

# **The Cross-cultural Experiences of International Secondary Students in Anglophone Countries— A Hermeneutic Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Prior to the pandemic, the number of international secondary students in anglophone countries had grown rapidly. Yet these minor transnational learners, most of whom unaccompanied, remain largely understudied and neglected in the educational research and policy discourses. This hermeneutic literature review addresses the literature gap by (a) identifying and synthesizing the available scholarly evidence on the cross-cultural experiences of international secondary students in anglophone countries, and (b) offering a critical analysis and assessment of the evidence that led to identification of knowledge and methodological gaps as well as implications for future studies. A conceptual framework was developed to provide a visual guideline of the cross-cultural adaptation process of international secondary students.*

**Keywords:** cross-cultural adaptation, hermeneutic literature review, international secondary students

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**P**rior to the pandemic, the transnational mobility of secondary school students had been on the rise in anglophone countries (i.e., US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand). In the US, the population of international secondary students increased by over 300% from 2004 to 2016. From 2013 to 2016, the increase in international enrollment at high schools (22%) had outpaced that of higher learning in the US (16%) (Farrugia, 2017). In 2019, of the total

69,518 international students in US high schools, 68% were long-term diploma-seeking students holding a F-1 visa and 32% were short-term exchange students with a J-1 visa (Mason & Andrejko, 2020). In Canada, a total of 56,160 international students enrolled in secondary schools in 2017, making up 11.4% of all international students (CBIE, 2018). In the UK, international secondary students grew by 7% from 2013 to 2016. Australia saw the most significant increase rate—34% in the same period (Farrugia, 2017).

Researchers have used a variety of terms to describe these minor international students. They are referred to as “unaccompanied minors” (Lee et al., 2020; Popadiuk, 2019, 2010; Ying, 2001), “parachute kids” (Abelmann et al., 2014; Cheng, 2020; Ngan & Chan 2021; Sun, 2014; Zhou, 1998), and “homestay students” (Wong et al., 2010). In this review, I refer to these fee-paying international students attending pre-tertiary schools in anglophone countries as “international secondary students” (Farrugia, 2014, 2017), henceforth ISS.

Despite the rapidly increasing number of ISS in the anglophone countries in the past two decades, there has been a dearth of research studies on these minor transnational learners (Cheng, 2021; Lee & Wentz, 2019; Nicola, 2021; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010). This literature gap is likely due to the complex, time-consuming, and multiple ethical review procedures involved in conducting research on minors (Popadiuk, 2010), especially considering the multifarious barriers in obtaining informed consent from overseas parents who require translation in multiple languages. Sadly, this means that ISS, as one of the most vulnerable groups of learners, remain largely understudied in educational research and policy discourses. An extensive search on Google Scholar and ERIC resulted in zero literature review articles focused on ISS in the past 25 years. Hence, a scoping literature review on the available studies on ISS thus far is both timely and critical in understanding these students’ experiences and informing future research studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To further contextualize the present study, I highlight the existing research on two pertinent areas in the ensuing section: a) the ISS mobility and contributing factors to the rising ISS enrolment in Anglophone countries, and b) the cross-cultural adaptation experience of international tertiary students. The research purpose and questions of the current study are presented afterwards.

### **International Secondary Student Mobility**

Historically, the global mobility of secondary students can be traced back to the youth exchanges organized by Rotary clubs in Europe in the 1920s. Up until the 1980s, short-term exchange students, mainly from Europe

and South America, had accounted for most of the transnational secondary student population worldwide (Farrugia, 2014). Since the 1980s, long-term diploma-seeking ISS from East Asia have gradually replaced the exchange students from Europe and Latin America to form the majority of ISS population in Anglophone countries (Farrugia, 2014, 2017). In the US, the biggest population of diploma-seeking international secondary students is from East Asia, with China accounting for almost 50%, followed by 8% each from Vietnam and South Korea (Mason & Andrejko, 2020). Similar demographic composition was also found in Canada and Australia (CBIE, 2018; Farrugia, 2014).

Scholars have attributed this upward trend of ISS enrolments in anglophone countries to the following factors: First, rapid economic growth in the newly industrialized economies has prompted the growing middle-classes to send their children abroad to accumulate what Bourdieu (1994) called ‘symbolic’ and ‘cultural’ capital (OECD, 2021; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014) and to maintain and reproduce their privileged social status (Cheng, 2020). Second, the fiercely competitive, test-oriented K-12 education system in East Asia impelled the middle-classes in this region to seek a western liberal education to circumvent the repressive education environment and to build cosmopolitan assets for advantageous career prospects (Kim, 2014; Lee et al., 2020; Wu & Zheng, 2019). Third, sociopolitical and socioeconomic instabilities in the ISS home countries/territories, such as the termination of U.S–Taiwan diplomatic relationship in 1979 and the return of Hongkong to China in 1997, triggered significant anxieties and precipitated large number of ISS from these regions to study in more stable and democratic anglophone countries (Ying, 2001). Most recently, China’s tightening political control over Hongkong has propelled a new emigration wave in that region —HK’s secondary schools lost, on average, 32 students and 7 teachers per school in the 2020–2021 school year (Chau, 2022).

Anglophone countries are the most desirable international student destinations overall, with four countries (US, UK, Canada, and Australia) attracting over 40% of all international students among OECD and partner countries (OECD, 2020). Apart from the obvious reason that these countries speak English—the *lingua franca* of the global village, another contributing factor to their popularity is that these four Anglophone host countries are among the top 10 destinations of immigrants (UN Population Division, 2020). Attracted by a prospect of higher standards of living, many families from the newly industrialized countries send their children to these destinations as a long-term life strategy to increase the prospect of immigrating and settling in the country afterwards (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Additionally, the well-established ethnic communities in these immigrant countries are believed to facilitate cross-cultural adaptation by lowering informational costs (Robertson, 2011) and psychic costs (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014).

## **Cross-cultural Adaptation**

Approaching from the open-system perspective, Kim (2001) defined cross-cultural adaptation as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (p. 31). To this date, there has been proliferous literature on the operationalization of the cross-cultural adaptation of international students and the multifaceted factors that facilitate or impede the adaptation process (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2016; Poyrazli et al., 2010; Sandel, 2014; Wang et al., 2012), but the vast majority focused on international tertiary students. Some of the most identified cross-cultural challenges among the international tertiary students include: (a) Lack of communication competence including English proficiency and social communication skills as the primary challenge to successful adaptation for students from East Asia (Leong, 2015); (b) More academic struggles in general than their domestic peers (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Irizarry, & Marlowe, 2010), which include comprehending lectures, academic reading and writing (Wu & Hammond, 2011), in-class presentation and discussion (Kim, 2011), study workload, and ambiguity over teaching styles (Redfern, 2016); (c) Perceived discrimination which negatively impacted their adaptation and wellbeing (Nilsson et al., 2008); (d) Social isolation and loneliness as a major stressor on campus (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008); and (e) Lower levels of social support than their domestic peers (Hechanova et al., 2003; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008), which is linked to higher levels of depression (Dao et al., 2007).

There is also accumulative literature comparing the experiences of white, European international post-secondary students with non-white, particularly Asian, counterparts. European students reportedly experience fewer adaptation challenges in the US than their non-European counterparts (Kim & Kim, 2016; Poyrazli et al., 2010) and significantly lower levels of acculturative stress than Asian/Pacific islanders (Poyrazli et al., 2010).

## **The Present Study**

The aim of this literature review was to (a) identify and synthesize the available scholarly evidence on the cross-cultural experiences of ISS in anglophone countries, and (b) offer a critical analysis and assessment of the evidence that led to identification of knowledge gaps and implications for future studies. A conceptual framework was developed to provide a visual guideline of the cross-cultural adaptation process of ISS based on the synthesized evidence of this scoping review.

The following research questions guide this literature review: 1). What are challenges and successes in the cross-cultural adaptation of ISS in

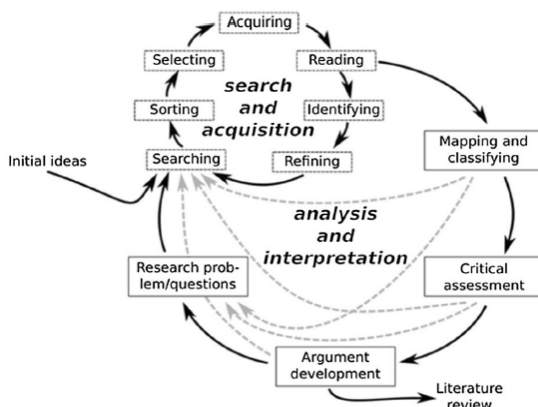
anglophone countries? 2). What supports are needed to facilitate effective cross-cultural adaptation?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This literature review undertook a hermeneutic approach which conceptualized the literature review process as a fusion of horizons of the reviewer and the text in a dialogical hermeneutic circle as illustrated in Figure 1. The hermeneutic framework consists of two intertwined hermeneutic circles—the search and acquisition circle and the analysis and interpretation circle—in a recursive fashion. The concept of saturation is used to determine when the literature review is sufficiently comprehensive and inclusive (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014).

**Figure 1**

*The Hermeneutic Framework for the Literature Review*



*Note.* From “A Hermeneutic Approach for Conducting Literature Reviews and Literature Searches” by S. K. Boell, and D. Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, *Communications for the Association of Information Systems*, 34, 12, p. 264.

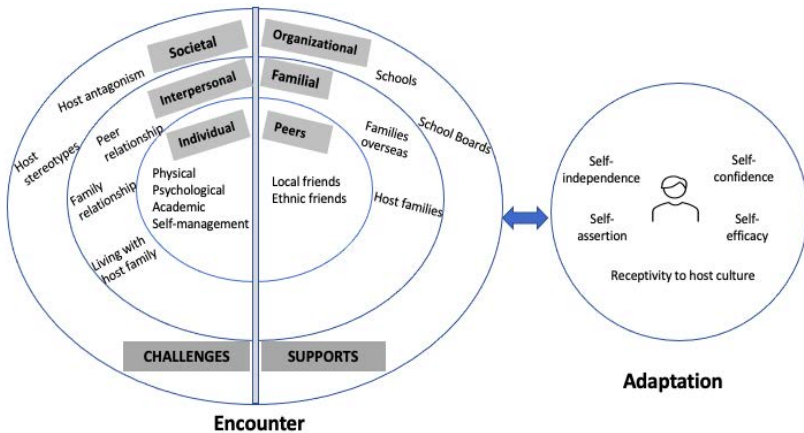
### Stage 1: Search and Acquisition

The comprehensive literature search employed two search databases: Google Scholar and ERIC. The following search terms and combined terms were used: “international secondary students”, “parachute kid\*”, “fee-paying students”, “early study\* abroad”, “adolescent OR unaccompanied OR minor AND “international students”, “cross-cultural” AND “international secondary students”. The inclusion criteria were: Original research studies on ISS in Anglophone countries and peer-reviewed journal articles written in English published in the past 25 years (1996–2021). While majority of the available articles on ISS were published in the past two decades when rapid

growth of ISS enrolment occurred, I extended the time frame to 25 years to include studies in the late 1990s whose findings, such as ISS relationships with parents and host parents, are still relevant today. The whole search process was circular and underwent constant refining using citation tracking which helped to identify additional relevant literature in the reference lists of procured articles, and citation analysis which allowed the tracking of related literature that cited an obtained publication through Google Scholar (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). No themes were developed prior to the search to allow for an open dialogue between the reviewer and the text. The search commenced in July 2021 and ended in September 2021.

**Stage 2: Classification, Analysis, and Interpretation**

The articles were mapped and classified in three phases: (a) a tabular comparison of each source which created a concise look at the essential information for cross-article comparison and contrast (Ridley, 2012); (b) a tabular summary of the patterns in the scholarship (see Appendix); and (c) a systematic analysis of the key findings and contributions within the literature and a thematic synthesis of the analysis. During the process, there was constant returning to Stage 1 for further evidence acquisition. The hermeneutic circle closed after the review process reached a point of saturation. A total of 30 empirical studies were identified, classified, and critically analyzed. 3 studies were excluded at the end of this process because of a lack of direct relevance to cross-cultural adaptation. The results are based on the remaining 27 studies.



**Figure 2**  
*Conceptual Framework of the Cross-Cultural Adaptation of International Secondary Students*

## RESULTS

An initial conceptual framework of the cross-cultural adaptation process of ISS was developed drawing on the thematic synthesis. This visually conceptualizing process illuminated the themes (parts) in the holistic context (whole). With the new insights gained from the whole, the reviewer delved back into the parts for more in-depth interpretation, then returned to the whole with an enhanced understanding. Figure 2 shows the refined conceptual framework.

### **Challenges**

The moment ISS land in the host country, they are in a state of “existential alertness” (Kim, 2001, p. 5). The strangeness in the new cultural environment poses adaptative challenges at individual, interpersonal, and societal levels.

#### ***Individual Challenges***

The challenges at the individual level entail physical challenges, psychological challenges, self-management, and academic adjustment.

**Physical Challenges.** They ranged from illness and injury—ones we all subject to—to bullying, taunting, and physical assault related to racism (Sheehan & Riddle, 2021). Of particular concern was the considerable number of sexual abuse and harassment suffered among the female homestay students (Popadiuk, 2009; Wong et al., 2010). Wong et al. (2010) discovered, based on a large-scale adolescent health survey conducted in British Columbia, Canada, that one in four female homestay students reported sexual abuse—a much higher rate than among other adolescents. The study also reported a significantly higher likelihood of cocaine use among female homestay students. Wong and associates raised alarm at the regulatory vacuum in host families that placed ISS in extreme vulnerability. Finally, another physical challenge often unthought of by the local people was the limited physical mobility as a result of the inconvenient public transportation, which contributed to students’ social isolation (Kim, 2014; Popadiuk, 2010).

**Psychological Challenges.** The most common psychological challenge across the studies is the sense of social isolation and loneliness (Kim, 2014; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Mok, 2015; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021). Many ISS also reported high distress and suicidal ideation (Cho & Haslam, 2010; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Popadiuk, 2009). Cho & Haslam (2010) compared Korean unaccompanied high school international students with Korean immigrant adolescents living with parents and other general American high school students in the US and found that Korean ISS had the highest levels in all the negative outcome measures. They endorsed almost twice the level of suicidal ideation as the immigrant group, with a great

number of them displaying clinically significant levels of depression and suicidal risk. Many ISS also grappled with a sense of guilt incurred by failing to meet parental expectations (Kim & Okazaki, 2014). The fourth psychological challenge was in the form of “identity crisis” (Erickson, 1968). To some ISS, cross-cultural sojourning exerted on them a growing sense of rootlessness because of estrangement from their parents as well as from both their home and host society (Sun, 2014). To some others, it resulted in a heightened affiliation with native culture and national identity (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Lee et al., 2020; Ying, 2001) as many of them experienced deprivation of privilege—from being privileged to being marginalized in the host society (Cheng, 2020).

**Self-management.** Self-managing the new-found freedom was a major challenge facing these minor sojourners (Cheng, 2020; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Zhou, 1998). Having too much free time after school with too little adult supervision was a major risk factor (Zhou, 1998). Kim (2014) reported that over a third of participants disliked the free time after school and the lack of structure in their everyday lives. They failed to self-manage the time as they often spent time with ethnic friends until late into evenings (Kim & Okazaki, 2014), or addicted to video gaming to escape reality (Cheng, 2020; Wu & Zheng, 2019).

**Academic Challenges.** An important indicator of psychological adjustment in transnational education is academic and linguistic adjustment. Low academic adjustment is correlated with higher levels of acculturative stress and more perceived prejudice (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). ISS’ underestimation of academic challenges prior to arrival was common across the studies (Cheng, 2020; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Wu, 2020). The reported academic challenges can be categorized into three dimensions: Linguistic, structural, and cultural.

First, English proficiency largely determined the overall experience of a student’s transition both inside and beyond the school. Some ISS even rated English competence as the most important factor leading to success (Sheehan & Riddle, 2021). Wu (2020) identified the English-only monolingual and coercive learning environment as major detriment impeding students’ English learning. In her classroom observation in a private boarding school which primarily served international students in Ontario, Canada, several teaching practices that led to coercive learning environment were noted: a ban on use of bilingual dictionary and cell phone for translation, grade penalty for speaking home language, requesting students with limited English proficiency to submit assignments free of linguistic errors, and attributing the grammar mistakes to learners’ irresponsibility. Furthermore, Kim (2014) observed that lack of English skills caused more problems in the host home than school as students were reluctant to join host activities because of difficulty in expressing subtle emotions and nuances (Kim, 2014).



Grieve (2015) identified three primary factors influencing English acquisition among German short-term international students: Involvement with the local culture facilitated by the host family and other gatekeepers, students' proactivity to seek out language learning opportunities, and the students' individual identity needs.

Second, ISS had to make adjustment to the structural differences in the host education system. They include: (a) different evaluation system—from summative exam-focused learning to an accumulative system where every assignment counts for grades, (b) different teacher-student relationship—from authoritarian to authoritative (Cheng, 2020), and (c) different classroom structures—from student-based classrooms to teacher-based classrooms (Kim, 2014).

Finally, ISS had to adjust to different cultural logics embedded in learning. They are reflected in: (a) conflict over “self-governed” learning, with ISS perceiving the teachers' emphasis on students' learning responsibilities as a lack of professional work ethics, (b) lack of social and cultural background to engage in critical thinking, (c) the cultural praxis of avoiding losing face in public attributing to passive participation in class discussion (Wu, 2020), and (d) different perceptions of plagiarism because of different cultural understandings of ownership of knowledge (Cheng, 2020).

The three dimensions of academic challenges are mutually constitutive. Both linguistic and structural challenges must be examined in the context of cultures involved. The mental health cost of coping with these academic challenges is also largely culture-driven, as the cultural praxis of attaching excellence in learning to filial piety and family face in East Asia places ISS from this region in emotional susceptibility to feelings of guilt. Students were reported to be avoiding contact with parents because of guilt and anxiety over their disappointing academic performance (Kim & Okazaki, 2014), which in turn estranged teacher-student, parent-student relationships (Wu & Zheng, 2019).

### ***Interpersonal Challenges***

Many ISS were in a state of “relational deficit” (Soong, 2016) with little understanding from either the host or the home societies (Wu & Zheng, 2019). They had to grapple with interpersonal challenges with parents, host families, and peers.

**Family Relationship.** Family estrangement was a common price ISS and their families paid for the transnational separation (Abelmann et al., 2014; Wu & Zheng, 2019 p. 30; Mok, 2015; Ngan & Chan, 2021). When communicating with their child overseas, many parents exclusively focused on academic performance (Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Mok, 2015) or money (Zhou, 1998), which bred further psychological distance. Those who studied abroad against their wishes expressed anger towards their parents (Kim &

Okazaki, 2014). Some even became quite skillful in manipulating the parents' sense of guilt to attain their wishes (Zhou, 1998). Ngan and Chan (2021) studied perspectives of parachute kids-turned-parents from Hongkong. 15 out of 25 of these parents perceived transnational family separation as an emotional detriment to their own childhood and would not choose to inflict the same feelings of loneliness and alienation on their children. However, there were also ISS who felt emotionally closer to their parents and learned the value of family time during the separation (Lee et al., 2020; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021), though these students still faced culture-based tensions with parents such as conflicts over dating and friendship (Lee et al., 2020; Lee & Friedlander, 2014).

**Living with Host Families.** Many ISS failed to develop a stable and trusting relationship with the hosts (Kim, 2014; Zhou, 1998). Common complaints against the host families included unfulfilled host responsibilities, house chores, different living habits (Cheng, 2020), constant scolding for poor grades (Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Newman & Newman, 2009), being too nosy or too strict (Zhou, 1998), and more interest in them as financial asset than as persons (Sauer & Ellis, 2019). On the other hand, the host parents reported that they were reluctant to discipline the host child for fear that active roles would lead to strained relationship and loss of income (Zhou, 1998).

**Peer Relationship.** Peer groups played a pivotal role in facilitating or impeding the success of immigrant children (Zhou, 1998). A lack of supportive peer group contributed to an outsider feeling which hindered the development of group identity (Newman & Newman, 2009). One ISS claimed in Sheehan and Riddle's (2021) study that difficult peer relationships caused her more pain than all the other challenges she faced in Australia. ISS in general found it difficult to befriend local students. Language barrier could be attributed to this difficulty as ISS often avoided interaction with local people to avoid the anxiety of English speaking. However, the main cause, according to some Korean ISS studying in the US, was the cultural difference in the concept of friends. These students reported feeling culturally closer to other Asians than Americans (Kim, 2014). Participants in Sheehan and Riddle's (2021) study in Australia echoed this view and shared that their lack of common knowledge of pop culture with local students would hamper friendship formation even given adequate English skills. Many ISS also reported bullying (Sheehan & Riddle, 2021), ill-informed prejudice, and accent/racism incurred discrimination from the local students (Cheng, 2020; Kim & Okazaki, 2014). Moreover, students who wished to sustain friendship with both local and ethnic students risked being ostracised because of perceived "divided loyalties" (Sheehan & Riddle, 2021, p. 7). Meanwhile, friendship within ethnic peers was not problem free either—it was a site of different types of struggles. For example, Korean ISS had to cope with the hierarchical senior-junior social status inherent in Korean social relationships

as well as within-group discrimination (Kim & Okazaki, 2014). The limited stock of ethnic friends available also created extra stress in maintaining ethnic friends (Kim, 2014).

### ***Societal Challenges: Host Antagonism and Stereotyping***

Human agency and society are ontologically complementary to each other (Harvey, 2009), hence, addressing individual challenges must take equal consideration of the societal stasis that works dialectically with human agency to reproduce these challenges. Studies that looked into the impact of international education on the host K-12 public education system (Arber 2009; Deschambault, 2018) showed evidence that the presence of ISS had discursive, rippling effect on the learning and teaching ecologies in the public schools. While desired by the host society because of their prominent economic contribution, ISS also became the racialized ‘other’ and found “their ‘otherness’ inscribed and embodied in a schizophrenic process of antagonism and desire shaped within powerful discourses of identity and difference, cosmopolitanism and commodification” (Arber, 2009, p. 168). Some teachers, whom Arber interviewed, were reluctant to provide support to ISS and their overlaying teacher talk mirrored the commodification and objectification of ISS negotiated between antagonism and desire by the host society. Another societal challenge the Asian ISS had to cope with both at school and in the host families was the racialized stereotype of Asians as model minorities. Students felt the acute pressure to succeed academically especially when they were being compared with other successful Asian students. This racialized stereotype was debilitating to ISS as their academic success was taken for granted whereas their struggles were downplayed (Sun, 2014).

### **Supports**

Establishing supportive interpersonal relationships and social support network was a key mediator of cross-cultural adaptation (Brunsting et al., 2019; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Mok, 2015; Popadiuk, 2009) and a fundamental buffer against distress and suicidal ideation for unaccompanied sojourners (Cho & Haslam, 2010). While only one study (Lee & Wentz, 2019) focused on the existing supports for ISS as the inquiry focus, all studies made suggestions on the supports that could facilitate successful cross-cultural adaptation.

### ***Peer Support***

ISS were reported to be mainly hanging out with peers from the same ethnic group (Cheng, 2020; Sauer & Ellis, 2019) or international students because they offered the greatest support (Sheehan & Riddle, 2021). While ethnic friends can provide “a sense of comfort and camaraderie” (Kim &

Okazaki, 2014, p. 6), they can also hinder students' progress in English acquisition and disrupt study schedule (Kim, 2014). In contrast, though it might be emotionally and linguistically taxing to establish friendship with local students, the rewards can boost self-esteem, facilitate English learning and a sense of belonging with the host environment (Sauer & Ellis, 2019). It is critical that schools and boards actively create opportunities that enable students to access supportive peers (Mok, 2015).

### ***Familial Support***

Parental support plays a central role in overall cross-cultural adaptation for ISS. Results indicated that ISS who had a close relationship with parents tended to adjust better (Cheng, 2020) whereas a lack of parental support posed a significant obstacle for overall adjustment (Lee & Wentz, 2019; Mok, 2015). The studies suggested that parents worked closely with their children beforehand to ensure they had the proper life skills and coping abilities to study abroad (Mok, 2015). Parents should also maintain constant virtual presence for ongoing support (Cheng, 2020), providing a network of affection and intimacies for their child and sustaining the emotional bond transnationally (Ngan & Chan, 2021). The other familial source of support, the host family, is another integral part of the social support network for ISS. Grieve (2015) described the host family as “the most powerful gatekeeper to integration” (p. 650). Her study on German short-term international students in Australian high schools revealed that a supportive host family validated ISS' self-perception, enhanced English learning, and facilitated positive attitudes towards host culture, whilst a strenuous relationship with the host family impeded students' social communicative environments and limited their access to the cultural and linguistic capital in the host country. To better support ISS, Wong et al. (2010) suggested that host families receive training on providing a healthy, nurturing home environment and parenting resources. Regular host and biological family conferences were also recommended as beneficial praxis.

### ***School and School Board Supports***

East Asian ISS tend to be reluctant to access help through counselling services (Popadiuk, 2010) and teachers (Cheng, 2020). While both could be attributed to language barriers and the perceived approachability of the teachers/counsellors, the former is also linked to cultural stigma attached to mental health problems. Popadiuk (2009) suggested that schools and school board websites post information about cross-cultural adaptation process, particularly from students' own stories, so that ISS could perceive their challenges as normal and systemically embedded as opposed to abnormal and individual-based. It is essential for schools and school boards to design and implement systematic pre- and post- arrival orientation and training programs

at the arrival and early stage of sojourn. Content may include cultural knowledge and education system of the host country, social communication skills with local people, strategies to cope with prejudice (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Ying, 2001), and understanding signs for stress and mental health issues (Lee & Wentz, 2019). These programs should also involve parents to inform them of the potential challenges and emotional needs involved in transnational studying alone and of the proper ways to provide support to their children (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). Creation of formal supervisory structures, such as monthly home visits or biweekly check-ins with ISS, was also recommended to provide additional support and guidance (Cheng, 2020).

In academic learning, the suggested supports center around proper ELL funding, building teachers' intercultural sensitivity, and creating nurturing, plurilingual learning environment. Deschambault (2018) argued, based on data collected from his study on the public K-12 international education program in British Columbia, Canada, that international education there was "officially unrecognized commodification of EAL education" (p. 66). Yet given the little transparency of the allocation of the tuition revenue collected from the international students, it was likely that ISS, who were not ELL coded, might not be receiving the specialized ELL funding that was required at the school level to provide the quality ELL education that was promised to them. Deschambault called for board policy makers to properly recognize, fund, and take accountability for the English language learning needs of the increasing number of ISS in public high schools. At the school level, Wu (2020) highlighted the importance of educators' intercultural sensitivities in attending to ISS' diverse learning and linguistic needs governed by multifarious transnational forces. Wu advocated for a collaborative teacher-student relationship that allowed for negotiation of pedagogy and creation of a safe, plurilingual learning environment. Further addition to educators' intercultural understanding is the necessity to adopt a "contextual transition framework" (Popadiuk, 2009) in making sense of ISS' cross-cultural experiences and to be mindful that "intrapsychic difficulties need to be addressed within the context of the relational and systemic issues linked to transition" (p. 239). The results also pointed to the importance of garnering and honoring students' home culture as rich teaching resource and effective motivator to enhance students' learning investment. The studies showed that there was a heightened espousal of home culture as a source offering security during transition among ISS (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Lee et al., 2020; Ying, 2001), stronger than accompanied minors and university international students from the same ethnic background (Ying, 2001).

The encounter section expounds on the individual, interpersonal, and societal challenges ISS had to grapple with in their cross-cultural transition. A three-pronged support model was synthesized based on the suggested supports which capital on circuits of affection through peer and familial

support and through collaborative and culturally sensitive support from the school boards and schools.

### **Adaptation**

Despite the multifaceted challenges, most ISS in the studies persevered and made efforts to adapt to the host environment. They reported growth in self-efficacy—from being passive to proactive (Cheng, 2020; Kim & Okazaki, 2014, p. 28), in self-confidence—from being shy to sociable (Newman & Newman, 2009; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021), in receptivity and openness to host culture—joining sports teams or extracurricular activities and making local friends (Kim, 2014; Popadiuk, 2010; Sauer & Okazaki, 2014), in self-assertion—being able to resist peer pressure (Kim & Okazaki, 2014), and finally, in self-independence—ability to self-care and make decisions (Ngan & Chan, 2021; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021).

### **Ambivalence Towards Ethnic Social Communication**

A prevalent motif across the studies was a sense of ambivalence among ISS towards their ethnic social communication at both interpersonal and mass levels, namely, interaction with ethnic peers and consumption of ethnic media on the Internet. On the one hand, ISS earnestly embraced ethnic social communication for comfort and a sense of belonging; on the other hand, they did it with anxiety and guilt as they believed exclusive association with ethnic culture hindered their cross-cultural adaptation (Kim & Okazaki, 2014). Some ISS even moved out of a school when they perceived that the school failed to provide an ideal English immersion environment (Deschambault, 2018). It raised critical questions about what an “ideal English immersion environment” should look like so that it provides just the right amount of ethnic familiarity for emotional support but not too much to hinder growth. Or can these two needs be reconciled?

### **The Impact of Arrival Age on Cross-cultural Adaptation**

Of all the studies, 18 of them involved current ISS, and 8 recruited ISS-turned adults. Comparison of the findings between these two groups of studies posed an important question on how the arrival age of ISS might mediate their cross-cultural adaptation. The adult participants who were former ISS in the 8 studies were all academically successful in their transnational education experiences, yet many of them reported that they would not have their own children become unaccompanied ISS to protect their children from the ordeal they had suffered. Even among those who viewed their own study-abroad experiences positively would all choose to send their own child abroad for high school (Ngan & Chan, 2021), not elementary or junior high school. Ngan and Chan did not probe into the reason behind this unanimous choice, but Sun’s (2014) study found that, in

comparison with ISS, the students who were sent abroad before junior high school suffered a stronger sense of being abandoned and hence more acute emotional alienation from their parents. This leads us to question how the students' arrival age may mediate their overall cross-cultural adaptation, identity development, and psychological health.

## **GAPS**

This literature review revealed multiple gaps in the literature on the cross-cultural adaptation of ISS, which further accentuated the scarcity of scholarly attention to this particular group. The gaps were reflected both in the limited research focus and the lack of methodological plurality. First, little attention had been devoted to direct investigation into how to provide social support to ISS. Only two studies (Lee & Wentz, 2019; Mok, 2015) explored “how to provide support” as an inquiry focus. Second, the ethnic background of the ISS participants in the reviewed studies was overwhelmingly East Asian, namely, Chinese and Korean. ISS from other top sending countries such as Vietnam, Mexico, and Brazil were largely missing from the studies. Third, there has not been any cross-sectional study that compares the cross-cultural experiences of subgroups within ISS such as the accompanied vs unaccompanied and long-term diploma-seeking ISS vs short-term ISS. Fourth, with interview and survey being two predominant methods for data collection, there needs to be more plurality in research methodology, especially given that most ISS are English language learners with limited proficiency. An over-reliance on verbal communications in data collection may detract from the various non-verbal communications of the participants (Flewitt, 2005). Researchers on ISS need to be more methodologically mindful and nimble by collecting data through visual, sensory, and other multimodal articulations that reflect the temporality, sociality, and material locality of ISS' day-to-day lived experiences. Finally, an exclusive reliance on the student voice in most of the studies resulted in a lack of polyvocality, creating a profound gap in perspectives from parents, host families, local students, and agents.

## **LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Although two studies (Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Grieve, 2015) in this review targeted short-term ISS from German, this literature review did not include “exchange students” in the search terms. Therefore, studies that exclusively focused on secondary exchange students and used the term “exchange students” in the title were excluded in this review. Future reviews in this field could address this limitation by expanding the search terms to include short-term secondary exchange students and other relevant terminologies.

Furthermore, because this review included studies published in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it is important to note that the experiences of ISS then were likely mediated by their less convenient access to technology and other communication means. Lastly, this review did not address the impact of COVID 19 on ISS as no peer-reviewed journal articles on this topic had been published when the review was conducted. Notwithstanding the limitations, this study contributes to the body of international student literature by shedding light on the lived experiences of a growing yet invisible group of learners.

There remain a lot of other unanswered questions that call for dedicated research attention in the future: e.g. How does the pandemic impact the transnational education mobility and experiences especially in relation to racism and mental health? How does the number of ethnic peers in a school impact the cross-cultural adaptation of ISS? What is the long-term impact of early study abroad on ISS' identity formation and psychological health? What are the interacting effects of puberty and cross-cultural adaptation? How can researchers engage in intersectional analysis to capture the “bio-psycho-social mix” (Sharfstein, 2005) and the temporal-spatial dynamics which constitute the ISS' cross-cultural adaptation experiences?

More integrative interdisciplinary research approaches are required as the transnational education experiences necessitate research attention to individual agency at the micro level, the structural/institutional praxis at the meso level, the structural/societal context at the macro level, and the equally important interplay between them. ISS researchers are also encouraged to partner up with school boards and/or agencies so that the research findings can make more substantive impact on the community at large. It is earnestly hoped that this literature review will call forth more empirical studies on the international secondary students—one of the most scholarly overlooked and vulnerable groups of learners in the anglophone countries.

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## Appendix

### Summary of the Patterns in the Included Articles

Criterion		No. of Studies	Articles
<b>Sources of Data</b>	<b>Primary</b>	25	Ngan & Chan, 2021; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Cheng, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Wu, 2020; Brunsting et al., 2019; Lee & Wentz, 2019; Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Deschambault, 2018; Grieve, 2015; Mok, 2015; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Sun, 2014; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Cho & Haslam, 2010; Arber, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2009; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Ying, 2001; Zhou, 1998;
	<b>Secondary</b>	2	Abelmann et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2010
<b>ISS Nationality</b>	<b>Taiwan</b>	6	Lee et al., 2020; Mok, 2015; Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Sun, 2014; Newman & Newman, 2009; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006
	<b>Hongkong</b>	1	Ngan & Chan, 2021
	<b>Mainland China</b>	4	Cheng, 2020; Wu, 2020; Lee & Wentz, 2019; Wu & Zheng, 2019
	<b>Chinese Inclusive</b>	2	Ying, 2001; Zhou, 1998
	<b>South Korea</b>	4	Abelmann et al., 2014; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Cho & Haslam, 2010
	<b>East Asia Inclusive</b>	5	Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Wong et al., 2010;
	<b>German</b>	2	Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Grieve, 2015
	<b>Mixed</b>	3	Brunsting et al., 2019; Deschambault, 2018; Arber, 2009
<b>Participants Involved</b>	<b>Current ISS</b>	12	Lee & Wentz, 2019; Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Grieve, 2015; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Cho & Haslam, 2010; Wong et al., 2010; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Ying, 2001
	<b>ISS-Turned Adults</b>	8	Ngan & Chan, 2021; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Lee et al., 2020; Brunsting et al., 2019; Mok, 2015; Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Sun, 2014; Newman & Newman, 2009
	<b>Current ISS, Teachers and Administrators</b>	4	Cheng, 2020; Wu, 2020; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Deschambault, 2018;
	<b>Current ISS, Guardians, Teachers and Councillors</b>	1	Zhou, 1998
	<b>Teachers and Administrators</b>	1	Arber, 2009
<b>Location of Study</b>	<b>US</b>	12	Cheng, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Brunsting et al., 2019; Lee & Wentz, 2019; Mok, 2015; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Sun, 2014; Cho & Haslam, 2010; Newman & Newman, 2009; Ying, 2001; Zhou, 1998;
	<b>US and Canada</b>	1	Lee & Friedlander, 2014
	<b>Canada</b>	8	Wu, 2020; Deschambault, 2018; Wong et al., 2010; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006
	<b>Australia</b>	3	Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Grieve, 2015; Arber, 2009
	<b>New Zealand</b>	1	Sauer & Ellis, 2019
	<b>Mixed</b>	2	Ngan & Chan, 2021; Abelmann et al., 2014
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	20	Ngan & Chan, 2021; Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Cheng, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Wu, 2020; Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Deschambault, 2018; Grieve, 2015; Mok, 2015; Abelmann et al., 2014; Kim, 2014; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Sun, 2014; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Arber, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2009; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Zhou, 1998
	<b>Quantitative</b>	6	Brunsting et al., 2019; Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Cho & Haslam, 2010; Wong et al., 2010; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Ying, 2001;
	<b>Mixed Method</b>	1	Lee & Wentz, 2019
<b>Focus Lens</b>	<b>Cross-cultural Adaptation</b>	18	Sheehan & Riddle, 2021; Cheng, 2020; Wu, 2020; Brunsting et al., 2019; Sauer & Ellis, 2019; Wu & Zheng, 2019; Kim & Okasaki, 2014; Kim, 2014; Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Cho & Haslam, 2010; Wong et al., 2010; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Newman & Newman, 2009; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Ying, 2001; Zhou, 1998
	<b>Familyhood</b>	4	Ngan & Chan, 2021; Lee & Chong, 2020; Abelmann et al., 2014; Sun, 2014
	<b>Host Receptivity</b>	2	Deschambault, 2018; Arber 2009
	<b>Intervention</b>	2	Lee & Wentz, 2019; Mok, 2015
	<b>Host Family and Identity</b>	1	Grieve, 2015

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