

How International Students Overcome Settlement Challenges



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Research Questions

- What settlement and integration challenges do international students (IS) face in Canada?
- What strategies do they activate to overcome social, cultural, and economic barriers?



FRAMEWORK

- The number of international students in Canada reached **1,040,985** in **2023**, a **29%** increase from **2022**, and a **63%** growth over the past five years (ICEF Monitor 2024; CBIE 2023).
- India, China, Philippines, and Nigeria were the top source countries for international students from 2019-2023 (ICEF Monitor 2024).
- **80%** of international students stay in their province of study one year after graduation, and **70%** remain after five years (Statistics Canada, 2021).

METHODS

- Interviews were conducted with **31** undergraduate international students.
- **Countries of birth:** China, Ghana, India, Malawi, Nigeria, Panama, Philippines, St. Maarten, Zambia, and Iran.
- **Age at year of arrival:** four participants were less than 20; 25 were between 20-24; 1 was between 25-29; and 1 was between 30-34.
- **Program of study:** Health, Social Sciences; Business and Economics; Technology and Engineering; Communications and Languages; and Hospitality and Tourism.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

"[The advice] is very much like surface-based, like they don't know. I've talked to other people in my program, and most of them, they didn't know what to do after school" (Delilah, Ghanaian, aged 22, arrived 2018).

- Inadequate career centre support.
- Lack of internships and co-ops.
- Limited academic advising.



HOUSING CHALLENGES

"You either have to live really far away from campus for cheaper accommodation, or you can live close to campus and then pay the price" (Henry, Vietnamese, under 20, arrived in 2017).

- Lack of affordable housing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).
- High rent, predatory landlords, and strict requirements.



Housing

EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

"The degree itself will be useful, but it's definitely not enough... it's not what you know but who you know" (Geneva, Filipina, aged 20-22, arrived in 2017).

- Difficulty finding full-time employment.
- Social connections key to finding jobs.
- Discrimination in the workplace.



FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

"My parents pay for my tuition and last year I contributed just a little bit of my savings to it. But my difficulty was that, when I started, the tuition fee actually significantly increased by [name of school] without any prior notice. So, it made it very hard for my parents to pay my tuition" (Ethan, Pakistani, aged 20-24, arrived in 2021).

- High tuition costs
- Limited financial support from universities and the government.
- Few scholarship opportunities.
- Ineligible for student assistance programs.



Financial Challenges

HEALTH CHALLENGES

"The main issue in Canada is, when you ask for help, for example, for mental health, they have such a long wait list. For example, I wanted to talk to a counselor for mental health, but the wait list was literally three to four months. So, before that, I couldn't even get the help I needed from them" (Jasmine, Tanzanian, aged 20-24, arrived in 2018).

- Loneliness
- Long wait times for counselling services.
- Unaffordable private mental health support.
- Reliance on friends for emotional support.

CONCLUSION

- International students display resilience in overcoming academic, financial, employment, and health challenges.
- Students build social connections with friends and colleagues to find housing and employment.
- Students rely on their families for financial support, including tuition fees and living costs.
- Students seek emotional and mental health support from friends and colleagues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universities need to provide better academic and career support.
- Universities need to provide opportunities for mentorship and networking.
- **IS** should have access to federally funded settlement services.
- **IS** should have access to affordable mental health resources and services.
- **IS** should become familiar with immigration policies to streamline the hiring and permanent resident (**PR**) process.

