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**CHINESE INTERNATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS'  
ADJUSTMENT CHALLENGES IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS**

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**Abstract**

Ontario schools host a significant number of international students arriving during their secondary school years. These students add to the diverse student body and promote the cultural understanding of the local students. However, having left their familiar cultural and educational environment of their home country, international students constantly need to adjust themselves to fit and thrive in the local learning and social environment. This literature review was performed with the purpose of identifying themes explored in studies focusing on Chinese international secondary school students' adaptation experiences in Canadian schools. The results show that English language proficiency as the major factor causing stress among students and a lack of English language proficiency affects students' academic study and social integration. Additionally, discrepancies between beliefs, expectations, habits and learning behaviours developed in students' previous home environment and the realities in Canadian school cause adaptation challenges for students. The literature review findings highlight the importance of developing a better understanding of Chinese international secondary school students' lived experiences in Canadian schools for the purpose of supporting them to navigate their adaption into a new learning and cultural environment effectively.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2021, 105,666 Chinese international students studied at different educational levels in Canada, constituting 17% of the total international student population; of these, approximately half studied in Ontario (CIBE, 2021). International students bring distinctive languages and cultures that contribute to the richness of Canada's multicultural society, and their formal educational experiences also make them desired skilled immigrants. However, newcomer Chinese international secondary school students experience difficulties adapting to local classroom learning and developing social connections during the first year of arrival (Foulkrod & Ma, 2014; Popadiuk, 2010; Sit, 2013; Soliman, 2020; Wu, 2020). Many students report being not fully engaged in their learning and sticking together with other Chinese students. Others spend extensive periods of time alone with limited personal connections, relying on social media and the internet to connect with peers. These behaviors are likely caused by a lack of English language skills and cultural knowledge (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012; Li, 2004; Popadiuk, 2010), as well as differences between Chinese and Canadian education systems and school cultures (Halpin, 2014; Greenholtz, 2003). It may also be that the programs or services available do not address these students' needs (Chen & Lewis, 2011). If left unresolved, such circumstances may affect students' confidence and prolong their struggle to adapt, thereby negatively affecting their well-being and long-term success.

Unfortunately, this group of young adolescent international students is an underrepresented group in the collective knowledge of experiences (Lindner, 2018; Popadiuk, 2010). Hoffman (2005) points out that the field is dominated by adults' viewpoints, and student perspectives and voices are missing from the literature and policies (Lindner, 2018). Existing studies have investigated international students' transition experiences from teachers' and schools' perspectives (Soliman, 2020), as well as the experiences of Chinese students in the USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand (Boyson & Short, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Zhang & Mi, 2010). There is a paucity of studies conducted with Chinese students in Canadian contexts (Popadiuk, 2010) and student perspectives and voices are missing from the literature (Lindner, 2018).

This literature review analyses the extant literature relative to international students' experiences adjusting to English educational institutions, with a focus on Mandarin-speaking Chinese secondary school students' transitioning to Canadian high schools. The literature search reveals the topic of international students' adjustment is receiving increasingly more attention from scholars, and much data has been produced, with a considerable amount of the research focused on the adaptation experiences of international students studying at post-secondary institutions, while a relatively smaller portion of the research is dedicated to the education and adaptation experiences of adolescent high school students. Specifically, the adaptation experiences of Mandarin-speaking Chinese secondary school students in Canada have received little attention.

Studies on the transition experiences of international students at post-secondary institutions focus on the stressors and barriers students experience with the goal of developing a better understanding of their experience and inform those who are engaging in international students' service work. Consistent findings regarding the elements that cause challenges include the following: English language proficiency for academic as well as for socializing purposes, adjusting to academic culture (for example, by acquiring critical thinking skills), achieving sufficient academic background knowledge, misunderstandings,

complications in communication with teachers and peers, feeling of isolation, frustration and homesickness, and a lack of appropriate support (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Jabeen, et al., 2019; Lee & Rice, 2007; Zheng, 2010). The literature recognizes international students experience challenges related to English language proficiency and discrepancies between beliefs, expectations, strategies, and habits valued in their home education and cultural environment and that of the host one.

## **2. Language Barriers in Academic Learning Experience**

In the literature, learning English is discussed as one of the important pull factors for international students seeking education in English-speaking countries (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). Studying in an English-speaking country, linguistic skills work as a medium for all other aspects of students' lives including the adjustment to academic and social life (Foulkrod & Ma, 2014). Some scholars discuss linguistic skills as a form of capital that connects students with other resources (Bourdieu, 2018; Fox, 2020; Lin, 2008; Lin et al., 2012). However, for students from Asian countries, like China, Korean and Japan, not only is learning English a challenging task, their lack of English proficiency skills also hinders their general academic experiences (Akanwa, 2015; Gebhard, 2012; Roy, 2019).

International students from Asian countries face challenges associated with all the four skills of language acquisition: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In countries such as China and Korea, instructors tend to rely on one textbook for a course, whereas in English institutions students are often required to read multiple books and articles which they find hard to accomplish due to their insufficient English reading ability (Gebhard, 2012). One participant from Japan in Wu et al.'s (2015) case study project on international students' academic, social, and cultururation adjustment reported that poor listening skills affect students' comprehension. The participants reported that the lecturer's rate of speech is too fast, and the pronunciation is "very different" from what they learned in their home country. Ashton-Hay (2016) reported similar findings in her mixed method study of early challenges faced by international students. Ashton-Hay found that international students face challenges acquiring listening and speaking skills due to "insufficient academic vocabulary and cultural competence" (p. A-6). Ashton-Hay's study also reveals that out of all the four skills, a large portion of students (48% of a pool of 151) acknowledge writing as their weakest skill, while 39% of students selected speaking as their weakest skill. It is unfortunate that the author did not report specifically on what aspects of writing affect students' studies. However, the author did provide some suggestions for supporting international students' academic writing. For example, one participant specifically expressed the benefits of clear feedback and hopes the lecturer could comment on the differences between good and poor writing. Students in Ashton-Hay's (2016) study depend on academic support services and appreciate it when academic writing staff and the lecturers discuss and deconstruct assignment examples and offer tips. Wu and Hammond (2011) reported that many international students had never practiced or written any assignment in English before they commence an international education.

In terms of speaking skills, Ashton-Hay (2016) revealed that the challenges of adjustment lie with the fast pace, colloquial expressions, and complex discipline discourse which was "confounded by the quick pace of the Australian accent with colloquial expressions" (p. A-9). To address this, Ecochard and Fotheringham (2017) suggest instructors speak slowly while facing international students, opting for

common words, repeat as many times as necessarily and use visual help as simple measures to support international students' understanding of lectures and ability to complete assignments.

Consistent with the findings regarding the language barriers encountered by post-secondary international students, those studying at secondary schools experience similar challenges in their language learning and testing experiences (Foscolos, 2000; Minichiello, 2001; Li, 2004; Soliman, 2020; Zhang & Beck, 2014).

Based on data gathered through interviews of ten international secondary school students studying in a large urban senior high school in Calgary, Foscolos (2000) concluded that the quality of students' high school experiences is determined by their perceived level of English language proficiency. Various other studies reported similar findings. Minichiello (2001) conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 Chinese-speaking foreign-born students in a high school in Vancouver and found that language was an issue identified by 22 out of 23 students. The student participants mentioned the single word 'language' 156 times, almost 3 times more than the second phrase, which was "peer relationships". Similarly, Li (2004) studied the transitional experiences of a group of students from a Chinese high school to one in Canada, and later to a Canadian university. In this process, language proficiency was the most consistent challenge for these students throughout their transitional learning experiences.

Despite the significant role that English language plays in international high school students' transitional experiences, few researchers dedicate their attention to the actual linguistic barrier students experience and how the barrier affect their learning experiences. For this purpose, Zhang and Beck (2014) studied four Chinese students' English language learning experiences and socialization processes in the context of International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, as well as their social lives, in Vancouver. Prior to departure to Canada, participants envisioned the ease of learning English in an immersive English environment. However, after arrival, this vision was greatly challenged by struggles they experienced to improve their academic English skills, and by their repeated failures taking the IELTS test. Their disillusion with English language learning results in a sense of loss and uncertainty of their futures.

As a common strategy, ESL programs are offered in different local schools to support the English language learning of newly arrived international students. However, different perspectives are reported regarding its effectiveness. Most students who participated in the ESL program made positive comments about their experiences, for example, regarding the benefits of mixing with other students and forming friendships, as well as developing English skills (Minichiello, 2001; Zhang & Beck, 2014). However, in some cases, there are discrepancies between the instructors' intentions and students' interpretations (Minichiello, 2001). Regulations such as requiring students to speak English only in the school setting was misunderstood by some participants as a practice of discrimination. In a class where the number of Chinese-speaking students outnumbers students of other linguistic backgrounds, Chinese students felt constrained and hesitant to reach out to connect with students of different linguistic background due to concerns over losing bonds with home language groups. Students also discussed disadvantages of being placed in an ESL program. Some students expressed disappointment over being placed with others who share the same mother tongue and felt such placement prevented them from speaking English. Other students associated inferiority with being labeled an ESL student, and desire to mingle more with native peers (Minichiello,

2001). Still others explained that the time spent in ESL programs could be better used for taking meaningful credit courses that are required for college and university entrance (Zhang & Beck, 2014).

In addition to taking ESL classes, students also needed to budget time to prepare and take one of the high stakes standardized English tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or IELTS in order to fulfill university application requirements. Preparation for the TOEFL or IELTS tests is not included in the school curriculum, thus international students need to budget time, explore resources, and prepare for the test. Experiences relative to this aspect are only discussed in two studies, Li (2004) and Zhang and Beck (2014). Li (2004) recruited nine participants from a university preparation program offered in a local high school, four of them commented that the ESL program was “boring and not helpful”, not appropriate for their proficiency level (Li, 2004, p. 33). These participants wished to receive more intensive academic language training so that they could meet the requirements for university applications. Three out of nine participants in Li’s (2004) study believed that the ESL class did help with their communicative English skills. However, due to the pressure of obtaining a qualifying score of band 6.5 on the IELTS test, they decided to allocate time to prepare for the IELTS test instead of continuing the ESL classes. In follow-up interviews, participants in both Zhang and Beck’s (2014) and Li’s (2004) study commented that neither the ESL programs nor the IELTS test preparation classes prepared them for academic study at the university level.

International students who arrive in Canada during their high school years often plan to attend a Canadian university (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This means they have a maximum of three years to improve their English and fit into the local learning environment and the larger society. In terms of language support, there needs to be a more focused study to understand students’ specific needs; for example, by determining what ESL content/instruction would help with their academic learning and communicative language skills development. Other topics that need to be studied include determining the desirable qualifications or experiences that ESL instructors should have, and how instructors could incorporate IELTS or TOEFL test preparation into existing ESL programs to reduce students’ anxiety.

### **3. Adjusting to the Educational Practices in the Canadian School Environment**

There is an abundance of literature discussing educational transitions within the same education system of a country, such as students transitioning from early years to primary school, then to secondary school, then to post-secondary education, as well as further transitions to employment (Jindal-Snape, 2009). A variety of conceptual perspectives are used to understand the process, including resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy, well-being, and attachment theory, among others. Understandings of this process vary from conceptualizing it as a single event or an ongoing process, and whether it involves a solely horizontal adjustment, a vertical one, or perhaps both. Strategies used to ease such transition process include collaboration and communication between teachers and support staff from students’ current and future schools, organizing an “information night” at the new school, running induction programs for new students, and implementing bridging programs to help students transition from a lower grade to a higher grade in a new school (Jindal-Snape, 2009).

In comparison, there are much fewer studies examining the educational transition experiences of international secondary students from Asian countries to English-speaking countries, from China to

Canada, in particular. There may be similarities to the process of transiting from lower grades to higher ones within the same educational system. The fundamental difference lies in that international students are transitioning between two vastly different educational systems and cultures, whereby differences in educational values, practices, and expectations between students' home and host country may induce distinctive challenges from those arise during the transition process within the same education system.

#### **4. Teaching and Learning Practices and Behaviors**

Fundamentally, international students who have completed more than ten years of full-time education in China have developed an understanding of the general requirements for their academic success and have formed learning strategies and habits to succeed in the home learning environment (Wu, 2018). Their transition process involves efforts of trying to cope with learning and expectations in a vastly different educational environment using previously developed strategies from their home education system. In a situation where they are not provided systematic training on how to handle changes arising from their transition, stress may arise which could affect their adjustment negatively. The mismatch between their previously developed academic expectations and the realities of school life in the host country have been documented by some scholars. Smith and Khawaja (2011) reported that international students encounter challenges when they try to perform as well academically as they did in their home country due to discrepancies in the host country's teaching and learning styles as well as language barriers. For Chinese students, adjusting to a critical thinking approach and active participation is particularly challenging (Wu, 2018); this is partly because classroom teaching in China is textbook-based and teacher-centered (Cheng & Xu, 2011), wherein teachers are "in full control of classroom activities" (Halpin, 2014, p. 3), and students are expected to comprehend and memorize test related knowledge in order to do well in quizzes and exams, while not to critique (Donnelly, 2014; Wu, 2018). According to Hu et al. (2010), Chinese teachers and teacher educators are more likely to believe that classroom discussion, and participatory methods in general waste valuable time that would be better spent on the teacher-led transmission and absorption of knowledge. Different from China, Canadian schools emphasize critical thinking, knowledge application, and active class participation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Owing to these differences, a learner who excels in Chinese classrooms may need to adjust their learning strategies, behaviors, and habits to succeed in Canadian classrooms. The challenge that Chinese students face in acquiring skills for critique is rooted in culture. In a society where one seeks harmony with others (Tu, 1998, as cited in Hayhoe & Li, 2017), to be critical is potentially linked to conflict, a situation that people try to avoid in order to maintain harmony. Hence, a learner from a Confucius-based education culture may approach a new school of thought or ideas with a modest and humble attitude. Such attitude does not mean the learners do not understand critical thinking, rather, it is an approach to maintain harmony in formal educational settings.

To facilitate international students' development of critical thinking skills, Kutieleh and Egege (2004) proposed a three-stage method to implement critical thinking in a transition program for post-secondary school students. The first stage explains the history and tradition from which critical thinking owes its roots and explores the cultural assumptions behind its legacy. The second stage is to acknowledge that there are culturally different approaches to knowledge acquisition, of which the Greek method of critical philosophical discourse is but one. Examples of alternative methods of knowledge acquisition, the

Chinese method for instance, are discussed. The third stage illustrates the techniques and mechanisms expected within a Western critical thinking approach. This three-stage method provides explicit instruction to cross-cultural students about the origin and development of critical thinking in English culture, and how it differs from eastern approaches to knowledge acquisition, and why it is beneficial to postsecondary students.

## 5. Classroom Learning Behaviours of Chinese Students

Chinese international students are perceived as being rote learners (Wang, 2018), which entails being passive, quiet, and unwilling to engage actively with group activities or to initiate debate with the teacher (Starr, 2012). However, “what appeared to be mindless rote-learning was in fact a process of memorization and reflection; the absence of learner-initiated verbalization ... actually masked a process of silent but effective mental engagement with the topic” (Starr, 2012, p. 5). Cheng (2011) interprets rote learning as intertwining two processes: application and understanding. Dahlin and Watkins (2000) found Chinese students believe that understanding can be achieved through an extensive contribution of personal effort in memorization and repetition. Li (2005) breaks down the rote-learning approach into five steps: committing new material to memory, seeking understanding of it, applying it to real life situations, and finally, questioning and modifying the original material. The first step often involves solitary learning and contemplation, while the last step can lead to verbalization and discussion with others. In the same article, Li (2005) attributes quiet behaviors to the belief in the essential virtue of concentration for learning, and that speaking can interfere with learning. These ideas are possibly related to the distrust in speaking on moral grounds expressed by Confucianism: “Speaking is viewed by Confucians as an act of committing oneself to one’s claim; if one is unable to back one’s claim with action, one should remain silent” (Li, 2005, p. 192). The third feasible explanation provided by Halpin (2014) is that Asian learners believe that “some knowledge is so precise that it does not need to be bargained about, but rather directly passed on, with explanation provided where necessary” (Halpin, 2014, p. 2).

Despite these unfavorable labels, such as “rote-learners”, Chinese students are also described as hard-working, respectful of teachers, patient, and possessing long attention spans (Starr, 2012; Foulkrod & Ma, 2014). As described in China and the Confucian Education Model (Starr, 2012), beginning in kindergarten, the system employs “whole-class” teaching, wherein the students read in chorus after the teacher reads, and then the teacher asks individual students (or the whole class) questions to facilitate understanding. If group tasks are initiated, the teacher usually assigns the same task to each group to ensure that they all proceed at the same pace. The intention of such activities is to develop “memory and group coordination” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, p. 175 as cited in Starr, 2012).

Hayhoe (2008) adopts a cultural perspective to explain why Chinese students are hardworking. Diligence is a highly valued quality in Chinese culture; it is regarded as a virtue which can bring wealth, earn high academic achievement, and win respect from others. The appreciation of diligence originates from the traditional philosophers, Confucius (551-479 BCE), Mencius (372-289 BCE), and Xun Zi (340-245 BCE), who agreed that “everyone is educable, everyone can become a sage, and everyone is perfectible” and these beliefs have formed “the basic optimism and dynamism towards education in Confucian tradition” (Lee, 1996, 2004 as cited in Hayhoe, 2008, p. 7). Differing from Chinese beliefs,

traditional Western views dictate that “there are certain innate abilities that no amount of education can change” (p. 27) and that intelligence and wisdom were inborn and could only be inherited genetically. Hence even today’s education system in the West stresses a person’s innate ability, intelligence, and initiative rather than encouraging an individual to work harder to achieve more. While in the Confucius-heritage cultures, it is a widely held belief among teachers, parents, and students that as long as one puts “maximum effort” into learning, they can achieve academic success (Hayhoe, 2008, p. 27).

The cultural as well as philosophical foundations that Chinese pedagogic practice evolves from encourages us to re-evaluate Chinese students’ learning behaviors. Unlike Western students who view understanding as a process of sudden insight, Chinese students arrive at understanding through extensive personal effort in perusing the text (Li, 2005). Quietness and handwork are highly valued learning behaviors in Chinese classrooms, demonstrating that Chinese learners have a careful and precise attitude towards learning.

## **6. Different Teacher Qualities**

In Hayhoe’s (2008) comparative study between East Asian and American education, eastern and western models place different values on teacher qualities, with Asian teachers regarded as skilled performers, and western teachers viewed as learning facilitators and innovators (Hayhoe, 2008; Wu, 2018). According to Hayhoe’s (2008) report, Beijing teachers believe that the top quality of the ideal teacher is to have clear explanation skills, while Chicago teachers regard sensitivity as the most important quality for teachers. Having completed approximately a decade’s full-time education in China, students developed their learning habitus according to the eastern teaching model, in which they rely on their teachers to explain the lesson and guide their learning (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Studying in Canadian classrooms, students may expect Canadian teachers to provide clear explanations and guide their learning without realizing the different roles teachers play. Such discrepancies create learning challenges for students. Not surprisingly, the Chinese participants in Wu’s (2020) study noticed that instead of demonstrating what to learn, Canadian teachers ask students to choose what they want to study. Participants also complained that because Canadian teachers did not teach every aspect of required knowledge, students needed to search for large amount of information themselves. One participant felt that it was hard to understand some points of knowledge relative to the subject and desired more learning guidance and support from teachers.

Obviously, there is a mismatch between the expectations of Chinese students and the roles Canadian teachers play in formal education. Such scenarios cause extra challenges for international students. As a result, some students expressed that they still enjoyed the familiar teacher-dominant learning in China where their former teachers supervised their learning and patiently explained all the points of knowledge and details (Wu, 2018, p. 376).

## **7. Peer Relationship**

In the literature, cross cultural concerns are among the top issues affecting students’ transition experiences (Li, 2004; Minichiello, 2001; Popadiuk, 2010; Soliman, 2020). On one hand, a school’s cultural proficiency relative to attending international students may help improve the confidence of the newcomer



students and make them feel valued (Soliman, 2020). If teachers and counsellors develop multicultural counselling competence and adopt a culturally responsive strategy, it helps relieve stressful incidences and greatly improves the transition experience (Zhang & Beck, 2014). From students' perspectives, their adequate knowledge of the academic as well as social culture provide skills to develop social relationships (Zhang & Beck, 2014). In turn, positive relationships in school as well socially may help develop a sense of belonging and strongly promote the integration process (Minichiello, 2001).

One of the major adjustment issues reflected in the studies is developing close bonds with local peers (Minichiello, 2001; Zhang & Beck, 2014). International students have been observed to socialize mostly with peers from the same home culture (Oikonomidou et al., 2019). Some scholars refer to this phenomenon as students' comfort zone, others refer to it as an ethnic enclave (Chen & Ross, 2015). Studies also indicate that students join with peers from the same ethnic group for advice, support, and a sense of belonging (Bal, 2014). Mak (2020) and Fox (2020) found that students socializing with co-national peers enjoy a better adaptation experience in the early stages of culture shock. Despite the benefits, Fox (2020) suggests co-national peer support should "only be used as a scaffold gradually augmented by additional supports" (p. 1080).

Different from the supporting functions of co-national peer groups, interacting with English-speaking peers helps enhance language ability and connection, expand cultural knowledge (Fox, 2020; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Mak, 2020) and increase confidence (Gill, 2007; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011).

Despite the benefits of socializing with local peers, a survey of more than 3000 students from Canadian post-secondary institutions reveals that 56% of students have no Canadian students as friends, and 37% experienced difficulties in getting to know Canadian students (CBIE, 2014). The CBIE data indicates that international students desire to socialize with native students, but experience obstacles in doing so. Gill (2007) suggests the difficulties are related with different "ways of thinking and perceiving, values, attitudes and worldview" (p. 175). To respond to this suggestion, Mak (2020) designed a ten-session intervention program, Friendship Across Culture, aiming to promote intercultural friendship and reduce acculturative stress by ways of building knowledge and raising students' awareness of acculturation. Students' responses at the exit interviews indicated several benefits. International students expressed that they learned practical intercultural skills, and that they were able to meet new people and make new friends by participating in the program. Additionally, they felt a sense of belonging and experienced the importance of social bonding and communication. However, their weekly reflections did not indicate whether they developed close friendships with Canadian peers who also participated in the same intervention program. The Canadian students revealed the program helped them develop empathy for international students through understanding of the challenges they experience. Most importantly, Canadian students became more willing to "reach out across the language and cultural barriers to meet new people and extend welcome, help, and care for the needs and concerns of international students" (p. 141).

Mak (2020)'s intervention program seems effective for addressing the intercultural knowledge gap between international and local students. However, the fact that no students developed friendships with local peers upon completing the program indicates that other factors are involved. McKenzie and Baldassar (2017) indicate that there are differences in the understanding of what friendship means in both Chinese and Canadian culture. Chinese students come from a highly collectivist culture where friends tend to hang

out together much of the time. This type of friendship may seem boring to local peers who are from a highly individualist culture, and who may enjoy each other's company but do not do everything together.

Chinese and Canadian students also make different choices regarding popular cultural activities (Minichiello, 2001; Soliman, 2020). The participants in Minichiello's study explained how different pop culture choices prevented students from developing friendships with peers outside of their home cultural group. The development of the Internet has enabled today's students to maintain and replicate their home culture and habits while living in a different country. Furthermore, in school settings where there is a good proportion of students from the same home culture taking the same course, these students tend to duplicate their home cultural environment within the larger school community. These duplicated environments function as comfort zones, wherein students need to make a conscious decision to step out of them and expand their networks (Minichiello, 2001).

## **8. The Gap and the Implications**

As discussed earlier, the literature relative to international students' adjustment experiences is dominated by studies focusing on international students studying in post-secondary institutions. More studies are required to develop a better understanding of international students attending secondary schools. This current literature search resulted in finding relatively more research on international students studying in America, Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. Indeed, there may be similarities in student experiences across different English countries. However, Canada, a country that promotes immigration, has characteristics relative to the school environment that may lead to different adaptation experiences for students.

This current literature search indicates there is a lack of studies investigating how international secondary school students adjust to their learning and social lives in Canadian schools. Scholars investigating international secondary school students' learning experiences in Canada have called for more studies to contribute to scholarship in this area. Minichiello (2001) examined 23 Chinese international secondary school students' experiences in a Vancouver school, suggesting that there is a need for data regarding international secondary school students studying in other provinces with significant immigrant student populations to reassess "the appropriateness of current policies, practices, and educational programs to determine whether they meet the needs of the immigrant population and/or what changes would be suitable" (p. 93). Brown (2014) conducted a study aiming to identify positive and negative aspects of school experiences among newcomer youths; the findings indicate that the youths need to "feel respected enough to have the freedom to participate in activities" (p. 51). However, the lack of related research focusing on their experiences results in their needs not being well addressed.

In her investigation of international students' experiences of school counselling support, Popadiuk (2010) indicated that all her participants had obtained the language proficiency that enabled them to express their thoughts clearly. Participants being able to communicate in English helps researchers to collect rich data. From a different perspective, the data collected from such participants may not represent those whose English is not strong. Popadiuk (2010) suggests that further studies are needed that are conducted by researchers who understand the participants' native language to ensure students of different language proficiency levels are represented in the literature. This suggestion assumes that students with lower

language proficiency skills may experience more challenges, thereby it is significant for encouraging inclusion.

Popadiuk (2010) provides further explanation regarding the lack of research focusing on English as an additional language for speakers in secondary schools. One reason is relative to the complexity of research ethics that may involve stricter ethical review procedures (Schulz et al., 2006). A second factor could be that researchers may need to obtain consent from both the adolescent students and their guardians or parents who may live in a different time zone and speak a language other than English. The third concern is related to the possible disclosure of issues that may challenge researchers in terms of how to handle such disclosures. Finally, to recruit adolescents as participants, researchers may need to go through additional procedures according to the schools. These reasons above explain possible causes for the paucity of academic literature relative to international secondary school students' adjustment experiences.

As discussed earlier, adolescent international students are less researched group in the literature. Still, extant studies have identified the various adaptation issues experienced by Asian international students, despite the availability of programs or services offered for the purpose of support. International students are not actively engaged in classroom learning, and they still socialize with co-national friends in their lives outside of school. More studies are needed to investigate the struggles and successes by considering the cultural and educational differences between students' home and host countries. Findings from such studies will provide insight into students' behaviors, and help teachers, counsellors, and school administrators to develop a better understanding of the experiences international students lived during their transition experience in the new environment. In particular, data derived from students' voices is needed to understand how international adolescent students view the various factors affecting their experiences and how they wish to be supported.

## Glossary

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

ESL: English as a Second Language

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

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