



Assessment of Acculturative Stress Awareness and Mental Health Preparedness among Pre-migrant Students in Nigeria

Adejoke F. Jaiyeoba & Mercy A. Onwuama
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education
University of Lagos, Nigeria
Email: jokejaiye@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study aimed to investigate the relationship between acculturative stress and mental health preparedness among Nigerian pre-migration students intending to study in foreign countries. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study, the population comprised 385 participants recruited through immigration consultancies, foreign examination training and tutorial centers, using a purposive sampling procedure. Data was collected using validated standardized instruments, of the Perceived Stress Scale, Mental Health Assessment Scale, and the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale. The demographic data was analyzed using frequency count, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, while a cross-tabular analysis was used to analyze all research data. The study revealed a significant level of perceived stress and mental health conditions among the pre-migrant students, indicating a low level of mental health preparedness and a strong anticipated difficulty in overcoming acculturative stress in the course of acculturation. The study concluded that there was a low level of acculturative stress awareness and mental health preparedness among the pre-migrant students in Nigeria. Based on these findings, interventions that will address acculturative stress and mental health preparation for pre migrant students before their relocation for studies abroad are strongly recommended to equip them to navigate the complex psychological challenges of cross-cultural migration, manage potential acculturative stress, and develop effective coping mechanisms in unfamiliar social environments.*

Keywords: *Acculturative stress, Assessment, Mental health preparedness, Pre-migrants, Students.*

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2. Introduction

Migration is an old phenomenon among humanity. People migrate for different reasons, which range from the search for a better quality of life, and quality education, fleeing conflict and seeking safety, fleeing political or economic instability including climate change and disasters. In the last two decades, there has been a

rise in the number of migrants worldwide. In 2022, the United Nations estimated 281 million international migrants in the world which amounted to 3.6% of the global population as against the 150 million (2.8%) reported in 2000 (IOM, 2024). As the total number of world migrants has increased over the years, so also has the total number of students seeking international education has continually risen over the last two decades

with a great number of students across the globe migrating from their home countries to other countries seeking higher education with hopes for much positivity such as career opportunities, Language skills, an expanded network, Global employment opportunities, travel opportunities and cross-cultural competencies among others. From the 2.2 million students studying abroad in 2001, there has been an upsurge to 6.4 million in 2023 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). Consistently, four countries, Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Germany, have remained the destination countries of choice for students seeking education abroad, accounting for nearly 44% of all international students in 2023.

From the data obtained from the 2018 QS applicant survey, the US, Canada, and the UK remain the leading destinations for students from the African region with variance in the level of study across undergraduate, master's, and PhD candidates. Additionally, Canada emerged as the most preferred choice among the students from the region and was rated as the first choice overall for both undergraduate and PhD candidates (ICEF monitor, 2018). Despite the preference and the many benefits attached to international education, it is also accompanied by various challenges and barriers that could stand as stressors before migration from the country of origin and during the process of acculturating in the host or destination countries. Among the challenges and barriers profoundly faced by students seeking international education are; racial discrimination, separation and detachment, financial pressure, academic requirements and expectations, Language barrier, climatic change and living conditions, teaching-learning culture, laws, rules and regulations among others (Okusolubo, 2017)

Inadequate mental preparation towards all these predisposing stressors may lead to negative emotions and mental health issues such as anger, rage, sadness, irritation, anxiety, identity confusion, depression, psychosomatic symptoms and general psychiatric disorders (Baezar-Rivera et al, 2022). In a study measuring the acculturative stress of international students and investigating the predictors of acculturative stress 22.4 % of the students in the study were found to have exceeded the normal stress level and might benefit from mental health treatment such as counseling or psychological intervention (Bai, 2016). A large scale study conducted in the United States at the national level incorporating 129 universities with a diverse sample of 68,085 college students reported by Salerno et al (2024) discovered that at different point in the lives of the participants in the course of their studies as international students, 26.9% had diagnosed depression, 34.6% had

diagnosed anxiety while 23% had both anxiety and depression.

Acculturation is a process of adaptation that an individual undergoes as a result of their living or long contact with people of different cultures (Hepler & McCallister, 2023). The acculturation process requires psychological changes and the stress involved in the process is regarded as acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is described as the stress response that resulted from the effect of multiple stressors associated with the need to acculturate. In literature, a relationship has been established between acculturative stress and mental health. In the United States, while about 20% of international students have been estimated to be at risk of experiencing mental health problems because of acculturation-related issues, a large number of the students were also found with mental health issues with 45% reported being depressed and 29% having symptoms of severe anxiety. (Koo & Tan, 2021). Among the identified conditions usually experienced as a result of acculturative stress are major depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse, behavioural problems, and poor psychological well-being (Lerias et al, 2024; Baezar-Rivera et al, 2022; Okusolubo, 2017). Aside from the general challenges and barriers faced by students seeking higher education internationally, African students pursuing higher education abroad are usually faced with academic and social difficulties which usually originate from language proficiency, physical and intellectual discrimination, differences in the educational system, trouble adapting to new environment and culture, sense of loss, isolation, alienation and loneliness which consequently may result into loss of self-confidence, working harder than usual, and having little time off for pleasure. Additionally, African international students are in many instances subjected to racism, discrimination, stereotyping, and segregation into the minority group (Okusolubo, 2017) While many of international students have been able to surmount some of these acculturative stressors and barriers encountered in the course of their studies abroad, some were so unlucky having had to experience negative outcomes in their mental, social and physical health. In Canada, various difficulties and challenges associated with acculturation and adaptation have been documented. A survey conducted by Carleton University among the International students assessing Psychological, academic and financial stress during the covid-19 pandemic suggested nearly 55% of the international students were at risk of depression and about 50% were at risk of anxiety disorder while over 70% expressed psychological stress and nearly 40% expressed academic stress (Stacey, 2022).

2.3 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is currently experiencing a significant exodus of its workforce and youth, driven by the pursuit of better economic opportunities and quality education. The persistent challenges in the Nigerian tertiary education system, characterized by frequent academic staff strikes, prolonged study durations, and recurring government and academic staff conflicts, have intensified the migration trend among young Nigerians. Despite the increasing number of pre-migrant students seeking educational opportunities abroad, particularly in countries like Canada, a critical gap exists in addressing acculturative stress and their psychological preparedness for international transition before their relocation. Most prospective migrants focus predominantly on external opportunities while neglecting crucial aspects of mental health and cultural adaptation. Hence, there is limited awareness and inadequate mental health preparedness among pre-migrant students resulting in most of these young ones being insufficiently equipped to navigate the complex psychological challenges of cross-cultural migration, manage potential acculturative stress and develop effective coping mechanisms in unfamiliar social environments. From the literature, the diverse mental and psychological difficulties Nigerian students face in host countries underscore the urgent need for comprehensive research (Okusolubo, 2017; Gebregergis, 2018). This study therefore seeks to bridge critical knowledge gaps by comprehensively examining acculturative stress factors among Nigerian pre-migrant students, thereby providing insights that could inform potential targeted psychological interventions and support strategies for the pre-migrant population

1.2 Purpose/Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the level of awareness of acculturative stress and mental health preparedness among Nigerian pre-migration students seeking to acquire higher education in Canada and other foreign institutions. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Assess the level of acculturative stress awareness among pre-migrant Nigerian students
2. Evaluate mental health preparedness levels of students planning international migration for higher education in Canada and other foreign institutions
3. Examine the level of resilience factors for mental health preparedness among pre-migrant Nigerian students
4. Identify key socio-economic factors contributing to acculturative stress

1.3 Research Questions

The study provided answers to these research questions among the pre-migrant students in Nigeria

1. What is the level of acculturative stress awareness among pre-migrant Nigerian students?
2. What is the level of mental health preparedness for acculturative stress among pre-migrant Nigerian students?
3. What is the level of individual resilience for mental health preparedness among pre-migrant Nigerian students?
4. What are the key socioeconomic factors contributing to acculturative stress among Nigerian students?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no significant level of perceived stress among Pre-migrant Nigerian students
2. There is no significant level of mental health preparedness among Pre-migrant Nigerian Students
3. There is no significant level of resilience for mental health preparedness among Nigerian Pre-migrant students
4. There is no significant socio-economic factor contributing to acculturative stress among pre-migrant Nigerian students

2. Literature Review

Migrants in many foreign countries usually experience migration-related stress resulting from adjustment to new environments and various acclimatization experiences. Acculturative stress is has been documented to be synonymous with incidences of mental health problems among migrants and has remained a serious dilemma faced by international students in the course of transition from their home country to the host country in pursuit of studies. Acculturation is the process and the experiences involved in transitioning from one culture to another (Koo & Tan, 2022). It is a process in which an individual undergoes psychological changes as a result of continuous contact with people of different cultures (Gebregergis, 2018). Acculturative stress is a specific type of stress resulting from the experiences of the acculturation process, usually

accompanied by symptoms such as depression, anxiety, anger, identity confusion, and social conflict (Quan et al., 2022). Acculturative stress arises as a result of a reaction to changes and adjustment arising from the differences between the native culture and the primary host culture (Berry, 2005, Berry, 2006). International Higher Education has increasingly become more and more prominent in the last few decades, resulting in millions of students across the globe moving from their home countries to foreign countries in pursuit of higher education. Despite the advantages and benefits attached to international education, inadequate preparation for the acculturation process has often resulted in overwhelming acculturative stress and tension negatively impacting the mental health of the individuals. Therefore, understanding the factors contributing to acculturative stress and developing effective pre-migration interventions is essential for supporting international students' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

2.1 Prevalence and Trends of International Students in Higher Education Institutions

International student enrollment has surged globally in higher education over recent years, with institutions worldwide experiencing significant growth in their international populations. The scale of this phenomenon varies considerably by country. Data revealed that the US, Canada, and the UK remain the leading destinations for students from the African region with variance in the level of study across undergraduate, master's, and PhD candidates. Additionally, Canada emerged as the most preferred choice among the students from the region and among major destinations where international students now represent nearly a quarter of all enrollments at 23.7% as of 2020 and was rated as the first choice overall for both undergraduate and PhD candidates (Sakis & Jencius, 2024; ICEF monitor, 2018). 5.3 million students traveled to a country other than their home country to continue their education according to statistics in 2017 with more than half of these ones studying in six countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and Russia with the number of foreign students that migrated to the United States in 2019 hitting over a million and representing 5.5% of all American University Students (Amlashi, Majzoobi, & Forstmeir, 2024).

2.2 Risk Factors for Acculturative Stress

Certain factors have been identified as contributors to acculturative stress among international students, while some factors can also act as protection against acculturative stress. Among the risk factors identified to be contributory to acculturative stress are Cultural Differences and Language barriers. In addition to facing other factors of acculturative stress, international students frequently face difficulties that are consequential to cultural differences in their educational experiences. Students may experience internal conflicts between their cultural values and those of the host society, leading to identity confusion and psychological distress. This is particularly pronounced when host cultural values directly contradict students' personal or religious beliefs. Acculturative stress arises from intercultural contact that is brought about by post immigration factors such as difficulties assimilating to the beliefs, values, and norms of a dominant culture, and the frustration of limitations imposed by language barriers (Mohammed et al, 2024). Emotional and Social Issues arising from Homesickness is another issue confronting international students. International students experience homesickness because of not having experience living in a different culture and country. Adjustment to the new environment may lead to stress and absence of families, friends and feelings of alienation from loved ones often contribute to factors causing acculturative stress among international students experiencing separation anxiety and craving for their families. Furthermore, discrimination, social isolation, loneliness and language barriers are other issues that can predispose international students to acculturative stress. While Educational difficulties and other practical problems may further lead to Social Isolation and loneliness among international students (Torees et al, 2011).

International students have additionally been documented to often encounter various forms of discrimination such as alienation, and derogatory stereotypes which significantly impacts their mental health causing them to suffer mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-harm ideations, and suicide attempts in the course of their academic pursuit (Liu et al, 2024). The challenge of building new social support networks in a foreign environment contributes significantly to acculturative stress; however, international students who were more satisfied with their social network of support felt less discriminated against and experienced fewer negative emotions. Sociopolitical Influences may also provide possible explanations for increased stress including sociopolitical influences, such as increased experiences of

discrimination, prejudice, immigration policy changes, and other acculturation-related factors (Quan et al, 2022). Additionally, Academic Adjustment Difficulties in terms of comfort in accommodation, student adjustment to college, language proficiency, and academic pressure resulting from Educational System differences may further present a major challenge for international students adapting to new academic systems and expectations (Sings et al, 2024). Financial Pressure could also be an additional source of concern faced by international students as transitioning to different educational systems, combined with financial pressures and uncertainty about future prospects, creates additional stress which are often compounded by visa restrictions and limited work opportunities. Financial pressure could also play a determining role in housing and comfort issues experienced by students facing difficulties in securing affordable, appropriate, and comfortable living conditions in their host countries. Despite all these experiences, acclimatization to weather conditions in regions of opposite climatic conditions to the native country could be a major predisposing factor to acculturative stress experienced by international students.

2.3 Protective Factors against Acculturative Stress

Despite the challenges encountered by international students in the process of acculturation, research has identified several protective factors that can mitigate acculturative stress. These include: Social Support which many research reports have indicated to be a great buffer against experienced stress. Both physical and emotional support from family, friends, and institutional sources serve as crucial buffers against acculturative stress. Studies consistently demonstrate that students with strong social support networks report lower levels of psychological distress and better adjustment outcomes. (Elkhodr et al, 2024). Cultural Identity Maintenance is another factor that can help protect students against acculturative stress, as it has been established in literature that students who maintain strong connections to their cultural heritage while remaining open to new cultural experiences demonstrate better psychological outcomes. This supports Berry's integration model of acculturation. (Berry, 2005). Possessing Pre-existing Coping Skills can also serve as a buffer against migration stress, as students with well-developed problem-solving skills, emotional regulation abilities, and adaptive coping strategies are better equipped to manage acculturative stress. Additionally, Institutional support were made available by universities through the provision of comprehensive orientation programs, culturally sensitive counseling services, and ongoing

support has demonstrated significantly better outcomes for their international student populations (Liu et al, 2024)

2.4 Mental Health Impact of Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress has numerous impacts on international students which extends beyond the academic, social and cultural difficulty, there is also a documented relationship between acculturative stress and psychological outcomes in international students, indicating significant associations between higher levels of acculturative stress and increased rates of anxiety, depression, substance misuse, behavioural problems and overall psychological distress (Liu et al., 2024; Lérias et al., 2024; Abdulhamed et al., 2022; Blackmore et al., 2020). The Mental Health Problems Associated with Acculturative Stress include:

Depression and Anxiety Disorders: these represent the most frequently documented mental health problems associated with acculturative stress. Research indicates that depression often stems from cultural loss, while anxiety emerges from uncertainty about how to navigate new cultural environments (Berry, 2006; Soufi Amlashi et al., 2024). Studies show that acculturative stress serves as a significant risk factor for both depression and anxiety, with intercultural contact stress and general psychosocial stress maintaining these relationships even when other variables are controlled (Torres et al., 2011).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has also emerged as another critical concern, particularly among refugee populations. Research demonstrates that acculturative stress associated with post-migratory experiences significantly predicts the severity of PTSD symptoms, even after controlling for age, sex, and exposure to traumatic events (Kovacev & Shute, 2016). This finding highlights the unique contribution of acculturation-related stressors to trauma-related symptomatology.

Eating Disorders, Substance misuse and behavioural problems: Contemporary research has expanded the understanding of acculturative stress effects to include eating disorders, substance misuse, and behavioral problems among immigrant youth (Abdulhamed et al., 2022; Blackmore et al., 2020). A recent systematic review found that 45.6% of participants in acculturative stress studies reported depressive symptoms, 61.5% experienced anxiety, and 72.1% reported stress symptoms, indicating the widespread nature of these mental health impacts (García-Ramos et al., 2022).

Research has consistently demonstrated that acculturative stress serves as a significant risk factor for multiple mental health conditions, with effects that persist over time and across different cultural groups. Meta-analytic evidence shows that the stress of cultural adaptation itself represents a distinct pathway to psychological distress. Therefore, understanding these specific mental health problems associated with acculturative stress is essential for developing targeted interventions and providing culturally responsive mental health services to immigrant and refugee populations.

2.5 Pre-Migration Mental Health Preparation

Literature reveals a significant gap in pre-migration mental health preparation programs. Providing the information about migration, preparing the migrants, ensuring the necessary health and public services will help in preventing expected psychological distress and promoting mental health well-being among migrants. However, most existing interventions focus on post-arrival support rather than preparation before migration. The migration process involves multiple phases, each presenting unique psychological challenges. Pre-migration stressors could include lack of livelihoods and opportunities for education and development, exposure to armed conflict, violence, natural disasters, poverty and/or persecution (World Health Organization, 2023). Research indicates that addressing mental health concerns before departure can establish a foundation for resilience and better post-migration outcomes (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).

The Key components of comprehensive pre-migration mental health preparation include:

Psychoeducation and Coping Skills Training: Providing information about expected stressors during migration and teaching adaptive coping strategies can enhance psychological preparedness (Iqbal & Hussain, 2014). This includes education about common psychological responses to migration stress and techniques for managing anxiety, uncertainty, and cultural adjustment challenges.

Cultural Orientation with Mental Health Components: Traditional cultural orientation programs can be enhanced to include mental health literacy components, helping migrants understand mental health resources available in destination countries and reducing stigma associated with seeking help (Hynie, 2018).

Social Support Network Development: Research consistently shows that social support serves as a protective factor against migration-related mental health problems (Torres & Casey, 2017). Pre-departure interventions can help migrants identify and strengthen social connections before leaving their home countries.

Trauma-Informed Preparation: For migrants with pre-existing trauma exposure, specialized preparation addressing trauma symptoms and providing stabilization techniques before departure can prevent deterioration during the migration process (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010)

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative cross-sectional survey design implemented through digital data collection methods. A structured questionnaire was developed using Google Forms (Google LLC, Mountain View, CA), a cloud-based survey platform, and distributed electronically via WhatsApp Messenger (Meta Platforms, Inc.) to ensure broad accessibility among the target demographic. The cross-sectional study examined the demographic factors of the participants. It also examined their mental health status, their perceived level of stress and their resilience level

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised pre-migrant students intending to travel abroad to acquire international higher education either at undergraduate or at post graduate levels. It also consists of students who have received admission offers from universities in destination countries.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample for the study comprised 385 pre-migrant students who were drawn through purposive sampling technique and recruited from international examination (SAT, TOEFL, IELTS) training centers, visa processing centers and educational consultancies collaborating with study abroad agencies.

3.4 Research Instrument for Data collection

A google form survey platform was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A comprising demographic data which were elicited using self-structured questionnaire and section B comprising research data on the set variables in the hypotheses of the study using standardized questionnaire of mental health assessment scales (Perceived Stress Scale, Mental Health Assessment Scale and the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale- CD-RISC-10) for the research data collection. The questionnaire was structured into four sections to elicit information on the four variables stated in the hypotheses: stress awareness, mental health preparedness, resilience and socio-economic factors.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The questionnaire used for the research data was adapted from standardized instruments that have been developed, tested, and used for a long period of years with established psychometric properties which are valid over the years. However, a pre-test of the instrument was conducted by administering the questionnaire to 10 participants who were not part of the original study to determine any issues that might come up in the course of the study and ascertain the reliability of the instrument. Identified ambiguous questions were restructured and the flow of questions was modified.

3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms design. The participants were recruited through immigration consultants, foreign examination training/tutorial centers, and social media platforms of intending foreign school admission seekers using a

purposive sampling procedure. Survey responses were automatically validated through Google Forms' built-in validation features. Duplicate responses were prevented through email verification and one-response-per-device settings. Incomplete responses were excluded. The responsive design ensured compatibility across different device types and screen sizes, and Google Forms' secure infrastructure was utilized to protect participant data, with responses stored on Google's encrypted servers.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained through an initial consent page in the Google Form. Privacy Protection was ensured by pre-informing the Participants about data usage, and storage. The survey was designed anonymous with no personally identifiable information collected to ensure confidentiality, and voluntary participation was indicated with clear information about the right to withdraw at any point.

3.8 Procedure for Data Analysis

Survey responses were automatically compiled in Google Sheets and subsequently exported to Excel and R for statistical analysis. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics Analysis of frequency count, Percentages, and Bar charts for the presentation of the demographic data, and a cross tabular analysis was used to analyze all research data. The research data response from a 5-point Likert scale was coded numerically (Never=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4, Always=5). Item-level analysis was conducted for each of the questions using weighted sum calculation and a cut-off criterion was applied (Accept if $M \geq 3.0$, Reject if $M < 3.0$) as a decision rule

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, and the response to research questions.

Table 1: Responses on sociodemographic assessment of the participants

	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender		
Male	59	52.2
Female	54	47.8
Others	-	-
Total	113	100
Age		
15-19	47	41.6
20-24	29	25.7

25-29	14	12.4
30-34	11	9.7
35& above	12	10.6
Total	113	100
Marital Status		
Single	91	80.5
Married	22	19.5
Divorced/ separated	-	-
Widow/widower	-	-
Total	113	100
Proposed level of Education		
Undergraduate	81	71.7
Postgraduate	32	28.3
Total	113	100
Proposed Country of study		
USA	35	31.2
Canada	62	54.9
United Kingdom	14	12.1
Australia	2	1.8
Others		
Total	113	100
Employment status		
Employed	39	34.5
Unemployed	74	65.5
Total	113	100
Income Status		
Low	71	62.8
Middle	34	30.1
High	8	7.1
Total	113	100
Previous International Travel Experience of Six Months and Above		
Yes	16	14.2
No	97	85.8
Total	113	100

Descriptive statistics of the sample showing age distribution, gender, marital status, proposed level of education, employment status, income status, and previous international travel experience are presented in Table 1. The percentages of the age distribution of the participants revealed age group 15-19 years (41.6%), 20-24 years (12.4%), 25-29 years (9.7%), 30-34 years (10.5%) and 35 years and above (10.5%). In the gender distribution, the male constituted 47.8% while the female constituted 52.2%, no other group gender was indicated. The indications under the preferred country of study revealed Canada as the most preferred country of study

with 54.9% of the respondents indicating Canada as their intending country of study. 80.5% of the respondents under marital status were single while 18.6% were married. Furthermore, 71.7% were seeking admissions at undergraduate levels while 28.3% were seeking postgraduate levels. Additionally, under the income status, 62.8% had low-income status, and 30.1% had middle income status while 7.1% had high income status. The indications under the previous travel experience of six months and above stay revealed 85.5% with no previous travel experience and 14.2% with previous travel experience.

Table 2: Responses on participants Perceived Stress level

S/N	Perceived Stress Level	N(1)	R(2)	S(3)	O(4)	A(5)	Total	Mean()	Decision
Q1	How often have unexpected events upset you?	4	9	46	20	31	395	3.6	Accept
Q2	How often have you felt unable to control important aspects of your life?	8	21	41	21	19	352	3.2	Accept
Q3	How often have you felt nervous or overwhelmed by stress?	1	14	39	28	28	398	3.6	Accept
Q4	How often have you felt confident in managing your personal problems? (Reverse-scored)	6	12	44	25	23	377	3.4	Accept
Q5	How often have things generally gone your way? (Reverse-scored)	8	10	53	23	16	359	3.2	Accept
Q6	How often have you struggled to cope with your responsibilities?	10	18	42	19	21	353	3.2	Accept
Q7	How often have you been able to manage irritations in your life? (Reverse-scored)	5	15	58	22	10	347	3.1	Accept
Q8	How often have you felt in control of your daily tasks? (Reverse-scored)	7	19	52	22	10	339	3.1	Accept
Q9	How often have you been frustrated by things outside your control?	5	15	39	29	19	369	3.3	Accept
Q10	How often have you felt overwhelmed by the number of challenges you face?	8	19	45	17	21	354	3.2	Accept

Cut-off criterion (Accept= $M \geq 3.0$, Reject= $M < 3.0$)

Table 2 displays the responses of the participants to their perceived level of stress within the past three months. The responses revealed the participants demonstrated a

high level of perceived stress as indicated in all the ten items of the perceived stress scale.

Table 3: Responses on participants Mental Health level

S/N	Mental Health Level	N(1)	R(2)	S(3)	O(4)	A(5)	Total	Mean()	Decision
Q1	How often do you feel overwhelmed or stressed?	3	15	34	34	25	396	3.6	Accept
Q2	How often do you feel sad or depressed?	12	26	39	26	8	325	2.9	Reject
Q3	How often do you feel anxious or worried?	5	20	38	40	8	359	3.2	Accept
Q4	How often do you feel irritable or angry?	3	24	48	22	14	353	3.1	Accept
Q5	How often do you feel lonely or isolated?	11	31	42	16	12	318	2.9	Reject
Q6	How often do you have trouble sleeping?	17	24	39	29	2	308	2.8	Reject
Q7	How often do you feel tired or fatigued?	4	13	48	28	18	376	3.4	Accept
Q8	How often do you feel a lack of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy?	15	20	39	27	10	330	3.0	Accept
Q9	How often do you have trouble concentrating or focusing?	9	16	61	16	9	333	3.0	Accept

Cut-off criterion (Accept= $M \geq 3.0$, Reject= $M < 3.0$)

Table 3 revealed the participants responses to the assessment of their mental health. The study revealed a significant level of overwhelming stress, anxiety, irritability/anger, fatigue, lack of interest/pleasure and

poor concentration. While feelings of loneliness/isolation and depression appeared insignificant among the participants.

Table 4: Responses on participants' Resilience level

S/N	Resilience Level	N(1)	R(2)	S(3)	O(4)	A(5)	Total	Mean()	Decision
Q1	How often are you able to adapt to change?	1	4	22	30	54	465	4.2	Accept
Q2	How often do you deal effectively with whatever comes your way?	3	6	27	49	26	422	3.8	Accept
Q3	How often do you try to see the humorous side of problems?	5	10	31	42	23	401	3.6	Accept
Q4	How often does coping with stress help you become stronger?	11	23	39	27	11	337	3.0	Accept
Q5	How often do you bounce back quickly after illness or hardship?	4	5	25	32	45	442	4.0	Accept
Q6	How often do you achieve your goals despite facing obstacles?	1	5	29	38	38	440	3.9	Accept
Q7	How often do you feel undeterred by failure?	5	18	31	41	16	378	3.4	Accept
Q8	How often do you stay focused under pressure?	6	12	26	32	35	411	3.7	Accept
Q9	How often do you think of yourself as a strong person?	1	5	21	34	50	460	4.1	Accept
Q10	How often do you handle unpleasant feelings effectively?	2	11	43	22	33	406	3.6	Accept

Cut-off criterion (Accept= $M \geq 3.0$, Reject= $M < 3.0$)

Table 4 revealed a strong level of resilience among the participants. The study revealed that the participants demonstrated resilience in all the ten items of the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale.

Discussion

From table 2, the assessment of the participants' level of perceived stress in the last three months of their lives indicated that respondents most strongly agreed that unexpected events upset them ($M = 3.6$) and that they have felt nervous or overwhelmed by stress ($M = 3.6$). They also acknowledged feeling confident in managing their personal problems (reverse-scored, $M = 3.4$), although they reported frustration with things outside their control ($M = 3.3$) and struggling to cope with responsibilities ($M = 3.2$). Similarly, respondents expressed difficulty in controlling important aspects of their lives ($M = 3.2$), feeling overwhelmed by the number of challenges they face ($M = 3.2$), and perceiving that things have not generally gone

their way (reverse-scored, $M = 3.2$). Managing irritations (reverse-scored, $M = 3.1$) and feeling in control of daily tasks (reverse-scored, $M = 3.1$) were also strongly endorsed. This result summarily indicates a strong level of perceived stress among the participants while in their home country, thereby giving a strong indication for the need to improve coping mechanisms and daily task management while still in the native country in order to avoid susceptibility to acculturative stress in the host country. This finding is particularly significant as many international students arrive unprepared for the physical and emotional challenges associated with migration to another country and studying in a new cultural context. This is in line with a research by Torres et al, (2018) which demonstrated that students who received pre-departure orientation including practical life skills training showed significantly better adjustment outcomes and lower levels of acculturative stress compared to those who did not receive such preparation as proactive coping strategies training before migration can serve as a protective factor

against the development of more severe psychological distress during the acculturation process.

Furthermore, the assessment of the mental health of the respondents, in Table 3, showed that respondents generally experience a moderate level of mental health concerns. They most frequently reported feelings of anxiety, being overwhelmed or stressed ($M = 3.6$) and tired or fatigued ($M = 3.4$), as well as lack of concentration/pleasure. Though low levels of depression and isolation/loneliness were expressed, this may be attributed to the present support system available while still in the home country, in the host country, where the support system is absent, and the presence of acculturative stress, the current mental health indications may not be sufficient to navigate the acculturation process. This assertion and the findings are in line with the results from various studies reported. Koo & Tan (2022) reported approximately 20% of international students were at risk of experiencing mental health problems due to acculturative stress and acculturation-related problems and large numbers of international students struggle with mental health issues. Furthermore, the study of Mewett & Sawyerr 2016; Liu et al, 2024; Quant et al, 2022; and Sakis & Jecius, 2022 supported providing interventions for mental health preparation among international students as it has been revealed that international students expressed cases of depression, and severe anxiety with more likelihood of experiencing severe mental issues than their domestic peers. The low level of mental health preparedness identified in this study suggests that students may be entering their international education experience without adequate knowledge of how to maintain their psychological well-being or access appropriate support when needed. Therefore, giving a strong indication for mental health literacy among pre-migrant international students and supported by the research of Kim et al, (2020) which revealed international students who received mental health literacy training before departure showed significantly better help-seeking behaviors and mental health outcomes compared to those who did not receive such preparation.

On the resilience testing among the participants, in Table 4, interestingly, the study found no significant level of resilience factors among pre-migrant students, indicating a generally high level of resilience among participants. The findings revealed that respondents most strongly agreed with statements reflecting their resilience, particularly their ability to adapt to change ($M = 4.2$) and their self-perception as strong individuals ($M = 4.1$). They also demonstrated a high capacity to bounce back quickly after illness or hardship ($M = 4.0$) and achieve their goals despite facing obstacles ($M = 3.9$). Effectively dealing with challenges as they arise was similarly endorsed ($M = 3.8$),

along with the ability to stay focused under pressure ($M = 3.7$) and see the humorous side of problems ($M = 3.6$). Handling unpleasant feelings effectively was moderately endorsed ($M = 3.6$), while feeling undeterred by failure ($M = 3.4$) and viewing stress as a source of strength ($M = 3.0$) were less strongly supported. These results indicate a generally high level of resilience among respondents, with some variability in their coping strategies and attitudes toward stress. This suggests that many individuals who choose to pursue international education possess inherent resilience characteristics, including adaptability, and persistence as the decision to leave one's home country for educational purposes itself may indicate certain resilience traits, which requires courage, adaptability, and a willingness to face uncertainty. However, the presence of high resilience alongside significant stress revealed in table 2 and mental health concerns in table 3, suggests that resilience alone may not be sufficient to prevent acculturative stress without appropriate preparation and support as the demonstrated resilience in the home country may not be sustainable in a foreign country where there is a lack of support system, inadequate mental preparation to handle the stressors associated with acculturation process and mental health concerns. Research has indicated that resilience operates most effectively when combined with adequate coping resources, social support, and environmental support as evidenced in the study of Miller & Rasmussen (2010) and Forbes-Mewett,(2019) established that addressing mental health concerns before departure and a good support system in educational pursuit can establish a foundation for resilience and better migration outcome

Summary of Findings

Among the study participants, Canada emerged as the most preferred country of study with 54.9% of the respondents indicating Canada as their intending country of study. The age group 15-19 constituted the largest percentage of students seeking international education, having 40.2 % of the sample within the age group. The largest percentage of the pre-migrant students were single, constituting 79.4% of the study with 71% seeking studies at undergraduate level. Furthermore, majority of the students (62.6%) fell into the Low-income group with 86% of the students having no previous international travel experience. There was a significant level of perceived stress among the pre-migrant students indicating a strong anticipated difficulty in overcoming acculturative stress during acculturation. Additionally, there was a significant level of mental health conditions among the pre-migrant students, indicating a low level of mental health preparedness among the participants.

However, there was no significant level of resilience among the pre-migrant students, indicating a generally high level of resilience among the participants.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The intersection of pre-existing mental health conditions with the stress of international education is particularly concerning. Studies indicate that the transition to international education can exacerbate existing mental health vulnerabilities, leading to more severe symptoms and poorer academic and social outcomes. The findings from this study underscore the need for comprehensive mental health screening and preparation programs before students depart for their international education. While students demonstrate significant resilience capabilities, they also face substantial challenges related to stress management, mental health preparedness, and practical life skills. Addressing acculturative stress among pre-migrant students requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that involves various stakeholders and addresses the complex nature of cultural transition. There is a need to develop comprehensive pre-migration preparation programs that address these multiple dimensions of readiness for international education. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting proactive, prevention-focused approaches to international student mental health and well-being. By addressing vulnerabilities and building on strengths during the pre-migration period, educational institutions and support organizations can significantly improve outcomes for international students and reduce the negative impacts of acculturative stress.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are provided to serve as a framework for developing targeted interventions that can significantly improve the well-being and success of students preparing for international migration:

1. **Pre-Departure Preparation Programs:** Educational institutions, Visa Processing centers and foreign examination preparation centers can collaborate with embassies, to facilitate comprehensive interventions that will address acculturative stress and mental health preparation before their relocation for studies abroad to sufficiently equip pre-migrant students navigate the complex psychological challenges of cross-cultural

migration, manage potential acculturative stress and develop effective coping mechanisms in unfamiliar social environments

2. **Provision of Mental Health Resources:** Mental health awareness and coping strategies should be integrated into the pre-migration preparation package. This can be achieved by providing access to counseling services that specifically address migration-related anxiety and stress, and addressing the unique challenges faced by pre-migrant students, including family pressure, financial concerns, and cultural identity conflicts.

4. **Community Resource Networks:** Community-based support groups for families of prospective migrants should be established to share experiences, provide practical advice, and create solidarity among families facing similar challenges as well as connect families with successful migrant families who can serve as mentors and role models.

5. **Digital Support Platforms and AI-Powered Support Systems:** Mobile applications and online platforms could be developed to provide resources, peer support, and professional guidance for pre-migrant students. These platforms should be accessible, culturally sensitive, and available in multiple languages. Artificial intelligence tools that can provide personalized support and resources based on individual student needs and stress levels should be provided to offer 24/7 availability and complement human support services.

Limitations of the study

The response rate for this study was considerably lower than anticipated, which raises concerns about the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of findings. The study achieved a sample size of 113 participants, which represents a significant shortfall from the estimated sample size of 385 participants calculated for adequate statistical power. This substantial difference between the planned and actual sample sizes may compromise the study's ability to detect statistically significant relationships and limit the precision of parameter estimates.

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