

# Scoping Review: Examining the State of Literature on International Students' Dietary Acculturation in Canada

## Introduction

International students are an integral part of Canada's educational and economic landscape. In fact, international students were responsible for a \$21.6 billion boost to Canada's gross domestic product in 2018. Despite their obvious contributions to the economy, previous research suggests that this group often endures difficult dietary acculturation experiences while in the country. Dietary acculturation is the transition from eating traditional cuisine to eating foods similar to those in one's host country, and it is often a result of the stressful nature of immigrating to a new country and having to integrate into a new environment. This area has been and continues to be under-researched in Canadian academia.

## Objectives

To understand the state of existing literature and identify gaps in research regarding the dietary patterns and acculturation of international students in Canada.

## Research Questions

Why might international students develop poor nutritional habits while studying in Canada?  
Does dietary acculturation play a role in this?  
Are there any policies or programs in place to prevent or respond to this?

## Methodology

A scoping review is a more systematic kind of literature review, where articles are retrieved following a set of steps. A date range, key words, and general search criteria were chosen to streamline retrieval.

Using the Arksey and O'Malley scoping review framework, 4 databases were chosen.

### Search Criteria

**Key words:** International student, Canada, United States, Dietary Patterns, Dietary Acculturation, Food Insecurity, Immigration  
**Date Range:** any date – March 1st, 2024

**Search Criteria:** English articles, Canadian or American international students, Canadian immigrants, peer-reviewed articles.

## Results and Key Themes

### Accessibility

#### Lack of Transit Options

A lack of convenient transit options make it difficult for international students to access shops carrying cultural foodstuffs, and this also reduces their likelihood of grocery shopping at all.

#### Time Constraints

Research suggested a lack of time to grocery shop, prepare, or cook foods due to busy schedules and stressful academic and social acculturation. Stresses like acquiring housing and employment replaced healthy eating in importance.

#### Financial Stress

Many international students did not have the financial mobility to afford nutritious foods, leading to their acquiring of a convenience-based diet

### Cultural Differences and Acculturation Struggles

Moving to a new country and adjusting to the social and cultural values can be stressful, leading to a negative acculturation experience; doing so alone, as many international students do, can increase these feelings.

#### Food as a Shared Experience

Some cultures value eating and cooking with others, but many international students do so alone; this increases feelings of loneliness and homesickness.

### Food Insecurity

International students are more likely to experience food insecurity than domestic students. This can be because of an inability to access cultural foods, which thus increases their likelihood of experiencing negative mental health outcomes and chronic illnesses.

Preliminary search (EBSCO Host Academic Search Elite, ProQuest Sociological Abstracts, PubMed, Trent + Omni Library Database)

120 articles after search

80 articles after duplicates removed

Database Search Process

22 after second screening for relevance

32 articles after screening for relevance

## Policies & Programs

Examples from literature:

### Community Cooking Workshops (CCWs)

Simon Fraser University's CCW has helped international students increase their nutrition knowledge while also providing a social outlet for international students. This may ease acculturation experiences.

### Growing Roots

Growing Roots in Winnipeg has helped introduce newcomers to Canadian cuisine and provide culinary knowledge. It is also an effective social outlet.

## Discussion

More proactive policy and programming solutions are required to limit international students' negative experiences of social and dietary acculturation.

As such, the New Canadians Centre, in conjunction with Trent University, aims to use the data collected in this study to better understand the experiences of international students studying in Peterborough for upcoming research projects.



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