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# International Students Challenges During the Pandemic in Higher Education

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# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CHALLENGES DURING THE PANDEMIC IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Merab Mushfiq

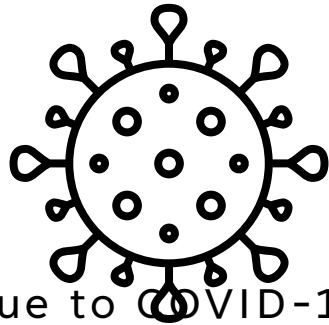
York University, North York, ON

# ACTIVITY

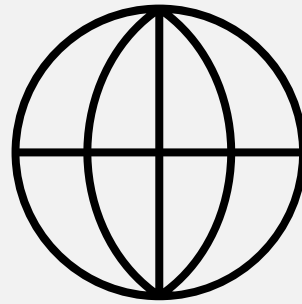
What  
challenges  
did you face  
within your  
organization/  
institution  
during the  
pandemic?

What  
challenges  
do you think  
international  
students  
faced?

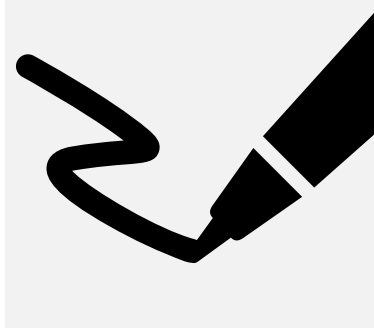
# INTRODUCTION



Due to COVID-19, various challenges and difficulties were faced by faculty, staff, and students (World Health Organization, 2019)



International students faced even more challenges due to online and blended learning (Almarzooq et al, 2020)

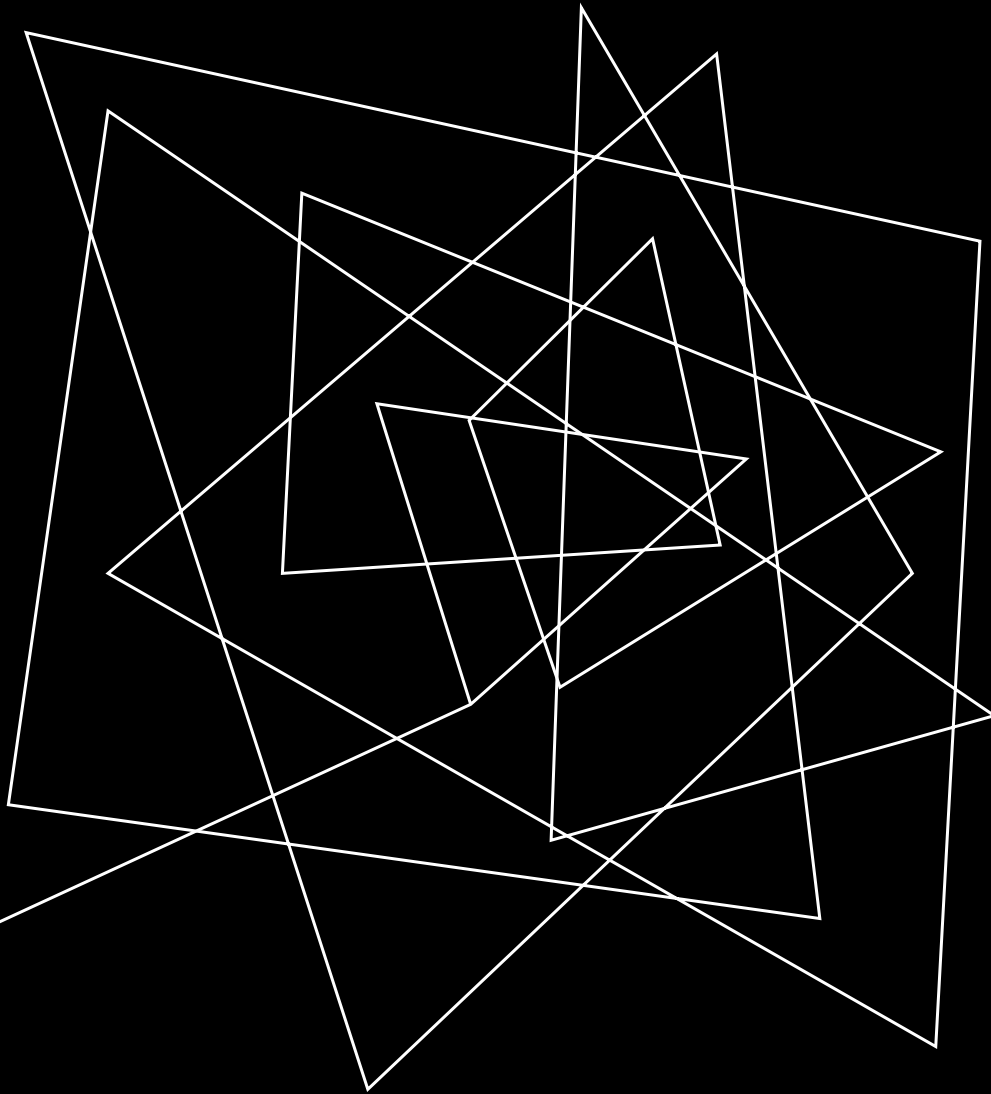


Some challenges included academic difficulties, lack of support from faculty and host institution overall, and participation during class



Because of these challenges and other additional stressors being an international student such as time differences if at home country, suspended and/or paused student programming, absence of faculty on-campus created mental health challenges for these students

# LITERATURE REVIEW



- Online and blended learning model has been going around for a long time (Idris, 2018)
- However, it was extremely in use especially during the pandemic to make learning and resources available and accessible
- Demuyakor (2020) stated challenges which international students were facing during the pandemic where lack of internet, web access is limited, distraction in the background and credibility of course content were main cause of concerns
- The adequate knowledge of digital tools is also important in order to navigate online teaching and learning (Rosyada & Sundari, 2021)

# METHODOLOGY



- Semi-structured interviews were conducted
- 10 international students from across all levels were recruited
- The main research questions were:
  - What are the challenges that are being faced during the pandemic?
  - How do you perceive online learning?
  - How is it impacting your well-being
- Data was recorded, transcribed, and coded
- Thematic analysis was performed



# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

| Academic Difficulties  | Learning and Navigating   | Use of Technology   | Mental Well-Being   | Other Significant Challenges   |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Expressed frustration and complexities</p> <p>Academic difficulties because they were new to Canadian education system</p> <p>Teaching pedagogies are different and hence they were struggling to adapt as there was minimal to no support</p> <p>Teaching is focused on student-centered and involved activities which participants struggled with</p> | <p>“Academic learning from home country was hard as I had no idea what to do and how to do” (A101)</p> <p>Participants were confused because they were not given much information about academic learning for online/blended courses</p> <p>“I did not understand synchronous and asynchronous meaning.....I thought I have to complete tasks during zoom in the presence of an instructor...” (A102)</p> | <p>“In China, we don’t use too much tech[nology] that is here...I was not aware of Twitter and my professor gave an assignment. I failed because I did not know what to do...” (A104)</p> <p>Lack of technology aid such as use of Zoom, Teams, and other platforms to be successful as an international student was missing</p> <p>“Zoom features are confusing and that is why I don’t like to present and hate presentations” (A108)</p> | <p>Most participants were stressed, having double thoughts of quitting school</p> <p>“I am tired of attending back-to-back classes online ...causing a lot of anxiety” (A101)</p> <p>“I am mentally drained because it is hard to navigate and communicate when I cannot meet with professor in-person” (A109)</p> <p>Participants did not know if they could reach out to anyone since most services were paused, cancelled, or online</p> | <p>There were other significant challenges were there which were interrupting their learning and ability to participate and learn:</p> <p>Lack of internet</p> <p>Slow Wi-Fi connections</p> <p>Random power outages</p> <p>Time difference</p> <p>Noise in the background because family and sometimes joint family system makes it hard to focus</p> <p>Lack of sleep due to time difference</p> <p>Financial and environmental stress</p> |



Support

Inside and outside class: faculty office hours, one-to-one discussions with international students

Teaching  
Pedagogies

Incorporate different teaching pedagogies to include international students in various activities should be encouraged and applied in curriculum

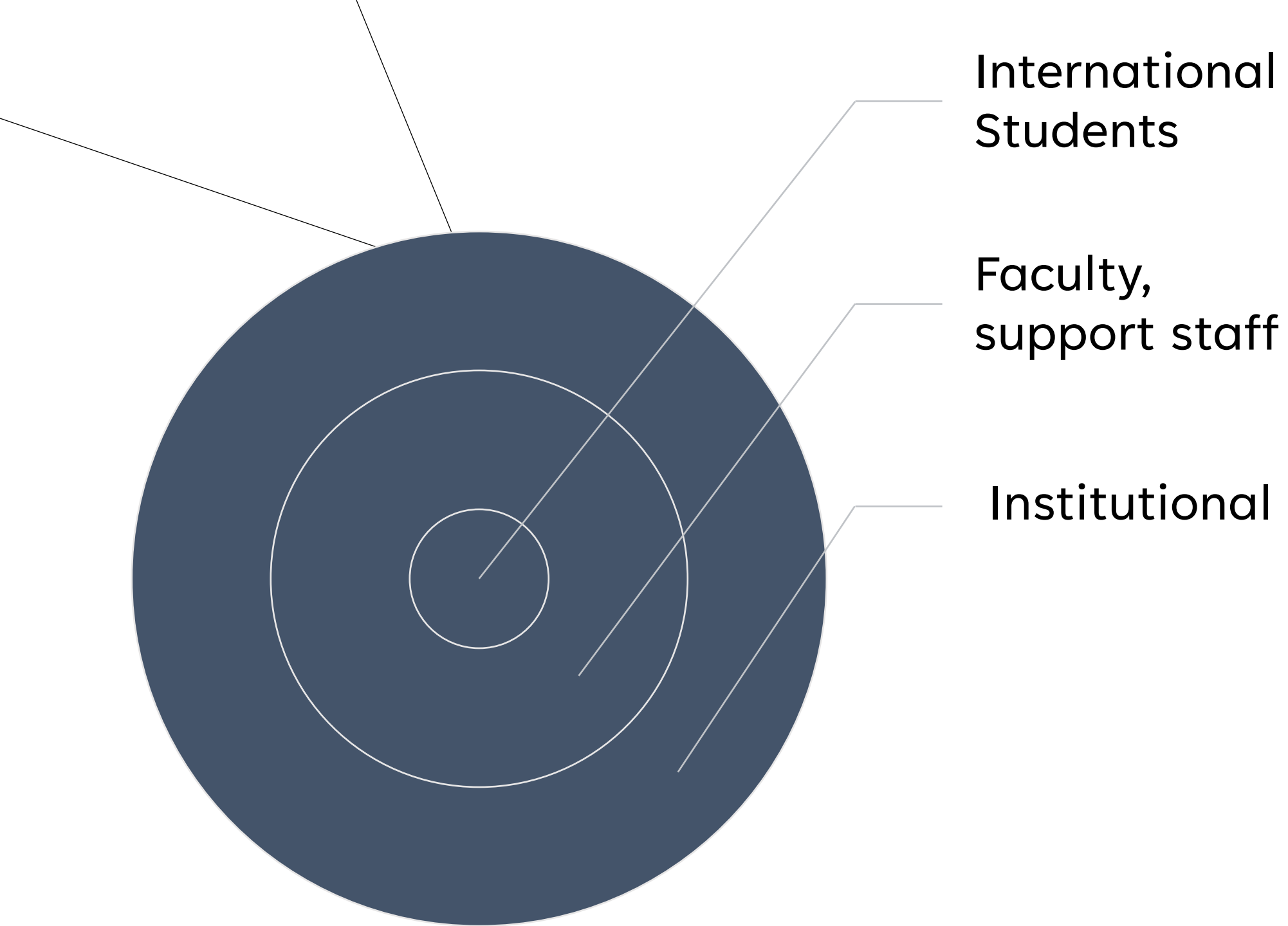
Intercultural  
Awareness

Develop and incorporate relevant cultural pedagogies to promote intercultural awareness in the class. It is important to develop culturally relevant pedagogy for the classroom where students see their own culture reflected during learning activities

Mental health  
Awareness

Bring mental health practitioners/counsellors in the classroom to bring awareness, talk about mental health, and create a space where students are encouraged and supported to use mental health and well-being services

## IMPLICATIONS



# References

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# THANK YOU

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