Transitional Experience of International Students from African Countries Studying in Canada: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to understand the transitional experience of international students from African countries who are studying in Canada, provide guidance on how post-secondary institutions in Canada can best support these international students from African countries to enable them to settle and succeed in their academics, add to the limited body of literature on African students in Canada and give a voice and advocate for African students in BC. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions in line with this purpose:
1. What are the transition experiences of international students from African countries studying in Canada?
2. What are some of the barriers or challenges that hinder the success of African international students in Canadian post-secondary institutions?
3. What factors affect African international student success in post-secondary educational institutions?
A scoping review of the literature was conducted. The review included research studies focused on international students from African countries studying in Canada. The core concept underpinning the review was transitional issues, with the outcome being their ability to successfully settle in Canada. Thematic analysis across studies was used to identify key themes emerging. Over 50 articles (with a date range between 1995 and 2024) from different authors were included in the review. Four key factor groups emerged from the review: Academic adjustment, institutional support, social-related concerns, and geographical location. Drawing from a literature synthesis that provides a holistic perspective on transitional student experiences and using Social Support Theory, this paper will provide guidance on how post-secondary institutions in Canada can support these international students from African countries to enable them to settle and succeed in their academics.

Keywords: African, International Students, Student Success, Barriers to Students, Canadian Universities

The goal is this systematic literature review is to look at the transitional experience of African international students in Canada. International students from African countries studying in Canada encounter transitional issues that affect their ability to succeed (Hamilton & Shang, 1999; Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2009). Some of those transitional issues include cultural adjustment (Ngala, 2005), educational adjustment (Jacquet et al, 2008; Masinda et al, 2014), peer connection (Masinda et al, 2014). Gorgorio et al (2002) linked student transitional issues to severe cognitive and behavioral ramifications. International students from African countries studying in Canada have steadily grown for over a decade. According to Statistics Canada (2023), the number of international students from African countries studying in Canada has grown from less than 15,000 in 2009 to over 42,000 in 2021. Despite the recently announced international student cap across Canada, it is still estimated that international students from African countries studying in Canada will continue to grow. Many of these students encounter transitional issues that can impact their ability to settle in Canada and complete their program of study. A review of current literature demonstrates that this population encounters various barriers to their academic success, including social, cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic barriers.

While China and India make up over 50% of Canada's international student population (El-Assal, 2020), African countries—such as Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Algeria—are the fastest growing international student populations in Canada (Oluwole, 2024). Therefore, to support the growth of these student populations and facilitate their success, it is important to identify the transitional experiences that international students from African nations experience while studying in Canada. To develop a rationale for future research on this topic, it is critical to understand both the transitional experiences of this population and their demographic background as it relates nation of origin, culture, language, education, and other important social markers. It is then critical to conduct a literature review to determine what is known about this population and where the current gaps are. Then, based on analysis through the theoretical framework of social support theory, it is possible to discuss the implications of what is known in the current literature and the limits therewithin.

Background

Economic

The importance of international students to the Canadian economy cannot be overstated, and we can see this with the increase in the number of study permits issued over the years. According to Sa and Sabzalieva (2016), 11% of university enrollments nationally can be attributed to international students. The Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) in 2015 mentioned that the federal and provincial governments identify international student

enrollment as a strategic source for economic immigration programs. Canada seeks to maintain its economic advantage and address its aging population via immigration. Canada's immigration policy is first and foremost about improving the country's economic prowess and addressing demographic challenges (Sweetman & Warman, 2008; Termote, 2011).

Social

The recruitment of international students to Canadian universities benefits the country economically and adds to the country's social fabric of maintaining multiculturalism and cultivating diversity. According to Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007), "The presence of these students on campus has numerous educational, social, cultural, and economic advantages. These students enhance intercultural relations and enrich the education of all students through their diversity of experiences and cultures" (p 26). Social connection and social adaptation are among the characteristics that international students bring to Canadian society. International students can serve as a good advert to encourage domestic students to explore other countries outside North America. Many international students help promote student mobility on campuses by showcasing their unique cultures (Beech, 2015; Aha & Cox, 2016).

The Uniqueness of African Students

All international students are not the same, and it is important to acknowledge their differences and not generalize their experiences as students or immigrants in Canada. International students from African countries face unique challenges studying in Canada (Finlayson, 2013). The unique challenges that these international students face in Canada is not a recent phenomenal. According to Dei (1996), some of these challenges are not limited to but include "differential treatment by race, the absence of Black teachers, and the absence of African Canadian history and literature in their resource" (p. 7). Research has shown that African students in Canadian schools are exposed to racism, face low expectations from instructors and present a higher dropout rate (Dei, 2005; Raby, 2004). According to Shizha et al. (2020), "African youth are vulnerable due to the ways in which they are socially constructed and perceived in Canadian society and schools" (p. 69). Schools are meant to expose students to knowledge that would make them informed citizens. However, research suggests that schools are sometimes used as a medium to perpetuate racial discrimination toward students from an African background (Shizha et al., 2020).

First Year Experience (FYE) and Transitional Issues

Issues related to transition can be linked to a student's first-year experience and this could impact a student's academic trajectory (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007). As we can see from the above paragraph, African international students in Canada are susceptible to many transitional challenges. First-year experience does not solely lie with the student; the university plays an integral role in shaping how students experience their first year. According to Gilbert et al. (1997), a student's first year can be seen as a possible predictor of their academic success, and this responsibility lies with the university to strategically improve the chances of success for the student by identifying potential challenges that can disrupt the student's ability to succeed.

Rationale and Relationship to the Topic

The reasons for choosing this topic are deeply rooted in my personal and professional experiences. I used to be an international student many years ago and still remember some issues that significantly affected me and delayed my ability to graduate and settle in Canada. After graduating and working in post-secondary for over nine years, I can see firsthand how institutions can do more to support international students, especially students from Africa. The literature review would suggest limited research on African undergraduate students across Canada (Okusi, 2021; Park & Bahia, 2022). There have been a few studies on African postgraduate students but limited research on African undergraduate students across Canada (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2009). It will be important for more research to be done on this population of students to enhance their academic experience and boost Canada's diversity. A diversity of students on the university campus would benefit all stakeholders involved in the Canadian education sector.

Studies have proven that international students encounter hardship compared to their domestic peers, attributed to cultural differences (Andrade, 2006). One of those hardships includes feelings of marginalization outside and inside of classrooms. As mentioned by Hernandez-Ramdwar in his 2009 research on Caribbean students studying in Canada, feelings of marginalization are more common in classrooms among international students than in their Canadian

counterparts. Many African students find it hard to interpret these feelings of marginalization due to their unfamiliarity with the concept. Other reasons international students encounter hardship in Canada include "different food, unfamiliar living circumstances, financial problems, balancing work, studying schedules, learning styles, or any difficulties related to language, culture, and personal barriers" (Wu et al., 2015, p. 2).

Method

A systematic literature review was applied to this study. The review included mostly qualitative primary peer-reviewed research studies focusing on international undergraduate or postgraduate students in Canada and the United States. The core concept underpinning the review was the transitional experience of international students. Thematic analysis across studies was used to identify key themes emerging.

Search Method (Inclusion and Exclusion)

To ensure alignment with my research questions, my main primary search term, "African international students," was consistently used throughout the literature search. Other terms such as "barriers," "challenges," and "black students" were added to expand the literature sources because it was challenging to find literature specifically on African international students. The literature search used different databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and Educational Source. Online blogs and newspapers that speak to African international students in Canada was also engaged for the purpose of this literature review. Over 50 articles were explored with date range from 1995 – 2024. The articles were categorized into emerging themes that are explained in the literature review section.

Theoretical Framework - Social Support Theory

Different authors have used different theories to analyze the African international students in Canada and other parts of the world. Some of the more common ones include Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Okusi, 2021; Park & Bahia, 2022; Luhanga et al., 2023) and Intersectionality (Schroeter & James, 2015; Luhanga et al., 2023). CRT states that systems and practices of racism, neo-racism, and attitudes can infringe on people of colour (Okusi, 2021, p. 92)), which in our case will be international students from African countries in Canada. Intersectionality on the other hand states that "social categories related to race, class, and gender interact and influence people's identities and lived experiences" (Goodman 2014, p. 99). One of the most important needs of international students is the tailored support. International students need support in many areas to deal with stressors. One theory that speaks to the importance of support and dealing with stressors is the Social Support Theory (SST). According to Thoits (1995), social support is generally viewed as an individual's social resource when dealing with life problems and stressors. After synthesizing and analyzing the literature on African international students studying in Canada, Social Support Theory (SST) speaks to their transitional experience as compared to CRT and intersectionality. Social Support Theory speaks to the needs of African international students. One of the reasons why SST speaks to the experience of African international students is because of its multiple (holistic) dimensions.

According to Thoits (2011), social support has several dimensions: "First, support can be conceptualized as perceived, feeling supported or feeling that support is available, versus received, reporting that assistance was provided. Second, support can be instrumental, informational, or emotional. Instrumental support refers to providing materials or assistance with practical tasks or problems, such as lending money or borrowing a car. Informational support refers to advice-giving, guidance, or providing information that may help a person solve a problem. Emotional support involves the expression of sympathy, caring, esteem, value, or encouragement" (Kort-Butler, 2018, p. 2).

Literature Review

Table 1: African International Students in Canada from 2012-2022

Country of citizenship	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Africa	16,116	17,895	21,567	23,979	25,743	26,739	29,397	34,683	37,035	42,300
Western Africa	7,086	8,445	10,407	11,946	12,567	12,534	13,464	15,762	17,526	19,461
Eastern Africa	2,817	2,904	3,435	3,867	4,503	5,340	6,123	6,729	6,741	6,867
Northern African	4,101	4,359	5,193	5,457	5,709	5,880	6,405	7,884	8,160	11,010
Central Africa	1,533	1,641	2,004	2,232	2,481	2,481	2,931	3,804	4,080	4,410
Southern Africa	582	549	522	474	483	510	477	507	528	552

According to Statistics Canada (2023), the below table indicate by number the trend of international students from African countries for the last ten years, except for Southern Africa. Unsurprisingly, the number of international students seeking to study abroad continues to increase. Based on the current trend, it is safe to anticipate that the number of international students from African countries will continue to increase in the coming years.

Education has always been seen as a motivational force that makes people choose to travel around the world and seek growth in different areas of their lives (Lashgara et al., 2019). The mobility of international students worldwide comes with challenges, and international students from African countries studying in Canada are not immune to these challenges (Hanassab, 2006). According to Wu et al. (2015), international students often face personal barriers, language, culture, learning styles, study and work-life balance, financial problems, unfamiliar living circumstances, and different food. International students from African countries studying in Canada are particularly susceptible to these challenges because they come from traditional, tight-knit families, and cultures (Finlayson, 2013). The struggles of African international students are not limited to Canada alone, as research suggests countries with high international student numbers, like the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia, often report cases of international student challenges (Russell et al., 2010). This systemic literature review will categorize the challenges these international students from African countries face into four categories: Academic adjustment, institutional support, social related concerns, and geographical location. After the thematic analysis of the challenges, there will also be a discussion and conclusion, theoretical framework, limitation section, and potential areas for future research.

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment is one of the biggest issues international students from African countries face upon arrival to Canada (Howe et al., 2023). Many of these international students desire to adapt quickly to their new academic life because they know the value of education. According to Shizha et al. (2020), African students link their academic achievement to their ability to adapt and adjust to their new school culture. These international students have to adjust to everything academically in a new country, and that could impact their transition experience. The education system they were exposed to before coming to Canada is usually different. Even in cases where students come to Canada from a French-speaking region in Africa to study at a university in Quebec, "the conditions in which their study took place varies tremendously (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007, p.30). Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007) highlight other adjustment issues that international students from African countries encounter upon arrival to Canada, including methods of evaluation, different work habits, and academic relationships in their universities. According to Aurah (2014), international students from African countries experience difficulty when confronted with non-didactic

pedagogy (p. 41). Aura (2014) states that these students come from a teacher-centered educational model to a student-focused one, and many struggle with the switch to the Canadian student-centered education model.

African international students' academic adjustment struggles in Canada can be linked to a gap in reality versus expectations. Oloo (2022) notes that participants highlighted the fact that there was a "gap between their expectations and reality as it relates to their academic, extracurricular, and life in general" (p. 67). Some contributors to the expectation and reality gap can be traced to these students' cultural identities. Many African cultures see education as a legacy to leave to the younger generation, which could be seen as added pressure for these students who chose to study abroad. African students who pride themselves in having a strong cultural identity are more likely to display resiliency that can help them succeed academically (Codjoe, 2006; Constantine et al., 2005; Noreiga, 2022; Okusi, 2021; Schroeter & James, 2015). The fragility of international students, in general, is an area that universities and colleges admitting international students must pay closer attention to because it tends to affect every area of their lives, including their academics. According to Constantine et al. (2005), it is possible that international students who live on campuses and in certain societies are exposed to things that could affect their perspectives and values, and this could cause cultural adjustment issues that can affect their "academic functioning" (p. 58). The linkage between academic success and cultural adjustment issues is one of the things that make African international students unique compared to other students.

Institutional Support

First Year Experience. According to Kanu (2008), research suggests that the presence of African immigrants in Canadian universities has yet to be accompanied by the right education and other support to assist them in the acculturation, integration, and academic success. Institutional support for new university students is essential due to the vast difference between high school and college. It is even more important for many international students because they were approved to study in Canada and rely solely on institutional support to transition to their new environment. The First Year Experience (FYE) in the United States was developed because institutions realized the importance of supporting new students and helping them succeed at the university (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007). The success of FYE in the United States has made universities in the country expand it to "students in transition and, more specifically, transfer students who are not in their first year but who are in need of support" (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007, p. 27). Aside from the United States, European countries have developed specific institutional support to help international students transition, especially students not from the West, like African countries (Smit, 1996). Institutions that admit international students in Canada should see this space as an opportunity to make a lasting impression on students by providing adequate all-round support. One of such support could be academic orientation on teaching and learning models. Universities could educate students on the switch from teacher centered to student-centered programs and enforce actions that seek to provide a welcoming atmosphere (Deen, 1996).

Classroom Participation. Classroom dynamics and staff relationships with students are some areas of institutional support that affect the transition experience of international students from African countries in Canada. According to Finlayson (2013), students would sometimes "raise their hands to offer suggestions and opinions but were not chosen by teachers to allow them to speak; in fact, they often felt very invisible" (p. 1237). International African students often come to a new environment reserved, and getting such an experience within the classroom can negatively impact their performance in such a class. The lack of Black teachers and leaders in resources was also stated as a concern by Black students on campus (Finlayson, 2013; Luhanga et al., 2023). In the study that focused on Black nursing students at a Canadian university by Luhanga et al. (2023), they added that representation of Black faculty members would have helped participants settle into their program (p. 462). Finlayson (2013) further stated that some academic advisors dissuade African Canadian students from pursuing certain programs because of preconceived notions about their cognitive ability to cope with certain programs. Some students receive potentially biased or prejudiced treatment like this from university staff but tend not to speak out (Luhanga et al., 2023).

Financial Support. Financial support is another area where international students look up to their university for support. According to a survey by the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) in 2009, international students are constantly under financial pressure. The report on the CBIE survey went further to state that many international students are calling for universities to reduce their tuition fees and increase bursary opportunities. Like international students from other parts of the world, many international students from African countries who come to Canada to study come from families with modest incomes. Financial aid, such as bursaries, would ease some of these

students' pressure and allow them to focus on other engagements on and off campus (Finlayson, 2013; Hurley et al., 2021).

Social-Related Concerns

Cultural Adjustment. International students from African countries face many social concerns upon arrival in Canada. One such social-related concern is the culture shock they face upon arrival to Canada. Upon arrival to their country of destination, many international students experience culture shock that leads to other stressors (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). International students who experience culture shock react to it in different ways. One of the ways African international students react to culture shock is 'self-segregation' (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Self-segregation is when individuals isolate themselves or relate to people who only look like them (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Self-segregation is not the goal of institutions when it comes to embracing and promoting diversity. Many institutions create programs and events encouraging students to connect with their peers. Still, unfortunately, international students are not always keen on connecting with other students, especially at their initial stage of transition. One-way international student tries to leave their comfort zone is known as "exclusive and inclusive global mixing" (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013, p. 418). Exclusive global mixing is when international students connect with only students who look like them and other international students of similar ethnicity or nationality (p. 418), while inclusive global mixing is when international students connect with co-nationals, other international students, and students from the host country (p. 419). Cultural adjustment issues related to lifestyle and interpersonal communication habits have been linked to one of the reasons why African international students find it hard to connect with other students (Constantine et al., 2004; Essandoh, 1995; Mori, 2000; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997; Taylor & Nwosu, 2001).

Identity Formation. Identity formation is another social concern that African international students face upon arrival to Canada. According to Finlayson (2013), upon "hearing and seeing" certain stereotypes, African international students tend to start doubting their identity (p. 1238). African international students come to Canada in a vulnerable state because they are outside of their comfort zone, and it comes as no surprise that stereotypic statements directed towards them can make them question who they are. Identity can be a complex problem for students of African origin. Baffoe (2010) alluded to the identity development issues for African immigrants in Canada when she mentioned that African youth raised in Canada still had issues seeing themselves as Canadians because they felt safe and welcomed whenever they went back home for visits. The complexity of identity formation becomes more challenging for international students because some have no established social capital in Canada. In their study on second-generation African Canadians, Creese (2020) also reports that young African Canadians would rather be referred to as "African or African Canadian" rather than just "Canadians" (p. 183). Authors have applied theorists' concepts to analyze the complexity of identity formation. Okusi (2021) used concepts from W. E. B Du Bois to analyze Black students' identity formation at a Vancouver, British Columbia, university. Okusi (2021) states that Black students must deal with perceptions about them while trying to attain a sense of self that they hold about themselves. African international students having this daily battle of the mind about who they are can have an emotional toll on them. Okusi (2021) also used the Du Bois term "double consciousness" to highlight the identity dilemma some African international students face in Canada. According to Du Bois (1903), double consciousness is when an individual is living a life that is based on preconceived notions dictated by the "other world" of how Black people ought to be (p. 18). The stress of living with a double consciousness as it relates to identity formation is an added layer of transitional issues that many African international students face in Canada.

Racism and Microaggression. Many international students from African countries, prior to arrival in Canada, have rarely ever experienced racism. Some of these students are familiar with the word racism but have never seen it in real life, so some of them even struggle to identify it when it happens to them. According to Mensah (2014), "It is when Black Africans venture outside the continent that their sensitivity to race is stirred up the most" (p.14). Not being able to identify what racism is can be problematic for these African students because they would not be able to seek help or report the cases, and the perpetrators can continue with such acts. Some of these racist attitudes appear in the form of prejudice towards Black students. Such prejudiced feelings toward Black people are prevalent in North America, and many international students cannot escape the discrimination directed toward them (Okusi, 2021). Educating international students on racism before arriving in Canada could be a proactive step that institutions take in dealing with such problems. There is a tendency for the discrimination to escalate if institutions in Canada do not take these proactive measures. According to Baofo-Arthur (2014), the discrimination that Black students face in Canada extends beyond skin color but also culture, as in cases of neo-racism. Attacking the culture of these African students

means it will affect their essence, the core of what they see themselves as. For these international African students, it becomes a dilemma because they are unable to see value in being an African due to the discrimination they face and the demeaning image of how Africa and its citizens are portrayed. According to Okusi (2021), this dilemma can be attributed to the "double consciousness" by Du Bois.

Geographical Location

East Coast vs West Coast. Geography plays a significant role when international students decide which part of Canada they want to study. The decision about location is crucial for many international students from African countries because many of them are from warmer climates, and some would prefer to live where they know a community can support them. Due to the community of Black and African people, it is not surprising that most international students from African countries attend universities in "Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal" (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016). The pattern of African international student flow in recent times have pointed to a different direction. The current trend of where international students from Africa go to school is inconsistent with where international students' enrollment gains are currently happening in Canada. According to a survey by the CBIE in 2015 since 2008, Prince Edward Island (PEI) has had the "highest national growth rate in international student enrollment" (p. 23). The provinces in the Atlantic region of Canada are not typically the most diverse. According to the National Household Survey conducted in 2011, visible minorities only represent about three percent of the provinces in the Atlantic region of Canada. Despite the low diversity rate in these provinces in the Atlantic region of Canada, international students from African countries still see reasons to live and study there. There are a few reasons why these students choose the Atlantic provinces. According to Universities Canada (2015), an appealing combination of low tuition and living costs seems to be a driving factor for international students from African provinces as study destinations. Despite the allure of affordability for international students from African countries in choosing Atlantic Canada as their destination for study, these international students "stand out as newcomers and as visible minority persons in the Atlantic provinces, more so than at other destinations in Canada" (Chira, 2013, p. 140). Standing out means these students are vulnerable and subject to transitional challenges.

Blasé Lifestyle. Cities like Vancouver on the West coast of Canada may be more diverse than provinces in Atlantic Canada, but the transitional experiences of international students from African countries are similar. Okusi (2021) used Simmel's "Blasé city lifestyle" to describe some of the socio-cultural realities of Black African students in Canada. According to Okusi (2021), Simmel's Blasé city lifestyle is "concerned with how individuals preserve their individuality in a modern city with significant external culture, historical forces and technologies" (p. 103). International students from African countries studying in Vancouver are constantly engaging with the city culture, and there is expected to be some sort of reaction during this exchange. According to Simmel (1950), this exchange results in what is called the "Blasé attitude" (p. 414). Simmel (1950) went further to state that the blasé attitude has biological ramifications in the sense that "A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their ́ strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react" or are incapable of reacting appropriately (p. 414). Applying Simmel's theory to international students from African countries studying in Vancouver shows that some students get to a point during their studies where they grow numb and stop reacting to certain exposures. Some of the exposure is not limited to academic, socio-cultural, and institutional challenges. Upon arrival to Canada, the African internationals' struggle shows how significant geography could impact their transitional experience. Vancouver happens to be a busy city that is "characterized by constant movement and consumption of ideas, goods, and people (Simmel, 1950, p.410). Another reason some African international students struggle to adapt to a city, like Vancouver, is that they are not used to it. Some of these students are from smaller and less busy communities in their home country, and adjusting so quickly to other issues they have to deal with can complicate their transitional experience. The complication of adjusting to a new environment and the attitude it creates in these African international students is summed up by Baffoe (2010): "The concept of blasé attitude is relevant to the focus on identity struggles of Black African international and immigrant students because metropolitan cities in Canada are the main destinations of migration for African immigrants" (as cited in Okusi, 2021, p. 103).

The blasé attitude points to an atmosphere of desensitization in cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Importantly, this numbness is also a way of coping to avoid being overwhelmed from the profound intensity and

rapidity of stimulation that surrounds the metropolitan individual. This indifference also extends to unresponsiveness to situations that require responses. (Simmel., 1950, as cited in Okusi, 2021, p. 103)

The key takeaways from the Simmel (1950) and Okusi (2021). One of them is that African international students who study in big metropolis cities are susceptible to developing a harmful coping mechanism to deal with some of the lifestyle associated with living in a big city. Secondly, the copying mechanism development is harmful because they will lack the ability to seek help when needed due the ambivalent feeling that has been created in them at this point.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. What are the transition experiences of international students from African countries studying in Canada?
2. What are some of the barriers or challenges that hinder the success of African international students in Canadian post-secondary institutions?
3. What are the factors affecting African international student success in post-secondary educational institutions?

This section of the systematic literature review highlights the answers to the research questions that guided the literature search. The below paragraphs talk about the transition experience, barriers, and factors affecting African international students in post-secondary institutions in Canada. In response to questions one and three, the results from the analysis showed that several intersecting factors affect the transitional experience of international students from African countries studying in Canada. Research has shown that these intersecting factors include academic adjustment, institutional support, social-related concerns, and geographical location. The positive aspect of identifying these factors is that students, institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders are aware of them and can start working towards making the necessary adjustments to work on them.

Academic adjustment issues can have a significant impact on the transitional experience of students. Academic adjustment has been identified as one of the main barriers to international student success in Canada (Howe et al., 2023). The inability of an international student to adjust academically can cause stress because their ultimate purpose for coming to Canada is to attend university. Students who are doing poorly academically may be required to withdraw from their university, meaning that they must return home. Academic adjustment is an area where one of the dimensions of SST (instrumental support) can help institutions support African international students. Institutions could come up with academic accommodations tailored to the needs of African international students. An example could be extra support classes.

Like academic adjustment, institutions play an important role in helping students transition smoothly. Many of these African international students need to be aware of the challenges that await them before coming to Canada; this can be a space of opportunity for universities. According to Okusi (2021), "addressing these challenges that arise for Black African students is essential for Canadian universities to address these concerns, inform initiatives for community transformation and support services and to enhance more positive transition and experiences" (p. 107). It will be crucial for universities to take a closer look at in-depth issues that some international students face on campus. Issues related to classroom dynamics, lecture styles, racism, and microaggression toward African students (Finlayson, 2013).

In response to question two, result from the analysis showed that African international students face social challenges that impact their day-to-day lives, both on and off campus. SST speaks to the importance of emotional support to help individuals thrive. According to Park and Bahia (2022), in their study on the experience of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), graduate students in the social sciences and humanities at a medium-sized comprehensive university in Canada noted that BIPOC students face "alterity and hostility" in classrooms and on campus (p. 153). These social challenges that African international students face prevent them from being able to establish a social support network for themselves. The inability to make these connections inhibits their ability to transition properly and can cause a vicious cycle of psychological stress. Creating an awareness of the importance of establishing a support network for new students before arriving in Canada can be a positive start for universities to try out.

It is encouraging to see that international students from African countries are choosing to attend universities all across Canada. The number of international students in the Atlantic region of Canada is "especially promising because

those regions are in need of newcomers" (Chira, 2017, p. 148). Some African international students in the Atlantic region have expressed uneasiness due to the lack of diversity (Chira, 2017). There is an opportunity for universities to create a welcoming atmosphere for students from visible minority backgrounds, and hopefully, this will reduce the stress they encounter from constantly standing out. Equally, international students who choose to study in bigger cities, like Vancouver, also have challenges adjusting to the city's culture. The challenges that come with moving to a big city, like Vancouver, can have attitudinal ramifications. According to Okusi (2021), "Simmel's blasé attitude explains why there is a prevalence of double consciousness and the veil. It explains the why and how of the persistence of the oppressive systems" (p. 106). According to SST, provision of informational support can assist individuals in transitioning to their new environment. Institutions might have to educate students on the city culture and ask them what acclimatization would look like for them.

Limitations

This research focused on undergraduate and postgraduate international African students. This excluded the K - 12 students taking courses online or hybrid (students who started their program in their home country and then moved to Canada to complete their studies). More comprehensive research that considers all these categories of students may have yielded a different result. This research also looked at all African international students as one category, which could be flawed. There are variations in student experiences, and this research did not consider that fact. Research examining the variation among international students from African countries could yield different findings. All these facts attest to the need for more research into African international students in Canada. According to Okusi (2021), "there needs to be more literature about Black African students in Canadian universities. This is both a limitation and a matter of fact" (p. 107).

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