

**Enhancing International Student Achievement and Well-Being: Exploring the  
Significance of Support Mechanisms during their Academic Journey in Canada**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **My Experience in Education**

Throughout my career as an educator, encompassing roles as both a teacher and vice principal in a small independent high school, I have had the privilege of working closely with a diverse group of international students hailing from various corners of the globe. Nestled in the multicultural fabric of Canada, our school has become a vibrant melting pot, attracting students who have made the bold choice to study internationally for a myriad of reasons. As I was starting my journey through my Masters of Education at Thompson Rivers University I was helping out in an English Language Learners class once a week. Through my casual conversations with the students in front of me I learned about their families back home, how they were adjusting to their life in Canada, what they were enjoying about their new adventures, and what struggles they were facing. The element that stood out to me was the emphasis that they put on relationships.

Each year these students would pack up their things, leave their families, and come overseas to study in Canada. As they embark on their new adventure, they will often find varying degrees of success in reaching their goals. Since these students have left their familiar routines and culture behind, it is important for their new schools to support them in any way they can, to help limit the negative impacts of the psychological and sociocultural acculturation that can occur. Some of the issues that they face are comparable to the rest of the students, but they also have an additional layer that is unique to living in another country, away from their families.

### **Reasons for Studying Internationally**

The decision to embark on an educational journey abroad is often driven by a quest for high-quality education, exposure to a multicultural society, and the opportunity to explore new horizons. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2017) there were 20,438 international students studying in British Columbia from kindergarten to Grade 12. International

students are charged annual tuition fees to attend school and these additional fees have encouraged districts to recruit these students to come to their schools. This has caused the revenue generated in British Columbia from international students to quadruple to approximately \$242 million from 2002 to 2017 (Kuehn, 2018). Many studies have looked at the impact that international students have on the schools they are attending. These researchers have generally focussed on the financial benefit of having fee-paying international students attending their schools and the impact that those students have on the school, but few studies have looked at the experience of the international students during this transition time.

### **Challenges for International Students**

International students face a unique set of obstacles as they embark on their educational sojourns in foreign lands. The journey of transitioning to a new country encompasses not only the pursuit of academic excellence but also the navigation of unfamiliar academic, social, and cultural norms. In my years of experience, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of a supportive educational environment in facilitating the successful integration of international students. Conversely, I have also observed the detrimental effects of a lack of proper support systems, which can hinder students' ability to adapt and thrive.

When international students feel supported and connected to the people in their new environment, they are able to build strong relationships that help them navigate this critical transition period in their lives. The profound impact of these relationships extends beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge; they provide a sense of belonging, emotional stability, and foundation upon which students can build their academic and personal success. However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all students experience a seamless transition. Some find themselves grappling with feelings of depression, anxiety and a profound sense of alienation (Popaduik, 2014).

Adolescent international students represent a uniquely vulnerable group when they arrive in a new country. Research by Kuo and Roysircar (2004) has revealed that

unaccompanied international students often face higher stress levels and lower levels of acculturation compared to other immigrant students. The absence of familial and social support networks, coupled with the challenges of adapting to a new educational system and cultural context, can be overwhelming. Furthermore, international students, particularly those from Asian countries, may be less inclined to seek out support on their own if they encounter difficulties. Due to the physical distance from their families and the cultural norms they may adhere to, these students often internalize their struggles, underutilize the services offered through their school, and perceive counselling as a resource reserved for serious psychological problems (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010).

### **Presenting my Argument**

While it is important to acknowledge the agency and personal responsibility of international students in their own integration and transition, it is equally crucial to recognize the shared responsibility that educational institutions hold in supporting these students during their transformative journey. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in creating an inclusive environment and providing the necessary support systems to ensure students' overall well-being and academic success. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by international students, schools can foster a nurturing environment that empowers these students to overcome barriers and reach their full potential.

While the importance of supporting international students during their transition cannot be understated, it is worth considering a counterargument that challenges the notion of sole responsibility falling on the school. Critics argue that international students should take personal initiative and responsibility for their own integration and seek out available resources. They contend that placing the burden solely on the school can foster dependency and hinder students' development of self-reliance and resilience.

However, it is important to recognize that international students face unique challenges that can be overwhelming, particularly when compounded by language barriers, cultural

differences, and homesickness. The responsibility of educational institutions lies in creating an inclusive environment and providing the necessary support systems to ensure students' overall well-being and academic success.

This paper evaluates the strategies that schools have been using to support their international students. It highlights the importance of creating an honest, open dialogue between school administration and the international students they are serving which will allow both groups to learn from each other. The school can learn from the needs of their students and the students can learn about the different opportunities that are available to them. As they work together to find solutions they can include teachers, administrators, counsellors, host families, agents, international alumni, and current international students.

This paper conducts a literature review on the experiences of international students in Canada, exploring strategies used by schools to support their transition. It identifies gaps in existing support systems, discusses benefits and challenges, and adapts successful strategies for new students. Topics covered include counselling physical activity, peer mentorship programs, helpful skills, and future areas of investigation. The application chapter focuses on preparing students and schools, providing information, promoting inclusivity, and involving host families. Overall, it guides schools in creating a supportive educational environment for international students.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Experiences of International Students**

The research question guiding this literature review was: What strategies can schools put in place to support the transition of their international students? This review will examine the experiences of international students, particularly those studying in Canada, and explore the strategies implemented by various schools and districts. The aim is to learn from these experiences and adapt them to accommodate the students joining our school each year.

British Columbia's schools offer a rich educational environment that promotes cultural diversity, inclusivity, and academic excellence. However, the experiences of international students within this context may vary significantly from those of their domestic peers. Language barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, and social adjustment challenges are just a few examples of the unique hurdles these students may face (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006).

Understanding the experiences of international students in British Columbia schools is essential for several reasons. First, it enables educational institutions and policymakers to identify gaps in existing support systems and develop targeted interventions to address the specific needs of this student population (Amundson et al., 2011). Second, it promotes a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with hosting international students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and enriching educational environment for all students.

### **Strategies to Learn From**

The influx of students from diverse cultural backgrounds presents unique opportunities and challenges for educational institutions. As schools aim to create inclusive learning environments and promote academic success for all students, it becomes crucial to develop effective strategies that cater to the specific needs of international students.

The presence of international students in schools can significantly enrich the educational experience for all students involved. However, these students often encounter a multitude of challenges as they adapt to a new educational system, culture, and language. The successful



integration and support of international students not only contribute to their personal growth but also promote intercultural understanding and global competence among their peers (Brunette, Schmidt, & Creighton, 2019).

### ***Counselling***

Considering that the majority of fee-paying international students coming to British Columbia are from Asia, schools have had difficulty supporting these vulnerable youth with the use of a counsellor. Many Asian cultures do not recognize mental health problems in the same way that many Western countries do, resulting in a lack of understanding among these students regarding the positive impact that counselling can have on struggling adolescents (Popadiuk, 2014).

There are some strategies that have been used to help international students open up. For example, guided walks are a mobile interview. They have been found to put the participants at ease and create a pressure-free dialogue. Instead of sitting towards each other and maintaining continuous eye contact, the guided walk has the participants walking side-by-side, which creates a more comfortable conversation and balances the power between the participants (Brunette et al, 2019). Other adjustments to the location of the conversations can be made depending on the student and their age. For instance, sitting on the swings with a younger student, shooting hoops with an athletic student, or drawing with an artistic student. The distraction and casual nature of these conversations can help build a rapport with the student and ease the connection required to get the student to participate in the discussion.

In addition to counselling the well-being of these students, they also need guidance counselling to help with their future plans. Students coming from different countries and cultures add unique issues to a guidance counsellor's role. They must take into consideration their values, delivery methods, and cultural impacts that come from living and studying abroad (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010).

### ***Physical Activity***

Engaging international students in physical activities has been found to have numerous benefits for their physical and mental well-being. Research has consistently shown that outdoor and physical activities can decrease anxiety levels, increase social participation, and facilitate cultural exchange (Stodolska, 2015). International students themselves have expressed appreciation for these opportunities, recognizing their positive impact on enhancing their education and facilitating their transition into a new environment (Brunette et al., 2011).

Some educational institutions have taken proactive measures to incorporate physical activity into the experiences of international students. For example, Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, includes a mandatory outdoor education trip as part of the orientation for all international students. These trips provide an informal setting where students can practice their English language skills while enjoying the scenic views of the new surroundings. The outings often involve a combination of international students and mentors from the school community, fostering connections and sense of belonging (Hooke-Wood, 2020).

To ensure the success of such trips, it is essential for schools to consult with the international students attending, taking their perspectives and needs into account. This collaborative approach allows students to feel comfortable with the expectations and be adequately prepared for the activities, particularly when they come from different climates and outdoor environments (Brunette et al., 2019).

Incorporating physical activities into the experiences of international students goes beyond promoting their physical health. These initiatives create opportunities for social interaction, team building, and cultural exchange. By engaging in activities together, international and domestic students can bridge cultural gaps, foster friendships, and develop a sense of community within the school environment (Schwarz, 2018).

Moreover, physical activities have the potential to positively impact the mental well-being of international students, offering a break from academic pressures, and providing a space for

relaxation, rejuvenation, and stress reduction. The combination of physical exertion, natural environments, and social engagement can contribute to an overall sense of well-being and help international students cope with the challenges of adjusting to a new educational and cultural setting.

In conclusion, incorporating physical activities into the experiences of international students offers numerous benefits for their overall well-being. By decreasing anxiety levels, increasing social participation, and facilitating cultural exchange, these initiatives contribute to a positive and supportive school environment. Through collaborative planning, consultation with international students, and consideration of diverse needs, schools can design physical activity programs that enhance the educational experiences and transition process for international students in a way that is inclusive, engaging, and meaningful (Stodolska, 2015).

### ***Peer Mentors***

Peer mentorship programs have shown promising outcomes in supporting international students during their transition to Canadian schools. Numerous studies have examined the benefits of pairing international students with Canadian peer mentors, highlighting the positive effects on psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Thomson & Esses, 2016).

For instance, one study implemented a program where Canadian mentors met with their international mentees on a weekly basis. At the conclusion of the program, Thomson and Esses (2016) observed that the international students who participated in the mentorship program exhibited lower levels of acculturative stress compared to control participants. These positive outcomes were consistently observed, although they were particularly noticeable among students who were not residing with a host family. Host families typically provide social support and contribute to developing familiarity with Canadian customs, which may alleviate some of the challenges faced by international students.

However, it is crucial to consider that interactions with peers can be both positive and problematic experiences for international students (Palgren et al., 2017) While students often

report peer interactions as some of their most positive experiences, they also acknowledge that the interactions can sometimes be challenging. By focusing on increasing positive interactions between Canadian students and international students, it is possible to mitigate the number and intensity of negative experiences within the school environment.

To enhance the effectiveness of peer mentorship programs, it is essential to establish clear objectives, provide adequate training and guidance to peer mentors, and facilitate ongoing communication and support. Peer mentors can serve as valuable resources for international students, offering guidance on academic matters, navigating social dynamics, and providing cultural insights. Through these relationships, international students can develop a sense of belonging, build social networks, and gain a better understanding of Canadian customs and norms.

By fostering positive connections between international students and their Canadian peers, schools can create an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes cross-cultural understanding and integration (Maffini, 2018). Peer mentorship programs hold great potential for facilitating smoother transitions, reducing acculturative stress, and ultimately enhancing the overall experiences of international students in Canadian schools.

### ***Helpful Skills***

Examining success stories, Amundson et al. (2011) identified four consistent categories that contribute to the success of international students: attitude, skills and resources, educational experiences, and community and family support. These findings suggest that international students can benefit from developing certain skills and traits prior to studying abroad. For example, arriving with a positive attitude and well-developed coping strategies can facilitate a smoother adjustment to a new country compared to being ill-prepared.

When international students apply to study abroad programs, recruiters and interviewers can play a vital role by assessing the skills students already possess and identifying areas where further development is needed. Moreover, educational institutions can provide support

and resources to help students cultivate these ideal skills before they arrive in their new country. By offering assistance and guidance, schools can contribute to the preparedness and success of international students.

One hindering factor identified in the research is the lack of a clear and realistic goal. This is an area where educators can work closely with students. While many high school students may not have a precise vision of their future ten years down the line, setting short-term goals can serve as powerful motivators for achieving small successes along the way. Encouraging continuous goal setting skills can empower students to monitor and adjust their plans as they progress through their teenage years (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). These goal-setting skills are valuable and applicable throughout life, benefiting individuals regardless of their cultural background.

By focusing on developing these skills and fostering a positive mindset, educational institutions can empower international students to thrive academically, socially, and personally. The cultivation of these skills not only supports students' immediate academic journeys but also equips them with essential life skills that will contribute to their long-term success and well-being.

### **Counter Argument**

Critics contend that international students should take personal initiative and assume responsibility for their own integration process by actively seeking out available resources, rather than relying solely on schools (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010). According to this viewpoint, placing the burden solely on the school can create a sense of dependency and impede the development of self-reliance and resilience among international students.

While it is important for schools to provide support and resources for international students, proponents of this viewpoint argue that students should proactively engage in the process of integration. By taking personal initiative, international students can better navigate

language barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, and social adjustment challenges they may encounter (Brunette, Schmidt, & Creighton, 2019).

Seeking out available resources can empower international students to develop self-reliance and resilience as they take ownership of their integration process (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010). This approach encourages students to actively explore the educational environment, interact with peers, and engage in extracurricular activities that promote cultural exchange and social connections (Brunette et al., 2019). By actively seeking support, international students can access resources such as counselling services, peer mentoring programs, and guidance counselling, which can contribute to their personal growth and academic success (Popadiuk, 2014).

Moreover, critics argue that fostering self-reliance and resilience is essential for international students' long-term development and adaptation beyond their educational experience. By cultivating these qualities, students can better navigate future challenges and develop a sense of independence and adaptability that will serve them well in their personal and professional lives (Arthur, Popadiuk, 2010).

Educational institutions play a crucial role in supporting the integration of international students while acknowledging their agency and personal responsibility. By creating an inclusive environment, providing comprehensive orientation programs, and offering support services such as counselling and peer mentorship, schools can empower students to overcome challenges and reach their full potential. While recognizing the importance of students' personal initiative, the collaborative approach between students and educational institutions ensures a nurturing environment that fosters self-reliance, resilience, and academic success in the transformative journey of international students.

### **Future Investigation**

After thoroughly reviewing the existing research, several areas emerge as potential avenues for further investigation to enhance support for international students in British

Columbia schools. Firstly, it is evident that incoming international students benefit from clear and realistic expectations. Exploring the most effective ways to provide support to both students and schools in managing these expectations would be valuable. This could involve developing comprehensive orientation programs, providing information and resources on cultural adaptation, and fostering open communication channels between students, educators, and support staff.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the impact of the mentorship program on Canadian students who serve as mentors to international students during their transitional period. Understanding the benefits and potential challenges faced by Canadian mentors in terms of intercultural awareness, communication skills, and personal growth would contribute to the development of effective mentorship programs (Sleeter & Grant, 2009).

As international students complete their studies and potentially relocate for work, they may experience a sense of cultural dislocation and a lack of attachment to a specific cultural identity. Investigating the experiences of these students in terms of cultural belonging, cultural conflicts, and the sense of home would provide insights into how to support their ongoing cultural development and promote a sense of identity that integrates their international experiences with their home country roots.

Lastly, considering the challenges surrounding counselling services for international students, it would be beneficial to explore alternative approaches. For instance, investigating the potential benefits of providing counselling services in students' first languages could enhance their comfort and confidence in expressing themselves and seeking support. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of group counselling as a means of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where international students can connect with peers who share similar experiences would be worthwhile (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011).

By delving into these areas of inquiry, researchers and educators can gain a deeper understanding of the specific needs and experiences of international students in British Columbia schools. The findings from such investigations can inform the development of target

interventions, programs, and support services that promote successful academic, social, and cultural integration for international students (Morrison, 2013).

In the application chapter, the focus shifts to practical aspects of preparing international students, schools, and host families for a successful transition. This involves setting clear expectations through comprehensive orientation programs, fostering connections within the school and local community, and maintaining ties with the students' home country. Ongoing support, including mentoring programs and accessible counselling services, is emphasized, as well as the importance of continuous monitoring to address any challenges that may arise. By implementing these strategies, schools can create an inclusive environment that promotes the integration and academic success of international students.



## **Chapter Three: Application**

### **Preparing for Student Arrival**

Educational institutions need to play a pivotal role in creating an inclusive environment and providing the necessary support systems to ensure international students' overall well-being and academic success. Preparing for the arrival of international students is a crucial aspect of fulfilling this role and creating a welcoming and supportive educational environment. Effective preparation ensures that both the students and the school community are ready to embrace the opportunities and challenges that come with cross-cultural exchange. This chapter explores the various steps and strategies involved in preparing for student arrival. It begins by discussing the importance of preparing the students themselves, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to thrive in a new educational setting. Next, it delves into the preparations that schools and educators can undertake to ensure a smooth transition for incoming students. Additionally, it explores the role of host families in creating a nurturing home environment. By attending to these critical areas of preparation, schools can lay the foundation for a successful and enriching experience for their international students.

### ***The Student***

Preparing international students for their study abroad experience is essential to facilitate a smooth transition and ensure their academic and personal success. Prior to their arrival, it is crucial to provide students with comprehensive information and resources that will help them navigate the new educational system and cultural context. A Student's Guide to Study Abroad (4th ed.) provides valuable guidance on preparing for studying in a foreign country, covering topics such as cultural adjustment, academic expectations, and support services (Amundson, Buckland, & Nauta, 2011). Furthermore, the Government of Canada's website offers useful information on preparing to study in Canada, including visa requirements, health insurance, and resources for adapting to Canadian culture (Government of Canada, n.d.).

To ensure that international students are well-prepared academically, it is beneficial to provide them with information about the curriculum, grading systems, and academic expectations in Canadian schools. Leask (2015) emphasizes the importance of internationalization of the curriculum in education, which involves incorporating global perspectives and intercultural learning opportunities into the learning environment. By familiarizing students with the curriculum and promoting an inclusive educational approach, schools can help international students feel more confident and prepared for their academic journey in Canada.

In addition to academic preparation, it is crucial to address the social and emotional aspects of transitioning to a new country. Maffini (2018) highlights the significance of building inclusive classrooms and creating supportive environments for international students. This can be achieved through pre-arrival orientation programs that introduce students to Canadian customs, social norms, and available support services. Morrison (2013) further emphasizes the need to develop intercultural communication skills and cross-cultural competence to facilitate effective interaction and integration within the Canadian context.

### ***The School***

In addition to preparing the students, it is equally important to ensure that the school is ready to welcome and support their international students effectively. Schools can benefit from implementing strategies and policies that promote cultural diversity, inclusivity, and cross-cultural understanding (Maffini, 2018). By creating a supportive environment from the outset, schools can enhance the experiences of international students and foster a sense of belonging.

One effective way to prepare the school is by providing professional development opportunities for educators and staff. Training sessions on intercultural communication, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive teaching practices can equip school personnel with the necessary skills to engage and support international students (Smith, 2012). Additionally, workshops on

addressing unconscious biases and promoting equity in the classroom can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

Moreover, schools can establish partnerships with community organizations, universities, and other educational institutions to leverage their expertise in supporting international students (Morrison, 2013). Collaborative efforts can involve sharing best practices, resources, and experiences, allowing schools to learn from each other and implement effective strategies.

### ***The Host Family***

In my current school, our international students live with host families. It is essential to prepare these families to provide a supportive and welcoming environment. Host families play a significant role in helping international students adapt to their new surroundings, providing them with a sense of belonging and emotional support (Maffini, 2018). Preparing host families involves providing them with training and resources on cross-cultural communication, understanding the needs of international students, and addressing potential challenges that may arise.

Orientation sessions for host families can be organized to familiarize them with the students' cultural backgrounds, expectations, and potential cultural differences. These sessions can emphasize the importance of open communication, patience, and understanding during the adjustment period. Additionally, schools can establish support networks or mentorship programs that connect host families with experienced hosts or other international students' families who can offer guidance and support.

Preparing for student arrival involves a multi-faceted approach that focuses on both the students and the school community. By providing international students with comprehensive information and resources, schools can help them navigate the academic, social and emotional aspects of studying in a new country. Equally important is ensuring that schools are prepared to create a supportive and inclusive educational environment for their international students. By

offering professional development opportunities for educators and establishing partnerships with relevant organizations, schools can enhance their ability to meet the diverse needs of international students. Additionally, preparing host families and providing them with the necessary training and support is vital in creating a nurturing home environment for international students. By attending to these critical areas of preparation, schools can lay the foundation for a successful and enriching experience for their international students.

### **After the Student Arrives**

Once international students have arrived at the school, there are various important aspects to consider in order to facilitate their integration, support their well-being, and foster a sense of belonging. This section explores the post-arrival phase and focuses on three key areas: creating connections within the school, creating connections around the community, and helping students maintain connections back home. By actively addressing these aspects, schools can cultivate an inclusive and supportive environment that enriches the educational experience of international students and promotes their overall success. This section delves into strategies and initiatives that schools can implement to foster meaningful connection, both within the school community and the broader local community, while also recognizing and honouring the students' cultural heritage and ties to their home countries. Through these efforts, schools can create a network of support and opportunities that empower international students to thrive in their new environment.

### ***Connections Within the School***

Creating connections within the school community is an essential aspect of integrating international students and promoting their overall well-being. Peer mentorship programs have emerged as effective strategies for supporting international students in this regard (Thomson & Esses, 2016). These programs involve pairing international students with Canadian peers who can serve as mentors, fostering friendships, facilitating cultural exchange, and providing a valuable support network.

To establish successful peer mentorship programs, it is important to adequately train and prepare mentors. Training sessions can focus on developing intercultural competencies, which include enhancing understanding and appreciation of different cultures, recognizing and challenging stereotypes, and promoting inclusivity (Thomson & Esses, 2016). By equipping mentors with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can effectively navigate cross-cultural interactions and provide meaningful support to international students. Active listening skills are particularly important for mentors to empathetically understand the unique challenges and experiences faced by international students, allowing them to offer appropriate guidance and assistance.

In addition to peer mentorship programs, schools can organize various social events, clubs, and extracurricular activities that encourage interaction and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). These activities can serve as platforms for students to meet and engage with their peers, fostering a sense of belonging and creating opportunities for cultural exchange. By participating in these events, international students have the chance to showcase their own culture, traditions, and talents while also learning about the local culture. This mutual sharing of experiences contributes to a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Schools can also consider implementing initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation among all students. This can be achieved through multicultural awareness campaigns, diversity workshops, or even incorporating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum. By providing all students with opportunities to learn about different cultures, beliefs, and experiences, schools can foster a sense of empathy, respect, and acceptance, thereby creating a more inclusive and harmonious school community.

### ***Connections Around the Community***

Connections within the local community are invaluable for international students as they offer opportunities to expand their cultural experiences, improve language skills, and foster a

sense of belonging (Schwarz, 2018). To facilitate these connections, schools can collaborate with community organizations, cultural centers, and local businesses, creating avenues for students to engage with the community and its residents.

Collaborating with community organizations allows schools to establish volunteer programs specifically designed for international students. These programs not only provide students with meaningful ways to contribute to the community but also enable them to interact with local residents and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture and customs. Through volunteering, international students can develop a sense of purpose, build interpersonal skills, and establish connections with individuals who share similar interests and values (Maffini, 2018).

Cultural events organized in collaboration with community organizations and cultural centers offer another avenue for international students to engage with the local community. These events can showcase the diverse cultures represented within the student population and provide opportunities for cultural exchange. By participating in cultural events, international students have the chance to share their own traditions, cuisines, and artistic expressions while learning about the traditions and customs of the local community. Such interactions foster mutual understanding and appreciation, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious community (Schwarz, 2018).

Language exchange initiatives also play a crucial role in connecting international students with the local community. Partnering with language schools or language exchange programs allows students to practice their language skills with native speakers. This not only helps them improve their language proficiency but also facilitates social integration by creating opportunities for meaningful interactions with local residents. Language exchanges often involve sharing personal stories, discussing cultural differences, and engaging in everyday conversations, which enhances cross-cultural understanding and promotes friendships between international students and community members (Maffini, 2018).

### ***Connections Back Home***

Recognizing and honouring the connections that international students have with their home countries is important for their overall well-being and sense of identity. Schools can play a significant role in supporting students in maintaining these connections and celebrating their cultural heritage.

By offering resources and support, schools can create an inclusive environment that encourages international students to share and showcase their cultural traditions. Cultural festivals and events provide a platform for students to proudly exhibit their customs, music, dance, and attire. These celebrations not only allow international students to express their cultural identities but also offer an opportunity for their peers to learn and appreciate different cultures (Leask, 2015).

International food days can further promote cultural exchange and appreciation within the school community. These events allow students to share traditional dishes from their home countries, creating a space for culinary exploration and cultural learning. Through sharing and tasting diverse cuisines, students can develop a deeper understanding and respect for different cultures, fostering a sense of unity and inclusion (Leask, 2015).

Furthermore, schools can establish cultural clubs or organizations that focus on specific cultural backgrounds or regions. These clubs provide a platform for international students to connect with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Students can engage in discussions, organize cultural activities, and provide support to one another, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Banks, 2015).

By offering resources, organizing cultural events, and creating platforms for cultural exchange, schools empower international students to maintain their connections with their families, communities, and cultures of origin. Recognizing and valuing their diverse backgrounds not only enhances their educational experience but also contributes to the overall richness and diversity within the school community.

Creating a supportive and inclusive environment for international students involves a multifaceted approach that spans different stages of their educational journey. Schools and educators need to be prepared to ensure a smooth transition for incoming students. Creating connections within the school community and fostering connections around the broader local community will allow the students to engage with their new environment and broaden their cultural experiences. Programs must also recognize the importance of helping students maintain connections with their home countries, celebrating their cultural heritage and providing a sense of identity and belonging. By addressing these key areas schools can establish a comprehensive support system that promotes the well-being, integration, and academic success of international students.

### **Seeking Support**

International students may face various challenges and emotions during their transition to a new educational environment. It is crucial for schools to emphasize the importance of seeking support and to provide accessible resources for students to address their emotional well-being.

Promoting a culture of openness and encouraging students to reach out for support can significantly contribute to their overall well-being and academic success. Schools can educate international students about the available counselling services. Students should be made aware that seeking emotional support is not a sign of weakness but a proactive step towards maintaining their mental health and adjusting to the new environment.

Counselling services can play a vital role in supporting international students' well-being. Trained counsellors can provide a safe and supportive space for students to discuss their concerns, navigate cultural adjustments, and manage stress. These services can assist students in developing coping strategies, building resilience, and addressing any personal or academic challenges they may encounter.



To ensure the accessibility of counselling services, schools can offer multilingual counselling options or collaborate with external organizations to provide culturally sensitive support. Additionally, promoting awareness of counselling services through orientation sessions, informational materials, and online platforms can help international students understand the resources available to them.

By emphasizing the importance of seeking support and providing accessible support and counselling services, schools can foster a supportive and caring environment for international students. Proactive efforts in promoting students' well-being contribute to their overall success, personal growth, and successful integration into the school community.

### **Continuous Monitoring**

Cultural monitoring is essential to assess the effectiveness of support measures and address any emerging challenges faced by international students. Schools should establish mechanisms for ongoing communication and feedback from international students, host families, and staff (Schwarz, 2018).

Regular check-ins, surveys, and focus groups can provide valuable insights into the experiences and needs of international students (Morrison, 2013). Based on this feedback, schools can make necessary adjustments to their support strategies, policies, and programs, ensuring the continuous improvement of their services.

Preparing for the arrival of international students requires comprehensive efforts from both schools and the broader community. By preparing students, schools, and host families before the student's arrival, establishing connections within the school and community after the student arrives, and facilitating connections back home, schools can create an inclusive and supportive environment that enhances the educational experience of international students. Continuous monitoring and adaptation are key to ensuring that support measures remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of international students. Through these efforts,

schools can foster intercultural understanding, promote diversity, and enrich the educational landscape for all students.

## **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

### **Summary**

It is evident that international students require robust support systems during their transition to a new country in order to facilitate their success. The challenges faced by these students, who have left behind their familiar surroundings, necessitate the provision of assistance and connection in their new environment. Research has shown that when these vulnerable students receive adequate support and establish meaningful relationships, they are better equipped to navigate this critical phase of their lives. Conversely, those who lack support often experience difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and feelings of alienation.

Unaccompanied international students, in particular, are found to have higher stress levels, and lower acculturation levels compared to other immigrant students. Moreover, cultural factors and the distance from their families make it less likely for these students to seek support when they are struggling (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010). Consequently, it is crucial for educational institutions to recognize the unique needs of international students and provide accessible counselling services that destigmatize seeking help, ensuring their overall well-being and successful integration into the new cultural environment.

This paper emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment for international students studying in Canadian schools. It recognizes the unique challenges they face, such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, and social integration, and highlights the need to address these hurdles to ensure their successful integration (Popadiuk, 2014). The strategies discussed in the previous chapters, including counselling, physical activity, peer mentorship programs, and the development of helpful skills, offer practical approaches to support international students and promote their well-being.

Furthermore, preparing for the arrival of the international students is identified as a crucial step in creating a welcoming environment (Maffini, 2018). This involves equipping students with the necessary knowledge and resources to thrive in a new educational setting,

preparing the school community to effectively support international students, and supporting host families to create a nurturing home environment. By implementing these strategies, schools can establish a strong foundation for a successful and enriching experience for international students.

The importance of creating connections within the school and the broader local community will help facilitate integration, cultural exchange and a sense of belonging (Schwarz, 2018). Peer mentorship programs, social events, and collaborations with community organizations offer avenues for students to connect with their peers and engage with the local culture. Additionally, recognizing and honouring students' connections to their home countries through cultural festivals, language exchanges, and cultural clubs contributes to their overall well-being and sense of identity.

International student programs need to acknowledge the importance of seeking support and continuously monitoring the experiences of their students. Providing accessible resources, including counseling services and multilingual options, fosters a supportive and caring environment (Morrison, 2013). Ongoing monitoring and adaptation ensure the effectiveness of support measures and allow for necessary adjustments to better meet the evolving needs of international students.

Creating a supportive educational environment for international students requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that addresses their unique challenges, prepares students, schools, and host families, and fosters connections within the school and the broader community. By implementing these strategies and continuously improving support measures, educational institutions can create an inclusive and enriching environment that promotes the well-being, integration and academic success of international students.

#### Implications

The insights presented in this paper contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation surrounding the importance of supporting international students during their transition to another

country. By highlighting the unique challenges faced by international students, such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, and social integration, the need for targeted strategies to address these hurdles is evident (Brunette et al., 2011). The exploration of various approaches, including counselling, physical activity, peer mentorship programs, and the development of helpful skills, provides practical insights into how educational institutions can effectively support international students (Thomas & Esses, 2016). These strategies not only promote the well-being of international students but also foster cross-cultural understanding and inclusivity within educational environments (Leask, 2015).

The practical implications of these findings extend beyond the local context and have the potential to impact various stakeholders involved in international education worldwide. Educators, school administrators, and policymakers in different countries can benefit from a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by international students and the strategies to support their transition. Implementing the recommended strategies can lead to the creation of more inclusive and supportive educational environments for international students globally. The desired changes include increased cultural awareness, improved integration and support systems, enhanced intercultural understanding, and the promotion of academic success and well-being among international students. Ultimately, the goal is to foster an educational landscape where international students can thrive, feel a sense of belonging, and achieve their full potential academically, socially, and personally.

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