

University of Alberta

**Investigating And Analyzing Effective Strategies Employed by Canadian Universities In
Mitigating Mental Stress In International Students.**

By

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Abstract

This comprehensive study examines how Canadian universities play a role in mitigating international student mental stress. The study examines international students' pressures, barriers to mental health support, coping techniques, and Canadian universities' effective well-being programs. The study findings show that academic challenges, cultural changes, and social isolation are international students' main concerns. Stressors impact academic performance, social integration, and satisfaction. According to the literature review, overseas students suffer linguistic challenges, mental health stigma, and limited understanding of support options when seeking help. International students' coping techniques show that social support, mindfulness, and smart use of university resources improve resilience and well-being. The study also discusses Canadian universities' successful mental health awareness initiatives, peer support programs, culturally appropriate counseling, and more. This promotes theory development and education field enhancement, providing a framework for international student mental health and informing Canadian university policies and resource allocation. Additionally, the insights presented can help institutions worldwide improve the mental well-being of their international students, creating a more inclusive and supportive higher education environment.

Keywords: Canada, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Universities, International students, Mental Stress, Mental Health,

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Investigating and Analyzing Effective Strategies Employed by Canadian Universities in Mitigating Mental Stress in International Students.

Introduction

Higher education is a transforming journey that brings academic obstacles and emotional and psychological stressors, especially for international learners (Akhtar & Kröner, 2015). Universities worldwide are characterized by the influx of students from varied cultural backgrounds as globalization shapes higher education. Canadian higher education institutions (HEIs) are significant contributors to educating more overseas students (Butler, 2010). This demographic shift has also raised concerns about overseas students' mental health as they transition to a new academic, social, and cultural environment (Dark-Freudeman, Jones & Terry, 2021). Canadian HEIs have introduced several mental stress-reduction measures for international students to provide a supportive and inclusive environment. Increasing international student numbers in HEIs show the country's commitment to diversity and inclusivity in higher education (Denovan & Macaskill, 2012). Canada's multiculturalism attracts international students (Domene, 2016). These youths have high academic expectations but also confront unique hurdles as they adjust to a new educational and social environment. Linguistic and cultural transitions stress international students (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012)). Non-native English or French speakers may struggle in most Canadian universities, where English and French are the main languages of instruction. As one might imagine, it can be emotionally demanding to navigate academic coursework, class discussions, and tasks in a language different than their mother tongue. Adapting to Canadian culture and society can also cause homesickness and isolation

(Dunley & Papadopoulos, 2019). Canadian colleges offer many support programs to address these concerns. These include academic support, language programs, and counseling. Depending on the institution, many International students receive language training and study skills workshops (Maeshima & Parent, 2020). Many HEIs also provide mentorship programs that match overseas students with local peers to help them succeed academically (Hyun et al., 2007). Another essential part of foreign student life is cultural integration (Sitton, 2022). Many HEIs host cultural exchanges so students can learn about Canadian culture and share their customs. These HEIs include cultural workshops, seminars, language exchange programs, international festivals and nights, student welcome international events, global awareness weeks and global leadership programs. These events encourage belonging and make campus life more inclusive. Many Canadian HEIs have prioritized mental health care. They offer experienced counselors to help international students cope with academic stress, cultural shock, and homesickness. HEIs that offer experienced counselors to international students include homestay programs, cross-culture buddy programs, global leadership programs and cultural competency programs. These services are crucial since international students' mental health concerns might result from immigration-related stressors like visa issues and the difficulty of finding a part-time job. Overall, Canadian HEIs have recognized the particular problems encountered by their overseas students and made steps to establish a nurturing and helpful environment. These HEIs provide a wide range of academic, cultural, and mental health support services to help international students flourish academically and emotionally in Canada. Canadian universities' diversity and inclusion play a role in their global leadership in higher education since they look after international students (Jones, et al., 2022).

The Rationale for the Study

International students' mental health is essential to a positive and rewarding education since it is an ethical responsibility to the host country which promotes diversity and inclusivity. Mental stress affects academic performance, social integration, and student satisfaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 2013). Canadian HEIs solutions can help other educational institutions confront comparable concerns (Lewson, 2022). International student mental health is a growing concern in higher education (Jones, et al, 2022). Universities have specific issues relating to the well-being of overseas students as their numbers expand (Linden, Stuart & Ecclestone, 2022). Students leave their home nations to study abroad and experience different cultures (Makeeva, Kulinich & Yakovleva, 2022). However, moving to a new academic, social, and cultural setting can be stressful and lead to mental health concerns if not handled properly. De Moissac et.al (2020) emphasizes that addressing overseas students' mental health is crucial. Mental stress can affect many academic elements. It can impair concentration, coursework engagement, and academic success (Marginson, 2013). It may also cause homesickness and isolation, hindering their integration into the local student community and cultural interchange (reference). International students' mental stress can also impair student satisfaction, which is crucial to educational institutions' success and reputation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

With their vast experience hosting a diverse and expanding international student body, Canadian universities appreciate the necessity of proactively tackling these difficulties (Mori, 2000). Many Canadian HEIs have adopted measures and support services to reduce mental stress and promote international students' complete well-being. Examples of Canadian HEIs that have adopted measures and support services include peer support programs, wellness and health centers, counselling services, cultural adjustment programs and language support programs. These programs provide international students with coping strategies and practical tools. It is

possible that tactics can provide insights that other HEIs worldwide can use. According to Denovan and Macakskill (2012), understanding Canadian institutions' successful practices is crucial for various reasons. First, it can inspire foreign student-friendly universities worldwide. Universities can adapt and develop similar programs and services to address international students' unique challenges by studying in Canadian Universities. Second, the inquiry can illuminate academic support, cultural integration, and mental health treatment best practices. As noted above, Canadian HEIs offer language programs, mentorship, cultural exchanges, and career guidance. It might be possible for HEIs worldwide can adjust their support systems for international students by studying the outcomes and impact of these services. The outcomes of this study may also help explain how mental health affects international students' academic progress. By gathering data from people's perception on these support programs, institutions might gain insights on how mental health affects academic achievement and create a case for more student well-being funding. From the interview findings, every participant came to an agreement on similar challenges such as weather, culture gap, language, financial issues as well as social isolation. These challenges can give an insight to the institution on how mental health arises and its effect to academic achievement.

Overall, studying Canadian institutions' mental health programs for overseas students has several benefits. For example, the ethical need to protect students' mental health, improve student satisfaction and academic achievement, set worldwide standards, and, share best practices. This research could improve international education worldwide, making higher education abroad a more positive and fulfilling experience for students from throughout the world.

Objectives

Identifying Key Stressors

International students studying in Canada face many challenges that affect their mental health. This purpose is to identify and examine the key stressors they confront in Canadian universities, which include academic, cultural, and social factors that complicate their experience.

Academic stress: Academic stress is common among international students. English and French, being the main languages of instruction, create considerable linguistic hurdles. Taking complicated classes, participating in conversations, and completing homework in a foreign language can be emotionally and intellectually demanding. These language hurdles hinder comprehension and conversation (Dark-Freudeman et.al, 2021). Educational systems, instructional techniques, and evaluation strategies differ from their home nations, causing confusion and ambiguity. The need for international students to immediately understand these differences and thrive academically can cause stress.

Cultural adaptation: Canadian university grading systems can be challenging to understand and adapt to, hurting confidence and performance. The worry of failing or not reaching expectations causes anxiety and psychological effects during exams. Cultural pressures cause communication style discrepancies and miscommunications (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015). Cultural clashes and discomfort can result from different social norms, values, and rituals. International students may struggle with identification and cultural dissonance due to Canadian cultural standards.

Social integration: Social integration is essential but stressful. Homesickness from being apart from family causes intense emotional suffering. Due to the difficulty of making meaningful social connections, loneliness can cause severe emotional discomfort (De Moissac et.al, 2020).

Cultural differences, linguistic hurdles, and rejection fear can make friendships and romantic relationships difficult.

Overall, overseas students in Canadian institutions endure many pressures that impair their academic achievement, cultural adaptation, and social integration. Understanding these stressors is crucial to creating effective support strategies for their unique challenges. Addressing these pressures helps universities improve overseas students' mental health and success.

Exploring Existing Support Mechanisms

Canadian universities lead the way in addressing overseas students' mental health. Canadian HEIs, as noted above, offer many support services and programs to ensure a good and successful education. Each of these academic, cultural, and mental health support strategies aims to reduce stress for overseas students in Canada.

Academic Support: International students in Canada receive academic support from Canadian universities. Many Canadian HEIs offer language assistance services because language limitations are a major academic stressor. ESL classes, labs, and tutors are part of these programs. These services strengthen students' language abilities, aim to help ESL students to understand complex academic coursework, participate in class discussions, and finish assignments. Second language support improves pupils' academic confidence and linguistic proficiency (Domene, 2016). In Canada, educational systems, teaching techniques, and evaluation strategies may change for international students. Academic advisors often advise on course selection, study strategies, and time management to assist this transition. Helping overseas students adjust to new learning norms and expectations reduces confusion and ambiguity. Customized coursework is another critical component of academic support. Canadian

universities often tailor academic programs to international students. These programs may include extra support sessions, more extended deadlines, or alternate assessments. Universities customize coursework with the aim of assisting international students in succeeding academically without academic stress. These academic assistance strategies significantly reduce academic stress. Language proficiency, academic coaching, and specialized coursework help international students thrive, improving their well-being and educational experience.

Cultural Integration Initiatives: International students face cultural adaptation challenges, and Canadian colleges have taken aggressive initiatives to support this process. Mentorship programs are crucial (Nash et al., 2017). These programs match overseas students with local or experienced peers who advise and explain Canadian culture. Mentors guide students through Canadian communication styles, conventions, and culture. Peer support aim to promote belonging and reduces cultural stress (Parkes, 1994). Cultural exchanges are also crucial to these endeavors. These gatherings bring together students from different cultures to foster understanding (Denovan & Macaskill, 2012). They let international students learn about Canadian culture while sharing their own. This can reduce cultural stress and makes universities more diverse and inclusive (Payne, 2021). Intercultural workshops can also improve cultural understanding and competence (Sawir et al., 2007)). These kinds of support services aim to give international students a secure place to address their struggles. They also aim to teach domestic students and staff about international students' needs and viewpoints, encouraging cultural awareness and inclusion. Mentorship programs, cultural exchanges, and intercultural courses at Canadian universities have significantly reduced overseas students' cultural stress (Sitton, 2022). These activities promote belonging, cultural integration, and a supportive campus community (Thoits, 1995).

Mental health support strategies: Providing mental health services is crucial for reducing stress among overseas students (Wiljer, et al., 2020). To protect their diverse student bodies, many Canadian colleges offer extensive mental health services. Professional counseling, mental health awareness initiatives, and crisis response are included. At some institutions, licensed mental health practitioners provide counseling for stress, anxiety, depression, and other issues. These services are free or inexpensive for overseas students, making them accessible (Dark-Freudeman et.al, 2021). Mental health awareness initiatives can minimize stigma and encourage students to seek help (Xiong & Yang, 2021). These programs promote self-care, stress management, and mental health education. The aim is for international students to feel comfortable addressing mental health and seeking help. Moreover, emergency student support is also provided via crisis intervention programs. Examples include emergency hotlines, on-call counselors, and urgent mental health resources. Student crisis assistance is a priority in most Canadian universities. Stress management and well-being are greatly improved by these mental health interventions (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Many Canadian HEIs offer professional counseling, mental health awareness programs, and crisis intervention to international students to manage academic and cultural stress.

Overall, many Canadian HEIs provide stress-reduction programs for international students. International students can benefit from academic support, cultural integration, and psychological services at these universities. These support measures aim to reduce stress and foster a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for international students' academic, cultural, and emotional success.

Assessing Program Effectiveness

To improve international students' mental health in Canadian universities, the effectiveness of strategies and support mechanisms must be evaluated. This objective evaluates how these measures reduce mental stress in international students, focusing on academic accomplishment, social integration, and well-being.

Academic Success: Academic support programs impact on international students' academic achievement is a crucial indicator of success. To overcome language difficulties and adapt to different educational systems, many Canadian HEIs offer specialized courses and language programs. According to Thoits (1995), grade improvements can measure the impact of these activities. This measure compares overseas students' academic performance before and after language programs and specialized courses. It is possible that if these support approaches minimize academic stress, grades, then academic achievements will improve. International student retention rates can be another important indicator of assistance program performance. Higher retention rates suggest that students are overcoming academic hurdles and continuing their studies (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012). Universities can determine if international students who have participated in these programs are more likely to continue their studies. A rise in student retention can suggest that academic assistance methods result in improved academic success. Arguably, degrees or certifications are the highest indicator of academic performance. Graduation rates among overseas students can reveal academic support programs' long-term effects. Universities can compare international student graduation rates with and without support services. Higher graduation rates among program participants would prove these techniques work.

Social Integration: To promote social integration among international students, cultural integration programs are crucial. Many Canadian universities host cultural exchanges so students

can learn about Canadian culture and share their customs. International student attendance at such events can be used to assess their efficacy. In these kinds of supports, international students would participate more in cultural activities to engage with the local population, create cross-cultural exchanges, and reduce social stress. Social integration can also foster cross-cultural friendships (reference). Cultural integration programs can be measured by counting the number of cross-cultural friendships international students make at university. Examining the response content can measure perceptions of the effectiveness of these friendships by those who participate in the programs. Cross-cultural connections may increase, suggesting these programs help social integration and minimize loneliness and isolation (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015). A sense of belonging is also essential for social integration (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Universities can measure international students' sense of belonging. International students in cultural integration programs can be surveyed or interviewed to determine their sense of belonging. Increased belonging would indicate that these activities reduce social stressors and promote social integration.

Overall Well-being: Many Canadian institutions offer mental health services to improve overseas students' well-being. These services should be assessed using quantitative and qualitative mental health outcomes. Universities can track international students who use mental health services for stress, anxiety, and emotional well-being improvements. These mental health outcomes should improve to show that these services improve well-being. The happiness of international students with support services is another sign of their efficacy. University surveys and interviews can assess international students' satisfaction with academic support, cultural integration, and mental health services (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012). If these services meet international students' needs, satisfaction will be high. Stress reduction beliefs among overseas

students are also crucial for well-being. Surveys or interviews can determine whether overseas students who have received support services report perceptions of reduced academic, cultural, and social stress. Positive perceptions of stress reduction would show that the tactics promote well-being.

Overall, analyzing the effectiveness of methods and support mechanisms in reducing mental stress among international students in Canadian universities is crucial for evidence-based program evaluation. Universities can adjust their support systems to overseas students' needs and improve their holistic well-being by analyzing academic success, social integration, and well-being.

Providing Recommendations

In this globalized world, international education is more accessible than ever, attracting a diverse student body to colleges worldwide. International students confront many unique problems due to increasing mobility and cultural variety. These issues can negatively harm their mental health and education. In response to these issues, this study's final goal is to give evidence-based suggestions for educational institutions worldwide to improve international students' mental health. Focusing on overseas students' mental health is crucial. These students often leave home to study abroad, which can be scary and upsetting. Language difficulties, cultural standards, and educational systems may differ in a foreign context. Educational institutions must address these pressures and provide extensive support and services (Frydenberg, 1997). The prior sections were aimed to illuminate international students' experiences and issues in Canadian HEIs. It will be beneficial to use the findings from the interviews on suggestions to improve mental health services where all participants agreed on enabling the university app. The evidence-based suggestions, mainly the effective strategies that

universities in Canada can implement to reduce mental stress among international students, will be based on the findings from the interviews on coping strategies. International student mental health recommendations are essential for various reasons. First, international students make up a large portion of higher education students worldwide, diversifying campuses. Institutions can improve campus life, inclusivity, and learning by enhancing mental health.

Significance of the Study

This research is crucial in many ways. First, it adds to the expanding body of knowledge on international students' mental health by highlighting their unique concerns in Canada. Globalization and different student backgrounds make Canadian universities ideal for such study (Butler-Kisber, 2010). It is possible this study can help overseas students improve their mental health by detecting stressors and evaluating support measures. Secondly, the study seeks global university actionable insights. The study aims to achieve the global actionable insights by reviewing extensively the existing literature on the psychological stresses faced by international students in different global contexts. Within the selected Canadian higher learning institutions, key stakeholders such as support staff and administrators are interviewed to have more understanding on the implemented strategies addressing the mental health of international students. As higher education grows more international, institutions worldwide worry about the mental health of students from varied cultural backgrounds (Carver et al., 1989). Many of the Canadian universities' mental health support techniques and processes can inspire other educational institutions to tailor their programs to international students (Hyun et.al, 2007). This study aims to increase awareness and provides a roadmap for institutions to improve international students' mental health by making empirically-based recommendations. The study supports higher education's goals of cross-cultural knowledge, diversity, and global citizenship.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated international students' lives, making the research timely. The pandemic has exacerbated isolation, mental health, and academic concerns, making it even more critical for HEIs to adapt and provide appropriate support for overseas students.

Overall, this study could improve our understanding of international student mental health and provide practical advice for colleges worldwide. This study also aims to address the challenges international students face in Canadian universities and evaluate support mechanisms to make higher education more inclusive and supportive for diverse students.

Theoretical Framework

Stress and Coping Theory

Lazarus and Folkman's Mental Stress Theory (1970) will guide the analysis of international students' stressors in Canadian universities as well as their and the institutions' coping techniques. This late 1970s psychological framework by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman has shaped mental health research. It claims that how people interpret and cope with external situations affects stress. The theory explains stress's complexity in multinational students. Student stress may result from academic difficulties, cultural adjustment, and social issues (Colyar et al., 2023). It shows that stresses are not intrinsically upsetting; rather, their cognitive assessment affects their impact on mental well-being (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). The theory stresses cognitive assessment, both primary (assessing a stressor's relevance) and secondary (assessing one's ability to deal). International students must examine the perceived threat of academic obligations, cultural adaptation, and social relationships. International students' stress perceptions and coping techniques will be examined. Lazarus and Folkman's

(2021) framework contrasts problem-focused coping (addressing the source of stress) with emotion-focused coping. International students might cope by obtaining academic help, cultural exchange programs, or mental health services. Understanding these coping mechanisms is essential for appraising their stress management and well-being benefits. This approach will also be applied to Canadian universities' international student support programs. Problem-focused coping mechanisms at universities include academic help, cultural integration, and mental health services. They may also provide emotional support through therapy and welcoming surroundings. This framework helps us evaluate how institutions understand international students' requirements, develop coping methods, and react to stressors.

Higher Education and Student Support Literature

To complement Lazarus and Folkman's framework (date), this study will draw on a rich tapestry of relevant higher education and student assistance literature. This literature lets us understand higher education student well-being issues from multiple perspectives. Higher education is vital to student mental health (Jones, et al, 2022). University mental health services, especially for overseas students, are discussed in Carver et al., (1989) literature. It stresses the need for a friendly, inclusive environment that boosts academic success and student well-being. The research suggests that colleges are communities that impact students' lives. Due to this, schools are realizing the necessity for comprehensive student well-being measures. This includes mental health services, safe discourse places, and well-being promotion (Lewson, 2022). It also emphasizes the necessity of training instructors and staff to recognize distress and connect students with resources. Moreover, international students' particular problems and the specialized help that institutions should provide have been explored (Nash et.al, 2017). International students, who spend time away from home and adjust culturally, linguistically, and academically,

are more stressed (Creswell, 2013). This literature highlights academic assistance, cultural integration, and mental health care as critical components of a holistic approach to foreign student challenges (Linden et.al, 2023) Academic support for international students may include English language courses, study techniques workshops, and mentorship. These programs aid with academic progress and reduce stress from language barriers and educational inequalities. Moreover, cultural integration programs help international students feel included (Creswell, 2013). Cultural clubs, intercultural communication training, and cross-cultural contact can make institutions more welcoming. Further, international student mental health programs recognize the pressures of homesickness, cultural adjustment, and isolation. Culturally sensitive therapy and awareness initiatives can help international students discover mental health choices (De Moissac et al., 2020).

Creswell (2013) offers best practices and case studies from higher education institutions, especially Canadian universities, in helping international students' mental health and well-being. These examples can help institutions globally improve their support offerings and initiatives (Maeshima & Parent, 2020). These institutions' experiences and results can help identify successful methods that can be replicated. Illustrations by Carver et.al (1989) demonstrate how HEIs have met overseas students' mental health requirements. They have also illuminated the obstacles and inventive solutions, teaching other universities how to improve student support services. Overall, the literature by Akhtar and Kröner-Herwig (2015), (see also Colyar, Pichette & Deakin, 2023; Denovan & Macaskill, 2012; Domene, 2016) underpins the research's holistic approach to overseas students' mental health. It recognizes the complexity of international students' challenges and the numerous solutions needed to support them.

Methodology

Research Design

During the Pilot Study, it was crucial to carefully choose a qualitative research methodology to ensure a thorough and insightful investigation. Qualitative research, when strategically combined with an exhaustive and judicious literature assessment, is the best way to successfully and comprehensively answer our study's research questions and objectives. According to Butler-Kisber (2010), qualitative research, known for its ability to reveal subtleties and profound insights, is ideal for studying complex, diverse phenomena. This approach allows researchers to navigate the research topic's complexity while gaining a thorough understanding of the study participants' experiences, ideas, and perspectives (Creswell, 2013). I anticipated this qualitative journey to deepen my understanding of human experiences and the study domain.

Data Collection

Literature Review

This qualitative study begins with a review of the literature on international students' mental stress in Canadian universities and its management. Drawing on earlier studies and publications in this field lays the groundwork for our research. The review examines scholarly articles and other relevant literature. This literature review has complicated interconnected goals. First, it's essential to understand the different stressors international students confront in Canadian universities. There are intellectual, cultural, and social integration demands. Secondly, the literature review examines Canadian universities' mental health support programs for international students hence reviewing how effective strategies such as app-based approaches can reduce mental stress and improve foreign student experiences. These treatments will be reviewed for their effects on international students' academic performance, social integration, and well-

being. The literature review synthesizes Canadian mental health best practices for international students for worldwide application. This assessment will provide suggestions and direction for educational institutions facing comparable issues. The literature review guides and helps generate interview questions, assess data, and provide evidence-based recommendations.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were crucial and the process of gathering detailed and nuanced data from varied individuals. This qualitative data collection approach is essential for capturing international students' personal experiences, perceptions, and insights (Domene, 2016). By studying these individuals' tales and viewpoints, I hoped to comprehend the complex dynamics of mental well-being, stress, and higher education strategies. For the data collection, there was a careful selection of individuals to ensure variety and representation in our study. The recruited international students were from various nations, and academic areas; this gave me diverse viewpoints and experiences. This careful selection allowed the investigation of a range of mental health concerns and strategies for international students. The study included semi-structured interviews of 3-5 international students.

Semi-structured interviews were the preferred data-gathering approach because they blend flexibility and emphasis. This method explored new avenues while staying focused on research questions. There was a series of core questions, but it is also important to dig further into issues or follow up on surprising findings because the interviews were semi-structured. Participants were asked to speak about their mental health, stressors, and coping mechanisms. The open-ended questions allowed participants to speak freely and share their thoughts and experiences. This approach captured each participant's unique story of struggle and challenges.

Research Questions

- What are the primary stressors experienced by international students in Canadian universities? What are the barriers to accessing mental health services for international students?
- What are the coping strategies used by international students to manage their mental health concerns while studying abroad?
- What recommendations can be made to enhance the support provided to international students?

Data Analysis

A diligent analysis of the qualitative data from the series of interviews ensured that the information acquired was not merely assessed but carefully and rigorously analyzed. The goal was to draw relevant conclusions from the participants' rich and diverse narratives through data analysis. It makes the necessary link between the data collected and the study goals.

Transcription:

The data analysis journey began with the transcription. Each interview, full of personal anecdotes, thoughts, and experiences, was transcribed precisely. This approach turned spoken words into text, providing a comprehensive and consistent analysis base. Transcription is more than a technical task; it transforms spoken narratives into a format for further analysis.

Coding:

After transcription, coding followed, where a careful open coding round began. Open coding was used to analyze textual datasets to find themes, patterns, and emerging categories that were required to gather participants' experiences and viewpoints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Code (also called labels or tags), were generated from the interview content. These tags guided me to draw meaningful data segments, which was crucial to qualitative analysis.

Categorization:

Later, the open coding codes from the previous phase were categorized into themes and categories in the next step. Categorization simplifies and unifies data and helps in creating groups according to relevant codes to structure our data. Category and theme creation were crucial to data analysis since it helped me to organize and interpret the data.

Interpretation:

Once the data were categorized and themed, interpretation began. In the interpretation phase, there was a thorough screening of the data to untangle our interviewees' experiences and viewpoints. This stage brought the data to life, revealing fascinating insights that helped in comprehending international student mental stress and university treatments.

Overall, the data analysis approach used was systematic and iterative, starting with transcription, then coding, categorization, and interpretation. This technique unlocked the full potential of qualitative data, turning it into a valuable resource that illuminates international students' challenges and universities' responses.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the highest ethical standards in this research, this study was approved by the institution's research ethics board (REB) (see details for the REB approval in the appendix) and part of an assignment in my EDPS 509 course (Professor José da Costa was the instructor for the course, 2023). As part of the course requirement, informed consent from all participants was

obtained. The study was committed to research ethics by protecting participants' anonymity and holding their data confidential. The ethical approval from the institutional ethics review board was received before data collection, supporting the commitment to ethical integrity and human subject protection in research.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings of the study illuminate the complex and diverse challenges encountered by international students in Canada, placing a special emphasis on their mental health experiences. The identified themes provide a nuanced understanding of the issues faced by these students, offering valuable insights that can guide universities in developing and refining support structures tailored to this demographic. The participants' suggestions, particularly those related to leveraging technology, present concrete and feasible approaches to enhance mental health services and cultivate a more supportive atmosphere for international students.

Multifaceted Challenges

The analysis sheds light on a range of challenges, including language barriers, adverse weather conditions, academic stress, financial constraints, cultural differences, and social isolation. These challenges are interconnected and contribute to the overall complexity of the international student experience in Canada. This was observed that despite strong academic backgrounds and proficiency in English, participants faced difficulties securing part-time employment during the initial stages of their stay, exacerbated by the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Valuable Insights for Universities

The identified themes not only serve as a comprehensive overview of the challenges but also offer valuable insights for universities seeking to improve their support systems. By understanding the multifaceted nature of these challenges, educational institutions can tailor their services to address the specific needs of international students effectively. During observation it was noticed that none of the participants were on prescribed medication for their mental health issues, suggesting a reliance on coping mechanisms rather than formal medical intervention. Cultural norms and expectations played a crucial role in shaping participants' attitudes toward seeking mental health services, contributing to their hesitancy.

Technological Solutions for Mental Health

A key finding revolves around the participants' recommendations for technological solutions to enhance mental health services. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the accessibility of mental health services. Long waiting periods for counseling appointments, coupled with screening processes, created barriers to timely support. The frustration of waiting was exacerbated by the urgency of their mental health needs. The proposal for a university app for virtual counseling aligns with contemporary expectations and addresses the issue of long waiting times for appointments. These suggestions provide practical avenues for improving the accessibility and efficiency of mental health support.

Fostering a Supportive Environment

The study suggests that implementing the participants' recommendations could contribute to fostering a more supportive environment for international students. The use of technology not only addresses the challenges of accessibility but also aligns with the preferences of the tech-savvy student population, potentially enhancing their overall well-being. Despite the challenges,

participants shared their personal coping strategies. Engaging in activities such as meditation, music, and exercise, they emphasized the importance of distraction and self-care during periods of anxiety and depression. Participants actively sought ways to manage their mental health independently, reflecting resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges.

Implications

This research project impacts foreign student mental health support in higher education. These implications focus on theory research and field advancement to improve overseas students' Canadian education.

Theory development

The findings in this study add to the theoretical literature with respect to international student well-being and stress management. The Lazarus and Folkman's Mental stress paradigm examines international students' mental health in Canadian universities using qualitative interviews and extensive literature analysis. Following Lazarus and Folkman's Mental Stress Theory, the framework examines stressor perception and response (Thoits, 1995). International students' cognitive assessments of academic, cultural, and social influences were explored. This theoretical approach helps us comprehend international student stress and coping and provides a framework for this study. The stated theory in the study helps to relate the strategies employed by Canadian universities in mitigating mental stress in international students with the already existing literature. The study also addresses overseas students' mental health and academic success. This study emphasizes the relevance of support services in lowering stress, boosting academic performance, and encouraging social integration for overseas students. Considering the findings from the collected data in the interviews, the participants suggested a similar approach

on having university app which can help them connect with counsellor virtually. The participants suggested that the university app will enable the support services which in turn can lower the stress, increase social integration and improve academic performance.

Field Enhancement

The practical implications of this study are essential and can improve Canadian university international student support services, improving students' academic and personal experiences. This study can guide Canadian institutions' policy and resource allocation. The findings can provide insights for universities to develop and implement strategies which may, in turn, reduce international students' stress. Based on this study's outcomes, academic support, cultural integration, and mental health care can be enhanced (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). This study also provides insights that may lower international students' support service challenges, with the establishment of more effective university apps as echoed by the participants in the interviews, where learners can seek help virtually (Wiljer, et al, 2020). The findings from the data make a significant contribution to both theoretical understanding and practical interventions. The theoretical understanding is enriched by a deeper insight into the lived experiences of international students, while the practical implications involve implementing solutions that directly address the identified challenges. The call for future research to explore the efficacy and implementation of suggested solutions by participants indicates a commitment to ongoing improvement. Understanding how technological interventions impact the mental well-being of international students and exploring the potential benefits of student-to-student support initiatives can further refine and expand the knowledge base in this critical area.

The data study not only uncovers the challenges faced by international students but also provides actionable recommendations for universities. By acknowledging the role of technology

in mental health support and considering the impact of peer support initiatives, educational institutions can take meaningful steps toward creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for their international student population.

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Appendix A



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Adult Participant Consent Form

EDPS 509 Research Assignment: What are the most effective strategies that universities in Canada can implement to reduce mental stress among international students?

Researcher: Pooja Malhotra

Date Range of Research: February 09, 2023

I, _____ (Name of the participant) hereby consent to participate in the research, **How can Universities help in minimizing the significant challenges causing mental stress faced by international students?**

I understand that my participation includes:

- Face-to-face interview for 30 minutes with **Pooja Malhotra**.
- The interview will be transcribed from the audio-recorded

format. As per the Letter of Information, I understand that:

- My participation in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the research without penalty until **February 10, 2023**.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- No identifying information will appear on written representations of the data: pseudonyms or numerical coding will be used to convey the data.
- The data will be used for the purposes of completion of the Master of Education in Educational Studies (MES) program and may be used in future presentations and publications in the educational context.
- The plan for this research has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and the ethical conduct of research, I can contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

February 09, 2023

Signature of Participant

Date

Letter of Introduction - Individual Interview - Adult Participant

Appendix B

Pooja Malhotra,

Graduate student in Educational Policy Studies,

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta,

Edmonton, AB T6G 2R3

+1-7806953159

pmalhot1@ualberta.ca

Participant,

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student in the **Master of Education in Educational Policy** program at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to you to take part in a research assignment for my **EDPS 509 Research Design and Data Analysis** course. My assignment is intended to look at the challenges faced by international students that cause mental stress and how the university is helping international students to overcome those challenges. Your participation would involve a face-to-

face interview of 30 minutes. Your participation is voluntary; there will be no consequence to you should you decline to participate or decide to withdraw from participating.

In order to gather data for my research assignment, I will be using Qualitative research methods and for my data collection, I will be taking your interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Please note:

- You may choose not to answer any question.
- You may opt out of this research assignment once responses have been submitted. To do so, please submit your request by email by **February 10, 2023**, and I will destroy all data.
- I will send you a transcription of the interview as well as a summary of the main points I understood you to make by email; you will have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription and my interpretation of it.

Should any concerns, complaints, or questions arise from your participation, you may contact me or my instructor, Dr. Jose da Costa (jdacosta@ualberta.ca).

All data will be handled in compliance with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants:

- Participant names will not be revealed. To protect the confidentiality, pseudonyms or numerical coding will be used in all written representations of the data.
- Hard copy data will be locked in the **My Documents** folder and will be destroyed upon the completion of my graduate program.
- Digital data will be stored on my computer under a secure password-protected system and will be destroyed upon the completion of my graduate program.
- Data will be used to complete my **EDPS 509** course, and my graduate program, and may be used in future presentations and publications in educational contexts.

Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in my research. If you wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it to **email by February 10, 2023**. I have included two copies of the consent form: one is to be signed by you and the other is for your own records.

The plan for this research has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and the ethical conduct of research, you can contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Should you wish for a copy of my research findings, I would be pleased to provide one upon your request.

Sincerely,

Pooja Malhotra,

Graduate student in Educational Policy Studies,

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta,

Edmonton, AB T6G 2R3

+1-7806953159

pmalhot1@ualberta.ca

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

I am a graduate student in the Master of Education in Educational Policy Studies program at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this interview is for you to take part in a research assignment for my EDPS 509 Research Design and Data Analysis course. My assignment is intended to How can Universities help in minimizing the significant challenges causing mental stress faced by international students? Your participation would involve 30 minutes of an interview. Your participation is voluntary; there will be no consequence to you should you decline to participate or decide to withdraw from participating.

To gather data for my research assignment, I will be going for a face-to-face interview with approx. half an hour. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Please note:

- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You may choose not to answer any question.
- You may withdraw from the interview at any time.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- No identifying information will appear on written representations of the data: pseudonyms or numerical coding will be used to convey the data.
- The data will be used for future presentations and publications in the educational context.
- You may opt out of this research assignment once responses have been submitted. To do so, please submit your request by email by 10th February and I will destroy all data.
- I will send you a transcription of the interview as well as a summary of the main points I understood you to make by email; you will have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription and my interpretation of it.

Q1 Why Mental Health is so important? How would you describe your mental health state as an international student at the University?

Q2 Why do you think it is more challenging for international students as compared to domestic students in Universities? What are some challenges that act as stressors for international students in Canada?

Q3 Have you noticed any cultural differences in the way mental health is perceived and treated in Canada compared to your home country?

Q4 What are the coping strategies used by international students to manage their mental health concerns while studying abroad?

Q5 How do you feel the Canadian education system supports the mental health needs of international students? In your opinion, what could be done to improve the mental health support and resources available to international students in Canada?