrictions they experience while trying to improve their education. Although this study was done on Brazilian students living in Ireland, it is evident that the challenges are not exclusive to one nationality.

Gilmartin (2024) states that such obstacles also affect students' emotional stability, as they are constantly stressed over the uncertainty of their income. This problem is exacerbated even more by the lack of policies that contemplate their specific needs, such as more flexibility in the number of hours they are allowed to work during the schooling period or facilitating transition to more stable employment.

The Lima (2018) analysis shows that the housing crisis in Dublin, driven by the increase in rental costs and the lack of available housing, significantly affects students' ability to prioritize

essential expenses. This is particularly relevant for international students, who must find a balance between living costs and limited income earned from part-time jobs.

Despite the fact that the abovementioned studies offer a broader view of the difficulties caused by the existing visa policies, there is a clear lack of specific proposals to amend those restrictions. Additionally, little attention is being given to the manner in which such impediments affect international students in the hospitality sector, where income is particularly unstable. This Project intends to address these weaknesses by exploring the way labour restrictions affect the day-to-day life of international students in Dublin, focusing on individual experiences of students, such as those working as servers.

2.3 Theme 3: Labor Restrictions and Visas

The type of visa given to non-European students is Stamp 2 visa, which only allows students to work up to 20 hours per week and excludes social benefits and full labour rights.

The Machado (2024) study conducted on the basis of ethnographic interviews shows how international students, particularly those from Brazil, experience precarious conditions of different proportions: financial, legal and social. That includes difficulties in paying their rent, keeping up their studies and trying to live on insufficient income. It also points out that, since international students have no family networks or any type of social assistance, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by the real estate and labour markets.

Cawley (2018) also studies legal restrictions in Ireland and provides a global analysis of the housing crisis, stating that political solutions such as rent subsidies and rent control could significantly alleviate the financial stress in cities such as Dublin. Although those policies have not specifically been designed for students, they could be amended to benefit that vulnerable sector of the population.

Arnold (2017) touches on the problems of illegal hiring of foreign workers not belonging to the European Union. That group includes international students working illegally in the hospitality industry, such as in restaurants, which has been identified as high-risk area for informal workers. As from 2011, Ireland has implemented significant reforms to regulate the student immigration system, including time constraints on residence and work permits. The foregoing has reduced the risk of abuse by the system, but has also increased the precariousness of international students.

Gilmartin (2024) establishes that the relationship between work and education creates a "vicious circle", since students need to work in order to pay for their studies, but in doing so they jeopardize their legal status. It is worth noting that Gilmartin states that despite the challenges, students find endurance and support in their communities or through social media.

The EMN (2024) is a report that describes the way in which international students contribute significantly to the Irish economy, but also shows a number of challenges faced in connection with their legal status and work restrictions, although the report does not refer directly to specific cases.

2.4 Theme 4: Financial Support Systems

The lack of financial stability among international students in Ireland has given rise to the need for effective financial support systems. Those systems could be key in helping students to manage irregular income, reduce stress and improve academic performance. Delany *et al.* (2024) propose amendments to higher-education financing policies, such as loans contingent to income, that would allow students to pay back their debt according to their future income, thus reducing the immediate financial stress.

The Dabrowski (2024) study complements the above perspective by establishing how financial support programs, such as scholarships and subsidies, could ease financial stress and improve the general wellbeing of international students. This author emphasizes that the high cost of living in cities like Dublin increases student reliance on such support systems.

Gilmartin (2024) takes on a more critical approach by analysing how the lack of access to structured support systems perpetuates financial precariousness among international students. She explains that, although there are certain options in place such as student loans and scholarships, they are frequently insufficient or are not designed to address the specific needs of international students.

Lastly, Duong (2024) mentions several success cases where financial support systems have significantly improved international student retention and academic success. The author suggests that Irish universities should adopt similar models to ensure that students concentrate on their studies without over worrying about their financial situation

Lastly, Kennamer, Katsinas y Schumacker (2010-2011) mention cases of success showing that the financial support systems have significantly improved the retention and academic achievement of international students. The author suggests that Irish universities should adopt

similar models to make it possible for students to focus on their schoolwork without having to worry excessively about their financial situation.

Although existing literature offers valuable perspectives on financial support systems, more research is needed as to how those strategies may be implemented, specifically for international students working as servers. This project seeks to explore that area, evaluating current needs and possible solutions.

2.5 Theme 5: Academic Performance and Well-being

The academic and personal wellbeing of international students is intrinsically related to their financial and work situation. O'Reilly, Ryan and Hickey (2010) point out that the stress caused by financial uncertainty and long working hours negatively affect the academic performance of students. According to this research, students who lack proper financial support tend to spend more time working and less time studying to the detriment of their academic performance.

Dabrowski (2024) explores the relationship between financial anxiety and emotional wellbeing. The study shows that constant worrying about money may cause insomnia, anxiety and a decrease in concentration, all of which directly affect academic results. Additionally, the author suggests that lack of emotional support worsens these problems, giving rise to a stress and low performance cycle.

Another article that emphasizes the effects of financial stress on academic performance is Gupta and Verma (2020), which discusses psychological effects such as lack of concentration, absenteeism and a lack of motivation, and also proposes the creation of financial programs that are more accessible to students.

It also focuses on strategies that students can use to manage academic and financial stress. It identifies that support networks, both institutional and social, play a crucial role in academic success. Students who have access to stress management programs and academic tutoring are more likely to overcome the challenges associated with international student life.

In turn, Singh, Hasan and Sharma (2024) mention another type of common stress suffered by internation students, cultural stress, which is directly related to their emotional wellbeing and academic performance. The authors go into this problem and provide strategies to mitigate that stress, and also discuss the subject of financial spending in adapting socially or unexpected expenses arising from stress.

Prendergast *et al*. (2021) examine the way that high costs of living, especially housing costs, produce financial stress among students in Ireland. Although the study centres on local students, the findings are applicable to international students as well. Strategies such as sharing housing and cutting down on unnecessary expenses are listed among some common ways to reduce their financial burden.

An additional challenge faced by international students in Ireland is the obligation to maintain at least 85% class attendance, a prerequisite for being able to renew their Stamp 2 visa. This criterion can become a constant source of stress, as many students must balance long working hours, demanding studies, and the pressure of complying with this regulation. Although there is not much specific literature exploring this issue literally, these types of administrative requirements aggravate students' financial and emotional concerns. This lack of research on this subject leaves a significant gap, as complying with these demands often means reducing working hours or sacrificing personal time, which intensifies the stress already mentioned by Dabrowski (2024) and Gupta and Verma (2020). Therefore, this aspect deserves more attention in future research, especially as it reflects a common reality among international students who struggle to stay afloat in an environment that can be very demanding.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Paradigm / Philosophy employed

Relating to the theory of pragmatism, the research adopts an ontological as well as an epistemological research philosophy in order to offer a holistic perspective on the financial impediments coming up with international students operating part time as servers in Dublin. Because of this fitting in of the two approaches this study appeals to, namely the pragmatic one, pragmatism is particularly fitting for this study.

Pragmatism from an ontological standpoint argues through this that reality is a subjectivity and a socially constructed, acknowledging that each student experiences financial constraints in their own way, which pertains to facts, socio economic background or the way each student sees things (De Waal, 2021). The research recognizes that these financial difficulties cannot be fixed but are to some extent a result of external circumstance, such as visa problems, variability of income, the high cost of living in Dublin. Consequently, the study tries to examine these subjective realities in order to find a way for students' lived experiences to guide the research process.

Pragmatism is epistemologically that knowledge is discovered and constructed through inquiry by real data (both objective figures and information) and perceptual knowledge (personal experiences and obvious impressions) (Elder-Vass, 2022). The study's use of mixed method approach is compatible with this philosophical stance as it aims to capture both the statistical trends on the students' financial situations and the personal narrative that depicts how financial stress affects the emotions and psyche of students. Combining these methods, in their research, they offer a richer and deeper understanding of the challenges faced by international students in Dublin from a combination of objective data and subjective experience that can fully answer the research questions.

3.2 Justification for the adoption of method

For this study, a mixed method approach was used, representing a quantitative and qualitative research approach, aiming to provide an overall view of international students working as servers in Dublin to cope with their financial situation. This has the effect of exploring both statistical patterns as well as personal experience in the overall findings.

Quantitative Method (Survey): To gather numerical data on the frequency and types of challenges to International students' finances including income variability and living costs, a

survey was used on a larger sample. This thus provides some general pattern and trend's identification, which are crucial for knowledge about the broad financial scene of international students (Ravalier *et al*., 2021).

Qualitative Method (Interview):

Through interviewing the students, the opportunity for a deeper exploration of the students' lived experiences is provided. Open ended questions allow participants to describe the emotional as well as psychological consequences of financial instability, the coping techniques they adopt, and whether the existing financial support mechanisms work well or otherwise (Gale *et al*., 2021). This allows contextualizing the numerical findings and provides an inroad into the complexities of students' financial lives.

3.3 An outline of sampling technique and sample size

For both survey and interviews, the study used the convenience sampling. The practicality of Convenience sampling is chosen because it's a means of recruitment of available participants that are easily available and ready to participate (Golzar, Noor and Tajik, 2022). Since the research is on international students working part time as servers in Dublin, participants would be drawn from the local student groups, university campuses and hospitality industry networks. As such, this non probability sampling method helps collect efficient data with the awareness of limitations of generalizability.

Sample Size:

Survey: In total, 24 international students were surveyed. A sample of this size is sufficient for being able to identify trends and patterns in the financial challenges faced by students and yet small enough statistically and to allow for management of the data. This sample will offer a snapshot of how students financially about how much income and spending one student derives or is being derived from income.

Interviews: Unstructured interviews has been conducted within a smaller group of 4 students. The reduced size of the sample allows for a more intense investigation of the way that the students cope with their finances and the personal experiences that they consider relevant for this purpose. The study can obtain rich, qualitative insights through focusing on a few individuals, and then complements the survey data.

Stakeholder Table:

Stakeholder	Role/Responsibility	Interest in Research
International Students (Survey Participants)	Respondents to the survey, providing quantitative data on financial challenges, income variability, and financial management strategies.	Their financial well-being and academic performance are directly impacted by income variability, cost of living, and visa restrictions.
International Students (Interview Participants)	Participants providing qualitative data through unstructured interviews, offering in-depth insights into personal financial experiences.	Their personal experiences highlight the emotional and psychological impact of financial stress, which can inform policy recommendations.
University/Institution	Provider of educational programs to international students.	Interested in understanding how financial stress impacts students' academic performance and overall well-being.
Employers (Restaurants, Employers in Hospitality Sector)	Employers providing part-time employment to international students.	Interested in understanding the work constraints and challenges faced by international students, which may impact staffing and work hours.
Immigration Authorities (Irish Government)	Authorities regulating the visa and work permit system (Stamp 2 visa) for international students.	Interested in understanding how visa restrictions affect the earning potential and well-being of international students.
Financial Institutions (e.g., Banks, Credit Unions)	Providers of financial services, loans, and support for students.	Interested in offering better financial products tailored to the needs of international students, such as loans and payment plans.
Policy Makers/Regulatory Bodies	Government or organizational bodies responsible for the welfare of international students in Ireland.	Interested in understanding the financial challenges students face, to inform future policy changes that can provide better support.
Researcher (You)	Responsible for conducting the research, analysing data, and drawing conclusions.	Interested in contributing to the understanding of the financial challenges faced by international students and suggesting solutions.

Table 1: Stakeholders

(Source: Self-created)

3.4 Explanation of what analysis method employed

Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis of data for the survey data, whereas the interview data was analysed through thematic analysis. In these methods, the quantitative and qualitative

aspects of the research were both covered in order to obtain a complete and detailed examination.

Descriptive Statistics for Survey:

To summarize and interpret the responses, the study analysed the survey data using descriptive statistics. Insights on the financial challenges faced by students on factors such as income variability, spending habits and visa restrictions were going to be analysed through measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, percentages, etc. (Ubalde, Calo and Baylin, 2022). Descriptive statistics helped in identifying the trends or common patterns that can be found in the data, so that a general view of the financial climate for part-time working international students in Dublin can be minted.

Thematic Analysis for Interviews:

The analysis of the interview data was done using thematic analysis in order to determine recurring themes and patterns in student experiences. This method involves coding the data, deriving the themes from codes and then interpreting these themes to achieve what participants went through (De Paoli, 2024). Analysis of theme is useful for a deeper study of the emotional and psychological effects of financial stress and coping strategies used by students. The findings from the quantitative analysis will be augmented by the findings from this qualitative analysis to offer a more complex understanding of the challenges inherent among the participants.

Thematic Coding Table:

Theme	Interview Responses
1. Income Variability and Financial Stability	- Student 1: “You don’t have like a fixed income, so you have to be really careful about what you expect your expenses to be.”
	- Student 3: “Sometimes the tips are enough, like €200–€250 a week... I don't spend my salary when I need to pay the rent, I just expect for my tips and for my food.”
	- Student 2: “Income variability affects my daily life a lot. I constantly have to plan ahead and create strategies to make sure I can cover essential expenses.”
2. Cost of Living and Rent	- Student 2: “Around 50% of my income goes toward rent and essential living expenses.”
	- Student 4: “Rent alone takes more than half of what I earn, and the rest goes quickly on food, bills, and other important things. I cannot save anything.”

	- Student 3: “I spent €1,200 for months including my rent, bus, and food. I usually save for the half of my salary in the month or pay for these expenses.”
3. Visa Restrictions and Work Hours	- Student 3: “When you have the Stamp 2, you need to go to the college... you can’t work more than 20 hours... many companies don’t accept part-time workers.”
	- Student 4: “It’s hard to find legal work that fits the visa conditions... I’ve lost jobs because I couldn’t work more than 20 hours.”
	- Student 2: “The restrictions have a big impact. Many workplaces have available hours and need staff, but they can’t offer those hours to me because of the 20-hour limit.”
4. Financial Stress and Emotional Well-being	- Student 2: “Worrying about money adds a lot of pressure and affects my mental health.”
	- Student 4: “It’s hard to study when I’m always thinking about money. I worry about rent, bills, and even food. Sometimes I sit in class, but my mind is full of stress.”
	- Student 1: “Currently yes, because I’m being alone from home with the money I earn here and a loan that I have also in this country. So, money is kind of an issue.”
5. Financial Support Systems	- Student 3: “Financial support for loans by banks... would be helpful for paying college fees.”
	- Student 2: “Flexible payment plans or options to pay in smaller instalments would reduce a lot of financial stress.”
	- Student 4: “We need more than kind words—we need real help. Emergency money, food support, rent help, and more work flexibility would really help international students.”

Table 2: Thematic Coding

(Source: Self-created)

3.5 Ethical Section

This research was conducted while several ethical considerations were considered to ensure the integrity and credibility of the study.

Validity: Both the survey and interview questions were developed based on established literature and pilot tested to ensure that they were clear and relevant to the research objectives in order to ensure validity of the results (Stadnick *et al*., 2021). Therefore, this process guaranteed that the international students’ financial challenges are relatively properly measured with the instruments.

Reliability: The collected data is consistent and maintained to be collected in the same manner from now on and for interviews, the standardized instruments should be used. While the survey is quantitatively administered, the use of interview guide gives the control of uniform questioning among participants (Sreekumar and Sreekumar, 2023).

Reflexivity: Considering I am an international students and I might be biased. I observed that current of personal bias interpret participants' responses. Therefore, I reflected on my own experience and made sure that my interpretations were based in the data and not a priori notions (Karunarathna *et al*., 2024).

Avoidance of Bias: To minimize bias, efforts were also made to ensure that both questions asked in the survey and in the interviews are neutral and open ended, and instead of imposing preexisting ideas, data were analysed systematically to allow themes arise organically (Karunarathna *et al*., 2021).

Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

The discussion section provides key themes from survey responses, interviews transcripts as well as existing literature. It aims to reflect on the financial obstacles that international students in Dublin have to face such as income variability, extent of living, visa limitations, financial pressure and these limitations as against the absence of relevant enough financial support schemes, on their welfare and academic performance.

4.2 Income Variability and Financial Stability

However, income variability becomes an important issue for international students working part time in Dublin, explicitly in the hospitality sector, where tips are localized as the main way of earnings. Survey responses and the interview began to illustrate the unpredictability of income, made worse by the fact that it is also an unreliable source of material and financial stability for students.

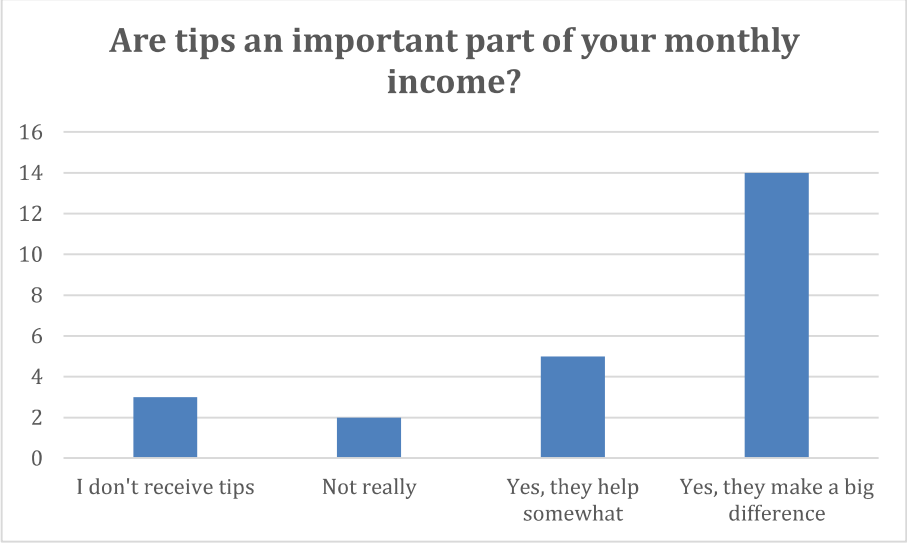


Figure 1: Are tips an important part of your monthly income?

The survey results revealed that a substantial portion of students live on tips in order to survive on a monthly basis. Tips make up about 60 percent of our respondents' earnings, the respondents agreed, but most conceded the fickle nature of tip income (figure 1). Of those, most earned about €1,081 to €2,160 before tips (figure 2). This income, however, is very variable, being affected, for instance, by factors such as seasonality in the hospitality industry and customer behaviour. For the most part, student's allocate more than 50% of their portion

to rent and other compulsory expenditures (figure 3), thus saving little (if anything) to earn more.

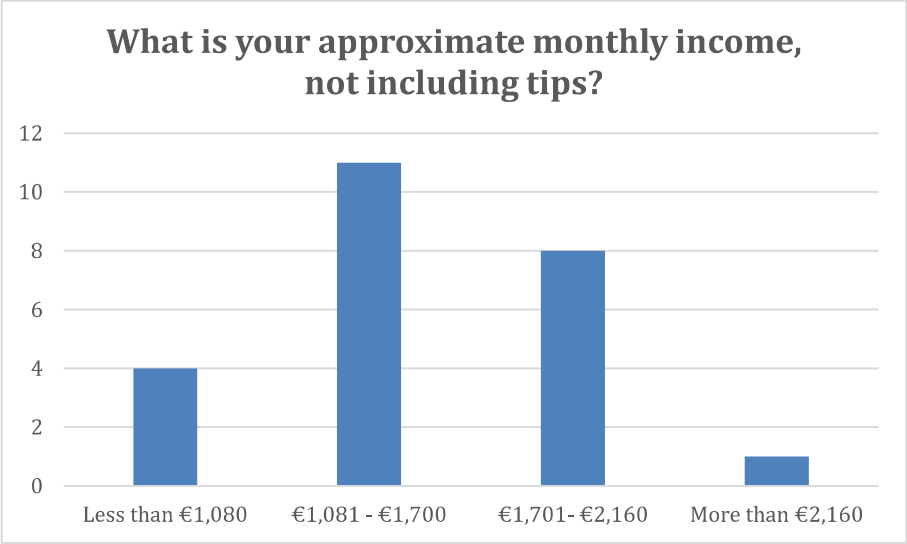


Figure 2: What is your approximate monthly income, not including tips?

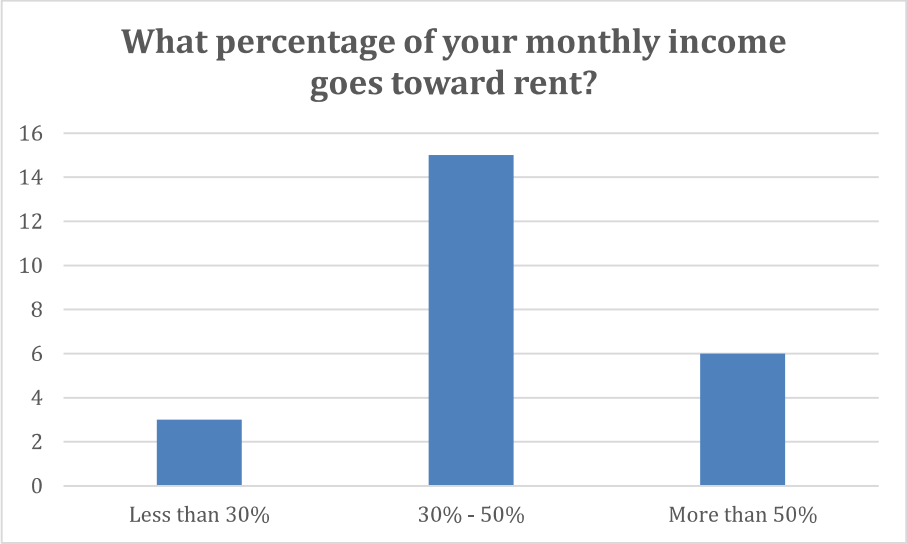


Figure 3: What percentage of your monthly income goes toward rent?

The interviews gave more detailed information about how income variability affects students. Student 1 explained, "*You don't have like a fixed income, so you have to be really careful about what you expect your expenses to be*," reflecting the anxiety and financial stress caused by unstable earnings. Student 3 emphasized using tips as "*savings*," saying, "*if something happens, if I need money, I just want to see how much I have saved*." This illustrates the role of tips as a financial cushion, but tips are an unreliable source of income.

Management of irregular income is a tough battle according to the literature. Esmaeily (2024) and Synovus (2024) argue that industries with tips do have financial instability and that students are challenged with budgeting and planning. One suggestion of how to address income uncertainty as promoted by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC, 2024) is the 50/30/20 budgeting rule that encourages students to allocate their income to essential expenses and emergency funding.

Key factor in a financial instability regarding international students is income variability, especially depending on tips. Existing literature supports that students fail to budget as most will use tips as a safety net when their budgets fall short. Both the survey and interviews demonstrate this lack of budgeting among students.

4.3 Cost of Living and Rent

International students are most affected by the high cost of living in Dublin, in particular by the burden of rent. Living expenses put the students under financial strain that drastically limits their capacity to save, and this has a considerable adverse effect on their financial status.

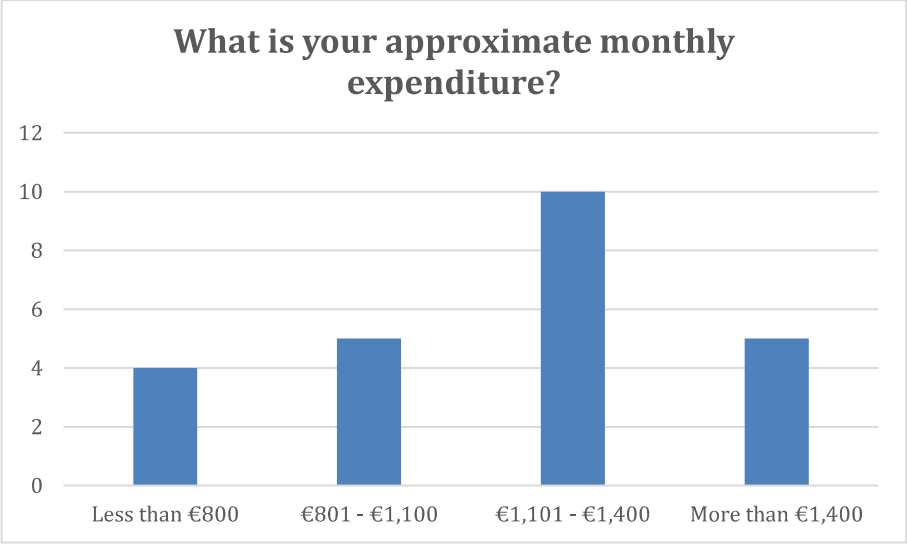


Figure 4: What is your approximate monthly expenditure?

In survey results, more than 50 per cent of students allocate more than 50 per cent of their income to rent and essential living costs. Indeed, according to approximately 40 percent of students, that sums to as much as €1,401 per month (figure 4), mostly to cover the rent, utilities and food. Living costs remain high and there is little left over to spend on discretionary items as 75% of students are unable to save or only save occasionally (figure 5). It adds to the idea

that students are financially vulnerable as housing expenses wash up most of their available funds.

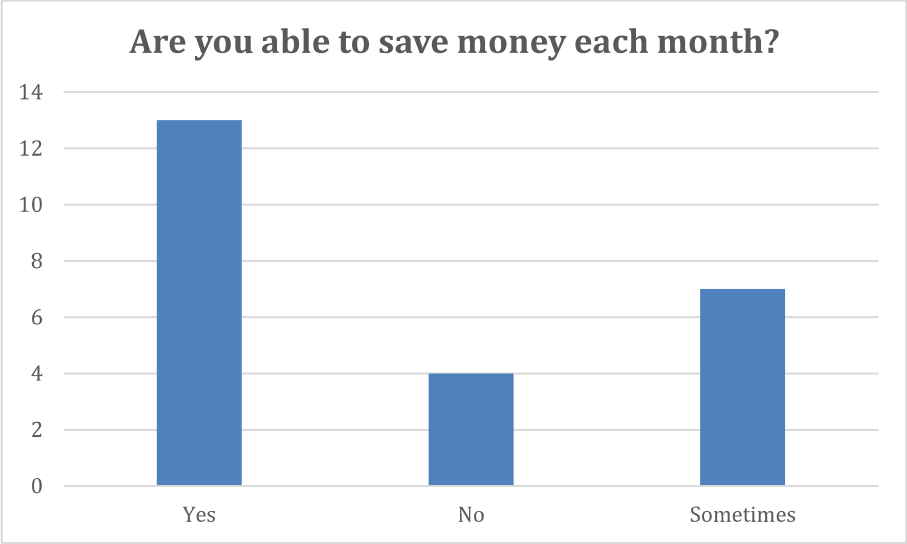


Figure 5: Are you able to save money each month?

The issue of high living expenses was also confirmed from the interviewees. Student 2 mentioned, "*Around 50% of my income goes toward rent and essential living expenses*," while Student 4 described, "*Rent alone takes more than half of what I earn... I cannot save anything*." These personal experiences reflect the challenge of managing the living in a big city like Dublin with a small income, where rent takes up much of the earning.

Dublin's housing/renting crisis is a repetitive topic emerging from the literature as it has emphasized on the financial problems that international students suffer to face. According to Gilmartin (2024) and Lima (2018), rent is usually the biggest cost for students and can necessitate another sacrifice in some aspect of life. More and more students are spending a disproportionate amount of their income on accommodation, owing to the lack of affordable housing in Dublin.

However, the biggest struggle that international students have is the cost of living, especially high rent. The results do confirm that the steep housing costs in Dublin curtail the available students' financial flexibility in that they are unable to save or manage non-essential expenses. This matches previous research of the financial burdens of students in expensive urban settings.

4.4 Visa Restrictions and Work Hours

Visa restrictions drastically lower the earning potential for international students in Dublin, especially of the 20-hour work limit imposed by the Stamp 2 visa. It relates to how legal

constraints limit a student's ability to obtain sufficient income to cover living expenses, e.g. worsening financial insecurity.

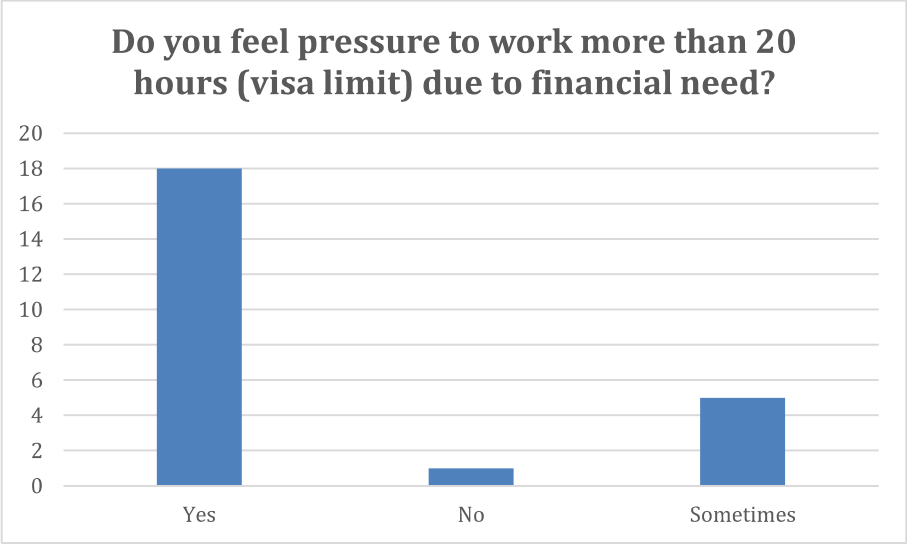


Figure 6: Do you feel pressure to work more than 20 hours (visa limit) due to financial need?

The results of the survey show that a high percentage of students also thinks that visa restrictions negatively affect its capability to earn enough money. Over 60 percent of respondents stated that the 20-hour work limit is not enough to sustain their living costs (figure 6). The restrictions did not sit well with many students, since the work was available but it meant many simply weren't being allowed to take on additional hours. This is due specifically because of their visa status, which limits their working hours legally.

Visa restrictions were also stressed by the interviewees. Student 3 explained, "*When you have the Stamp 2, you need to go to college... you can't work more than 20 hours*." Student 4 added, "*It's hard to find legal work that fits the visa conditions... I've lost jobs because I couldn't work more than 20 hours*." The responses given by the interviewee students are a reflection of experience of having a visa restricting them from working enough to support themselves, when jobs are available.

The existing literature confirmed that visa restrictions have a detrimental effect for the financial condition of international students. This 20-hour limit forces students into precarious fiscal footing, as mentioned in Gilmartin (2024) and the European Migration Network (EMN, 2024). Most students cannot find enough work or are hired into informal, possibly illegal work

arrangements. As a result, this restriction not only reduces earning potential but additionally raises financial stress and insecurity (Gilmartin, 2024).

Building on their visa restrictions, international students are inhibited from having enough income to live. Survey and interviews indicate that the students lack financial strength since they only have 20 hours to accrue and the 20-hour limit deprives them from accumulating finances for their ventures. This literature also emphasises the bad effects that these legal conditions have on student financial well-being.

4.5 Financial Stress and Emotional Well-being

Being an international student in Dublin and working part-time, there is a lot of financial stress which affects the emotional and academic well-being of the worker. The anxieties, sleep disturbance, and mental health issues brought on by managing unstable incomes, high living costs, and visa restrictions are also part of on the job.

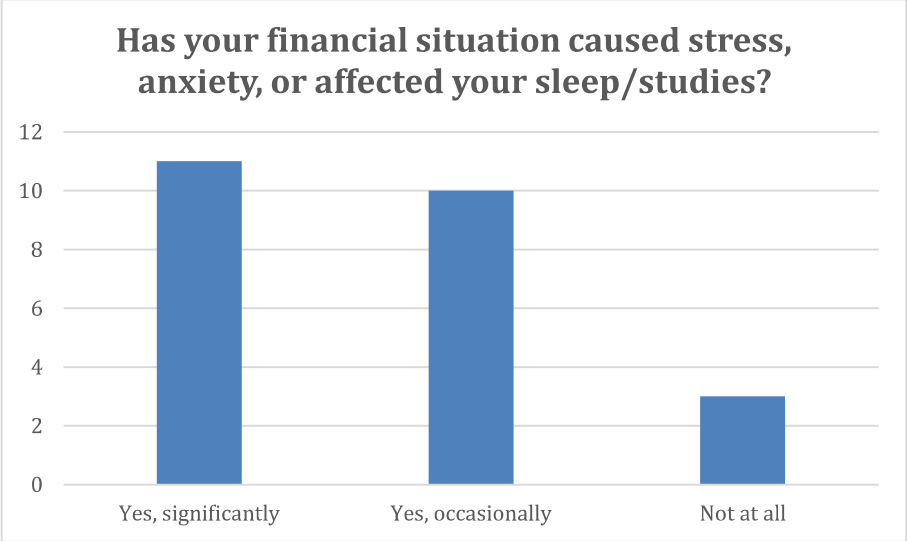


Figure 7: Has your financial situation caused stress, anxiety, or affected your sleep/studies?

It turns out that 70 percent of survey respondents are stressed and anxious because of their income status (figure 7). According to many, financial difficulties have a negative impact on sleep and studies, and 50 per cent of the students claim that financial problems have a serious impact on their education (figure 8). This reinforces what happens emotionally for students who are balancing academic demands while trying to cope with financial insecurity.

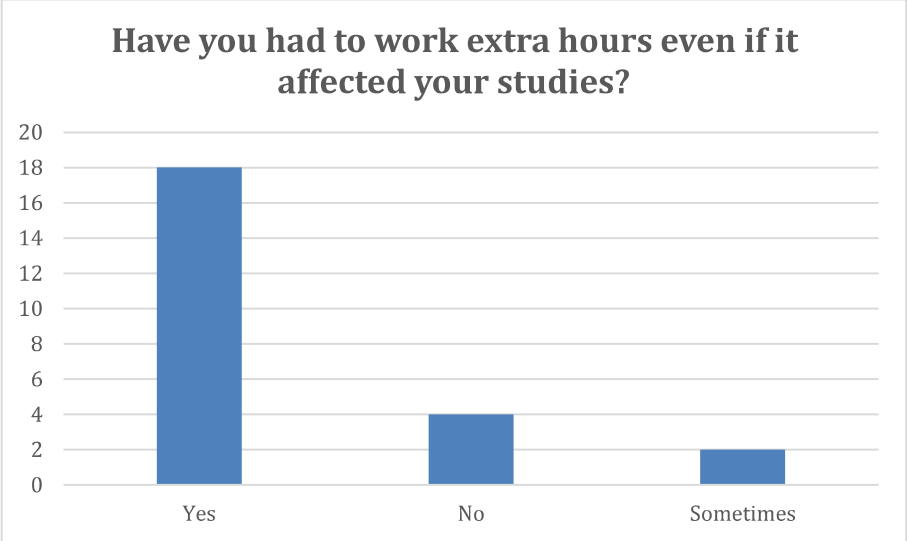


Figure 8: Have you had to work extra hours even if it affected your studies?

Participants openly spoke in the interviews about information regarding the emotional effects of financial strain. Student 2 stated, "*Worrying about money adds a lot of pressure and affects my mental health*." Student 4 emphasized, "*It's hard to study when I'm always thinking about money. I worry about rent, bills, and even food. Sometimes I sit in class, but my mind is full of stress*." The responses shed light on how completely these students' lives can be dominated by financial worries, that affect not only concentration and performance but their overall health.

There is always a strong link found between financial stress and negative emotional outcome in the existing literature. Dabrowski (2024) and Gupta and Verma (2020) also findings that financial stress cause anxiety, disturbance in the sleep pattern as well as decrease in concentration that will affect an academic performance. In addition, Prendergast *et al*. (2021) point out that financial insecurity incorporates emotional distress, thereby bringing misfortune, and that the face of poor mental health and drop in academic performance.

Financial stress has a very significant effect on the emotional well-being and academic success of the international students. The survey data as well as the interview data substantiate the results from the literature that financial insecurity leads to anxiety, stress and impedes ability to work on studies. But that will only happen if the financial support system is better and the policy is better so as to ease the burden on students as well as on the mental health that is needed.

4.6 Financial Support Systems

An important barrier to financial stability of international students in Dublin is the dearth of positive financial support systems. Many of the students recognize these resources, but the overall opinion is that support is poor, or if it exists, it is hard to get and not geared for their specific requirements.

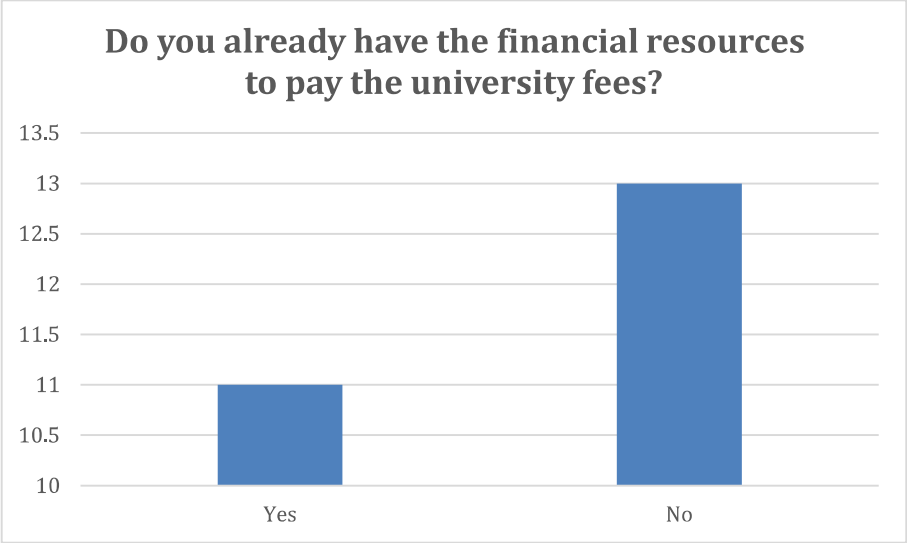


Figure 9: Do you already have the financial resources to pay the university fees?

The survey disclosures that majority of the students are ignorant of account of financing support options, this is because a maximum of 45 per cent of students state they have any type of help (figure 9). Many respondents understand those resources already do not work very well or that they cannot easily access them, which is 30 per cent of respondents saying that they need substantially more flexible payment plans for tuition or emergency loans (figure 10) which would make them less stressed financially.

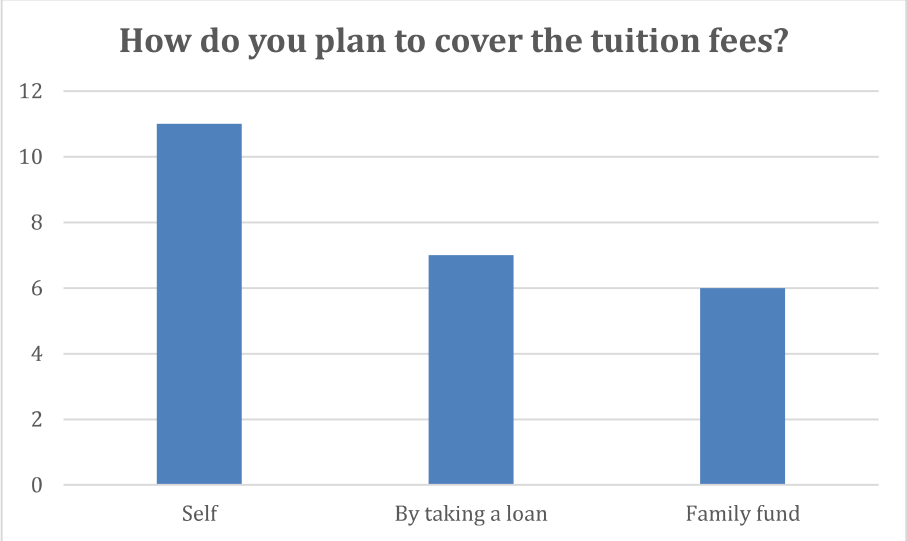


Figure 10: How do you plan to cover the tuition fees?

Like survey participants, the interviewees emphasized the need for better financial support. Student 2 mentioned, "*Flexible payment plans or options to pay in smaller instalments would reduce a lot of financial stress*." Student 3 suggested, "*Financial support for loans by banks... would be helpful for paying college fees*." These responses emphasize the importance of availability and customized financial solutions to aid people financially when there is hardship.

These concerns are apparent in the literature, as studies (Delany *et al*., 2024; Duong 2024) show that international students are not sufficiently supported by some financial options available to them. Ireland is an advocate of loans as well as scholarships (Gilmartin 2024), but many of them are limited in scope or poorly promoted. In addition, Gilmartin (2024) notes that international students are not eligible for targeted financial aid, thus, they are financially unstable and cannot fund their living and academic costs.

Dublin does not provide its international students with sufficient and easy to understand financial support systems. Survey and interview responses confirm the fact that disadvantaged students need easier to come by, more flexible financial assistance to deal with the financial burdens. This need is reinforced by literature that urges improvements in availability and accessibility of financial aid to best support students.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations, Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate some of the financial challenges of the international students who work as servers part time in Dublin, which includes the variability of income, living cost, that's non-viable, visa constrain, financial stress and lack of good support system. The study has illuminated the multi-dimensional nature of these obstacles, their psychological and emotional aspects, and the importance extended for the academic performance.

One of the major findings is income variability, most students relying on tips which are often unstable and unpredictable. On one hand, this uncertainty in income complicates financial planning and adds financial stress, a large fraction of these students dedicate such a large percentage of their income to rent and living expenses, leaving very little room for savings. Added to this is the effect visa restrictions have on the student's ability to finance their studies, as the 20-hour work limit of the Stamp 2 visa means students' earning potential is capped by the Stamp 2 visa, resulting in a financial ability to work gap.

In addition, the resultant financial stress influenced by these challenges negatively impacts students' emotional and academic performance. The financial problems among students caused a lot of students to feel anxiety, stress and were unable to put some efforts towards studying. Although some of the students were aware of such financial support options, many felt that these options were not enough and flexible financial assistance was suggested as a means of relieving some of the financial burdens.

Finally, international students in Dublin have little financial stability due to high living costs, unreliable income and restricted working hours. It is compounded by the lack of adequate supportive financial systems that largely exposes the passengers to emotional stress and negatively impacts their academic performance. This clearly shows that these issues need targeted solutions, which should enable international students to finances as much as they need to for them to thrive academically as well as for their personal lives.

5.2 Recommendation table

Recommendation	Action to be Taken	Expected Outcome

1. Increase the flexibility of visa work hours	Advocate for changes to the Stamp 2 visa to allow students to work more than 20 hours per week.	Students will be able to earn sufficient income, reducing financial strain and improving their overall well-being.
2. Implement more accessible financial support systems	Establish emergency funds, accessible loans, and financial support programs specifically designed for international students.	Financial stress will be alleviated, allowing students to focus on their studies and reduce anxiety.
3. Introduce flexible tuition fee payment plans	Allow students to pay tuition fees in smaller, manageable instalments rather than lump sum payments.	Students will have greater financial flexibility, reducing the burden of tuition fees and preventing unnecessary stress.
4. Increase awareness of financial support options	Universities and financial institutions should better advertise and simplify access to financial support resources.	Students will be better informed about available support, increasing their likelihood of utilizing assistance when needed.
5. Improve housing affordability	Encourage local government and institutions to develop affordable housing solutions for students.	Students will face less financial pressure from high rent, improving their ability to save and invest in other areas.

Table 3: Recommendations

(Source: Self-created)

5.3 Limitations

The sample was small, and given this it is not generalizable. Data were collected at a certain time, so it might not reflect what will happen later. As self-reported data, it is vulnerable to biases, and focusing on students in hospitality sector may not exhibit all of the international students' experience.

5.4 Suggestion for further research

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, exploring students across various sectors. Longitudinal studies could track changes in financial stress over time, and research could also evaluate the effectiveness of financial support programs and policy changes for international students.

5.5 Who benefits from this report

This report is will help international students, university administrators, policy makers, financial institutions, and employers. It suggests some modifications in financial support, policy changes and work condition that will assist students to overcome financial challenges and make off to better academic achievement.

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