

**CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
WHILE DOING THEIR GRADUATE STUDIES AT MEMORIAL
UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND**

By

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving parents Roy and Sagarika, who taught me the value of education and my ever loving Husband Hiranga Fernando, whom I could not have asked for anyone better.

ABSTRACT

This abstract provides an overview of the challenges faced by international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) while pursuing their graduate studies. It highlights the key challenges that international students encounter during their academic journey and the implications these challenges have on their overall experience and well-being.

This qualitative study explores various aspects of the challenges faced by international students at MUN, including financial difficulties, cultural adjustment, health, accommodations, language barriers, mental health, climatic, food, daycare and employment. It examines the impact of these challenges on students' academic performance, personal growth, and social integration.

Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis of existing research, this study sheds light on the experiences and perspectives of international students at MUN. It explores the multifaceted nature of the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles.

The findings reveal that international students at MUN face significant financial burdens, including high tuition fees, high living expenses, and limited financial support options. Moreover, language barriers pose communication

challenges, hindering their academic progress and social interactions. Cultural adjustment difficulties, such as adapting to a new educational system and social norms, further contribute to their challenges. Health care challenges included limited access to Medicare, health insurance coverage. Unaffordable housing cost, unavailability of housing closer to MUN and issues they had with on campus accommodation were discussed under Accommodations challenges. Limited availability to daycare and high cost of daycare were pointed out by the participants with regards to daycare challenges. Unpredictable weather conditions in Newfoundland and daylight hours were associated with climatic challenges. Difficulty in finding cultural foods and spices were the concerns of food challenges faced by international students.

This study also highlights the detrimental impact of academic pressure on international students, leading to stress, anxiety, and decreased mental well-being. These challenges often result in feelings of isolation, homesickness, and a sense of belongingness. Despite the various challenges, international students at MUN demonstrate resilience and determination in overcoming these obstacles. They employ coping strategies such as seeking support from peers, faculty, and support services, engaging in cultural activities, and participating in language enhancement programs.

This research emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for international students at MUN. It calls for the development of comprehensive support programs, financial assistance options, academic support services, and mental health resources to address the specific needs and challenges faced by international graduate students.

By understanding and addressing these challenges, MUN can foster an inclusive and supportive educational environment that enables international students to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

Keywords: International students, graduate studies, challenges, Memorial University of Newfoundland, financial difficulties, language barriers, cultural adjustment, academic pressure, mental health.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

International students continue to grow in number worldwide, prompting researchers to look for ways to make the study abroad experience more fruitful. International students are a valuable component of the internationalization process in schools, colleges, and universities across Canada, both in terms of bringing an international perspective and more diversity to the classroom. Their presence on campuses and within communities provides significant cultural, social, economic and educational benefits.

In particular international students bring international and intercultural perspectives to the classroom and the communities in which they live, which helps expand Canadians' views of the world. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada manages the International Student Program and issues study permits to foreign nationals seeking study in Canada. The International Student Program is demand-driven. In 2019, there were close to 720,000 study permit holders in Canada. Demand for Canada's study offerings was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with economic loss estimated between \$377M and \$3.4B in 2020-2021. (IRCC Minister Transition Binder 2021: International Students)

Internationalization and globalization are a large part of the university discourse as institutions of higher learning attempt to make their campuses,

programs and services, and perhaps more importantly their students more culturally aware and responsive to international and global contexts. A diverse campus provides opportunities for students to learn how to live and work effectively with others different from themselves (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005)

Studying abroad can exacerbate the pre-existing mood of international students than the domestic students in certain spheres as the transition to college or university can be an exciting new experience for many young adults. The transition from high school to university study is not easy for many students. Transition has been described by Gale and Parker (2014) as “the capability to navigate change” (p. 4). With the concept of consequential transitions, Beach (1999) further proposes that active construction of new knowledge involves the transformation of something which has been learnt elsewhere, resulting in the development of identities and new ways of knowing and of positioning oneself in the world. In the case of international students, the transition undertaken to Higher Education institutions includes the additional dimension of change across national borders, so that international students face greater difficulties in their transition to Higher education than home students (Wu & Hammond, 2011).

There is a growing knowledge base about the issues international students face in Canadian colleges and universities. Hence the colleges and universities that offer programs for the international students and enroll them along with the domestic

students in the same program need to develop a better understanding of how international students differ from their domestic student counterparts. For example, in a recent study comparing international and domestic student experience in the United States, international students (first year) scored higher on academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction and technology use.

These factors would indicate that international students were well adjusted academically. However, the same study found that international students spent less time relaxing and socializing and were less satisfied than American students (Zhao et al., 2005).

Social adjustment and satisfaction are also important factors to international student retention and success. The study focused on the challenges international students face with the ability to adjust to a new culture, the language, academia, and socialization with other students.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the different types of challenges faced by the graduate international students during their study at MUN. This study enables the graduate international students to reflect on their own experiences and to identify whether or not those challenges influenced the success of their academic goals and social lives.

Statement of the problem

International students come across many challenges while attending a foreign university since they are outside of the home country without their families, friends and closed ones. Arthur (2004) discussed issues such as culture shock, alienation, and even simple things in daily life that may have a psychological impact on international students, which in turn may cause them to experience serious problems related to their academic and social experiences. International students are less likely to experience social and academic challenges if they have a good relationship with their academic advisor. International students are a part of both the academic and social community in the country where they live and study. That is why it is important to encourage international students to integrate into college activities (Lin & Scherz, 2014).

Research Questions

The study is guided by a general question and four subsidiary questions.

General Research question

What are the challenges experienced by graduate international students during their studies at MUN.

Subsidiary Research Questions

1. What are the experiences and perspectives of the selected group of graduate international students while attending the university?
2. What are the needs and concerns of the selected group of graduate international students with regard to academic and social life?
3. What do the selected group of graduate international students report about their campus experiences?
4. What do the selected group of graduate international students report about the orientation program and other peer supportive programs held by the university?

Significance of the study for Research and Practice

1. There are several challenges involved in international students while doing graduate studies in a foreign university.
2. We can learn how to deal with these significant challenges by listening to what foreign students tell us.
3. We can take this information and develop various programs such as a program which will address the various financial challenges students experience on a regular basis.
4. These challenges gleaned from the various survey participants will be of considerable help to international students.

Assumptions

1. That students do have a number of challenges when doing graduate work in a foreign university.
2. That students are willing to talk about those various challenges.

Limitations

1. Participants may experience some limitations but not all that were discussed earlier.
2. This being a qualitative study, means that the survey results are not generalizable to the general population.

CHAPTER 2

Review of literature

For many International students, adjusting to a foreign land isn't that easy, as they face a variety of problems. Fostering the way of belonging is a crucial element in developing a campus community (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). A sense of belonging is formed through building relationships with institutional agents and peers (Smith, Gauld, Tubbs, & Correnti, 1997). After they attain the host country, international students often experience a loss of shared identity making transition difficult academically, personally and socially (Bunz, 1997; Hayes & Lin, 1994).

International students frequently undergo a period of cultural adjustment, which can prove to be a demanding and overwhelming experience, especially when their own cultural background differs significantly. This adjustment period encompasses the acquisition of new social norms and communication patterns, acclimating to unfamiliar educational systems, and grappling with emotions of homesickness and isolation. (Li et al., 2018)

Most international students report a few degree of culture shock when they arrive and start their studies (Furnham, 1988; Olaniran, 1996, 1999; Selvadurai,

1992; Thomas & Althen, 1989). Perhaps they need a certain period of time to get adjusted to the new cultural setting. But thus cultural shock might impact their studies as well, hence that shock is typically manifested as stress, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness, rejection, and isolation (Oberg, 1960).

The cultural challenges faced by international students can impact their academic performance and overall well-being. These challenges can include differences in communication styles, values, and attitudes towards education, which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Additionally, international students may experience discrimination and xenophobia, which can further exacerbate their cultural challenges. (Rienties et al., 2016) Moreover, Yeh et al (2007) state, "International students reported experiencing feelings of loneliness, isolation, and homesickness, which were compounded by language barriers and cultural differences" (p. 107).

Friendship networks seem to be a critical thought about how well international students accommodate stress (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). "International students often experience a sense of dislocation or a feeling of being in-between cultures, because their cultural expectations and communication styles may differ from those of the host country" (Chirkov, Safdar, & de Guzman, 2018, p. 65).

International students encounter numerous cultural, linguistic, and social challenges when adapting to a new educational environment. These challenges can

include difficulties with language proficiency, unfamiliar teaching styles, and cultural differences in classroom interaction and expectations. (Yuan & Lee, 2014, p. 31). People who have a robust social network tend to regulate school life in their host country more quickly and effectively. (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Schram & Lauver, 1988).

International students indicate a stronger preference for creating friends from the identical country or students from other nations over students from the host country (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). In fact, generally little is known about the extent to which international students are fulfilled with their experience, associated with peers and staff individuals, and take part in an assortment of other educationally deliberate exercises. Individual coping styles and social networks of support are important influencers on how international students deal with stress and pander to the transition to their host country. (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Zhao et al., 2005).

Therefore, how culturally diverse (or multicultural) an institution may influence which institution an international student chooses to attend. Zhao, Kuh, & Carini (2005) found that when the density of international students per total student population increases, they try to engage in more diversity related activities. However, density may contribute to social isolation and an overcompensation on academics, whereas high density could contribute to an inordinate amount of socializing by members of some groups which can have an adverse effect on

academic performance and social integration with domestic students (Zhao et al., 2005).

According to the findings of Tompson and Tompson (1996), the absence of a stable social support system had a notable impact on the level of comfort experienced by students in academic environments. It influenced their ability to address language barriers, adapt to daily norms and practices, and engage in informal classroom interactions. In a study conducted by Dillon and Swann (1997) involving interviews with six East Asian students, it was revealed that one of the major areas of insecurity for these students was their lack of confidence in their English language skills. This finding highlights the challenges faced by international students, particularly from East Asia, when it comes to acquiring proficiency in a foreign language.

Contrary to the assumption that everyone readily understands English, Takahashi (1989) reported that developing foreign language proficiency, especially academic English during adulthood, requires extensive studying, strong linguistic ability, and a deep understanding of the adopted culture. This emphasizes that learning a new language, particularly the specialized language used in academic settings, is a complex and time-consuming process.

The lack of confidence in language skills is not limited to East Asian students. Senyshyn et al. (2001) referenced the work of Tompson and Tompson (1996) who found that international students enrolled in business programs also identified the

lack of confidence in their language skills as a significant barrier to a positive adjustment experience. This suggests that international students across different disciplines and cultural backgrounds face similar challenges when it comes to language proficiency and the impact it has on their academic and social integration.

Poor English language proficiency limits the capacity of international students to be completely included in learning, and attempting to adjust to diverse dialect and slangs of the nearby mentors heighten the challenge for international students. Understanding local dialect helps international students to associate with local people and to way better understand local culture. Competency within the local dialect helps international students to begin social interaction, to discuss with college staff and workforce individuals, conjointly to settle down at their new places.

On the other hand, failure to interact with local individuals may cause social stuns and miscommunication which can lead to need of social support (Chen, 1999). Halic, Greenberg, and Paulus (2009) conducted a study exploring the experiences of non-native English Speaking international students regarding language, culture, and identity in the context of their graduate studies. They employed a phenomenological approach to explore eight international graduate students' experiences. They have concluded that the participants perceived English as both a barrier and a channel of access. They have recommended that there is a

need for educators who work with non-native English speaking international students to address “not just the academic but also relational and affective issues” (p. 92). Workshops that specialize in essential scrutinizing, rundown and review, verbal presentations and composing offer help upgrade many challenges common to international students (Spencer, 2003)

Several scholarly articles have emphasized the importance of providing clear instructions, offering language support resources, and accommodating students' language abilities to enhance their academic success and overall well-being.

In their article "Supporting International Students in Higher Education: A Comparative Study," Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, and Forbes (2010) highlight the significance of clear instructions and explicit expectations in supporting international students' academic performance. They argue that universities should provide detailed guidelines and assessment criteria to help students understand the expectations and requirements of their coursework. Clear instructions reduce ambiguity and enhance students' understanding, allowing them to better engage with the content and demonstrate their knowledge.

Similarly, Carroll and Ryan (2005) discuss the importance of language support resources for international students in their article "Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All." They suggest that universities should provide English language support programs, such as language courses, writing workshops,

and conversation clubs, to help international students improve their language skills and bridge any gaps that may exist between their current proficiency and the academic English required for their studies. These language support resources create a supportive environment that encourages students to develop their language abilities and feel more confident in their academic pursuits.

The study conducted by Kosheleva (2015) at the National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University focused on 60 students from various countries, including China, Vietnam, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire. The research aimed to explore stress indicators among these international students, with a specific focus on climate conditions.

According to the study's findings, approximately 24.4% of the respondents expressed fear or anxiety related to the climate conditions in the host country. This suggests that a significant portion of the students experienced stress or discomfort due to the unfamiliar or challenging climate they encountered during their studies.

Failure to alter to new environment will cause international students to encounter psychological symptoms (Tseng et al. 2002; Lin et al. 1997; Mori, 2000) such as feelings of inferiority, confusion, homesickness, loneliness, uneasiness, anger, isolation, misplaced of characters, sleep deprivation, low inspiration, incapable to focus and lacking of self-confidence.

An unpublished Canadian study conducted in 2005, distinguished a possibly homeless student population in one city with one post-secondary institution (Gordon & Kovacs Burns, 2005). In this last mentioned report, post-secondary students portrayed themselves as being powerless to “poverty” or living with lacking salary to bear housing as well as food and other fundamentals to outlive. Some students may indeed end up homeless, and a few “hidden homeless” since of their capacity to veil any recognizable proof that they have no lodging or that they are temporal between “couch surfing at distinctive friends” places and other helpful free areas. (Paden, 2012)

Some called themselves “homeless” or not having any comfort they can call their domestic or put to live though being a student. A coordinated, coordinates student-centered values approach to campus data, student services, referrals and student systems will upgrade a student’s capacity to either self-manage personal issues or get to the proper help/services to help in addressing issues before they gotten to be issues. A student-values or student-centered approach means that there's joint obligation of students, their families or bolsters, campus administrations and administration, for ensuring students will have housing, accounts and other individual needs attended to sometime recently there's any chance for students becoming powerless to destitution and homelessness, temporary or something else. (Gordon & Kovacs Burns, 2005)

(pg.63) A few students are versatile and move on in their endeavors to succeed with their studies, but some gotten to be physically sick, greatly on edge and distressed (Flatt, 2013), or turn to drugs or alcohol (Presley 2002).

International student administrations regularly offer assistance to international students with travel, introduction, money-related issues, enrollment, lodging, counseling, and (particularly) fruitful adjustment to the campus and community (Komives, Woodward, & Partners, 1996; Schuh, 2005). (Komives, Woodward, & Associates, 1996; Schuh, 2005). Internationalization Offices will have the capacity to give advice and guide the international students. Many international student organizations exist on most campuses. At some institutions this office may be connected with academic issues of students or an international programs division; in any case of where the service is found officially, student issues have a major part in international student success (Komives et al., 1996, p. 441-442).

Students, faculty and administrators at post-secondary institutions realize and accept that students experience anxiety related to their studies. By and large, Faculties give related support for students encountering such uneasiness. (Paden, 2012). However, students frequently cover up more private issues, stress or uneasiness related to their funds, housing or difficult connections, regularly since of shame (Dwoskin, 2010) or fear of stigmatization, or jeopardizing their scholastic objectives. (McLaughlin & Jones, 2009).

Some students lived with their families, whereas others chose to live alone or in shared accommodation. Some of the latter might have also experienced poverty, which means they had inadequate income for housing, food, clothing and other essentials, and were living below the country's identified poverty income line (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2008).

While pursuing their education, international students are expected to pay for their tuition fees, accommodation, transportation, food, and other basic needs. Unfortunately, the high cost of living and rent in Canada can pose a significant financial burden on international students.

According to a report by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2019), "Affordability of housing and living expenses is a major challenge for international students in Canada, particularly those in larger urban centers, due to the high cost of living" (p. 7). The report goes on to state that the average cost of rent for international students in Canada is approximately CAD 800 to CAD 2,000 per month, depending on the location and type of accommodation. Due to the limited availability of affordable housing options, international students often struggle to find affordable and suitable housing, which can impact their academic performance and overall well-being.

A study by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) found that high rental costs were a significant financial burden for international students in

Ontario. This study found that "approximately one-third of international students reported spending more than 50% of their monthly income on rent and utilities" (HEQCO, 2019).

The cost of housing is a significant financial burden for many international students, and it can impact their academic performance, quality of life, and overall well-being. A study by the University of Alberta found that the high cost of rental housing can impact the academic performance of international students, "international students who paid more for housing were more likely to report feeling anxious and stressed, which can impact their ability to concentrate and succeed academically" (University of Alberta, 2018).

Tuition fees were high taking a large portion of a student's "income" at the outset, and then there were living expenses on top of that including rent. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), international students pay almost three times as much as domestic students for tuition fees. The average tuition fees for international undergraduate students in Canada in 2020 were CAD 29,714, compared to CAD 6,463 for domestic students.

Similarly, the average tuition fees for international graduate students were CAD 19,209, compared to CAD 7,056 for domestic students (CBIE, 2021). This significant difference in tuition fees is a major financial barrier for international students, who often struggle to afford the high cost of studying in Canada. The

impact of high tuition fees on international students can be profound. A study conducted by the CBIE found that 58% of international students identified tuition fees as a significant financial challenge, with 26% stating that tuition fees were their biggest financial concern (CBIE, 2020). Another study found that high tuition fees can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and financial hardship for international students, which can negatively impact their mental health and academic performance (Yan & Berliner, 2018).

Furthermore, high tuition fees can create a sense of inequality and exclusion for international students, who may feel that they are being treated unfairly compared to domestic students. This feeling of exclusion can lead to a lack of integration and social isolation, which can further exacerbate the challenges that international students face (Bhandari et al., 2016). For any individuals not working or working part time, and going to post-secondary institutions, their level of poverty multiplied (Human Resources and Aptitudes Improvement Canada, 2008).

The tradeoffs to pay for rent or food or for heightening tuition fees and books put huge weight on students living in poverty all through the school term (Urban Destitution Consortium of Waterloo Region, 2000). Indeed in spite of the fact that society and governments emphasized that education may be a means to keep individuals engaged to find employment, the cyclical cuts in post-

secondary education and increments in tuition fees have made things more regrettable for students over the a long time. Strategies such as the “Transitions Services” instituted at DePaul Loop University in Illinois, assisted students during their years of study as well as after graduation when they had to pay back loans (McLaughlin & Jones, 2009).

Economic and Social report of Canada (2021) states that Over one-third of Canadian children aged 4 to 11 years regularly take part in a few frames of before- or after-school child care, the foremost common sort being a before or after school program. Several studies have shown that newcomer families, including immigrants, refugees, and academic sojourners, have different socio-economic experiences than the native-born population. (Beiser, 2005; Beiser et al., 2002; De Maio & Kemp, 2010; Newbold, 2009; Setia et al., 2011). These findings resound those of research on early childhood care, which recommend that cooperation in early-years child care is lower among children from immigrant background in Canada and somewhere else (Cleveland and Forer 2010; Kingsbury, Findlay and Arim, imminent; Mill operator et al. 2014).

Many of the international student parents encounter role conflict, especially when they try to balance their parenting and academic responsibilities (Doyle, Loveridge & Faamanatu-Eteuati, 2016; Myer-Walls et al., 2011). These parenting students often have difficulty in deciding which role to prioritize, causing feelings

of inadequacy in performing their role as parents (Myer-Walls et al., 2011). Such stressors can adversely affect their family's well-being and in turn impact the children.

Besides, these parents lack the benefit of extended family, as it is customary in traditional cultures that other family members often help parents to look after the children. Thus, children of academic sojourners do not get the opportunity to spend time with their grandparents and other family members and miss socializing with other caring adults and peers. (Myer-Walls et al., 2011).

This may impact their children's well-being as it is important for children to learn social skills from other caring adults.

Some international student parents reported that their children often talk about the loss of leaving behind their home, family, and friends (Loveridge et al., 2018). To address this, many newcomer parents look for daycare services or playgroups for their 22 children. Access to childcare services allows both parents to work or engage in other activities (Doyle et al., 2016). It gives children a chance to make new friends and experience learning opportunities from other caring adults.

However, many international students do not have sufficient economic resources to take their children to a language learning facility or a daycare due to the high cost of these services. Economic limitations are also tightly related to the quality of parental social resources and support available (Myer-Walls et al., 2011).

In this case, children not only miss quality time with their parents but also miss the opportunity to meet new friends or caring adults due to limited parental income.

However, finding affordable childcare has always been an issue for international student parents (Doyle et al., 2016; Myer-Walls et al., 2011). The child care initiative is an outcome of a 2013 report developed by a University of Manitoba child care working group that included student and faculty representatives, university administrators and on-campus child care personnel (November 2013). The working group highlighted the child care needs of parents and identified the limited availability of on-and off-campus child care spaces.”(Friendly & Macdonald, 2014)

It noted that,

“Lack of childcare hampers recruitment and retention of new and existing faculty and staff...Childcare issues are a significant barrier for students with children and an important factor for their recruitment and retention... Indigenous student parents are particularly hard-hit by lack of quality, affordable childcare. Graduate and international student parent success is hampered by lack of childcare”

(University of Manitoba Childcare Working Group, 2013: 12, pg. 34)

As such, during their academic journey in Canada, international students encounter a range of challenges, and one other particular area of concern is related to food. International students, with their diverse cultural backgrounds, often face difficulties adapting to new culinary landscapes and unfamiliar dietary norms. These challenges include finding culturally appropriate food, sourcing ingredients for traditional meals, accommodating dietary restrictions or religious practices, and adjusting to different eating habits. Access to familiar and suitable food is essential for the overall well-being, physical health, and preservation of cultural identity among international students. Similar to immigrants in Canada, international post-secondary students may face acculturation and dietary acculturation challenges, which may hinder their ability to access preferred cultural or religious foods (Aljaroudi et al., 2019). These challenges are influenced by factors such as limited familiarity with local foods and services (Booth & Smith, 2001; Calder et al., 2016; Chaparro et al., 2009).

Brown et al. (2009) indicated that the availability of food from a student's country of origin may alleviate feelings of anxiety and isolation. The study revealed that international post-secondary students encountered challenges related to food appropriateness, which pertains to the compatibility between the food options available and the students' preferences based on their religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009; Stewin, 2013).

Many factors influence students' decisions to preserve familiar diets, including availability, time, budget, convenience, and taste preferences, which are shaped by cultural and religious identities. Cultural food items have been a significant challenge for students from non-European countries, some of whom traveled long distances to obtain preferred foods. (Horacek & Betts, 1998) In this light, it is not only important to reduce hunger among international post-secondary students, but to do so by maintaining cultural identity with traditional foods, thus improving the acculturation experiences. (Amos & Lordly, 2014; Pinstrip Andersen, 2009; Power & Dietitians of Canada, 2005).

International students have the access for emergency food relief from the food bank located on campus. Unfortunately, food banks are unlikely to ensure food appropriateness (i.e., alignment with culture-specific foods), an important dimension of food insecurity, as they mainly distribute donated foods that are not always appropriate for culturally and ethnically diverse students, including international post-secondary students. (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012)

This literature review has shed light on the various hurdles encountered by international students, including cultural adaptation, language barriers, financial constraints, mental health issues, child care, food and climatic changes. It is evident through the literature review that international students navigate a complex web of obstacles during their academic journeys. However, it is essential to recognize that

these challenges are not insurmountable. Canadian institutions, policymakers, and support services have made significant strides in addressing these issues, aiming to create a more inclusive and accommodating environment for international students.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Before research can begin the researcher must design a plan to carry out the research based on the information that is sought. After choosing the desired methodology, participants are selected and data is collected and analyzed appropriately. Throughout the entire process the researcher must address concerns regarding trustworthiness of the data collected. In addition, strategies must be adopted to address the ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

According to O'Donoghue (2007) the initial stage of research consists of two steps: making an observation that prompts a person to seek further understanding and formulating a research question that focuses on the issues on which the research chooses to focus. Researchers have a sense of wonder about the world around them; some focus on physical constructs whereas others prefer a more interpretivist approach. Regardless of the field of study, the choice to pursue further

understanding comes from the interests of the individual. A statement of the problem to be studied arises from the individual's inner drive to obtain knowledge.

Bell (2005) outlines a series of steps that must be carried out when undertaking a research project:

“You will need to select a topic, identify the objectives of your study, plan and design a suitable methodology, devise research instruments, negotiate access to institutions, materials and people, collect, analyze and present information, and, finally, produce a well-written report.” (p. 1)

Once the topic is selected and the objective of the study is determined, researchers must then decide which research approach would be most effective in getting the information they seek. Quantitative, qualitative, action, and critical theory are examples of research approaches used in education, and although one approach may be chosen, researchers may use a blended approach depending on their purpose. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses and the “approach adopted and the methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required” (p. 8).

For centuries researchers have relied on the scientific approach when studying particular phenomena yet Ary, Jacobs and Razavien (2002) state that there are several limitations associated with trying to apply a scientific approach when studying education. It is difficult to make generalizations about human behavior since there is a complex interaction between many different variables in peoples’

lives. In addition it is difficult, if not impossible to replicate and control educational experiments since every international student and the challenges they face are different. Finally, the presence of an observer may cause research participants to behave differently. Social scientists, therefore, needed a different approach in trying to analyze and understand the field of education and many of them turned to qualitative research methods.

Qualitative research, in particular, is used to investigate topics that are not easily studied using statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is an “approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject's point of view” (p. 274). The data collected provide a rich description of the situation studied and its purpose is to provide understanding about this situation. In this study a questionnaire approach was chosen to identify the challenges faced by the international students while doing their graduate studies at MUN. The participants responded to a series of open-ended questions that were sent via an email attachment; this allowed the participants’ time to answer the questions at their own pace and in the setting of their choice without the presence of the principal researcher.

Questionnaire Approach

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) present five criteria used to classify research as qualitative. The research must be naturalistic, concerned with the natural setting whereby the researcher becomes the key instrument in gathering data. The data that is gathered must describe the situation in words, rather than numbers, and direct quotations and emergent themes are used to provide a rich, thick description of the inquiry. Qualitative research is concerned with the process taken rather than the resulting product. It does not seek to prove a hypothesis as is suggested by the scientific method; it allows themes to emerge naturally from the data. Finally, the purpose of a qualitative research project is to provide meaning, to reveal how people make sense of the world around them.

This study uses a qualitative approach to study the challenges experienced by graduate international students at MUN. Some would argue that by nature of trying to understand their point of view we have distorted “the informants’ experience” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 27). For this reason the researcher chose to use a questionnaire, a type of survey using questions, distributed via email attachment to all participants in order to reduce the impact of the researcher’s presence. In addition, it would be difficult, time consuming and costly for the researcher to print the materials needed and to interview respondents in person. The researcher felt that a questionnaire approach would be the best option based on the purpose of the study.

There are several advantages of using an online survey. It is less obtrusive than a face-to-face interview; it eliminates interviewer bias; participants have more time to think about their responses and can respond at their own pace. Most importantly, the selected participants are researcher's classmates and friends. Therefore the responses may not come out with their actual experiences and challenges. The participants may not feel comfortable in sharing their personal experiences with the researcher. Hence, the researcher decided to choose the questionnaire approach and make their responses anonymous to explore their real experiences and challenges faced while studying at MUN.

Ary et al. (2002) mentions that by using a mailed questionnaire participants are more likely to respond truthfully about matters with which they feel uncomfortable. Some disadvantages of using this approach include low return rate, limited generalizability, and misinterpretation on the part of respondents.

Dillman (2007) outlines that survey methodology is changing through the use of email, the internet and Interactive Voice Response (IVR). In the past cost was a major factor in determining sample size and location. Technological advances in the administration of surveys have almost eliminated "paper, postage, mail out, and data entry costs", provide the "potential for overcoming international boundaries" and reduce the time for implementation (p. 352).

For emailed surveys in particular, returns are much faster, answers are more detailed and complex and there is a lower number of nonresponse items (Dillman,

2007). A disadvantage to this method is that not everyone has email or is computer literate although this is not a major impact on the present study since all students at MUN have email accounts and are expected to use computers for their studies.

When designing a questionnaire the researcher must decide whether to use open ended questions or closed ended questions based on the type of information that is sought. Since the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to seek the perspectives of the participants an open ended approach is much more effective. Open-ended questions permit free responses, provide a wide range of responses, allow for individual time frames and are easier to construct. The disadvantages of open ended questions are they are tedious and time consuming to analyze, the responses will differ in length and the meaning of some responses may be unclear to the researcher (Ary et al., 2002).

When developing and administering the questionnaire the researcher consulted the design principles outlined by Dillman (2007). An email list was created on the researchers personal email account so that participants' names and addresses did not show up in correspondence. An introductory email was sent to all participants outlining the timeline for the project, giving information on what to expect, thanking them for their time, and letting them know they could withdraw at any time. Once the questionnaire was emailed, participants were given alternate ways to respond, such as faxing or mailing back completed responses if email was not favorable. A reminder email was sent to participants with a replacement

questionnaire attached in case participants lost or forgot about the original email. Instructions were presented clearly, pages were numbered, and participants were given space to respond freely.

Selection of Participants

The researcher contacted international students (Friends, Classmates etc.) Purposive sampling is selecting a nonrandom sample “because prior knowledge suggests it is representative, or because those selected have the needed information” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. G-6). This sampling method was used since the researcher was seeking input specifically from the international students at MUN. The sample consisted of one transgender student, male and female students, single students, student parents, new students and senior students studying at MUN. Using personal contacts, the researcher got email addresses for the participants at MUN and sent an introductory email explaining the purpose of the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. Upon receiving replies from interested individuals, follow up emails were sent thanking participants for their interest with the consent form and questionnaire attached.

Data Collection

In qualitative research the researcher can be thought of as the instrument that gathers the data whereas the participants are the direct source of data. In this study, the data was obtained using a survey developed by the researcher.

Using suggestions given by Ary et al. (2002) the questionnaire began with a question that was easy for everyone to answer. In addition, questions were grouped based on similar content, and general questions were asked first and followed by more subjective ones since a “logical arrangement contributes to better-thought-out answers” (p. 397). Open ended questions were used to solicit participant’s perspectives in this qualitative inquiry. According to Patton (1990),

“The truly open-ended question allows the person being interviewed to select from among that person’s full repertoire of possible responses. Indeed, in qualitative inquiry one of the things the evaluator is trying to determine is what dimensions, themes, and images/words people use among themselves to describe their feelings, thoughts, and experiences” (p. 296).

Open-ended questions allow the participants autonomy to use whatever words or phrases they feel are pertinent to their thoughts and feelings.

The eleven item questionnaire was emailed to participants as an attachment and responses were emailed back. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stress the importance of keeping data organized. Once responses were received, the researcher saved all

consent forms and questionnaires on her personal computer and backed up the data on a USB flash memory. Files were named using pseudonyms. New files were created for each question so that each response and each question could be analyzed separately.

Data Analysis

Although it is now possible to use computer programs to analyze qualitative data, “the preference is for less structured, open-ended data collection with structuring taking place later through content analysis or emergent themes” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 462). Creswell (1994) describes the process of data analysis as “eclectic” (p.153) since there is not a right or a wrong way to analyze data. The researcher must “be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts” (p. 153). The challenge of the researcher in qualitative research is to take large amounts of data and reduce “it to certain patterns, categories, or themes” and interpret “this information by some schema” (p. 154). Although there are a variety of ways to analyze data, researchers are obliged “to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible” (Patton, 1990, p. 372).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) data analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p. 159). The researcher obtained 25

questionnaires each with 11 questions. To begin data analysis, 11 computer files were created containing all the responses to each of the 11 questions. The researcher then developed a coding system by reading each individual response three times and writing down words and phrases to summarize the main ideas of the response. These words provided a method of sorting the descriptive data such that material with similar ideas could be separated from the remaining data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The words and phrases were grouped based on common ideas, coded using letters and the researcher identified the theme that emerged from the data. For example, after reading each response to question 1 three times, the researcher grouped all the common words and phrases, coded similar words and phrases using capital letters for example ; S = stress and identified a number of themes that emerged from the data. All eleven questions were coded in the same manner, one at a time. Bogden and Biklen refer to this family of coding as perspectives held by subjects, “codes oriented towards ways of thinking all or some subjects share that are not as general as their overall definition of the situation but indicate orientations toward particular aspects of a setting” (p. 175).

Once each of the eleven questions were read and coded, the researcher noticed that some themes contained common elements across questions. The researcher then compiled a list of all themes and identified which themes repeated between questions. Again, capital letters were used to code common themes and now the researcher had several predominant categories as category #1, #2, #3 and so on. The

researcher went back to the data one more time to identify key concepts to help explain the predominant categories from different questions. These numbers were then replaced by names which attempted, as closely as possible, to describe the essence of what the items were all about.

Although this was a time consuming and tedious process, it allowed the researcher to become comfortable and familiar with the data, allowing the themes to naturally emerge from the participants' responses.

Trustworthiness

The concepts of validity and reliability cannot be readily applied to naturalistic inquiry, although researchers still must ensure rigor in their methods. It is the duty of all researchers to ensure that the methods used to collect and interpret data are trustworthy. Upon reading a research report, the reader must be made aware of provisions used by the researcher to guarantee trustworthiness of the data. Traditionally researchers were called upon to quantify their data and report on the associated errors or statistical probabilities, which is undoubtedly impossible for naturalistic inquiry.

Guba (1981) was the first qualitative researcher to present criteria for assessing whether or not qualitative data is trustworthy. The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These measures were applied in this study to make “valid inferences from data” and to ensure “consistency

of the data” thus addressing the trustworthiness of data collection and interpretation (Ary et al., 2002, p.451).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the “researcher’s observations, interpretations and conclusions” (Ary et al., 2002, p. 451) and is often referred to as the “truth value”. The researcher must represent the thoughts, opinions, beliefs and ideas of the participants as accurately as possible and assure the reader that all efforts were made to report the true findings of the inquiry. In order to ensure credibility the researcher spent considerable time reading and coding the data and only used direct quotations from participant responses to explain emergent themes. Since the researcher was not physically on site, the influence of the researcher in participants’ responses was considered to be negligible.

“Several strategies can be used to enhance the credibility of the findings, including using multiple sources of data, providing thick descriptions, triangulating data, and member checking. Using multiple sources of data is important because it helps to ensure that the findings are not based on a single perspective or biased interpretation.” (Creswell, 2014, p. 214). Member checks is another way to ensure credibility and involves allowing participants the opportunity to verify the data and interpretations made.

Transferability

If the findings of a naturalistic inquiry can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents, then the findings are transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the individual who wishes to apply the findings of an inquiry is the person who should prove transferability, not the researcher of the inquiry. That is,

“..the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be tough, but the applicators can and do. The best advice to give to anyone seeking to make a transfer is to accumulate *empirical* evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible.” (p. 298)

To enhance transferability, researchers should provide a rich and detailed description of the context and participants, as well as use “theoretical or conceptual frameworks” to situate the findings within a broader context. This helps readers to understand how the findings may apply to other contexts or populations. (Creswell, 2014, p. 215)

In other words, it is the reader who ultimately determines the transferability of an inquiry. Within the context of this study, if a reader wishes to use the findings they will prove transferability if they believe findings are applicable in other contexts. The researcher feels that she has provided the thick, rich description necessary for anyone to make transferability judgments.

Dependability

An inquiry is deemed dependable if the findings “would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). This quality refers to the reliability or consistency of the study. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) add that demonstrating credibility ensures dependability. In order to provide a check for dependability, the researcher must make it possible for other individuals to check the consistency of results.

According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), “the researcher must make it possible for an external check to be conducted on the processes by which the study was conducted. This is done by providing an “audit trail” that provides documentation through critical incidents, documents, and interview notes and a running account of the process such as the investigator’s daily journal of the inquiry.” (p. 34)

"Dependability is achieved by using a systematic and transparent approach to data collection and analysis. This includes using coding and theme development to organize the data, keeping an audit trail to document the decision-making process, and having multiple coders or analysts to ensure consistency." (Creswell, 2014, p. 216)

The findings of this study arose from participant responses to the questionnaire. The researcher kept a detailed account of all responses, ideas that emerged from each response. Therefore, conducting an audit trail should not present any difficulty.

Confirmability

As stated by Shenton (2004) "to achieve confirmability, researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions" (p. 63). The interpretations or conclusions made must be independent of researcher bias. Although it is impossible to completely remove bias, in order to ensure confirmability the researcher must be forthcoming about his or her own bias, give reasons for decisions made during the inquiry and report both strengths and weaknesses of the approaches taken. Erlandson et al. (1993) state that the research cannot ensure the data are free from contamination by the researcher but must take steps that ensure that the data themselves are confirmable.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) this means that the data can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into a structurally coherent and corroborating whole is both explicit and implicit" (p. 243).

Creswell (2014) mentions, “confirmability refers to the degree to which the research findings are shaped by the biases and preferences of the researcher, rather than by the data themselves. To establish confirmability, researchers can use reflexivity to examine their own biases and assumptions, and an external auditor to review the research process and ensure that the findings are grounded in the data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 211).

Confirmability is also communicated using an audit trail. “An adequate trail should be left to enable the auditor to determine if the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced to their sources and if they are supported by the inquiry” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 35). As stated in the previous section, detailed accounts of the research process were kept by the researcher and should facilitate this process.

Ethical Issues

In order to carry out this research at Memorial University, the researcher had to obtain approval from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR), an ethics review board.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) promote several guidelines to support ethical approaches to qualitative research which are consistent with the requirements outlined by the ICEHR. The following procedures were used to protect participants in this study:

1. Participants were contacted via email and volunteered to participate. All efforts were taken to treat participants with respect and “seek their cooperation in the research” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50).
2. A letter of informed consent was distributed via email and participants could withdraw from the study at any point in time. The letter also detailed both the nature of the study as well as the harms and benefits associated with participation.
3. The researcher was forthcoming about the time commitment and promised to protect the identities of participants by using pseudonyms in the report.
4. Data was kept in a secure location. All information collected was treated as confidential.
5. All data analysis was performed by the researcher to ensure confidentiality.

The study proposal was submitted to the ICEHR of Memorial University and approval was granted.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the eleven open-ended questions used in the questionnaire (see appendix A) and discusses the various themes that emerged from the data. The themes are discussed with reference to responses given by participants. Specific categories surfaced across responses and are summarized at the end of this chapter.

Emergent Themes

This qualitative study examined the various challenges experienced by international students while doing their graduate studies at MUN. Data were collected from international graduate students, who study different programs in different departments. The questionnaire was distributed via email and each item was analyzed separately to identify underlying themes. Predominant categories emerged from the themes as the researcher analyzed each response to each question individually. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) contend that after reading through the qualitative data “words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events repeat and stand out” and the researcher must search “for regularities and patterns as well as for topics” (p. 173).

According to Merriam (2009) the construction of themes or categories or findings is “largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants of the study” (p. 183). In qualitative data analysis, the goal is to find meaning by identifying patterns in the data. Patton (2015) emphasizes that it is the researcher's duty to detect these patterns and comprehend their significance, which requires a thorough examination of the data, including multiple readings, to find both clear and subtle themes.

Creswell (2014) emphasized that analyzing qualitative data involves several key steps. First, the researcher must work with the data, which might involve transcribing interviews or field notes, or other forms of qualitative data. Next, the data needs to be organized and broken down into manageable units, such as individual quotes or themes. The researcher then needs to synthesize the data, searching for patterns and themes that emerge. Finally, the researcher must decide what is important and what can be learned from the data, and determine how to communicate these findings to others.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the process of identifying patterns in qualitative data, which is a key part of qualitative analysis. They explain that through coding, the researcher identifies categories or themes that emerge from the data. These categories represent patterns, themes, or explanations that can be found in the

data. By identifying these patterns, the researcher can draw conclusions and develop theories about the phenomena being studied.

They argue that during this analysis process, certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, and other elements will repeat themselves, making them stand out to the researcher. To make sense of this data, the researcher must search for regularities and patterns that emerge from the data, as well as identify the topics that are being discussed. This process involves careful reading and re-reading of the data, looking for both overt and subtle themes that may be present.

By identifying these patterns and regularities, the researcher can begin to draw conclusions about the data and formulate hypotheses or theories about the phenomena being studied. This process is an essential part of qualitative research, and it requires both attention to detail and a willingness to be flexible and open to unexpected findings. Using participant responses, the researcher explains the emergent themes for each question below. This chapter concludes with a summary of the predominant categories evident in the data.

Financial Challenges

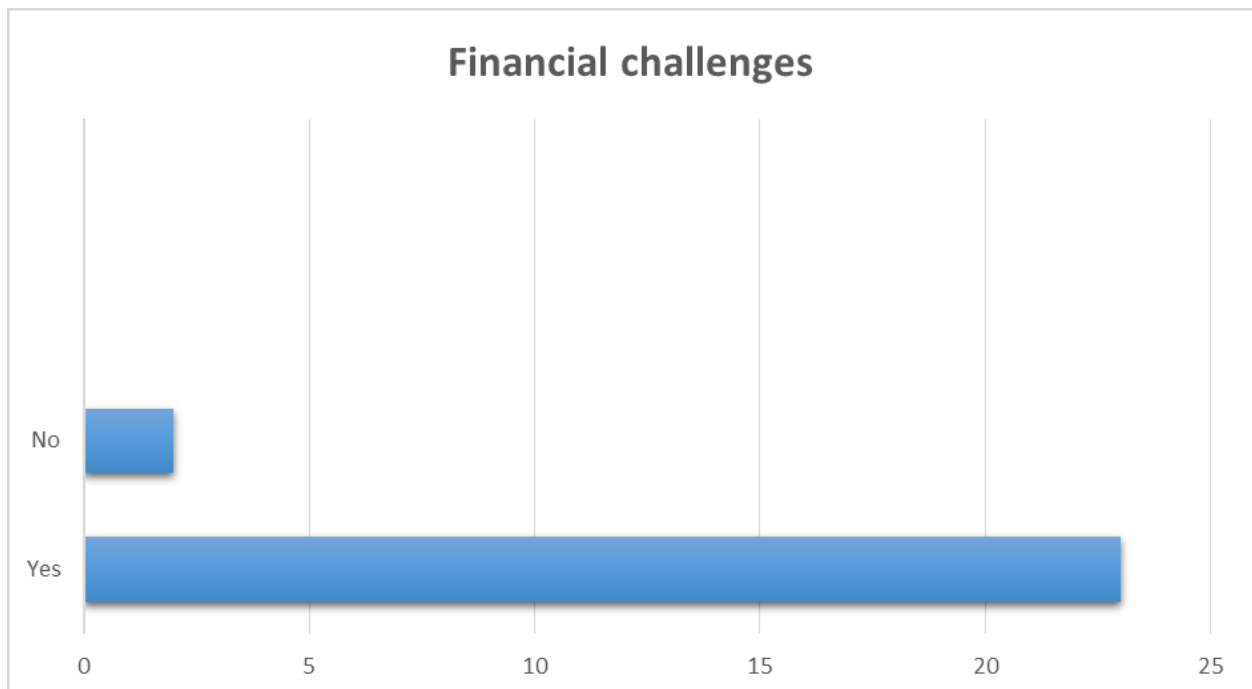
The first item on the questionnaire asked: Are you currently experiencing financial challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University?

(Please check one of these)

Yes

No

The bar graph represents the number of the participants who answered yes as well as No to this question.



According to the survey responses, there are typically several financial challenges that international students face during their studies. Next sub question in the questionnaire was: If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various financial challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

Many reported that the cost of living in St. John's was higher than what many of the international students had anticipated. Respondent A stated that,

"When I first arrived as an international student, I was shocked at how high the living costs were. Rent, groceries, transportation - everything was much more expensive than what I was used to back home. It was tough to manage my limited budget while also keeping up with my studies. I had to learn how to cook cheap meals and find ways to save money on transportation, but even then, unexpected expenses would pop up, like a medical bill or a car repair. It was a constant struggle to balance my financial needs with my academic responsibilities."

However, The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2019) reports that, "the average living expenses for an international student in Canada are estimated to be between CAD 15,000 and CAD 19,000 per year."(p.16) It also specifies that these expenses include accommodation, food, transportation, and other personal expenses. However, the actual cost of living can vary depending on factors such as location, type of accommodation, and individual spending habits. For

example, living in larger cities like Toronto or Vancouver can be more expensive than living in smaller cities or towns.

Respondent B mentioned that,

"I chose to live in a cheaper area to save on rent, but that came with its own set of challenges... The neighborhood wasn't as safe, and I had to commute much further to campus, which was both time-consuming and expensive"

Respondent C added,

"I had to sacrifice some of my social life because I couldn't afford to go out with friends as often as I wanted. Even simple things like buying textbooks or attending conferences could put a significant dent in my budget. It was frustrating to constantly worry about money while trying to focus on my studies."

These responses show how international students faced significant challenges in managing their finances while studying abroad. Despite their best efforts to budget and save money, the students still found it challenging to meet their living expenses and keep up with the demands of their studies.

Respondent D mentioned,

"As an international student, I knew that pursuing graduate studies would be expensive, but I didn't fully comprehend the extent of the financial challenges I would face. The tuition fees alone were higher than what I was used to in my home country, and even with a scholarship, it was difficult to make ends meet. Finding a part-time job

was also challenging because of the language and cultural barriers I faced. I felt like I was always juggling my academic responsibilities with my financial struggles, and it was emotionally and mentally draining. On top of that, unexpected expenses would come up, like needing to replace my laptop or dealing with a medical issue. It felt like every little setback was a major blow to my finances, and it was hard to stay motivated and focused on my studies. Despite the challenges, I remained determined to complete my degree, but it was definitely a difficult journey financially."

Here's how respondent E shared the experiences,

"I knew grad school would be pricey as an international student, but I had no idea how tough it would really be. The tuition fees were insane, way more than what I was used to back home, and even with a scholarship, it was a constant struggle to make ends meet. It just feels unfair, and honestly, it's really frustrating."

Another respondent added,

"I often felt isolated and alone in my financial struggles, which made it difficult to focus on my studies." This statement highlights the impact that financial challenges can have on international students, both in terms of their ability to manage their living expenses and their academic success. Without adequate financial support and resources, students may feel overwhelmed and discouraged, which can lead to negative outcomes both in and out of the classroom.

The responses of participants in the study indicate the diverse financial challenges that international students encounter while studying at MUN. The analysis of these responses revealed three prominent themes:

- cost of living

- rent
- tuition fees

Cost of Living

The majority of the participants reported that the living expenses in Canada are higher than what they are used to in their home country, which puts additional financial pressure on them. One of the respondents mentioned that, "I knew that living in a different country would be a challenge, but I didn't expect it to be this expensive. It's frustrating to see my friends from home living comfortably while I struggle to make ends meet."

Another survey participant added, "I have to be very careful with my spending because everything is so expensive here. Even the basic groceries cost a lot, and I can't afford to eat out or go to social events as much as I would like to." Respondent F stated, "I have had to adjust my diet because some of the foods I used to eat are just too expensive here. I have had to find cheaper alternatives, even if they are not as healthy or tasty." The increasing price of groceries in St. John's may have a significant impact on international students at MUN. Since food is a basic necessity, higher grocery prices can put financial pressure on students, affecting their ability to afford healthy and nutritious meals. Respondent G supported the above statement by mentioning that, "I have to be very careful with my grocery shopping and look for deals to save money."

Similarly, Respondent H and I stated, "Grocery shopping is a nightmare here. I have to carefully budget and plan every purchase to make sure I can afford everything I need for the week.", "I miss being able to buy fresh produce at affordable prices. It's frustrating to have to choose between buying healthy food and having enough money for other expenses. I feel like my options are limited because of the high cost of groceries."

Another respondent mentioned, "My money always flies whenever I pay rent and petrol. So sometimes I do not eat and only eat one meal a day and focus on meditating to avoid being hungry. I lost so much weight though."

Skipping meals or only eating one meal a day can have negative impacts on physical and mental health, leading to issues like malnourishment, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating on studies.

Rent

According to the survey responses, paying rent is a significant financial challenge for international students studying at MUN. The cost of housing is often much higher than what many international students are used to in their home countries. This can result in a strain on their finances, forcing them to find lower-cost housing options that may not be as convenient or safe. Additionally, many landlords require a large deposit upfront, which can be difficult for international students to afford. The high cost of rent can also make it difficult for international

students to enjoy their time in Canada, as they may be constantly worried about making ends meet. In the words of Respondents B and E,

"I had to pay a big deposit when I moved into my apartment, and it took up a lot of my savings. It's hard to feel secure financially when so much of my money goes toward rent."

"Finding affordable housing closer to the campus was really tough for me. Apartments closer to MUN were freaking expensive. But I had no other option as I had classes and lab work daily on campus and I had to go for it. However, right now, my rent takes up more than half of my monthly budget"

Many survey participants have reported the struggle to make rent payments on time, and some have even had to resort to working long hours or taking out loans to cover the costs. Respondents J and K reported, "I've had to work long hours at my part-time job just to make ends meet, and even then, it's a struggle. I've even had to take out a loan a few times to make ends meet. It's a constant worry and source of stress for me."

"..... to be honest, paying rent is a huge challenge for me as an international student. There have been times where I've had to work double shifts at my part-time job just to make sure I can make the payment on time. It's stressful and takes away from the time I could be spending studying or taking care of myself. And if I can't make the payment on time, I have to face the possibility of eviction and finding a new place to live. It's definitely not easy."

Respondent L supports the above statement as, "I have limited resources, and paying rent is always a struggle. I have to work multiple part-time jobs just to make ends meet, and it's taking a toll on my mental health and academic performance."

Similarly, Respondent K stated, "The high cost of rent has forced me to cut back on other expenses like food and transportation. I feel like I'm constantly living paycheck to paycheck, and I worry about what would happen if an unexpected expense came up."

Accordingly, paying rent remains a major financial challenge for international students at MUN. The high cost of rent, coupled with other living expenses, results in creating a significant financial pressure on students and impacting their academic success.

Tuition fees

Paying tuition fees is another predominant theme that was revealed through the survey. Three survey participants' responses below highlighted how paying tuition fees has been a big challenge for them while studying at MUN. "I wish there was more equity when it comes to tuition fees for domestic and international students. The current system is unjust and makes it difficult for international students to pursue their academic goals."

Another respondent supported this point by, "I feel like I'm being punished for being an international student. The division of tuition fees is so unfair. We pay so much more than domestic students for the exact same education. It's like we're being treated as cash machines. We already have to deal with the challenges of being in a new country, adjusting to a new culture, and being away from our families. The financial burden is just adding insult to injury. It's not fair that we're being penalized just because we come from a different country. Education should be accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their nationality."

Respondent D reported his/her opinions as "...I've already faced so many additional expenses like visas, flights, and living expenses. It's frustrating to see that my tuition fees are also significantly higher than my domestic classmates. I understand that universities need to make money to operate, but it shouldn't come at the expense of students' financial stability and access to education. It almost feels like I'm being treated as a source of income for the university, rather than a student seeking knowledge and personal growth."

However, this fact was discussed in literature review as well. According to a report by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), international students in Canada pay an average of \$22,000 CAD per year for tuition and living expenses, which is significantly higher than the fees paid by domestic students. Moreover, the report found that 58% of international students rely on personal or

family funding to cover their tuition and living expenses, while only 8% receive scholarships or bursaries (CBIE, 2021).

Two other respondents reported that provision of financial aid has not been of any support to them, "It's frustrating to see that international students are often not eligible for the same scholarships and financial aid as domestic students. This makes tuition fees even more unequal and makes it hard for us to pay for school."

Respondent G stated,

"I have been applying to many TA positions, all the job postings I see on campus, scholarships, government funding programs...fed up of all now. But to see my domestic peers receive more financial support simply because they are citizens of this country. It feels like our hard work and dedication to our studies are not valued equally. I believe that everyone should have equal access to financial aid and scholarships based on their academic achievements, regardless of their citizenship status. It seems like they have their fun life, no stress at all, but poor me, have to spend sleepless nights doing my assignments after working for hours and hours at the mall. "

Overcoming various financial challenges.

The final sub question of section 1 of the questionnaire was: How did you overcome your various financial challenges?

Majority of the respondents stated that they had to do two or three jobs to earn more money while others respondents stated that they borrowed money from friends and family back home to cover the expenses.

Respondent A mentioned,

“I never realized how expensive it would be to attend university until I started my first semester. I had to take on multiple part-time jobs just to make ends meet. It's exhausting trying to balance work and school, but I have no choice if I want to stay in school. I'm also grateful for the support of my family and friends who have helped me out with loans and small gifts of money along the way.”

Respondent B and C supported this statement by,

“...it's challenging to balance the expenses of living abroad and studying at university. I have to work long hours at multiple part-time jobs to make enough money to cover my tuition fees, rent, and other expenses. On top of that, I also have to borrow money from my parents and friends to pay for unexpected expenses or emergencies. It's a constant struggle to make ends meet, and it can be stressful.”

“I knew it was not easy. Some of my Nigerian friends at MUN told me all that before I moved in. But I thought I could manage. Between tuition, books, rent, and other bills, it all adds up so quickly. I had a very hard time before I found a job. Job hunting was also another battle. I couldn't find any job till the end of the first semester. Luckily, now I work for 2 companies. I find myself working more and more part-time jobs just to make ends meet. But, it's exhausting and takes away from my study time, but I have no choice if I want to keep going. I'm also grateful for my parents and friends who have loaned me money to cover unexpected costs. It's a tough reality, but I'm determined to make it work.”

Another respondent mentioned their feelings about borrowing money from others to cover up the expenses, but it had been the only option to overcome the financial challenges. In her/his words,

“It's frustrating to see some of my classmates who don't have to worry about finances because their parents are able to fully support them. Meanwhile, I'm stressing about how to pay for rent, food, and textbooks. I've had to borrow money from my parents and friends just to cover basic expenses, and I feel guilty about it because I know they have their own financial obligations. It's hard to focus on studying when you're constantly worried about money.”

While working and borrowing have been some sort of support to overcome their financial challenges, it has been a necessary stress for some students to afford their education. Hence, it's important to recognize the impact that financial insecurity can have on a student's well-being and academic success. One of the respondents stated that,

"Borrowing money from my parents and friends to cover my expenses while I'm at university is a last resort, but it still adds a lot of stress to my life. I hate feeling like a burden on the people I love, and I worry constantly about being able to pay them back. It's hard to focus on my studies when I'm constantly worried about my financial situation.”

When students are struggling to make ends meet, they may have to prioritize working over studying, which can lead to missed assignments, lower grades, and decreased engagement in their coursework. Additionally, financial stress can take a

toll on a student's mental health, making it even harder for them to stay focused and productive.

In the respondent K's words,

"I actually find myself struggling to balance my studies with the need to work multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet. I'm constantly worried about making enough money to cover my expenses, and it's hard to focus on my studies when I'm always tired and stressed from working. Borrowing money from my parents and friends is helpful, but it also comes with its own set of stresses and anxieties. It's not an ideal situation, but it's the only option I have right now to overcome the financial challenges of being a student."

These two respondents shared their experiences as,

"I never wanted to burden my parents or friends with my financial problems, but sometimes it's the only option. Borrowing money from them just adds to the stress of having to pay it back, on top of working and studying. It's a cycle that seems never-ending, and I feel like I'm barely keeping my head above water."

"It's even harder to find part-time jobs that work around my class schedule. I feel like I have to work twice as hard just to make ends meet, and it's taking away from my ability to fully focus on my studies. It's frustrating that financial challenges are hindering my academic success."

Cultural Challenges

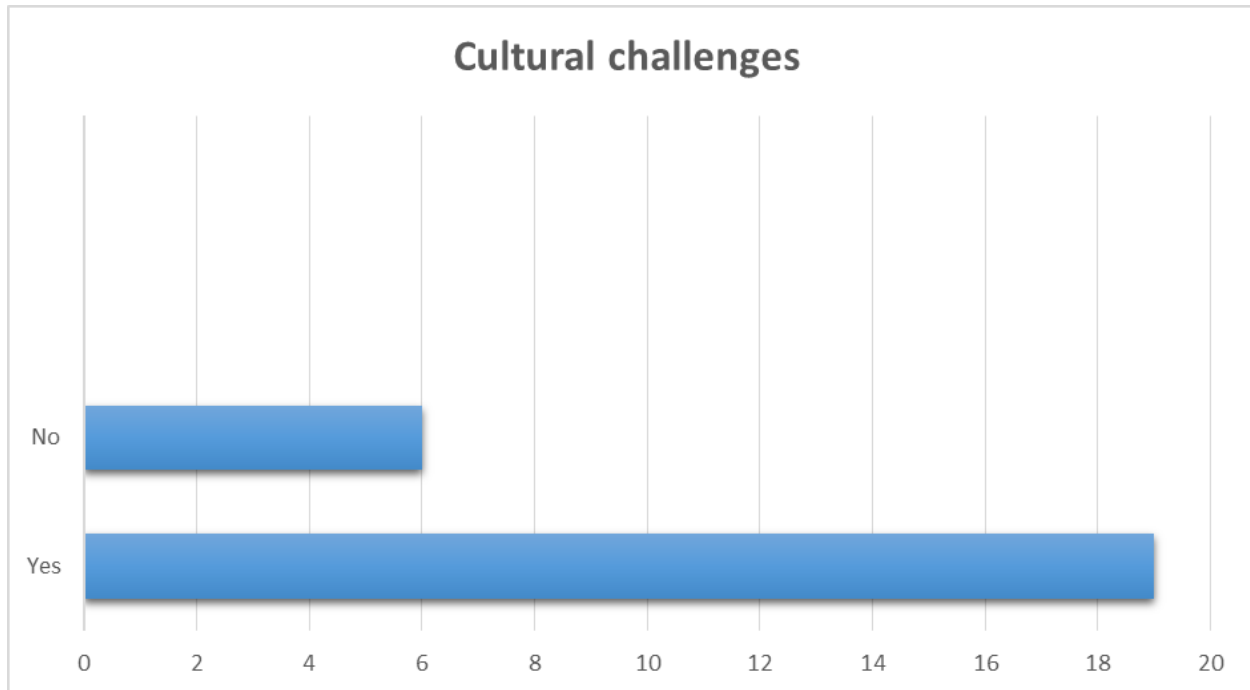
The second question of the questionnaire was: Are you currently experiencing cultural challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University?

(Please check one of these)

Yes

No

The bar graph below shows the number of the participants who answered yes as well as No to this question. Majority answered “No” to this question.



According to the survey responses, a few participants reported that they have been experiencing cultural challenges during their studies. Next sub question in the questionnaire was: If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various cultural challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

According to the participant's responses, Cultural adjustment problems have manifested themselves in various ways such as confusion, anxiety, isolation,

loneliness, homesickness, and frustration. This fact was discussed in Chapter 2; literature review. "International students may find it difficult to adjust to a new cultural environment, and may experience feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and social isolation" (Mori, 2000). Respondents A, B, C and D respectively expressed about how they experienced culture shock as,

- "Being away from family and friends in a foreign land is tough, especially when you don't know anyone in your new environment. I often feel homesick and isolated, and it affects my mental health"
- "Living in a different country can be exciting, but it can also be very lonely. There are times when I miss my home and my family so much that it hurts"
- "It's hard to adapt to a new culture, new people, and new environment. Sometimes I feel like I don't belong here and it makes me feel very isolated and alone"
- "I thought I was prepared to study abroad, but reality hit me hard. I feel like a fish out of water, and I miss my home, my friends, and my food. It's a constant battle to keep my spirits up and not feel isolated all the time."

According to these responses, the majority expressed feelings of homesickness and sadness during cultural holidays back home and no chance to

celebrate it as it's a working day in Canada. They reported about missing their families, friends, and traditional celebrations, which can be challenging and lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. Therefore, the two main themes emerged were;

- Homesickness
- Cultural shock

Homesickness

Several respondents reported about how they have been feeling isolated and lonely when they first arrived here as they miss the familiar faces and places they left behind and struggle to make new connections. As one respondent explained, "It's hard to make friends when you don't know anyone. You feel like you're all alone in a foreign country." Similarly, Respondent G stated, "I didn't realize how much I took for granted until I left my home country. Now, I miss everything about it - the people, the culture, the scenery. I don't get that feeling of home here as the people are new to me, the environment is wet and gloomy unlike back home."

Respondent H mentioned, "I miss speaking my native language with people who understand me. Sometimes, I feel like I'm losing a part of myself by speaking English all the time. lol "

Homesickness can also have a negative impact on students' mental health. Students may experience anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation and loneliness. These issues can further affect their academic performance and overall well-being. One respondent shared, "I feel so alone and anxious all the time. It's hard to focus on my studies when I'm feeling like this"

Respondent J stated, "I feel like I'm in a constant state of anxiety. Everything feels overwhelming and I can't stop worrying about what's happening back home. It's like I'm stuck in this in-between space and I can't relax"

Respondents K supported J's ideas above by writing, "I feel like I'm on an emotional rollercoaster. One moment, I'm okay, and the next, I'm missing my family and friends so much that I can't stop crying. It's affecting my ability to focus and study"

Respondent N explained how the feelings of isolation, loneliness, and anxiety make it difficult for students to cope and succeed academically. In her/his own words, "I feel like I'm on edge. Small things that wouldn't usually bother me back home now feel like a huge deal, and I'm always worrying about everything. It's affecting my sleep, my appetite, and my ability to focus on my studies"

These facts demonstrate how feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection from home can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges.

Cultural Shock

The researcher identified that Cultural differences as a significant challenge for international students through the responses of the participants. They have reported about the difficulty in adjusting to the local customs and traditions, which lead to feelings of isolation and homesickness.

Students may experience culture shock when they arrive in a new country. They may find it difficult to understand the local customs and traditions, which can make them feel like they don't fit in. One of the survey participants mentioned, "The culture here is so different from what I'm used to. It's hard to adjust to the way things are done."

Respondent C responded,

“At first, I tried to embrace the differences and learn as much as I could about this new culture. But soon enough, I started to feel overwhelmed and anxious. I missed my family and friends, and I longed for the familiar sights and sounds of home. I began to feel like an outsider, like I didn't belong....it was a struggle to adjust to the new cultural norms, and there were times when I made mistakes or unintentionally offended someone. I felt embarrassed and frustrated, and I began to doubt my ability to navigate this new world.”

Respondent D stated, "I felt like I had to change who I was to fit in with Canadian society. I had to learn a new language accent, adapt to new customs and social norms, and try to make friends with people who were very different from me. It was a lot of pressure, and I felt like I was always uncomfortable."

Respondent E mentioned, “The scent free zones are confusing a bit culturally because in my home country we used to put perfumes on but here we can’t. Sometimes I feel like I'm living two lives: one here and one back home.”

Cultural events play a significant role in helping international students feel connected to their home culture and to other students from similar cultural backgrounds. Not being able to celebrate these events can lead to feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and disconnection from one's own culture and community. Respondent F elaborated as, “..going year after year without really celebrating any holidays can be quite unsettling here. During the festivities of my home country like Diwali or Holi. Since it is a normal workday for the rest of the country, I had to go to work too, hardly noticing the joy and the cheer of the festival in the air.”

Another respondent supported this opinion, “I miss celebrating holidays and special occasions with my family. It's hard to be away from them during important moments in our lives.”

Overcoming various cultural challenges

The final sub question of section two of the questionnaire was: How did you overcome your cultural challenges? Most of the participants have joined Facebook groups of their community, joined cultural clubs and participated in cultural events and groups at MUN.

Respondent C stated that, "I joined a cultural club on campus and started attending their events. It was a great way to meet other international students and learn more about different cultures. It really helped me feel more connected and less homesick"

While Respondent D stated, "I read out the internationalization office listserv, which comes to my email and participated in activities and events of the Multicultural Women's Organization."

Respondent E mentioned "I tried to overcome this by joining the sharing joy club, coffee club at the internationalization office at MUN in the evenings after my classes. I felt I had some party to share after being there."

Respondent F's response was "By adapting to everything which was brand new to me. So essentially, I was doing this blindly, on my own. Knowing in my heart that I'm not a Canadian. I will never be. But, I'm also not the same Indian who once was when I first set foot in this land of dreams."

Another respondent stated "I found a Facebook page of Sri Lankans and I had the chance to communicate with others from the same country. I joined many cultural events organized by them and I was feeling like I have a family here"

These quotes stated above highlight the importance of reaching out to others and seeking support when facing cultural challenges. Joining clubs, taking language

classes, trying new things, and asking for help are all strategies that can help international students feel more connected and comfortable in their new environment.

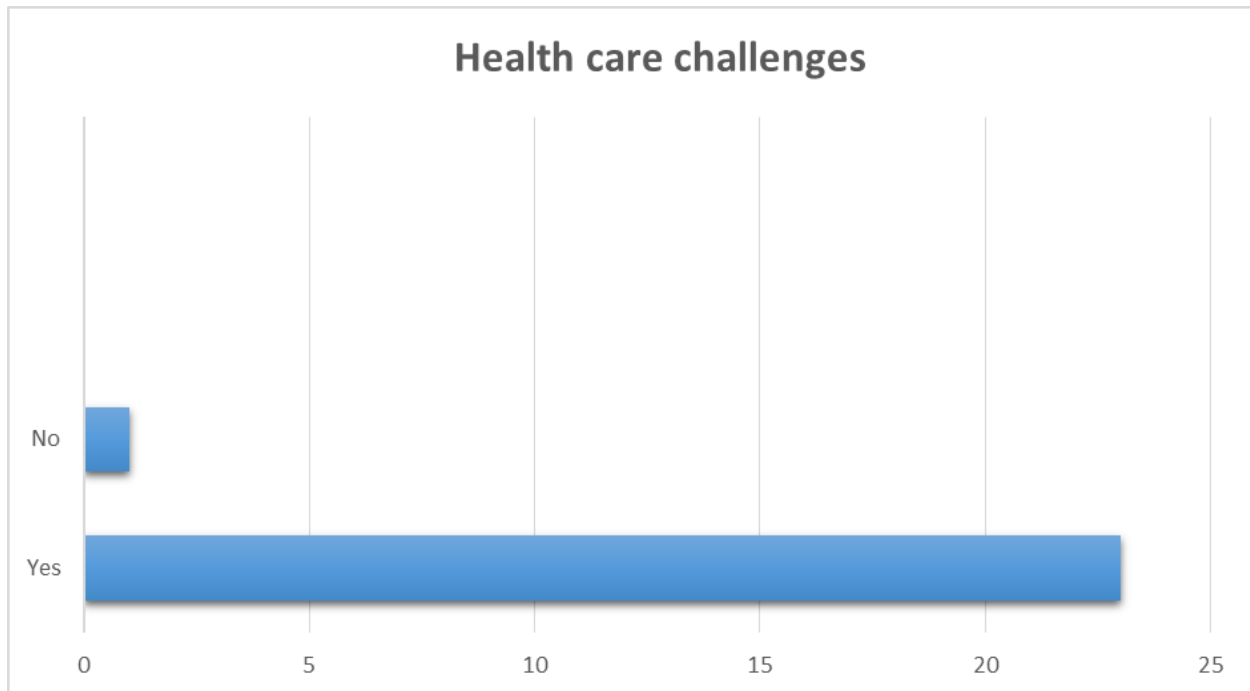
Health care challenges

The third question of the questionnaire was: Are you currently experiencing Health care challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University?
(Please check one of these)

Yes

No

The bar graph below depicts the number of the participants who answered yes as well as No to this question. The majority answered “Yes” to this question. More than half of the survey participants have reported that they have faced health care challenges while studying at MUN.



According to the survey responses, one of the biggest challenges for international students has been navigating the Canadian healthcare system. Many students are not familiar with the system or how to find a doctor or clinic that is accepting new patients. They are unaware of the specific healthcare services that are available to them. These facts were revealed by the data of some participants as they mentioned,

Respondent A,

"I had to wait for weeks to get an appointment with a doctor, and when I finally got the call for the appointment, LOL,,I was recovered and got some herbal medicine from back home."

Respondent C,

“Whenever I feel sick, I feel like going back home and seeing a doctor as the medical system there is better than here, my home country is a third world country though..”

Respondent M,

“I hate waiting for long hours in an emergency, but there’s no other option as I have no family physician. Once, I had to wait for about 7 hours to see a doctor”

Another challenge for international students highlighted by most of the survey participants were, limited access to certain types of medical care. Medical Care Plan (MCP) may not cover certain services for international students, or may require them to pay out of pocket for certain procedures. This has been a significant financial burden for students who are already struggling to cover tuition and living expenses.

Respondent D,

"I needed to get a dental procedure done, but I found out that my student health plan didn't cover it. I had to pay out of pocket, which was really expensive and put a strain on my finances."

Survey participants of E, G and N had the same challenge,

“Need to get my teeth filled but it’s too expensive, I’m not fully covered by the insurance”

"I went to see a specialist for a health concern, but my insurance wouldn't cover the visit because it wasn't deemed 'medically necessary.' I had to pay for the visit out of my own pocket, even though I really needed the care."

"I needed to see a specialist for a health issue, but my health plan only covered a certain number of visits per year. I ended up having to pay for additional visits out of my own pocket, which was frustrating and expensive."

There were two themes emerged through the data as:

- Limited Access no medical care
- Health Insurance Coverage

Limited Access to Medical Care

Many participants responded that they have limited access to the medical care system. This theme includes how unsatisfied they are spending long hours at the Emergency Room and medical system in here and long waitlist to get a family doctor, as is evident from the following responses:

- "I went to the emergency room with severe stomach pain and I had to wait for over 7 hours to see a doctor. It was a really stressful and painful experience."
- "I had a high temperature and went to the emergency room, but I ended up waiting for 6 hours before seeing a doctor. By the time I got treatment, my symptoms had gotten much worse."
- "I was feeling really sick with a high fever and cold, so I went to the emergency room. I waited for 5 hours before finally seeing a doctor. It was a really frustrating experience."
- "I had a bad fall and hurt my ankle, so I went to the emergency room. I ended up waiting for hours to get an X-ray and see a doctor. It was a really long and stressful experience."
- "Nurses are stupid and inexperienced. I wanted to get blood work done and they were struggling to find the veins. I had to be there bearing all the pain as they poked one after the other"
- "I understand that the healthcare system is overloaded, but it's really unfair that we have to wait for so long to receive basic medical care."
- "If you need medical help from a doctor, MUN Student wellness is there to get necessary help but it will take a longer time to get an appointment to meet the doctor. Even though Student wellness centers offer Walk-in clinics, those won't operate sometimes."

Especially during winter time they cancel the Walk-in clinics due to lack of staff. Access to healthcare is low and takes time”

- “Medical system is broken here. I was very badly sick one day and I had to walk to Emergency as I didn't have a family doctor and also the buses were not operating as there was a snowstorm that day. I had to wait in an emergency for 8 hours to see a doctor. There was a very big cue there and I was feeling very upset and helpless.”
- “MUN Student wellness center is providing health and mental help support but it takes a longer queue to get an appointment. Walk-in clinics are also not regular and it depends on the availability of the staff and the weather. Had to go to different walk-in clinics because there's no other doctors available if you don't have a family doctor.”
- “My wife got a surgical infection after her C-section. Before she was discharged from the hospital nurses said that they will be sending test reports and everything to our family doctor. But for more than one month we didn't get any information from our family doctor and several times I tried to contact the family doctor. But no answer to my phone calls and emails.”

Health Insurance Coverage

Despite paying for coverage, they may find that certain services or treatments are not fully covered or not covered at all. This can lead to financial stress and may even prevent students from getting the care they need to stay healthy. These quotes illustrate some of the problems that international students at MUN encountered when using their health insurance plans. One of the survey respondents stated, “.....the university insurance plans are extremely basic and don’t cover a wide range of ailments. Dental and eye care, for example, are not fully covered. Ironically, this is the type of insurance coverage a 20 something-year-old student may need the most.”

Respondent A supported the above point by,

"I got really sick with a broken tooth during exams and had to go to the MUN dental clinic. It turned out that my health insurance plan had a maximum coverage limit and I ended up having to pay hundreds of dollars in medical bills."

Another survey participant mentioned,

“I’m a transgender student and I had a really hard time finding a healthcare provider who was knowledgeable and supportive of my needs. I had to travel to a different city to find a specialist who could help me."

Respondent B shared,

"I have a pre-existing condition and my health plan doesn't cover any of the costs associated with it. I feel like I'm not getting the full benefits of my health insurance even though I pay a lot of money for it."

Another respondent stated,

"I had to initially pay for Guard me insurance, it was big money. However, I paid around \$350 as I could remember for a period of three to four months (a semester) and didn't use the insurance a single time. However, I switched to GSC later on, as it's cheaper. But for some of the treatments, I had to pay out of my pocket. It didn't cover alternative health care (homeopaths, etc.) that I had to undergo. "

Respondent F reported,

"I have a pre-existing condition and I found out that it's not covered under my health insurance plan. I'm worried about how I'll afford the medication and treatment I need to manage my health."

Here's what Respondent (D)'s opinion on Health care benefits,

"I was surprised to find out that my health insurance plan didn't cover mental health services. I struggled with anxiety and depression during my first year of studies and I couldn't afford to pay for therapy out of pocket."

Overcoming various Health Care challenges

The researcher asked in the questionnaire about how they overcame their health care challenges. The majority of them replied that they have not yet overcome their health care challenges, while a few others shared what they did to overcome them.

Respondent D said “I went to free counseling sessions of MUN wellness center”

Another respondent shared, “I realized that this cold weather makes me sick often, I didn’t get exposed to outside much. I used tunnels and skywalks to go to my department. I minimized all my outside work, did grocery shopping online and so on...., but I knew it was not a solution.”

Respondent G stated, "I was struggling with my mental health and didn't know where to turn. I reached out to the MUN Student Wellness center, and they were really helpful in guiding me towards resources and support systems that could help me manage my symptoms."

Another response was “understanding how the system works. Booking the appointment 1-2 months in advance. Being prepared.”

The researcher found out that international students faced many Health challenges with regards to accessing the healthcare system, finding a family

physician and issues with Health Insurance coverage. Whether it's by reaching out to MUN Student Wellness center, utilizing their student health plan, or seeking out counseling services, some international students were able to find solutions to their health problems and continue on with their studies, while majority of the responses highlighted that still they have not overcome their health challenges.

Accommodation Challenges

The first question under accommodation challenges was: Are you currently experiencing Accommodation challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

- Yes
- No

According to the participant's responses, accommodation is a major challenge for 22 out of the 25 survey participants. The majority of participants mentioned how housing and rent is a burden and discussed how it links with financial challenges as well. Data collected through the following question demonstrated three predominant themes.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various accommodation challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

The three predominant themes emerged were;

- Unaffordable Housing Cost
- Unavailability of housing closer to MUN
- Issues with On campus accommodation

Unaffordable Housing Cost

Many international students rely on part-time work or financial assistance from their families to cover their living expenses while studying in Canada. However, the high cost of rent can make it difficult for them to afford suitable housing that is close to their university or college. This can lead to long commute times, which can be particularly challenging for international students who may not be familiar with the local transportation system. This fact was proved by the respondents B, I and K,

- “I had a really hard time finding an apartment that I could afford. I was looking for months and all the places that were close to campus were really expensive. Eventually, I found a place further away, but it's a long commute and it's not ideal. It's been

really stressful and has definitely affected my ability to focus on my studies"

- “Sometimes I get support from my parents to cover the living cost whenever I go beyond my hard earned money through the delivery job. Often, Rent is on the top of everything. This is the only apartment I could find, which is within walking distance to the campus. Rent is very high as if it's made of gold or something lol.. But I had no other option initially as I could not stay longer in the Air bnb and had to move out quickly.
- “...I don't know if anyone believes me, once I had to make more than 30 phone calls to find a house for me and my family here. I felt like I had to do house hunting and lots of other stuff than studying here... Most of the landlords didn't want to rent us as we had kids. I could find none below \$1000”

Here are some other quotes from the survey participants about the high cost of housing.

- "Finding affordable housing near MUN is a nightmare. I'm paying almost half of my monthly budget just for rent, and it's not even a great place to live"

- "I thought living with roommates would be a more affordable option, but even sharing a place near MUN is expensive. I feel like I'm constantly worried about money instead of focusing on my studies"
- "I had to settle for a tiny, overpriced apartment because all the affordable places were taken."

Unavailability of housing closer to MUN

The majority of the participants have reported about how challenging it is to find an apartment closer to MUN. Moreover the participants shared their views and ideas about how the transportation system becomes a barrier when they have to live off campus. Respondents M and N shared their opinions as, "Due to travel limitations here we had to go to the closest accommodation option. But the problem is it's really expensive, even the university student apartments" and "The housing crisis near MUN is a real problem. I know several students who are living in cramped conditions or have to commute long distances to get to campus. It's really impacting our ability to focus on our studies"

Another participant stated "I could find a bunch of affordable houses which were away from the university. But then again, I had no car to drive to the university. I had to rely on the bus that comes every 1.5 hours. I was wondering, "Am I in Canada for sure...."

Respondent E mentioned, "I come from a culture where it's common to live with your family, but in Canada, everyone lives independently. It was a big adjustment for me to find my own place and to figure out how to live on my own. It was also hard to find an apartment that was close to campus and within my budget. I live away from the campus and I feel isolated sometimes..."

"I thought I would be homeless, So, I had to settle for a place that's far away from MUN because there was nothing available within my budget. Now I have to spend hours on the bus every day just to get to class. It's not ideal"

Two other responses stated, "It's really unfair that we have to pay so much for housing that's so far from the campus. I feel like I'm being taken advantage of because I'm an international student. I just want to be able to focus on my studies, but this is making it really hard" , "I've been searching for affordable housing near MUN for months, but everything is either too expensive or too far away. It's really stressful" These quotes illustrate the challenges that international students face when searching for housing near MUN. Many students struggle to find affordable options within a reasonable distance from the campus, which sometimes causes stress and affects their ability to focus on their studies.

Issues with on campus accommodation

These quotes illustrate the challenges that International students experienced when on-campus housing is unavailable at MUN.

Respondent B,

"I applied for on-campus housing months in advance, but I was still put on a waitlist. The university really needs to invest in more housing options for students, especially those who are coming from out of Canada"

Respondent H,

"I paid \$40.00 as the non-refundable deposit and filled out a housing application. This is my final semester at MUN. Still I didn't get a space at Burton's Pond"

Respondent F stated,

"I live in a crowded, noisy apartment off-campus because I couldn't get a spot in residence."

These two quotes demonstrate the frustration that some students felt when faced with the unavailability of on-campus housing at MUN, "I don't understand why the university can't provide enough on-campus housing for all students who need it. It's not fair that some students have to deal with the added stress of finding off-campus housing while others get to live on campus"

"The fact that on-campus housing is so limited is ridiculous. MUN is supposed to be a top university in Canada, but they can't even provide adequate housing for their students?"

Respondent J suggested that, "I wish that the MUN housing department would prioritize on-campus housing for international students. It's really hard to navigate a new city and culture when someone is brand new that setting"

Respondent N mentioned some of the problems she/he encountered while living on campus, "The Burton's Pond apartments are not very comfortable. My children and I do not enjoy living on the third floor"

Respondents L and P supported by mentioning, "The laundry facilities are hopeless for families at Burton's Pond. I'm a family of five and I get a very big load of dirty clothes. Laundry machines are very small and some are broken. The hardest thing is walking with a big load of clothes to the laundry room which is away from my building."

Respondent O shared his/her experiences with regards to pest control at on campus accommodation.

"I hate the squeaky sound the mice make at midnight. There are mice running in my room. Pest control is not successful"

Overcoming various Accommodation challenges

Most of the Survey participants' voices emphasize the significance of connecting with others, being flexible, and being proactive and seeking support from various sources to overcome accommodation challenges.

Respondent M mentioned how connecting with other students, being flexible with expectations was helpful to overcome accommodation challenges.

"When I first arrived in St. John's, I had a hard time finding affordable housing. But then I started reaching out to other international students and asking for advice. They were able to recommend some great resources and even helped me find a roommate. Now I have a comfortable place to live and I'm not so stressed about housing anymore."

Another respondent shared similar ideas as, "I joined social media groups for international students at MUN and was able to find a roommate who was also looking for affordable accommodation. It was great to have someone to split the costs with."

These responses specifically mention that networking with other students and using social media to search for accommodation options supported them to overcome their accommodation challenges.

Respondent C mentioned,

"I followed up different social media groups and online communities to connect with other international students who were looking for roommates or had already found accommodation. This helped me get some great tips and recommendations"

Respondent F stated,

"I found a Facebook page MUN off campus housing and was able to connect with others who were also looking for accommodation. We shared advice and resources, and some students even offered to let me stay with them for a short time until I found a place of my own. Also when there's an apartment for rent, they post the ad in the group. So we could easily reach out to them."

Respondent H has also overcome the accommodation challenges by the support of social media. "I got a place after researching on apartments posted in Facebook Marketplace"

Respondent L has started the accommodation search early, "I was proactive in my search for accommodation. I used online resources like NL classifieds and Kijiji to find rental options within my budget."

Accordingly, by taking these steps, most of the survey respondents have been able to find safe and affordable accommodation that meets their needs and allows them to focus on their studies.

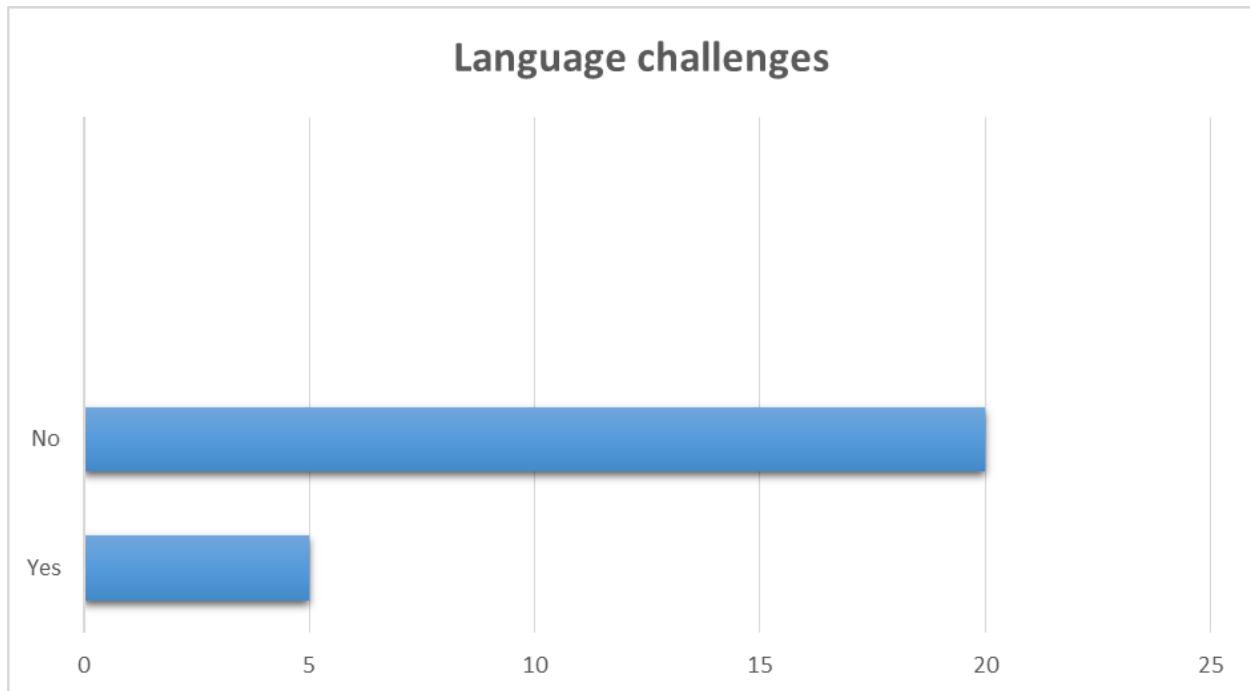
Language Challenges

Language challenges are a common experience for many international students studying in countries where the primary language of instruction is different from their native language. These challenges may range from difficulties in understanding lectures and textbooks, to struggles with communication in daily life, making friends, and even to finding employment opportunities. The seventh question in the questionnaire targets language challenges.

A) Are you currently experiencing language challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

Yes

No



The bar graph above was drawn with the data collected from the survey participants. According to the bar graph, the majority of the respondents checked “No”, while only 5 participants checked “Yes”.

The researcher was able to find out one predominant theme from the survey responses, which is,

- Accent

Accent

Accents are closely related to language and have also become a significant challenge for international students at MUN. International students may have

accents that are different from what is considered the norm in Canada, which can impact their ability to communicate effectively.

As one international student from the survey stated, “I come from a non-English speaking country is the reason, in India, we used to read, Write and listen in English but didn't speak that much, and hence I am not very fluent in English speaking but still I have working fluency which is fine too.”

Respondent L specifically mentioned “It was very difficult initially to catch up the accent.”

Language barriers can impact students' academic performance, social life, and overall well-being. This point is highlighted by respondent M's quote, “I often felt self-conscious about my accent when speaking in class or with my peers. I felt like I was not being taken seriously because of the way I spoke.” While another respondent mentioned, “Jokes they tell might not even be understood, and you barely get the references they make.”

Respondent N supported the above quote by writing, “Communication with locals is annoying. They speak very fast and the dialect is not familiar to me. I don't understand when I speak to local people.”

Overcoming Language challenges.

Most of the participants who have faced language challenges have mentioned that constant communication with peers and joining some English Conversational clubs and groups conducted by the Internationalization office have been supportive to overcome the language challenges. In one of the respondents voice,

“...time I spent at the coffee club was very helpful to understand the style of communication. I tried to catch up with the accent through the Canadians who were there with me. This on the other hand was a nice therapy for stress release. While having a nice coffee and snacks, we shared our own experiences, talked about a common topic, there were no right and wrong answers. The most thankful thing is that nobody laughed when someone made a mistake. I often noticed that I mispronounced most of the words. But I was not humiliated by others, I was given a chance to learn and expose myself. I think that this is the place where I improved my language skills”

Another respondent has overcome his/her language challenges by communicating with the Canadians, “I tried to speak with the locals, as I wanted to be familiar with the dialect and accents.”

One of the most effective ways to improve English proficiency is to practice speaking the language every day. This response is evidence that customer service related jobs are helpful to improve language skills. “I started speaking in English to everyone, and my job at CDS helped me a lot to communicate with native speakers and hence I am improving now.”

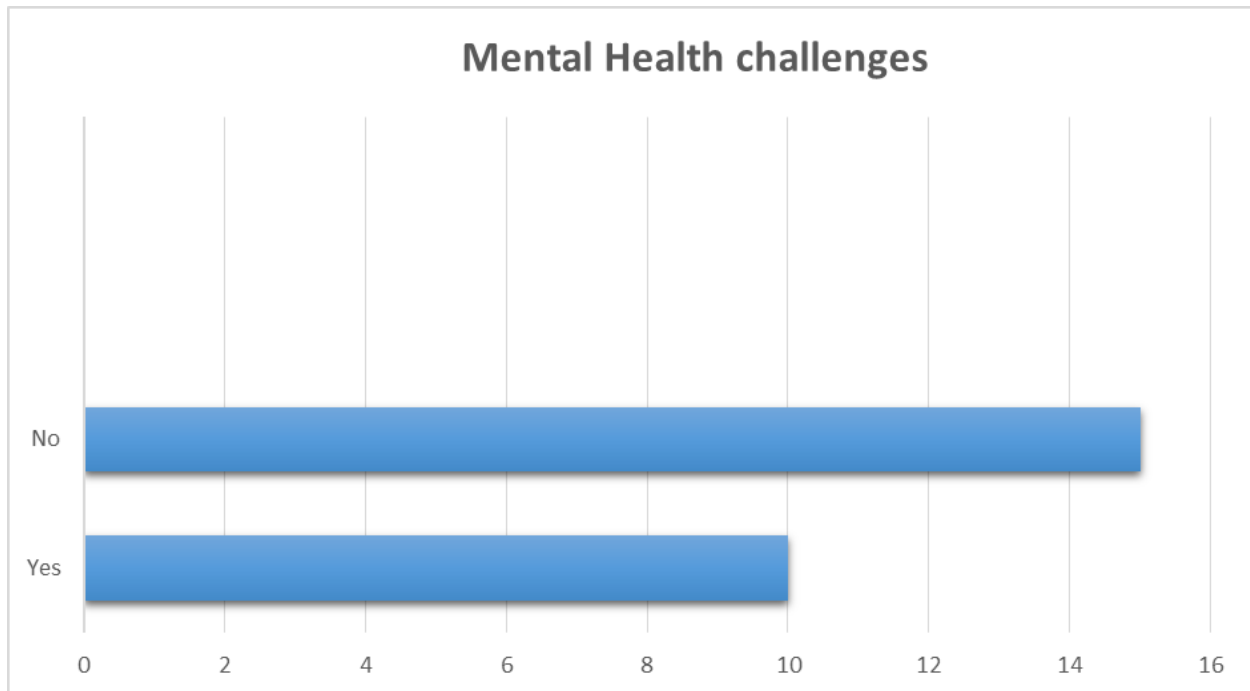
Mental Health Challenges

The experience of studying abroad as an international student can be both exciting and rewarding, offering the opportunity to explore new cultures, make new friends, and gain valuable education and skills. However, the challenges of adapting to a new environment and culture, being far away from family and friends, and the pressures of academic success can also take a toll on an individual's mental health.

The following chart is formed through the data collected from the question, A) Are you currently experiencing mental health challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

- Yes
- No

This bar chart represents the number of participants who have/have not faced mental health challenges while doing their studies at MUN.



According to the chart, 10 respondents have faced Mental Health challenges while studying. The participants elaborated on various mental health challenges they faced and one theme was emerged from the data,

- Academic Pressure

Academic pressure

These quotes highlight some of the mental health challenges that international students face due to academic pressure. The researcher identified that they demonstrate the impact that high workloads, competition, and expectations can have on students' mental health and sense of belonging.

- "The workload is just too much. There are too many assignments and too many exams. I feel like I'm constantly studying and I can't keep up...."
- "I worry about my grades, I worry about being able to keep up with my classmates, and I worry about meeting my family's expectations. It's hard to focus on anything else."
- "...the standards are so high and the competition is fierce."
- "I have trouble sleeping at night because I'm constantly worried about deadlines and exams. It's affecting my mental health and I don't know how to manage it."
- "There's always this pressure to perform and get good grades, not just for myself but for my family back home who are paying a lot of money for me to be here. It's a lot of pressure to handle."
- "I feel like I have to work twice as hard as domestic students just to keep up. It's overwhelming and sometimes I feel like I'm drowning in coursework."

Overcoming of various mental health challenges

Academic pressure linked to mental health challenges can be overwhelming for many students. The researcher observed the certain strategies that the survey participants have utilized to overcome them. According to their responses, one

strategy is to set small, achievable goals for oneself. Breaking down large tasks into manageable steps can make them feel less daunting and help build momentum towards success.

Respondents I, J and K respectively wrote in their own words as,

"I've found that setting small, achievable goals for myself helps me manage academic pressurestaying organized and breaking down big assignments into smaller, manageable tasks helped me feel more in control."

"I had to learn to prioritize my mental health over my grades. It was a tough lesson to learn, but I found that when I took breaks and practiced breaking big tasks into small steps, it helped me to be away from the big pressure I've experienced before."

"I found that setting small, achievable goals for myself helped me feel less overwhelmed. Instead of focusing on everything I needed to do, I would make a to-do list for the day and just focus on getting those things done."

Professors and other academic advisors can be a valuable resource for students who are feeling overwhelmed or struggling with coursework. These individuals have years of experience working with students and can provide guidance on how to manage coursework, study effectively and balance academic and personal responsibilities. They can provide valuable insights, tips and feedback on how to

approach a particular task or assignment. By seeking out their advice, students can gain valuable insights and strategies for managing academic pressure and staying on track with their studies. This fact is highlighted by the following responses,

"I found that talking to my professors and seeking academic support services on campus was really helpful. They were able to provide me with extra resources and accommodations that made a big difference in managing my academic workload."

"I struggled with imposter syndrome and constantly felt like I wasn't good enough. But I started talking to my professors and seeking their feedback, which helped me gain more confidence in my abilities."

"I started reaching out to my supervisor and classmates for help when I was struggling. It was hard to admit that I didn't understand something or needed extra support, but it made a huge difference in my grades and my mental health."

In addition to seeking advice from professors and breaking tasks down into smaller steps, two other respondents have used other strategies such as practicing self-care routines that included activities such as exercise, meditation to manage academic pressure and promote their mental health.

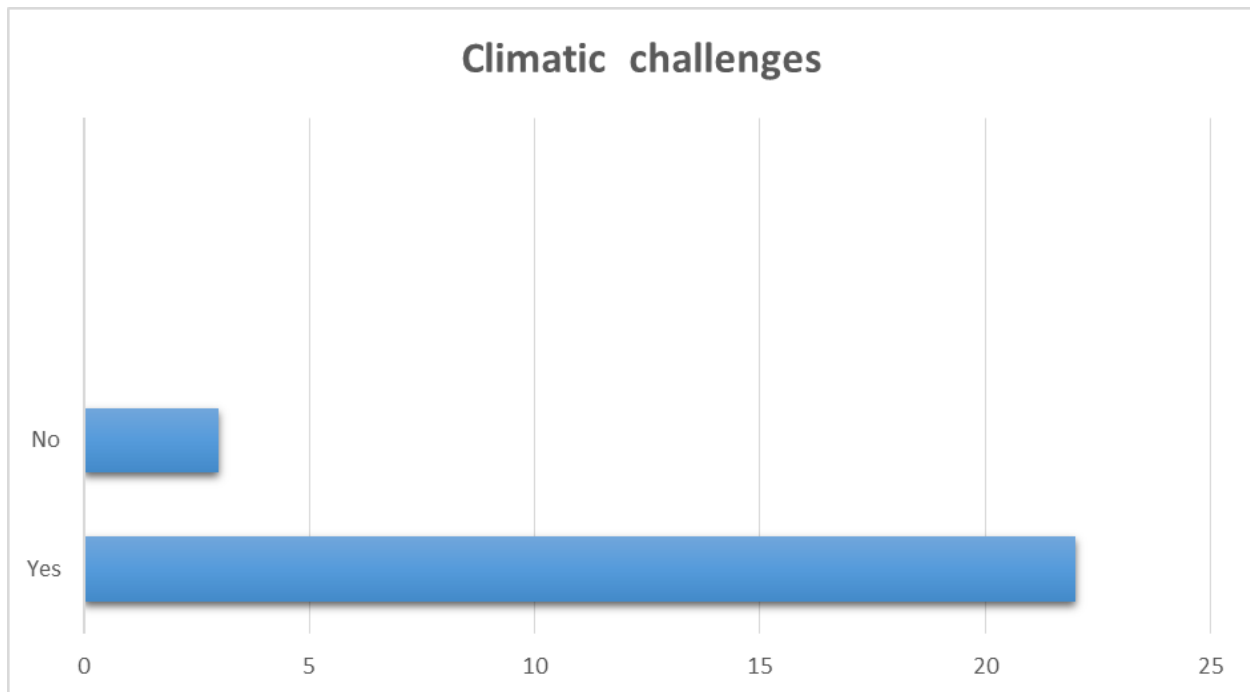
- "I found that exercise really helped me manage my stress levels. Even just going for a walk or doing some yoga would make a big difference in how I felt."
- "Practicing mindfulness and meditation has been a game-changer for me in managing academic pressure and mental health challenges. Taking a few minutes each day to focus on my breathing and clear my mind helps me stay centered and grounded."

Overall, managing academic pressure and promoting mental health is a critical aspect of success for students pursuing higher education. By seeking advice from professors, breaking big tasks into smaller steps, and developing good study habits and self-care routines, students have managed the demands of coursework and research projects and stay on track towards achieving their academic goals.

Climatic challenges

The weather in St. John's can be challenging for international students who are not used to the harsh winter conditions. The city experiences significant snowfall and strong winds during the winter months, which can impact transportation, outdoor activities, and overall daily life. International students may also need to adjust to the shorter daylight hours during the winter months, which can affect their mood and mental health.

Depending on their home country, international students may not be used to certain seasons or weather patterns. The seventh question in the questionnaire was aimed at identifying the various climatic challenges experienced by international students at MUN.



According to the above bar graph, it's clear that 22 out of the 25 survey participants reported that they are experiencing climatic challenges and the two themes emerged were,

- Unpredictable weather conditions
- Daylight hours

Unpredictable weather conditions

The unpredictable weather in St. John's can impact the daily lives of international students, particularly those coming from countries that are more vulnerable to its effects as it can make it difficult to plan outdoor activities, travel, or even attend classes. The following responses demonstrate how unpredictable weather conditions impacted them.

Here's the response of participant A and he/she has discussed about the experiences of climatic challenges with highlighting unpredictable weather conditions,

"I come from a country where the weather is warm and sunny all year round. So, when I arrived in this new country for my studies, the unpredictable weather conditions caught me off guard. One day it can be sunny and warm, and the next day it can be cold and rainy. It's hard to dress appropriately for the weather, and I often find myself either too hot or too cold. I have to constantly check the weather forecast to know what to expect, but sometimes even that is not accurate. It's also hard to plan outdoor activities because the weather can change so quickly. Sometimes I feel like I'm missing out on experiencing the city because of the weather. But I try to adapt and find indoor activities to do instead. It's just one of the many challenges of being an international student in a new country."

Another respondent directly stated, "...weather is very frustrating. It ruins all the plans as its unpredictable"

Respondent C stated,

"I come from a country where the weather is pretty consistent year-round, so it was a bit of a shock when I arrived in Canada and experienced the unpredictable weather conditions. I remember one day, it was sunny in the morning, and then suddenly it started snowing in the afternoon. I was not prepared for this, and I had to walk a long distance back to my apartment in the snow. It was so cold, and I felt miserable."

Respondent G wrote, "The normal temperature in my city was 30-35 degrees and when I came to St. John's during winter it was negative 8 degrees which was expected but I was not expecting the wind to be that harsh and that's the most difficult to handle."

Respondent J shared,

"Back in my home country, we had a predictable climate all year round, so I was not prepared for the constant changes in weather here. It can be sunny one moment and then start raining or snowing unexpectedly, making it difficult to plan my daily routine. The worst part is when the temperature drops to extreme levels during winter, and I have to bundle up with layers of clothing just to stay warm. It feels like a constant battle against the elements, and it can be really draining both physically and mentally."

Daylight hours

International students in St. John's may face challenges adjusting to the extreme seasonal variations in daylight hours. During the winter months, St. John's experiences relatively short days and long nights, while the summer months bring longer days and shorter nights. This can have an impact on students' mood, energy levels, and overall well-being.

Respondent K and O stated as follows,

“I feel bored and lazy when it is super dark and gloomy around 4.00 pm. in winter. It takes all my energy away and I feel moody”

“...the reduced daylight hours made me physically and mentally sick as it limited the amount of time I have for outdoor activities and exercise. “

Overcoming of various climatic challenges

Despite the short days in winter, it is important for students to get outside and get some natural light exposure, which can help to regulate mood and energy levels. Therefore, some respondents have planned up outdoor activities such as skiing or snowshoeing to make the most of the winter months.

“I had to get out of my room. Because I knew if I’m going to stay in my room until winter ends, that means I have to stay inside for more than half of the year as winter here is very very long. So I went out with my friends, played snow games, and my favorite was sleighing at Pippy Park. This helped me out to fight with daylight hours and to feel refreshed”

“I and my friend put some effort in practicing snowboarding”

“I went out to get some natural sun light bearing up the cold, walked around the pond with my dog to boost my energy”

Moreover, it's important for international students to prepare for the climate in St. John's by packing appropriate clothing and gear for the winter months and seeking support from their school or community if they experience any challenges related to the weather. Ultimately, students may need to invest in appropriate clothing and gear to stay warm and dry in all weather conditions, and should be prepared to adapt their plans at short notice if the weather changes unexpectedly. The following quotes depict how they have overcome climatic challenges by dressing in appropriate gear.

“I had to spend a bit more on a good quality coat, boots, and gloves. But, it will make a big difference in how comfortable you are in the winter months.”

“Checked daily weather forecasts and university updates on weather. Prepare with suitable jackets, boots, gloves etc. when going out”

“I remember spending hours searching for affordable winter coats, boots, gloves, and hats. I even bought some of them second-hand to save some money. It wasn't easy, but I had to do it to stay warm and healthy during the winter months. And let me tell you, it was worth it, because I didn't freeze and could focus on my studies without worrying about the cold.”

“By getting an idea from one of my friends at MUN of how St. John's winter is, I managed to buy appropriate winter gear for me and my family before moving”

“Apart from being cold, St. John's can also be wet, with frequent rain, snow, and slush. Wearing waterproof or water-resistant clothing, such as a raincoat and waterproof boots, helped me to stay dry and comfortable when out and about.”

Another respondent mentioned, "Well, NL winter is very hard compared to other provinces, and as an international student, I wasn't really prepared for it. I had to spend a lot of money on winter clothes because I didn't have anything warm enough to survive the harsh Canadian winter. I had to buy a warm coat, boots, gloves, a scarf, and a hat. The cost of all these winter essentials added up quickly, and I had to sacrifice other expenses to make sure I had enough money to stay warm. But, in the end, it was worth it because I was able to survive the winter without getting sick."

Food Challenges

According to the survey responses, the researcher identified that International students often faced food challenges due to differences in food culture, availability of certain foods, and difficulty to find food and ingredients that are similar to what they are used to eating in their home country. One theme emerged through the data collected from the following question.

- Unavailability of certain foods and spices

Unavailability of certain foods and spices

International students may come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their diet and food preferences may vary significantly from the local cuisine in their host country. This quote is evident.

- “Canadian’s dishes are very different from ours, they just use salt and pepper. The food here just doesn't taste the same.”

This quote shows that a student from Asia may be accustomed to eating spicy food, whereas a Canadian student may prefer milder flavors.

- "As a typical Sri Lankan, I would prefer more spicy food. But, it's been really hard to find the ingredients I need to cook the foods I'm used to eating back home. I've been to so many stores, but I can't find anything. It's really frustrating."

These two respondents reported how difficult it was to find food that is similar to what they are used to eating in their home country.

- "It's frustrating when I want to cook a certain dish, but I can't find the ingredients I need. I have to either substitute or change the recipe completely"
- "It's difficult to find Asian grocery stores here, so I miss the flavors and spices that are used in my home country's cuisine.”

Moreover, international students may struggle to find suitable food options that cater to their dietary requirements and preferences. These responses show how they miss home food and flavors,

- "Sometimes I crave a specific type of Asian snack or drink, but I can't find it anywhere in Canada. It's disappointing and makes me miss home even more"
- "I'm an Indian and there are not enough places to buy our spices. The lack of access to ingredients from my home country has made it challenging to cook authentic meals"

Overcoming of various food challenges

Most of the respondents answered that they overcame the various food challenges by finding some grocery stores that had international foods and spices.

"It was really hard to find Asian ingredients at first, and I was homesick for my mom's cooking. But I eventually found some specialty Asian grocery stores like Taste East, Andaluzia and SpiceX that helped me make dishes that reminded me of home."

"I was so happy when I found an Andaluzia grocery store near my apartment. I can finally make my favorite dishes and feel a bit more at home."

Another respondent has overcome food challenges by adjusting his/her cooking style.

"It's not just about the ingredients, it's about the taste and the way the food is cooked. I've had to adjust my cooking style a bit to get the flavors right, but I'm getting better at it."

These two respondents mentioned how they added substitutions or alternative ingredients to their recipes and how they enjoyed new recipes.

Respondent F "I've had to get creative with substitutions for some ingredients that I can't find here. It's not quite the same, but it's close enough to satisfy my cravings."

Respondent H "I didn't realize how much I missed the food from back home until I couldn't find it here. But I started learning how to cook more and trying new recipes, which has been a fun experience."

These three respondents stated how online grocery shopping was helpful to get specific spices they needed and overcome their food challenges although it was expensive.

"I had to rely on online shopping and ordering specialty ingredients from home to make the meals I missed. It was expensive and took a long time to arrive, but it was worth it to have a taste of home."

“I found a Sri Lankan grocery store in Toronto. I ordered online most of the spices I needed, It was very expensive though”

"Being able to order Asian groceries online made me feel more connected to my culture and helped me to overcome feelings of homesickness."

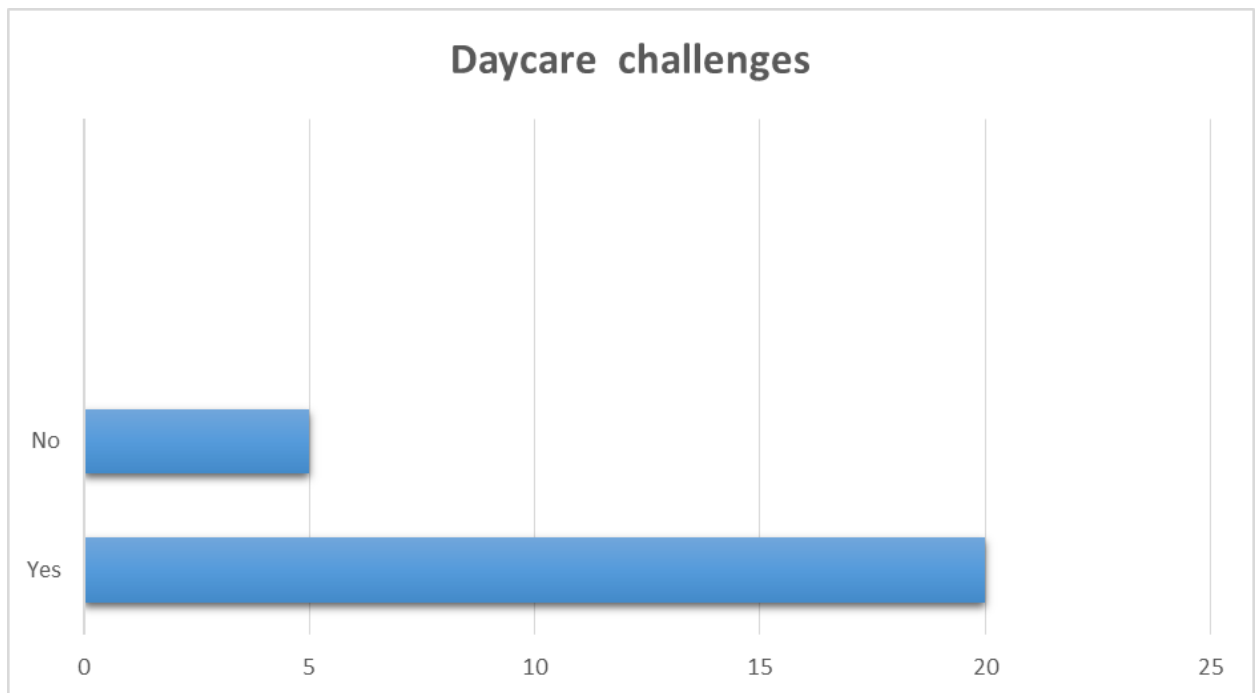
These three responses show how MUN food bank was a great help to manage their food challenges. “MUN food bank was a great help for me to get some free food. Canned foods and noodles helped me to survive a bit as I didn’t have to travel back and forth to the grocery store to buy certain foods and as well as it was good for my pocket.”

“I supplement with the food banks up to twice per month.”

“MUN food bank is a great help for me to overcome my food challenges while it saves some bucks.”

Day care challenges

The next question was designed to research on the various day care challenges that international students faced while studying at MUN. The chart given below specifically shows the number of respondents who had problems with day care and who had no challenges related to day care.



The participants were asked to elaborate on their daycare challenges. Majority of the respondents reported that Quality daycare services are limited in number, making it difficult for student parents to find a space for their child while other respondents mentioned the high cost of Daycare services, especially for student parents who have more kids and are already struggling to make ends meet. The two predominant themes emerged from the participants' responses were;

- Limited availability
- High cost

Limited availability

Availability of daycare is the biggest challenge for most of the respondents. Many universities and colleges have on-campus daycare facilities as MUN child care, but these may have limited spots and long waiting lists. Off-campus daycare facilities may also have waiting lists. This can create a stressful situation where student parents have to juggle their academic responsibilities with their parenting duties, and may have to rely on family or friends for help with childcare. Moreover, the limited availability of daycare options can make it difficult for student parents to find suitable care that meets their needs and the needs of their children.

The respondent B stated that he/she has to end up dropping out of school for a semester. In her/his voice, "I had to drop out of school for a semester because I couldn't find suitable daycare for my child. It was a really frustrating experience because I wanted to continue my studies, but I just couldn't make it work without proper childcare."

Respondent C mentioned, "I had to put my name on a waiting list for daycare as soon as I found out I was pregnant, and even then, I had to wait for several months before a spot opened up. This made it really difficult for me to plan my schedule and balance my responsibilities as a student and a parent."

Respondent F, "I've been on the waiting list for a daycare spot for months now, and it's starting to affect my ability to attend classes and study. It's frustrating

because I know I need to take care of my child, but I also need to focus on my education."

Respondent G "I had to change my course schedule at the last minute because I couldn't find daycare for my child during the hours I needed to be in class. It's difficult to be flexible when there are limited options."

According to their responses, It highlights the challenges associated with daycare can add significant stress and pressure to the already demanding lives of student parents, making it even more difficult for them to succeed in their academic pursuits.

Some of the survey participants are not satisfied with the MUN Day care system,

Respondent A "...is very low in quality and the waiting list is very long. Had to wait years to put kids there and also sometimes they sent kids back home unduly.

Respondent C, "It's hard to find suitable and certified daycare facilities. MUN daycare only provides services for the ages of 2 years or above. Waiting list is really high and you have to register even before the baby arrives.....Unregistered care persons charge a high amount to look after a kid."

"I've had to skip classes and lab work because I couldn't find anyone to take care of my child, when MUN daycare teachers sent my two kids home at the same time saying this and that which I feel is unreasonable,... It's not fair that being a parent should hinder my education, but the lack of accessible daycare makes it feel like it does. I wish there were more resources or support for student parents in this situation."

Here's a response of another mentioning about no actions taken up by the provincial government towards this issue,

“Childcare availability is a disaster in NL. No wonder the province has a little percentage of the younger generation. If a couple must have a child, it means one of the parents must be ready to stay at home or the couple has to spend a fortune on unregulated day homes. It is really unfortunate as the provincial government isn't even concerned about it as this has been a long time problem with no resolution in view.

High costs

According to the participants' responses, finding affordable and convenient daycare options has been a major challenge. Childcare expenses can be a significant portion of a family's budget, and if the fees are too high, it can be difficult to make ends meet. The challenges associated with daycare has added significant stress and pressure to the already demanding lives of student parents at MUN, making it even

more difficult for them to succeed in their academic pursuits. The following quotes witnessed this fact,

- "I found it extremely difficult to find affordable daycare for my child. Most of the options in my area were quite expensive and didn't fit within my limited budget. It was a constant source of stress for me as I tried to juggle my studies with caring for my child."
- "As a student parent, I find it incredibly challenging to afford daycare fees on top of my already high tuition fees. Sometimes it feels like I'm working just to pay for my child's care, and it can be really stressful."
- "I knew that daycare would be expensive, but I didn't realize just how much it would cost. With my already tight budget, the fees are a real struggle for me and my family."
- "I'm trying to balance my studies with raising a child, and the cost of daycare is really adding to the stress. It's hard to justify paying so much when I'm not earning a lot from my part-time job."
- "I have to choose between paying for daycare or paying for my textbooks, and it's a tough decision. I don't want my child to miss out on quality care, but I also don't want to fall behind in my studies."

Overcoming of Daycare challenges

The next part of the questionnaire was designed to find out the strategies of international students in overcoming day care challenges. But most of them have not been able to overcome daycare challenges while some have found temporary solutions such as relying on family and friends, finding casual babysitters.

Respondent F 's words,

"I'm a student parent, and finding affordable daycare has been a constant struggle for me. Even with the financial aid provided by the university, the fees are still too high for me to afford. As a result, I've had to rely on family and friends to take care of my child while I attend classes and complete assignments. It's stressful and exhausting, and I often feel guilty for burdening others with my responsibilities as a parent."

"I get help from my friends, but they too are students, so I feel guilty whenever I ask for help."

Another participant stated how she/he found a babysitter through Facebook, but further stated that it's very difficult and expensive, in her/his own voice,

"I joined the Babysitter's group on Facebook and found one, but she charges about 75 dollars a day, which is very expensive. But I had to go for it as there's none to get help with the baby. But still I don't know how my child is taken care of while I'm away because I don't know much about her and I'm new here."

“I found a casual babysitter who is a high school girl.”

The following respondent shared his/her experiences about how he/ she had to take the child to the class,

“Sometimes I have to bring my child to class with me because I cannot afford to miss lectures or exams. It's a difficult situation because I want to provide the best for my child, but I also want to pursue my education and secure a better future for us. I feel like I'm stuck in between “.

This respondent had to put studies on hold due to limited daycare facilities, In her/his voice,

“The waiting lists for daycare are also incredibly long, and it feels like I'm constantly competing with other parents for a spot. But I have no other option than to put my studies on hold because I can't find reliable and affordable care for my child. It's a constant source of anxiety and stress, and it's hard to see a way out of it.”

These quotes highlighted that some participants have not yet been able to overcome the daycare challenges.

- “Not yet overcome. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to secure a spot at any of the local daycare centers due to limited availability and long waiting lists.

- "No I haven't overcome. I have been struggling to find suitable daycare for my child since the beginning of the semester. All the nearby daycares have long waiting lists, and even if we manage to get on the list, we may not get a spot until next semester. I have been trying to balance my studies and taking care of my child at home, but it has been challenging. "Oh nope... I didn't. It's tough to focus on my studies when I'm constantly worrying about my child's well-being and struggling to find a balance between my responsibilities as a student and a parent. It feels like a constant juggling act, and I can't help but wonder if there will ever be a resolution to these daycare challenges."
- "I'm still struggling. I wish there were more affordable and accessible daycare options specifically tailored to the needs of student parents. It would alleviate so much stress and enable us to pursue our education without compromising the well-being of our children. Until then, I will continue to navigate these challenges and do my best to find a solution that works for both my child and me."

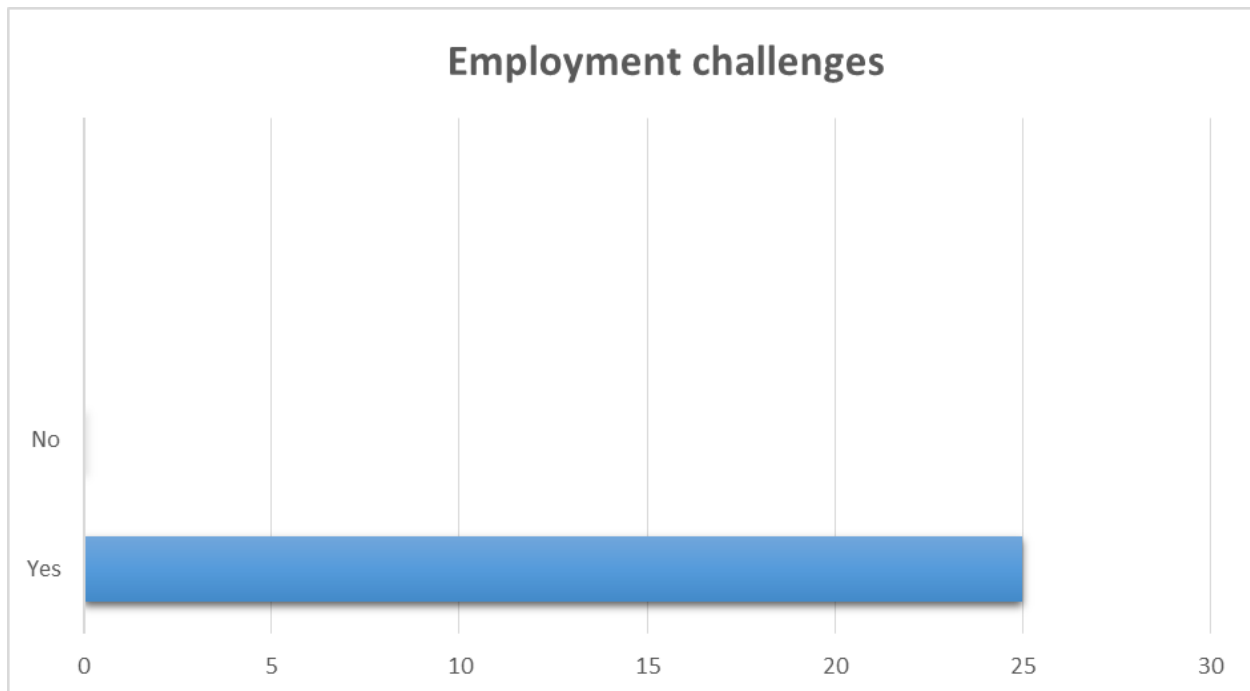
According to the survey responses, it is evident that daycare challenges persist among international students at MUN. While some students have been fortunate enough to find suitable daycare arrangements for their children, there are others who continue to face significant hurdles. For those who have not been able to overcome

these challenges, temporary solutions such as relying on family and friends, or seeking help from casual babysitters have been the only available options. However, these solutions may not always be reliable or sustainable, adding further strain to the already demanding lives of student parents.

Employment challenges

The next question was: A) Are you currently experiencing Employment challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

- Yes
- No



The bar graph was drawn with the data collected from the survey participants to question number 10. According to the bar graph above, it has been clearly represented that all of the participants checked “Yes” to this question.

The next part of this question was, B) if you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Employment challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

In part C, they elaborated on their various employment challenges while doing their graduate studies at MUN.

According to their responses, lack of Canadian work experience is a major challenge faced by international students when seeking employment. Many international students may have limited or no previous work experience in the host country, which can put them at a disadvantage compared to local students who may have had part-time jobs or internships during their studies.

Additionally, employers may have concerns or uncertainties about hiring international students without extensive work experience. They may prefer candidates who are already familiar with the local work culture, employment practices, and specific job requirements.

These three respondents A, B and F have written about this issue as,

- "As an international student, I have found it challenging to find employment in Canada due to my lack of Canadian work experience. Even though I have a strong academic background and relevant skills, many employers prefer candidates with Canadian work experience. This puts me at a disadvantage and makes it harder for me to secure a job to support my studies and living expenses. I have tried applying to entry-level positions, but even those require some level of work experience. It's frustrating to know that I have the ability to do the job, but I am not given the opportunity to prove myself simply because I don't have Canadian work experience."
- "It's been quite challenging for me to find employment as an international student due to my lack of Canadian work experience compared to local students. Many employers seem to prioritize candidates with extensive work backgrounds, which puts me at a disadvantage."
- "Back in my home country, I might have had some work experience, but it's often not considered relevant or valid in the new context. It feels like starting from scratch, trying to build a professional profile in a foreign land. Without local work experience, I struggle to showcase my skills and demonstrate my potential to prospective employers."

Lack of Canadian work experience has made it more difficult for international students to compete for job opportunities, as employers often prioritize candidates with relevant experience. Without a strong work history, international students may struggle to demonstrate their skills, abilities, and potential contributions to potential employers.

Some respondents have mentioned about discrimination. They have faced discrimination from employers due to their nationality or cultural background. Some respondents stated that some employers prefer to hire local candidates or those who they believe are more familiar with the Canadian workplace culture. This can lead to international students being overlooked for job opportunities, even if they are qualified for the position.

"As an international student, I have experienced discrimination from some potential employers during my job search. I have noticed that some employers seem hesitant to hire me simply because of my nationality or accent. It can be frustrating and disheartening to be judged based on factors that are beyond my control. I have put in the effort to learn the local language and customs, and I have the necessary qualifications and skills, but it seems that some employers are not willing to give me a fair chance. It is important for employers to recognize the value that international students can bring to their workplace and to treat all applicants equally."

"The discrimination I face not only affects my employment prospects but also takes a toll on my overall well-being. It creates a sense of exclusion and alienation, making me question my decision to study abroad. It's disheartening to realize that despite my academic achievements, I am still seen as an outsider in the job market."

Moreover, some respondents stated that employers have negative stereotypes or biases towards certain nationalities or cultures, which can lead to unfair treatment or discrimination in the workplace.

“I believe that employers should focus on a person's skills, experience, and qualifications rather than making assumptions based on nationality or cultural background. Creating a more inclusive and diverse work environment benefits everyone and allows international students like myself to contribute our unique perspectives and talents.”

“It makes me question my self-worth and abilities, even though I know that I have a lot to offer. It's frustrating to think that some employers may hold biases or stereotypes against international students, assuming that we are less competent or capable than our local counterparts.”

On the other hand, many international students rely on part-time employment to support themselves financially while studying abroad. Insufficient working hours or shifts can result in a reduced income, making it challenging for students to cover their living expenses, tuition fees, and other essential costs. Respondents reported about this as,

“Insufficient working hours or shifts really take a toll on us, international students. We come to a new country with dreams of studying, growing, and gaining valuable work experience. But when we are faced with limited working hours, it feels like our opportunities are slipping away.

“We rely on those part-time jobs to cover our living expenses, pay for tuition fees, and support ourselves. When the working hours are not enough, we find ourselves juggling multiple jobs or working extra shifts just to make ends meet.”

“Insufficient working hours also limit our opportunities to gain valuable work experience and develop our skills. We came here hoping to build our resumes, gain practical knowledge, and kickstart our careers. But when we can only find part-time jobs with limited hours, it feels like our potential is being wasted. We know that gaining relevant work experience is crucial for our future, and not having enough hours puts us at a disadvantage when we graduate and enter the job market.”

Three predominant themes emerged were;

- Lack of Canadian work experience
- Discrimination
- Insufficient working hours or shifts

Lack of Canadian work experience

International students may not have as much Canadian work experience as local students, which can make it more difficult for them to find employment. Having Canadian work experience is seen as an indicator of an individual's ability to adapt to the local work environment and their knowledge of the specific requirements of Canadian employers. Without this experience, international students may face challenges in competing with candidates who have a stronger understanding of the local job market.

Respondent C shared his /her opinions as, “It's disheartening to face rejection after rejection, knowing that my limited work experience puts me at a disadvantage. I understand the importance of practical knowledge and how it contributes to being a competitive job applicant. However, as an international student, I also believe in my abilities and the unique perspectives I can bring to the table.”

Respondent D answered, I've been proactive in seeking opportunities to gain work experience, such as internships or part-time positions, but those can be highly competitive as well. Sometimes, it feels like a catch-22 situation: I need experience to get a job, but I need a job to gain experience. It's frustrating to be trapped in this cycle.”

Respondent F supported this fact as, "As an international student, I found it hard to find work because I didn't have any previous work experience in Canada. It

seemed like every job I applied for required at least 1-2 years of Canadian work experience, which was frustrating because how was I supposed to get experience if no one would give me a chance? I felt like my foreign background was holding me back, even though I was a hard worker and had the necessary qualifications. It was a difficult situation to be in."

Lack of Canadian work experience can often be a barrier to finding a job as an international student. Many employers in Canada prefer candidates who have previous work experience in the local job market. They may prioritize candidates who are familiar with the Canadian work culture, industry practices, and have a network of professional contacts. Here is how most of the survey participants have reported about this in their words,

Respondents G, H and K wrote, "Finding employment as an international student can sometimes feel like an uphill battle, especially when we face the challenge of lacking work experience compared to local students. It's frustrating to see job postings that require years of experience when we're still in the early stages of our careers.

- "I was disappointed after sending out numerous job applications, only to receive responses that highlight our lack of experience as a barrier. We know we have the potential and the eagerness to

learn, but it's frustrating when employers prioritize experience over our enthusiasm and willingness to contribute.”

- “Sometimes, we might even consider taking entry-level positions or internships to gain the necessary experience. However, even those opportunities can be competitive and limited, making it even harder to break into the job market. I didn't even get a TA position. So from where can I get Canadian work experience when nobody gives a chance to gain it”
- I totally understand that experience is valuable, and we're willing to put in the effort to gain it. However, I believe that employers can recognize the unique skills and perspectives we bring as international students. We have a global mindset, cultural diversity, and adaptability that can be assets to organizations. But nobody gives a shit about it, my job application to Tim Horton's was refused 3 times...lol”
- “When I first started searching for job opportunities, I quickly realized that my lack of work experience in the local market was a significant barrier. While I have gained valuable skills through my studies and previous work experiences in my home country, it seems that employers often prioritize candidates with local work experience.”

Discrimination

International students may face discrimination from employers due to their nationality or cultural background. Cultural differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and biases in the workplace. International students may have different communication styles, work practices, or approaches to problem-solving that are unfamiliar to employers. These differences may be misinterpreted or undervalued, hindering their chances of securing employment or career advancement. One of the respondent wrote as,

“One of the challenges I often face is adapting to different communication styles. Our ways of expressing ourselves or articulating ideas may be influenced by our native language or cultural norms. It can be disheartening when our communication style is misinterpreted or seen as less effective simply because it differs from what is considered the norm in the workplace.”

Another respondent added, "I have noticed that sometimes my cultural background can be a barrier to finding a job. Employers may not understand my communication style or work practices, and this can lead to misunderstandings or biases. I try my best to adapt and understand the Canadian work culture, but sometimes it feels like my efforts are not recognized or valued. It can be frustrating because I know I have valuable skills and experiences to offer, but these differences

seem to overshadow them. I wish there was more understanding and appreciation for diversity in the workplace."

"Being an international student in the workplace can be a rollercoaster ride, especially when it comes to cultural differences. Our unique backgrounds and experiences bring a fresh perspective and a diverse set of skills, but sometimes these differences can lead to misunderstandings and biases.

"As an international student, I have noticed that sometimes my cultural background can be a barrier to finding a job. Employers may not understand my communication style or work practices, and this can lead to misunderstandings or biases. I try my best to adapt and understand the Canadian work culture, but sometimes it feels like my efforts are not recognized or valued. "

International students may face biases and discriminatory practices during the hiring process, which can limit their access to job opportunities. Some employers may have preconceived notions or stereotypes about international students, leading to biased decision-making and exclusion from certain positions or industries. These quotes have witnessed this point.

- "The differences are not always understood or appreciated by employers. There have been instances where my communication style or way of expressing ideas has been misinterpreted or

misunderstood, leading to a lack of effective communication and potential bias against my capabilities.”

- “It is frustrating because I know I have valuable skills and experiences to offer, but these differences seem to overshadow them. I wish there was more understanding and appreciation for diversity in the workplace.”
- “The discrimination I face not only affects my employment prospects but also takes a toll on my overall well-being. It creates a sense of exclusion and alienation, making me question my decision to study abroad. It's disheartening to realize that despite my academic achievements, I am still seen as an outsider in the job market.”
- “I've come across job listings where it's explicitly mentioned that they prefer local candidates or require citizenship or permanent residency. It's disheartening because I know I have the skills and the drive to excel in those positions, but my nationality seems to be a barrier.”
- “I hate to witness how my peers, who are local students, have more opportunities and are given preferential treatment. I feel like my potential is undermined and that I have to work twice as hard just to be considered on an equal footing. It's demoralizing

to be judged based on stereotypes or assumptions rather than my abilities and qualifications.

- “Discrimination not only affects my self-confidence but also has financial implications. It limits my job prospects and leaves me with fewer options to support myself financially. It feels unfair that my hard work and dedication can be overshadowed by biases that have nothing to do with my capabilities.”

The impact of biases and discrimination on international students' employment challenges is significant, as it limits their opportunities for career growth, hinders their professional development, and perpetuates inequalities in the job market. It is essential for employers to foster inclusive and unbiased hiring practices, recognize the value that international students bring to the workforce, and provide equal opportunities for their employment and career advancement.

Insufficient working hours or shifts

Insufficient working shifts can make it difficult for students to meet their basic needs, such as food, housing, and transportation. They may have to cut back on essential expenses, compromise on the quality of their living conditions, or rely on external support systems to make ends meet. Respondents J, K, M, O and P stated this fact in their own words as,

- "I rely on my part-time job to cover my living expenses, but lately, I've been struggling because I'm not getting enough shifts. It's really stressful not knowing if I'll have enough money to pay my rent and buy groceries."
- "I've been actively looking for more shifts at work, but they keep scheduling me for only a few hours each week. It's frustrating because I'm trying to save up for my tuition fees, and it feels like I'm falling behind."
- "When I first got the job, I was promised a certain number of shifts per week, but recently they've been cutting back and giving me fewer hours. It's disheartening because I was counting on that income to support myself and my educational expenses."
- "Not having enough shifts at work puts me in a constant state of financial stress. I'm constantly worried about how I'll afford textbooks, transportation, and other basic necessities. It's hard to focus on my studies when I'm constantly preoccupied with money."
- "I've been trying to balance my work and studies, but with the limited shifts, it's been challenging. I feel like I'm forced to choose between earning money to support myself and dedicating time to my education. It's a tough situation to be in."

On the other hand, this limits professional development. Working part-time not only provides students with income but also offers valuable opportunities for professional development. Insufficient working shifts can limit students' exposure to workplace experiences, skill-building, and networking opportunities. This may hinder their career advancement prospects and limit their ability to gain practical skills relevant to their future employment. Some of the respondents have elaborated this as,

"I understand that employers have their own staffing needs, but it's disheartening to see my colleagues gaining valuable experience while I struggle to secure enough shifts to contribute meaningfully to the workplace."

"I really wanted to gain practical experience in my field while studying, but with insufficient working shifts, I'm unable to secure enough hours to develop my skills and build my resume."

Another respondent has written a similar point as, "I'm worried that not having enough working experience on my resume will hold me back in my career. Employers want to see that you've had significant experience in your field, and I'm not getting that."

Respondents E and L mentioned that,

"Not having enough shifts at work has limited my opportunities to learn and grow professionally. I feel like I'm missing out on valuable experiences that could benefit me in the future."

"I've been working at this job for months now, but I've only been given a few shifts here and there. It's frustrating because I want to gain as much experience as possible before I graduate, but I'm not getting enough opportunities."

These two respondents have seen this in the same perspective as, "I was hoping to gain industry-specific knowledge and insights through my part-time job, but the lack of shifts means I'm stuck in entry-level tasks without the chance to take on more challenging responsibilities."

"Insufficient working shifts make it difficult to demonstrate my abilities and potential to employers. It's frustrating to be limited in my professional growth because of factors beyond my control."

Moreover, these two respondents have pointed out that they are experiencing some sort of stress due to not enough shifts at the workplace.

"Not having enough shifts at work has been a constant source of stress for me. I rely on my part-time job to cover my living expenses and

support my education, but when the shifts are limited, I find myself constantly worrying about how I'm going to make ends meet. It's a constant battle to balance my financial needs with my academic responsibilities, and the uncertainty of not having enough shifts adds a layer of anxiety to my already demanding schedule." - Respondent A

"The stress of not being given enough shifts at work is overwhelming. I feel like I'm constantly scrambling to find additional sources of income to fill the gap, which takes away precious time and energy that I should be devoting to my studies. It's frustrating because I know that my education is my top priority, but the financial pressure weighs heavily on my mind. I constantly find myself wondering if I'll have enough money for rent, groceries, and other essential expenses. It's a constant juggling act that leaves me feeling mentally and emotionally drained." - Respondent B

The impact of biases and discrimination on international students' employment challenges is significant, as it limits their opportunities for career growth, hinders their professional development, and perpetuates inequalities in the job market. It is essential for employers to foster inclusive and unbiased hiring practices, recognize the value that international students bring to the workforce, and provide equal opportunities for their employment and career advancement.

Overcoming of employment challenges

To overcome this challenge, international students can take proactive steps to gain relevant work experience during their studies. This can include seeking part-time jobs, internships, or volunteer opportunities in their field of interest.

These quotes are evident to support how volunteering was a strategy to gain Canadian work experience and overcome employment challenges.

- "By volunteering at MUN Food Bank, I had the chance to collaborate with a diverse group of individuals, including both students and professionals. This exposure to different perspectives and teamwork experiences enhance my interpersonal and communication skills, making me more adaptable in a professional setting." "Volunteering on campus gave me the opportunity to gain valuable Canadian work experience while studying. It helped me develop practical skills and build a professional network that will benefit me in my future career."
- "Through volunteering at IO, I was able to immerse myself in the Canadian work culture and understand the expectations and dynamics of the workplace. It boosted my confidence and made me more prepared for future employment opportunities."

- "I learned so much about Canadian workplace culture and norms through my volunteer experience, which has been invaluable in my job search"
- "I was lucky enough to go for a few volunteering jobs on campus. It was a great way to showcase my skills and work ethic to potential employers. It provided concrete examples of my abilities, which I could highlight in my resume and interviews."
- "I volunteered at YMCA and it allowed me to demonstrate my commitment to community engagement and social responsibility. It showed employers that I am not only focused on academics but also actively involved in making a positive impact, which is highly valued in the Canadian work culture."

Furthermore, some respondents have been able to overcome the various employment challenges they experienced while studying by networking and building professional connections through career fairs, industry events, or alumni networks can also open doors to job opportunities and provide valuable insights into the local job market.

One of the respondents stated that, "I should write this here... I was able to find a good job after dropping off my resume at the summer career fair at MUN. Thanks for that. And as a person who has been hunting for a job since last year, I'd

thoroughly recommend attending career fairs would definitely help to overcome employment challenges.”

Two other respondents supported, “The YMCA career event was the game-changer for me. I had the opportunity to interact directly with employers who were specifically looking to hire students. Through networking and showcasing my skills and qualifications, I was able to secure an internship that provided me with valuable Canadian work experience.”

“I cannot stress enough how crucial attending career fairs on campus was for my journey to gain Canadian work experience. The fairs provided a platform for me to learn about various industries, explore internship opportunities, and connect with potential employers. As a result, I landed a summer job that allowed me to apply my academic knowledge in a real-world setting and develop my professional skills.”

Several participants highlighted about how the MUN employment opportunities were supportive to overcome the employment challenges as,

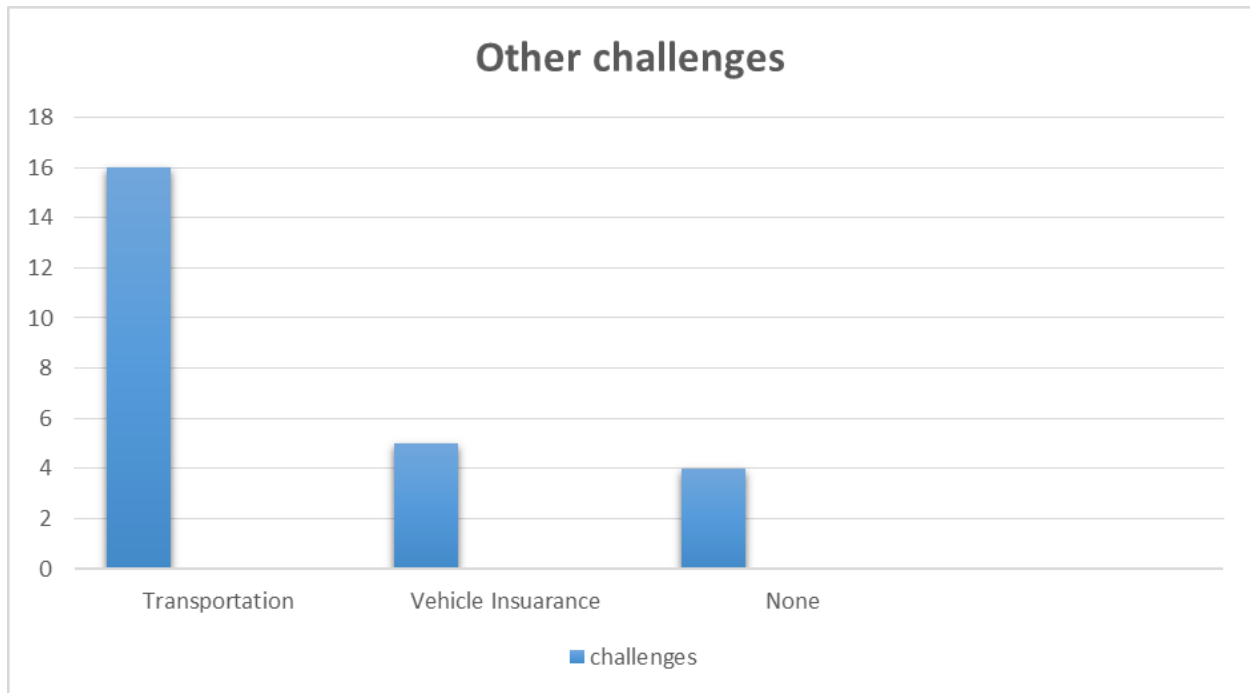
“I was able to gain some sort of working experience through the Grad SWASP program. I could learn more about working in a university setting which I think would be a great experience and I was able to add this experience to my resume.”

Another respondent wrote about MUN employment opportunities as,

“I was lucky enough to work as a Research Assistant through which I gained a lot of experience working with natives. And I think the job that I currently work in is a consequence of being a Research assistant over 4 months ago.”

The last question of the questionnaire was, Are there any other challenges (not already mentioned above) that you would like to elaborate on in this space.

The majority of them have responded with the transportation challenges and some of them reported about the vehicle insurance cost while a few stated, none. The bar graph below clearly represents the percentages of the respondents who stated about transportation challenges, Vehicle insurance challenges and also who had no other challenges to mention.



Transportation

Newfoundland and Labrador, where MUN is located, is known for its unpredictable and harsh weather conditions, including snowstorms, heavy rainfall, and strong winds. These weather events can lead to delays, cancellations, and changes in public transportation schedules, making it challenging for students to rely on consistent and timely transportation services. This fact is in respondents G, H and J's voice;

"The unpredictable weather in St. John's is bad enough, but it's even worse when the buses can't handle it. They should have better plans for snowstorms and heavy rain."

"I've had numerous occasions where I've waited for the bus in freezing temperatures or heavy rain, because of the delays or cancellation of buses. This is annoying because the only public transportation is metro buses , which we have depend on here and it too doesn't operate properly on the times we are really in need of.

"Living off-campus and commuting to the university can be challenging without a reliable transportation option. There have been instances where I had to rely on rideshare services or taxis, which can quickly accumulate expenses. Additionally, during severe weather conditions, like heavy snowfall, transportation disruptions make it even more difficult to attend classes or other commitments."

Respondent B stated about the difficulties she/he faced at unsheltered bus stops during harsh weather conditions, "The lack of bus shelters at many stops leaves us exposed to harsh weather conditions. It's disheartening to wait for a bus without any protection from rain, snow, or strong winds."

Two other respondents mentioned that the cost of a metro bus pass is expensive.

"The cost of the metro bus card is ridiculously high for students. It's already challenging to manage our expenses, and the expensive bus fare adds an unnecessary burden."

"The cost of a semester metro bus card is too expensive, especially for students on a tight budget. It feels unfair to have to pay so much for a service that often fails to meet its schedules."

According to the respondents' elaborations on transportation challenges they have experienced, "Punctuality of buses" has been a significant challenge for international students relying on public transportation. The unpredictability of bus arrival times have impacted their ability to be punctual for classes, meetings, and other important engagements. Moreover some respondents emphasized the need for transportation authorities to address and improve the punctuality of bus services, ensuring a more reliable and convenient commuting experience for international students. These quotes reflect the challenges that international students face when buses are not punctual.

"The bus transportation in St. John's is incredibly unreliable. I've missed countless classes because the buses either arrive late or don't show up at all."

"The bus schedules are inconsistent, especially during weekends and holidays. It's frustrating when you plan your day around the bus timetable, and they suddenly change without any prior notice. I wonder why

transportation authorities are silent to improve the bus services more efficiently. "

"The lack of communication from the transportation authority in St. John's is frustrating. They should provide timely updates on bus delays and cancellations to help students plan their day effectively."

"One of the biggest challenges I've faced as an international student is the inconsistency in bus arrival times. There have been numerous instances where I arrived at the bus stop on time, but the bus was either early or late, causing me to miss it. This lack of punctuality adds unnecessary stress to my daily commute."

"Being punctual for classes and appointments is crucial, but it becomes a constant struggle when the buses are not reliable in terms of their arrival times.

"The bus transportation system needs significant improvements to meet the needs of students. We deserve a reliable, affordable, and efficient service that allows us to attend classes without unnecessary disruptions."

"I've had instances where I had to wait for an extended period, unsure if the bus will arrive on time or if I should consider alternative transportation

options. It affects my schedule and makes planning my day more challenging."

"As an international student, I value punctuality and strive to be on time for all my commitments. However, the inconsistent arrival times of buses have caused me to be late on several occasions. It's irritating to depend on a transportation system that doesn't adhere to a strict schedule, making it difficult to manage my time effectively."

"The bus schedules in St. John's are so inconsistent. I never know when a bus will arrive or how long I'll have to wait. My mood and how I feel in the rest of the day depends on the bus schedule"

Several respondents have highlighted their dissatisfaction with the bus routes. And also they have mentioned that travel time is too long.

"The routes and schedules don't cater to the needs of students who have extracurricular activities or part-time jobs. It's disheartening to have limited transportation options when we have other responsibilities besides attending classes."

"Bus routes are designed as if we are going on a trip or sightseeing and not the needs of the passengers. They take a long time to come to the MUN center from airport heights. If I had a car, it would have been a 5 minutes' drive. Unfortunately, I am not rich lol...I don't have the luxury of owning a car, so I heavily rely on the bus. So, it's a pathetic plight when the transportation system fails to meet the needs of students who depend on it to access their education."

Vehicle Insurance

The high cost of vehicle insurance has posed significant challenges for international students. These quotes reflect the financial challenge international students face when it comes to affording vehicle insurance. The high premiums and associated costs often make it infeasible for them to own a car, limiting their transportation options and adding to their overall financial burdens.

"Vehicle insurance costs were challenging me. Even if I could afford to purchase a car, the insurance premiums would consume a significant portion of my budget. It's disheartening because having a vehicle would provide convenience and independence, but the financial burden is simply too overwhelming."

"The unaffordable cost of vehicle insurance prevents me from owning a car while studying abroad. It's very unfair because I know having a car would provide convenience, especially to me. I have my family here, kids often get sick, and so they need to be taken to hospital. I'm out of the school bus zone and I don't get the school bus. So picking up and dropping off kids to school is a very big challenge without a car. And also I'm struggling when it comes to grocery shopping or commuting during late hours when public transportation is limited."

"Owning a car would provide me with more convenience and flexibility in terms of transportation, but the cost of vehicle insurance is simply out of reach for me as an international student. The high premiums and associated fees make it unaffordable, leaving me with no choice but to rely on public transportation or other alternatives."

“High cost of vehicle insurance has forced me to rely solely on public transportation, which can be inconvenient and time-consuming. Having a car would have offered more convenience and saved time, particularly when traveling to off-campus locations or during unfavorable weather conditions. However, the financial burden of insurance has made it impractical for me as an international student.”

The inability to afford insurance limits their transportation options and can impact their ability to navigate their new surroundings effectively. This idea in respondent’s voice,

“As an international student, I wanted to have the convenience of owning a car to navigate the city more freely. However, when I looked into getting car insurance, I was shocked by the exorbitant premiums. The quotes I received were significantly higher compared to what I had expected”

Summary

International students face a range of challenges while studying, encompassing financial, cultural, and climatic, employment, food, daycare, health, mental health, language, and accommodation. Financial challenges included high tuition fees, unaffordable rent and living expenses. Cultural challenges have arisen from adjusting to a new cultural environment, experiencing homesickness, and cultural shock. Health care challenges encompassed accessing healthcare services, issues dealing with health insurance coverage. Accommodation challenges involved

were finding affordable and suitable housing options in a competitive rental market, unavailability of housing closer to MUN and issues with on campus accommodation. Language challenges included difficulties in catching up the accent in effective communication and adapting to the language dialect. Mental health challenges have occurred due to stress and academic pressure.

Students from countries with different climates have discussed the struggle to adjust to the weather conditions in their host country. Extreme temperatures, seasonal changes, or unfamiliar weather patterns and daylight hours have posed physical and emotional challenges for international students.

Food challenges include adjusting to unfamiliar cuisines and finding affordable options. They have experienced challenges in finding culturally appropriate ingredients, restaurants, or grocery stores that cater to their dietary preferences, leading to difficulties in maintaining their preferred eating habits. Daycare challenges stem from high costs, limited availability, and the need to balance parenting responsibilities with academic demands.

Employment challenges involve difficulties in finding suitable jobs due to lack of Canadian work experience, insufficient working hours biases and discrimination. These barriers hindered their ability to find suitable employment, gain relevant work experience. These challenges collectively contribute to the

unique experiences and difficulties faced by international students throughout their educational journey.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

The experiences and perspectives of the selected group of graduate international students attending the university provided valuable insights into various aspects of their journey. The majority of the survey participants explore their experiences and perspectives related to financial challenges, cultural adjustment, healthcare, accommodation, language barriers, mental health, climatic conditions, food, daycare, and transportation.

The selected group of graduate international students often have faced financial challenges. These participants discussed high tuition fees, living expenses, and rent as the main difficulties associated with financial challenges. Many students have stated that relying on personal or family funding to cover their educational and living costs, doing two or more jobs to earn more money while some participants have expressed concerns about borrowing money from friends and family were the strategies that they have used to overcome their financial challenges.

Some participants pointed out that it caused financial stress and impacted their overall well-being. Some of these elements are also present in the literature.

Yan and Berliner (2018) conducted a study which revealed that the imposition of high tuition fees can result in elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and financial difficulties among international students. These challenges, in turn, have the potential to adversely affect their mental well-being and academic achievements.

Moreover, the substantial cost of tuition fees can contribute to a perception of inequity and alienation among international students, as they may perceive themselves as being treated unjustly in comparison to their domestic counterparts. This sense of exclusion can result in difficulties in integrating into the university community and experiencing social isolation, thereby intensifying the existing challenges encountered by international students (Bhandari et al., 2016).

The survey participants highlighted that they are often burdened with higher tuition fees compared to domestic students. This disparity in tuition fees can create a sense of financial inequality and may lead to feelings of unfair treatment among international students. They perceive that they are paying a higher price for their education, which can contribute to a sense of exclusion and frustration.

This financial discrepancy can further exacerbate the challenges faced by international students, making it more difficult for them to afford their education and meet their living expenses.

International students have experienced a significant cultural adjustment when they arrive at the university. They may encounter differences in educational systems, teaching styles, and classroom expectations. Adapting to a new cultural environment, social norms, and making friends from diverse backgrounds can be both exciting and challenging. When students move to a new country, they often encounter cultural differences that can impact their daily lives, interactions, and overall sense of belonging.

These challenges can manifest in various ways, including differences in social norms and customs, and adjusting to a new educational system.

According to the participant's responses, Cultural adjustment problems have manifested themselves in various ways such as confusion, anxiety, isolation, loneliness, homesickness, and frustration. This fact was discussed in Chapter 2; literature review. "International students may find it difficult to adjust to a new cultural environment, and may experience feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and social isolation" (Mori, 2000).

Accessing healthcare services in a new country has been a concern for the selected group of international students. They have encountered problems navigating to the healthcare system in St. John's, understand health insurance requirements, and find suitable healthcare providers.

According to the survey results, limited access to healthcare is a significant challenge faced by many international students. When studying in a foreign country, students may encounter barriers that prevent them from easily accessing the healthcare services they need. These barriers were identified by the participants as unfamiliarity with the healthcare system, financial constraints, and the lack of appropriate insurance coverage. The lack of appropriate insurance coverage has been a major factor in accessing healthcare services.

Some international students have reported about comprehensive health insurance or insurance plans that have limited coverage or restrictions. This has resulted in challenges when seeking specialized care, mental health services, or preventive screenings. Without adequate insurance coverage, students may hesitate to seek medical help, leading to potential health complications and a negative impact on their overall well-being.

Finding suitable and affordable accommodation was a common challenge for graduate international students. Limited availability and high rental costs made it difficult to secure housing close to the university. Due to the limited availability of affordable housing options, international students often struggle to find affordable and suitable housing, which has impacted their academic performance and overall well-being.

Some students relied on shared accommodations or commute longer distances, impacting their convenience and overall quality of life. Accommodation challenges for international students in Canada were reviewed in chapter 2, "approximately one-third of international students reported spending more than 50% of their monthly income on rent and utilities" (HEQCO, 2019). After analyzing the data collected through the survey, the researcher found that students spent more than half of their monthly income on rent.

Language barriers have posed challenges in academic and social contexts. International students may face difficulties in understanding lectures, participating in class discussions, and expressing themselves effectively. Adjusting to a new language and improving language proficiency takes time and effort, impacting their overall academic experience. This was discussed in literature review, "...the lack of confidence in English language skills is a significant challenge faced by international students, as highlighted in the studies by Dillon and Swann (1997), Takahashi (1989), and Tompson and Tompson (1996) as referenced in Senyshyn et al. (2001). The data analysis helped to find out that by addressing these language challenges through targeted language support programs, English conversation clubs, groups or activities and creating an inclusive environment can contribute to the academic and social integration of international students and enhance their overall learning experience.

The mental health of international students is a critical concern. The stress of academic workload has been a main factor to mental health. The data analysis helped to find that excessive levels of academic stress can result in an “increased prevalence of psychological and physical problems like depression, anxiety, nervousness, and stress-related disorders,” which in turn can adversely affect academic results.

One effective way the participants have practiced to manage mental stress is by breaking down larger academic goals into smaller, manageable tasks. By breaking it down into smaller components, they create a roadmap that allows for a more structured and less overwhelming approach. By setting specific milestones and deadlines for each task has given the participants a sense of progress and achievement.

Another successful strategy that has been adopted by the participants to overcome academic pressure was by talking to Professors or instructors has been another strategy used by the participants to overcome academic stress. Most of the participants reported that building a relationship with the professors, supervisors or instructors is crucial for managing academic stress. They have been valuable resources who could provide guidance, clarification, and support for the participants. Professors are often understanding and willing to help students who show initiative and a genuine interest in their studies. Their insights and feedback can help alleviate stress and provide valuable guidance for academic success.

International students may experience challenges adjusting to the climate of their host country, particularly if it is significantly different from their home country. Extreme temperatures, seasonal changes, and unfamiliar weather patterns can impact their physical well-being and overall comfort.

The majority of the participants have used weather forecast apps in their phones to check weather conditions and dressed in the suitable gear to overcome climatic challenges. Meanwhile they have reported that they had to spend more money purchasing winter clothes.

Survey results show that international students have experienced challenges related to food, including dietary preferences, availability of familiar ingredients, and cultural dietary restrictions. Adjusting to the local cuisine, finding affordable and suitable food options, and maintaining a healthy diet can be important considerations for their well-being. International students encountered challenges related to food appropriateness, which pertains to the compatibility between the available food options and the dietary preferences dictated by their religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. This issue has been highlighted in scholarly literature by researchers such as Pinstруп-Andersen (2009) and Stewin (2013).

For international students who have children, finding suitable and affordable daycare facilities is a major challenge. Balancing academic commitments with

childcare responsibilities requires careful planning and access to reliable daycare services.

International students face a multitude of challenges when pursuing their education abroad. From language barriers to cultural adjustment, financial constraints to social integration, these hurdles can significantly impact their academic success and overall well-being. Therefore I was able to provide the following recommendations after considering the data analysis and conclusion to support and aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters their academic and personal growth.

Recommendations

Financial challenges have significantly impacted international students' well-being and academic progress. Universities should establish robust financial support systems, including scholarships, grants, and work-study opportunities specifically tailored for international students. They should expand more career opportunities on campus to gain more work experience that would help international students in their resumes to find more jobs and income. Additionally, providing access to financial advisors who can guide students on budgeting, managing expenses, and exploring part-time job opportunities can help alleviate their financial burdens.

Universities should offer comprehensive cultural orientation programs to help international students adapt to the new cultural environment. These programs can provide information about local customs, traditions, and social norms, as well as practical guidance on navigating daily life in the host country. Furthermore, creating platforms for intercultural exchange, such as international student associations and cultural events, can facilitate interaction between domestic and international students, fostering understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

One of the primary challenges for international students is language proficiency. Universities should establish comprehensive language support programs to assist students in improving their language skills. This may include language courses, conversation partners, writing workshops, and language labs. Additionally, providing access to online resources, language software, and language exchange programs can further enhance students' language acquisition.

International students often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and homesickness due to the pressures of studying abroad. Universities should prioritize mental health services, including counseling, support groups, and workshops, that cater to the unique needs of international students. Culturally sensitive mental health professionals who understand the specific challenges faced by international students can provide invaluable support.

MUN should ensure that health care services are easily accessible to international students. This includes providing clear information about available health services, their locations, operating hours, and contact details. Additionally, considering extended hours of operation of MUN Wellness Center or providing virtual health services can accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of international students.

Providing clear and comprehensive information about health insurance requirements and coverage for international students would support international students to overcome their health care challenges. Moreover, providing guidance on how to navigate the health insurance system, including the process for filing claims and accessing services and clear communication about the coverage and limitations of health insurance will help students make informed decisions about their healthcare needs.

Universities should offer comprehensive academic support services to help international students navigate the unfamiliar academic systems and expectations. This may include study skills workshops, tutoring programs, academic advising, and writing centers specifically geared towards international students. Providing resources and guidance on research methodologies, academic integrity, and citation styles can also help them succeed in their studies.

Securing suitable and affordable housing can be a major concern for international students. Universities should provide assistance in finding on-campus or off-campus housing options that meet international students' needs. Offering guidance on rental agreements, roommate matching services, and resources for understanding local housing laws can help alleviate their housing-related stress.

Faculty, staff, and domestic students should receive training on intercultural sensitivity and awareness. This will enable them to better understand and support the unique needs and experiences of international students. By fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment, universities can create a sense of belonging and promote positive interactions among students from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, MUN should establish feedback mechanisms to regularly assess the effectiveness of their support initiatives for international students. Hence MUN has extended their services to support in many ways to international students, but according to this survey results some of the problems and challenges of international students have not yet been addressed. Therefore, by conducting surveys, focus groups, or individual feedback sessions university can gather input from students. Actively seeking student input and addressing their concerns will help refine and improve the support services provided.

Addressing the challenges faced by international students requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses language support, cultural integration, financial

assistance, mental health services, academic support, housing assistance, and intercultural sensitivity. In conclusion, this researcher has articulated a number of recommendations, which should ameliorate many of the challenges international students are currently experiencing in their studies at MUN. However, there may be some services which international students may not be cognizant of. This researcher, therefore, strongly suggests that a forum conducted by the Internationalization Office be set up during the first month of the academic year to inform students of a variety of services that are available to them. For example, the services the support programs can be emailed as an attachment to the newly accepted students as a welcome package to make the newcomers being guided and feel safe in a foreign country. By implementing these recommendations, universities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students, facilitating their academic success, personal growth, and overall well-being. It is crucial to recognize the invaluable contributions of international students and provide them with the necessary resources and support to thrive in their educational pursuits.

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Appendix A
Online survey

Challenges experienced by international students at MUN while doing their graduate studies.

Online Survey

You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer

1. A) Are you currently experiencing financial challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various financial challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your financial challenges?

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2. A) Are you currently experiencing cultural challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various cultural challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your cultural challenges?

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3. A) Are you currently experiencing Health care challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)
YES ____
NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Health care challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your Health care challenges?

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4. A) Are you currently experiencing Accommodation challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various accommodation challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your accommodation challenges?

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5. A) Are you currently experiencing language challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various language challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your language challenges?

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6. A) Are you currently experiencing Mental Health challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Mental Health challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your mental health challenges?

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7. A) Are you currently experiencing Climatic challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Climatic challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your climatic challenges?

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8. A) Are you currently experiencing food challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various food challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your food challenges?

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9. A) Are you currently experiencing Day care challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Day care challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your daycare challenges?

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10.A) Are you currently experiencing Employment challenges during your graduate studies here at Memorial University? (Please check one of these)

YES ____

NO ____.

B) If you have checked YES, please proceed to C. If you have checked NO, please ignore C.

C) Please elaborate on those various Employment challenges you have been experiencing since you have started your graduate studies here at MUN.

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How did you overcome your employment challenges?

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11. Are there any other challenges (not already mentioned above) that you would like to elaborate on in this space.

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Appendix B
Ethics approval letter



Interdisciplinary Committee on

Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
 Tel: 709 864-2561
 icehr@mun.ca

www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	20230007-ED
Approval Period:	July 20, 2022 – July 31, 2023
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Jerome Delaney Faculty of Education
Title of Project:	<i>Challenges experienced by international students at MUN while doing their graduate studies</i>

July 20, 2022

Mrs. Radheeka Ranasinghe
 Faculty of Education
 Memorial University

Dear Mrs. Ranasinghe:

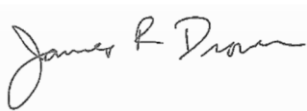
Thank you for your correspondence addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) for the above-named research project. ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarifications and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* for **one year**. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project. If funding is obtained subsequent to ethics approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR so that this ethics clearance can be linked to your award.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you **strictly adhere to the protocol and documents as last reviewed by**

ICEHR. If you need to make additions and/or modifications, you must submit an [Amendment Request](#) with a description of these changes, for the Committee's review of potential ethical concerns, before they may be implemented. Submit a [Personnel Change Form](#) to add or remove project team members and/or research staff. Also, to inform ICEHR of any unanticipated occurrences, an [Adverse Event Report](#) must be submitted with an indication of how the unexpected event may affect the continuation of the project.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you submit an [Annual Update](#) to ICEHR before **July 31, 2023**. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. All post-approval [ICEHR event forms](#) noted above must be submitted by selecting the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Researcher Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James R. Drover". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered below the text "Yours sincerely,".

James Drover, Ph.D.

Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research

JD/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Jerome Delaney, Faculty of Education