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Internationalization in Canadian Higher Education: Experiences of International Students in a Master's Program

Internationalisation dans l'enseignement supérieur Canadien: Expériences d'étudiants internationaux dans un programme de maîtrise

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the preferences and experiences of international students in a Canadian master's degree program. We collected data from 38 students in the program through a survey questionnaire, which asked research participants these questions: Why did they leave their own countries for education? Why did they select Canada? Did they plan to stay in Canada after graduation? The questionnaire also asked participants to indicate whether they agreed with 26 positive statements about the program. In addition, participants were invited to make comments about the program. Participants thought Canada had quality education and a safe environment, and most participants believed that they had a positive experience of undertaking graduate studies in Canada. Over half of them indicated that they plan to stay in Canada upon graduation. Based on the findings, we made recommendations on how to improve the program.

Résumé

Le but de cette étude était de comprendre les préférences et les expériences d'étudiants internationaux inscrits dans un programme de maîtrise au Canada. Nous avons recueilli les données de 38 étudiants dans le programme à travers un questionnaire d'enquête qui a posé les questions suivantes aux participants de la recherche: Pourquoi ont-ils quitté leur pays d'origine pour leur éducation? Pourquoi ont-ils choisi le Canada? Ont-ils l'intention de rester au Canada après leur graduation? Le questionnaire a également demandé aux participants d'indiquer s'ils ont d'accord avec 26 déclarations positives concernant leur programme. De plus, les participants ont été invités à faire des commentaires relatifs à leur programme. Les participants ont pensé que le Canada offrait une éducation de qualité et un environnement sécuritaire, et la plupart des participants croyaient qu'ils avaient eu une expérience positive en entreprenant leurs études supérieures au Canada. Plus de la moitié d'entre eux ont indiqué qu'ils ont l'intention de rester au Canada après leur graduation. En fonction de ces résultats, nous avons fait des recommandations sur la manière d'améliorer le programme.

Keywords: international students' experiences, master's program, Canada

Mots-clés : expériences des étudiants internationaux ; programme de maîtrise; Canada

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand what students' preferences and experiences were as they studied in an international Master of Education (MEd) program in a Canadian university. Internationalization is defined as the process of integrating an international dimension into the purpose and delivery of higher education (Knight, 2008). In the past two decades the concept of the internationalization of higher education has moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). Internationalization is reflected in several respects, of which one is the increasing number of international students on university campuses. All possible factors influencing students to move to another country can be arranged in a list of push

and pull factors. “Push factors operate within the home country to initiating the student’s decision to study overseas. Pull factors operate within the host country to make that country relatively more attractive than other potential destinations” (Gonzalez, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011, pp. 6-7). Canada has strong pull factors such as being a developed country where English is spoken, considered safer than the United States, and less expensive than the United Kingdom. One prominent push factor, which can also be considered a pull factor, is that Chinese, Indians, Saudi Arabians, and Thais believe that Canadian higher education is of high quality.

International student mobility is one of the cornerstones of the growing internationalization of Canadian universities (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), August 2007, p. 1). In 2012, 104,810 international students came to Canada for education (Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), 2013). Altogether in 2010 there were more than 218,200 long-term (staying at least for six months) international students in Canada, spending in excess of \$7.7 billion, creating over 81,000 jobs, and generating more than \$445 million in government revenue (Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2012). The positive impact international students have in Canada is not only economic. International students often can help those who teach them and interact with them have a better understanding of the world by presenting their perspectives (Lee, 2010). If Canadians want to play a role in the world, they need to have a better understanding of the world. The presence of international students is helpful in achieving such an understanding. International students have a great impact on our universities, and ultimately on society as a whole. How we manage international education will affect the course of our economic prosperity as well as our place in the world (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2012).

Internationalization of higher education has become a significant Canadian feature (Beck, 2012), and universities are “reporting a deepening and broadening of activities to integrate an international dimension into their core teaching, research and service functions” (AUCC, 2007, p. 3). Universities recognize the many benefits of a strong presence of international students and see it as a component of a truly internationalized campus (AUCC, August 2007). However, there is a “dearth of good practices, standards and data on which inputs lead to which outcomes” (AUCC, 2007, p. 23).

Three Canadian provinces loosened residency requirements for overseas graduates from their master’s programs, no longer requiring them to have an employment offer before applying for an immigration visa (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2010). Allocating \$10 million in its 2011 budget to promote Canada, the federal government is interested in having more international students (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2011). The Advisory Panel on Canada’s International Education Strategy recommended that Canada seek to double the number of full-time international students by 2022 (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2012).

Rationale

The overall number of international students coming to Canada increased from 65,513 in 2004 to 104,810 in 2012 (CIC, 2013). However, little research has been undertaken that focuses on international students’ preferences and experiences. Indeed their voices are rarely heard (de Wit, 2013), and we know little about their preferences and experiences (Hoare, 2012). Many institutions appear to pay little attention to supporting these students, and there is a lack of research that explains their choices and the satisfaction of these choices (Lee, 2010). There is a

need for evaluating internationalization efforts and learning outcomes (Coryell, Durodoye, Wright, Pate, & Nguyen, 2012).

“International students enrich our country in many ways, and we continue to learn about their positive experiences in Canada, and their reasons for choosing to study here” (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2009, p. vii). It is important to understand the preferences and experiences of students in the international MEd program in the university where this study was conducted, so that instructors may gain insights into how to meet students’ needs. Understanding students’ preferences and experiences will also assist in making the program viable, sustainable, and grow. Understanding their preferences and experiences in the international MEd program can be useful for student success and the program’s recruitment efforts. The knowledge gained will also contribute towards the internationalization of the university and may be useful for master’s programs in other Canadian universities with international students. In addition, the knowledge gained through this study will meet, to a certain extent, the need for evaluating internationalization efforts and learning outcomes. Studies discussing challenges in internationalization and sharing insights and practices are highly relevant. Disseminating outcomes of studies in this field will cast light on the value of internationalization and serve to engage more players in this enterprise (AUCC, 2007, p. 23). They contribute to building the knowledge base on internationalization of Canadian higher education.

Context of the Study

In the 2012-2013 academic year there were 1,651 international students, approximately 9 percent of the total student population, at the university where this study was conducted. International students were an important component of the student body. Most international students study together with Canadian students, but some study in programs established particularly for them. In 2003, a graduate from the master of education program at the university’s faculty of education proposed starting a MEd program specifically catering to international students. The program was called International Student Program (ISP) with the purpose of recruiting students from outside Canada and providing them with knowledge of Canadian and Western education with a focus on educational administration and leadership. Students in the international program took courses arranged specifically for them, but they had the option of auditing courses with Canadian students. Some of them did utilize this opportunity to audit courses in addition to taking the courses arranged for them. In March 2004, 25 international cohort students arrived on campus and in June 2005 they graduated with a master of education degree. Since 2004 there have been 10 international MEd cohorts. The 8th international cohort started in July 2011 and graduated in October 2012. Of the 48 students in the 8th cohort there were two Saudis, one Thai, one from the United Arab Emirates, and the rest were from mainland China. The 9th cohort started in July 2012 and graduated in October 2013. The current cohort is the 10th cohort.

The duration of the program is 16 months. The international program students start courses in early July, complete their study in August the following year, and graduate in October. Students take two courses in the summer term: introduction to studies in education and graduate seminar; four courses in the fall term: constructions of organization, field experience, introduction to research, and challenges of educational leadership; three courses in the winter term: effecting change, politics, power and policy, and comparative and international education; and two more courses in the spring and summer terms: reflective practitioner and culminating seminar. Some of them, often those interested in pursuing a doctoral degree, prefer to write a

major research paper with faculty advisement instead of only taking courses. In the 8th cohort, out of 48 students 4 decided to write a major research paper, who worked on their own research projects after taking seven courses. The department hosting the international cohort hires language mentors to assist students when they write their assignments. The department has a policy requiring cohort students to work with a language mentor. The department also arranges to have conversation colleagues, who are Canadian MEd students, to talk with the cohort students regularly to help them improve their oral English and have more interaction with Canadian students and the local people. However, having a conversation colleague is voluntary. Non-cohort international students in the regular MEd program taking courses together with Canadian students do not enjoy the services of language mentors and conversation colleagues because of a lack of resources.

Methodology

To collect data from the students in the international program we designed a survey questionnaire with three sections. The first section sought personal information and asked students the following questions: Which country are you from? Why did you leave your own country and come to Canada to further your education? Why did you decide to study in the international program instead of the regular program? Do you plan to stay in Canada upon graduation? The second section asked students to summarize their overall experience in the program by indicating whether they agreed with 26 positive statements about the program. Each statement was accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The higher the total score was, the more positive the student felt about the whole experience in the program. Space was provided following each statement for comments. The third section asked the students to comment on the focus of the program, what they liked the most, and what they liked the least about the program. Students were also invited to suggest things they would like to see added or deleted and make additional comments they would like to share (see the attached questionnaire).

The questionnaire was distributed together with an informed consent form in late April 2012 to students in two classes of the 8th international cohort. The questionnaire was anonymous because no name was required. A research assistant, who did not know the students, distributed and collected the questionnaire. Students had the right not to complete the questionnaire or not to answer any questions. Out of the 48 students in the cohort 38 completed and submitted the questionnaire, with a response rate of 79%. Once the questionnaires were collected, we input both the quantitative and qualitative data into an excel dataset. We carefully went through all the data several times to analyze them. We calculated the means and standard deviations of students' responses to the 26 statements about the program in the second section of the questionnaire to have a general understanding of their experiences and feelings with regard to specific aspects of the program. We also examined their responses and comments to the questions in the first and third sections of the questionnaire to comprehend their overall perspectives and opinions about the program's strengths and weaknesses and whether the program met their needs. This is a small scale descriptive survey study. "Surveys can provide us accurate, reliable, and valid data" (Neuman, 2011, p. 309). Since we use a convenience sample (Creswell, 2012), no attempt is made to generalize the results. The results of the data analysis follow.

Results

Of the 38 students that submitted the questionnaire, 1 (2.6%) was from Saudi Arabia, 1 (2.6%) was from Thailand, and 36 (94.7%) were from mainland China. Seven (18.4%) were male and 31 (81.6%) were female. While 1 female did not report her age, the average age of the other 37 students was about 25.5 years old with the youngest being 23 and the oldest being 35.

To the first question: Why did you leave your own country to further your education? 18 students (47.4%) responded that they wanted to broaden their mind or have overseas experience. Fourteen (36.8%) indicated that they left their own countries for a higher degree. Three (7.9%) stated that they wanted to improve their English. Two (5.3%) claimed that they wanted to find a better job. One (2.6%) said she wanted to take the new experience back to China. Another (2.6%) listed her two reasons for going overseas as the consideration of immigration and getting a higher degree so that she could get a better job.

When asked: Why did you select Canada to further your education? 12 students (31.6%) responded that they came to Canada because of its high quality of education. Eleven (28.9%) indicated that they selected Canada because it is a safe country. Nine (23.7%) stated that they had friends, relatives, or even husband here. Six (15.8%) said Canada had a good environment. Three (7.9%) indicated that they selected Canada because English is spoken here, and three (7.9%) stated that they liked Canada. Two (5.3%) said the possibility of immigration to Canada was the reason why they selected this country.

To the question: Why did you decide to study in the international program, not in the regular (domestic) program? 18 students (47.4%) indicated that they did not know they could apply to the regular program, or they did not know the difference between the international program and the regular program. Thirteen (34.2%) said they applied to the international program because their English was not strong enough, or the application process was easier. Four (10.5%) said the agent who helped them during the application process decided that they should apply to the international program. One (2.6%) stated that to earn the degree the international program was faster. When asked whether they would stay in Canada upon graduation, 15 students (39.5%) indicated that they would stay in Canada and 12 (31.6%) said they were not sure. Six (15.8%) claimed that they would return to their own country right after graduation. Five (13.2%) stated that they would stay in Canada for a couple of years but eventually return to their own country.

The 38 students responded to most of the 26 statements. From 37 students the mean of the Likert scale is 3.65 for the first statement, “the whole program is well structured”, indicating rather weak agreement. Twelve students made comments here, such as the course “reflective practitioner” was not needed, too much attention was paid to leadership, there was no focus, it was difficult to understand the connection between all the courses, the program should provide co-op opportunities, some courses were “rather lame”, and the program was too short.

From 38 students for the statement “the MEd (ISP) offers sufficient English language support” the mean is 4.11, indicating agreement. Seven students made comments, which included: the program was useful in helping to enhance their English, they needed to speak English more, time and staff support was not enough, they spoke too much Chinese in class, and the conversation colleagues were not available for them until February. Since the conversation colleague project started several years ago, conversation colleagues were usually arranged and started talking to international students regularly in the fall. For the 8th cohort the conversation colleagues were not arranged as smoothly as for previous cohorts.

From 37 students the mean is 3.38 for the statement “the conversation colleague opportunity is very helpful”, indicating that because of the unusual glitch in the arrangement for

this cohort the majority of the students were not sure. Of the seven students making comments, six said they did not know what this was. The other indicated that her conversation colleague seemed very busy. From 38 students for the statement “the program has increased my understanding of Canadian education” the mean is 4.37, indicating robust agreement. Four students commented, saying now they had foundational information about Canadian education, the program increased their understanding of Canadian education through the course of “field experience”, they needed more connection with Canadian education like the “field experience” course, and they had more American materials than Canadian materials.

For the statement “it has broadened my understanding of different approaches to education” the mean is 4.32, indicating robust agreement again. Only two students made comments. One said the program gave her the opportunity to understand different approaches to education, and the other stated that Canadian education was different from Chinese education. The mean is 3.61 for the statement “the courses have good flow and are connected in a meaningful way”, indicating very weak agreement. Two students commented, of whom one claimed that the courses connected well, but the other stated that some courses were not practical. The mean is 3.89 for the statement “the amount of group work required in the program is valuable”, indicating general agreement. Only one student made a comment claiming that she learnt a lot.

For the statement “feedback is prompt” the mean is 4, indicating agreement. Four students made comments: two reiterated agreement and said they got enough feedback from professors. However, one claimed that in some courses there were no specific grades for individual assignments, and another stated that some instructors were good at giving useful feedback promptly while students had to keep asking for feedback from other instructors. The mean is 3.95 for the statement “the support necessary to succeed in the program is sufficient”, indicating general agreement. However, the only comment stated that most of them were confused about their future career after coming to Canada. The mean is 3.68 for the statement “the duration of the program is adequate in length”, indicating rather weak agreement. Six students made comments here: only one agreed that the current schedule was fine, but the other five disagreed, saying that the program should be extended to 1.5 years to 2 years.

For the statement “the objectives of the program are clearly specified” the mean is 3.71, indicating rather weak agreement. Only two students commented: one stated that some courses needed to connect with Canadian education more closely, and the other claimed that the program was not suitable for new university graduates. The mean is 3.66 for the statement “the program includes adequate culturally enriching experiences”, indicating rather weak agreement again. Four students made comments: one hoped for more experience in the “field experience” course, another suggested more immersing experiences, one commented on the inadequacy of international activities, and another stated that the program should be called “Asian program” instead of international program because there were only Chinese and Mid-Easterners. The mean is 4.03 for the statement “the program offers sufficient academic supervision”, indicating agreement. The only comment mentioned receiving supervision through the “field experience” course.

For the statement “the opportunity to meet Canadian students is adequate” the mean is 2.08, the lowest among the 26 items, indicating disagreement. Eleven students made comments. Of these 11 students 6 said they had no opportunity to meet Canadian students. Of the other 5, 1 commented on meeting Canadian students “in the hallway, not in the classroom.” Four suggested having classes together with Canadian students. From 36 students the mean is 2.36 for the

statement, “the program offers enough social activities”, indicating disagreement again. Nine students commented: four said there were no social activities, two stated that there were not enough social activities, one claimed that they only went on trips composed entirely of international students, and another wondered whether there could be more social activities with local people.

From 38 students the mean is 3.16 for the statement “I would recommend the program to other international students”, indicating that the majority of the students were not sure. Three students made comments. One wondered whether the word “international” could be taken out, which he thought was a bad sign. Another claimed that the program was good only for those who were going back to their own country. The third said it depended. If international students only needed knowledge the program was good for them, but if they wanted to find a job in Canada the program was not adequate. From 32 students the mean is 2.91 for the statement, “my homestay experience is positive”, indicating that the majority were not sure. Thirteen students commented, and of these 13 students 9 indicated that they did not have homestay experience. Of the 4 with homestay experience, 3 did not like the experience, but 1 did.

From 38 students the mean is 3.34 for the statement “the program has met my expectations”, indicating that the majority were probably not sure. Five students made comments here. Of these five students two reiterated their agreement. Of the other three, one claimed that her English did not improve as much as she expected, and another said the program was too theoretical. The third stated that the program did not really meet her expectations, and the program was just “so so”.

For the statement “my graduate studies experience has been a positive one” the mean is 4, indicating agreement. Only two students commented: one reiterated her agreement, and the other said she enjoyed the facilities and had experienced Canadian style learning. The mean is 3.55 for the statement “the program has helped me achieve my academic goals”, indicating very weak agreement. Three students made comments: one reiterated agreement, another said it was hard to say because she had not practiced what she had learnt in the program, and the third claimed that they needed more academic opportunities.

For the statement “the program started at a convenient time of the year” the mean is 3.82, indicating weak agreement. Three students commented: two claimed that the current starting time was fine, but the other said perhaps starting in August or September would be better. The mean is 4.16 for the statement “I have gained a better understanding of academic research in education”, indicating agreement. The only comment indicated that it was from the “introduction to research” course. For the statement “I have learnt a great deal about academic writing” the mean is 4.26, indicating robust agreement. Only one student commented, saying not really. The mean is 4.13 for the statement “I am better able to inquire, question and reflect”, indicating agreement. Two students made comments: one reiterated agreement but the other said she did not think she had changed a lot.

The mean is 4.24 for the statement “I am better able to do a presentation”, indicating agreement again. The only comment claimed yes, to some extent. The mean is 4.29 for the statement “I am better able to take part in a discussion”, indicating robust agreement. Two students made comments: one reiterated agreement, but the other said she wanted more opportunities to discuss with Canadian students. Of the 26 statements in the questionnaire, students agreed with 20, were not sure about 4, and disagreed with 2. The grand mean for all the 26 items from the 38 students is 3.72, indicating rather weak overall agreement with the positive statements about the program.

In the third section of the questionnaire there were six items. The first item asked students to comment on the focus of the program being placed on “administration and leadership”. Thirty-one students made comments. The general point gathered from the majority of the comments was that the program was appropriate for people who wanted to become educational administrators. But several students pointed out that the focus was a little difficult for people who had just completed their undergraduate study. They needed more experience to put the theories they learnt in the program into practice.

The second item asked students to indicate what key ideas they had taken from the program, to which 33 students responded. They mentioned a variety of elements. They indicated that the most prominent things they learnt were organizational and leadership concepts and theories. Other things they learnt included educational change, critical thinking, and the importance of collaboration. The third item asked students about which parts of the program they found most valuable. Thirty-five students listed some courses as most valuable. In the order of prominence mentioned, they were the courses on “constructions of organization”, “politics, power, and policy”, and “field experience”.

The fourth item asked students about which parts of the program they found least valuable. Of the 24 students that made comments 6 indicated that the “reflective practitioner” course was least valuable. Six students stated that separating them from Canadian students was least valuable. Three said the course on “effecting change” was least valuable. Other comments were about a variety of elements of the program: one said some professors should have more control over the class, another claimed that some professors only asked them to do presentations instead of teaching them, and a Chinese student indicated that being surrounded by Chinese classmates was least valuable.

The fifth item asked students whether there were things they would like to see added or deleted. Of the 31 students that commented 28 wanted a variety of elements added. In the order of prominence mentioned, they are: more opportunities to study together with Canadian students, a co-op program, a longer “field experience” course, students from different countries, enhanced language support, and courses to help them become familiar with Canada.

The last item asked students to include any additional comments they would like to share. Thirteen students offered comments, which could be put into two general categories: The first category can be typified as expressions of gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in the program, and the second category can be typified as suggestions of changes to improve the program. One student commented that if appropriate changes were made the program would have more students. Another claimed that her language mentor played a critical role in her study. One stated that she had a great time studying in the program, while another commented that she learnt a lot from all the professors. However, one student worried about not finding a job after graduation. Another complained that the tuition was very high for international students. One wished to have more practical courses, indicating that it would be more meaningful to actually participate in school administration. Another said the program needed to focus on the career of students. Some also suggested that the program should have more students from countries other than China to make it really international.

Discussion

In this study 15 students (39.5%) said they would stay in Canada upon graduation. Twelve (31.6%) indicated that they were not sure. Two (5.3%) said the possibility of immigration was one of the reasons why they selected Canada. Canadian Bureau for International Education (2009)

claimed that 50% of international students planned to stay in Canada after they completed their studies. Ontario indicated that it would increase international student enrolment by 50 per cent (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2011). Manitoba made legislative changes so that all international students with a study permit are eligible for Manitoba health coverage (Manitoba International Students Health Insurance Plan, n. d.). British Columbia published its *International Education Strategy*, hoping to attract more international students (British Columbia Government, 2012). The predominant reason for the three provinces taking these actions is to encourage skilled overseas graduates to come and stay in their respective province. The federal government is also interested in having more international students study in Canada. Canada appears to be working to integrate its immigration policy towards two aims. The first is to help provinces capitalize on a valuable source of talent. The second is to give prospective international students overseas employment opportunities (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2010). One interesting topic that can be investigated further is how many international students come to Canadian universities with a goal of immigration. The desire for immigration is one of the reasons why students study overseas (Altbach & Reisberg, 2013). “International study is associated with a significantly increased probability of permanent migration to the host country” (Adnett, 2010, p. 629). However, it is still rare for international education to be discussed on the basis of economic migrants (Scott, 2010).

There seemed to be a contradiction between students' general agreement with the statement “my graduate studies experience has been a positive one” and their dissatisfaction with not having adequate interaction with Canadian students and other issues of the program. It was possible that Chinese, Thai, and Saudi students were more polite toward their professors and education institutions than Canadian students and that their gratitude of having the opportunity to study in the program distorted their responses. It was also possible that the overall experience was generally a positive one but they had problems with specific aspects of the program, particularly inadequate opportunities of interacting with Canadian students. Only individual in-depth interviews where research participants were honest with an interviewer could find out what they really thought. This can be considered in future research.

In Canada there is a need for international students to be recognized and supported commensurate to their importance. “The support services available to international students comprise an important component of their overall study experience and can help to attract and keep students to Canadian universities” (AUCC, August 2007, p. 6). Superior service delivery has become a key objective of universities to ensure they meet students' needs and expectations, and to maintain student satisfaction and loyalty towards study destinations (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). With the growing number of international students, Canadian administrators and academics need to identify ways to enable international students to adapt to the Canadian environment and enhance their experiences. Conversation on recruitment seems disconnected from conversation on student support, and there is a need for more research (Jones, 2011). Data from this study indicate that there is much room for improvement in the international MED program to provide adequate student support.

Out of 48 students in the cohort, 44 were Chinese. The reason the vast majority of the international program students were Chinese was that for Canada, China is the most important source of international students (CIC, 2013). In addition, the proposer of the international program at the faculty is a Chinese Canadian, who has relationships in China and makes continuous efforts to strengthen these relations so that professors can recruit candidates there with relative ease. The Chinese higher education system seems to not be meeting its citizens'

demand (Wei & Yuan, 2012). The number of Chinese going overseas for education increased significantly from approximately 130,000 in 2007 to about 399,600 in 2012 (Chen & Sun, 2010; Kang, 2013). China is the most important source of international students in the world (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2013). The number of Chinese students coming to Canada for education increased from 7,248 in 2004 to 25,346 in 2012 (CIC, 2013). However, students in the international cohort indicated that the program should be more diversified. The department hosting the program has made efforts to diversify the program, but past efforts have not been successful.

While we believe further internationalization of Canadian higher education is beneficial for both Canadians and international students, we need to be careful not to follow the examples of Australia and Britain, two countries that have depended on international students to generate income (Altbach, 2012). There is financial pressure on British universities to make money from international students, primarily from Asian students (Robertson, 2010). Britain is one of the leading providers of international education, from which significant revenue is central to the prosperity of the country's universities (Walker, 2010). However, international education was Australia's third largest export (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012). The history of Australian involvement in Asia via internationalization has yielded the emergence of a complex and unpredictable edubusiness, whose prioritization of the financial bottom line has supplanted normative educational intents (Luke, 2010). "Australia has become a by-word for making money out of international student flows" (Marginson, 2012, p. 11). Australia is over-dependent on international student tuition and every last dollar is ploughed back into the local teaching and research (Marginson, 2012). Most Australian and British universities are public sector at home but operate as commercial ventures abroad (Bashir, 2007). Some Chinese students comment that as long as you have money, you are able to obtain a degree from Australia and Britain (Li, DiPetta, & Woloshyn, 2012). In this study one student complained about the high tuition for international students. It is imperative to be vigilant to the impacts, both positive and negative, of internationalization (Knight, 2012). An uncritical pursuit of internationalization can result in a reproduction of the economic dimensions of globalization (Beck, 2012). Of the four possibilities of internationalization: learning about the world, cross-cultural understanding, improving the quality of education, and revenue generation (Jones, 2011), there is a danger of focusing only on the last one.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data, we conclude that generally speaking students in the 8th international cohort that participated in the study agreed that their graduate study experience was a positive one, although their overall agreement to the statements in the questionnaire was weak. There was adequate English language support, most professors provided prompt feedback, the support necessary to succeed in the program was sufficient, and the program broadened their understanding of different approaches to education. However, most of them were not happy that the opportunity to interact with Canadian students is far from adequate. About half of the students indicated the reason of leaving their own countries for further education was to broaden their mind or have overseas experience. The most important reason why they selected Canada was the quality of Canadian higher education. Another important reason was that they considered Canada safe, which confirms the finding of an earlier study (Bond, Areepattamannil, Brathwaite-Sturgeon, Hayle, & Malekan, 2007).

In responding to the question why they decided to study in the international program, 18 students (47.4%), all Chinese, indicated that they did not know they could apply to the regular program. It seems that these students applied through an agency in China. For Chinese applicants it is easier to apply through an agency because the agency will help them prepare the application materials. Such services make the application process easier (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2012). If applicants use the services of an agency, it is quite likely that the agency will recommend the international program because it is considered easier to enter. It is true that it is easier to get into the international program than the regular program at the department hosting the program. The number of Chinese applying to the regular MEd program in the department has been increasing significantly in recent years. The department can only admit a fraction of these applicants because working with international students means more work due to language and other issues. “International students... can bring new challenges to course and service delivery” (AUCC, 2007, p. 11). One challenge of internationalization for Canadian universities is a lack of resources (Weber, 2007). The department does not have the capacity to work with many international students. With built-in services such as the language mentors and conversation colleagues, the international program is more manageable. With the same qualifications it is indeed easier to enter the international program than the regular program although the requirements for both are the same.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that the program enhance the functioning of the conversation colleagues to facilitate more interaction between international students and Canadian students. Li, DiPetta, and Woloshyn (2012) found that international students who interacted with conversation colleagues indicated that conversation colleagues were very helpful in improving their spoken English and in facilitating their interaction with local people. Campbell (2012) stated that a number of studies reported the positive effect of peer support programs to help international students adjust to their new environment and overcome the problem of lack of contact with local students.

Several students in this study suggest increasing the duration of the program, because they feel the current schedule is too tight. We recommend increasing the duration of the program without increasing the number of courses. If international students stay in the program longer, they are more likely to audit courses together with Canadian students and to have more interaction with Canadian students. With a longer duration, instructors and all those interacting with international students will have a better understanding of students’ perspectives. The program can start in September and end in December the following year, which is two months longer than the current schedule. In addition, the results suggest that the program has not been successful in terms of cross-cultural learning and students want more opportunities to study together with Canadian students. More time in the program is very likely to increase their interaction with Canadian students and the local people.

We also recommend that the duration of the “field experience” course be extended from one semester to two semesters so that students can have more practical experience in local schools, increasing their understanding of Canadian education. Additionally, we recommend that the department make stronger efforts to recruit students from different countries for the international program to diversify the student population.

This is a small scale descriptive survey study, and there is no generalizability. It is also important to note that segregated programs such as the one described here are not the norm in Canadian universities. However, the study provides insight into the preferences and experiences of students in the international program. The results help the department and instructors meet the

needs of students. Students' preferences and experiences revealed in the study assist in making the program viable, sustainable, and grow. These preferences and experiences are useful for student success and the program's international recruitment efforts. The knowledge gained also contributes towards the internationalization of the university and may be useful for master's programs in other Canadian universities with international students. In addition, the knowledge gained meets, to a certain extent, the need for evaluating internationalization efforts and learning outcomes and fills a gap in the literature regarding international education from students' perspective. These students' preferences and experiences contribute to building the knowledge base on internationalization of Canadian higher education.

In 2011, nearly 4.3 million students were enrolled in higher education outside their country of citizenship (OECD, 2013). Global student mobility contributes US \$75 billion to the world economy (Altbach, & Reisberg, 2013). It is very likely that at least in the short to medium term the international demand for higher education will increase considerably, offering opportunities and challenges to higher education institutions around world (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). As a developed English speaking country with a quality higher education system that receives over 200,000 immigrants every year, Canada is a favorable destination for international students, however, "Canada attracts 5 percent of all tertiary students who study abroad, much lower than other major destination countries" (Trilokekar & Jones, 2013, p. 17). Most participants in the study indicated that they had an overall positive experience studying in the program, but many of them also made suggestions on how to improve the program. To raise Canadian stakes in international education, more can be done. We believe further internationalization of Canadian universities is a positive development and there is potential for growth, although there are challenges to be dealt with.

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APPENDIX 1 - M. Ed. (ISP) Evaluation, 2011 – 2012 Student Questionnaire

Section I. Personal Information

Which country are you from?

Gender

Age

Why did you leave your own country to further your education?

Why did you select Canada to further your education?

Why did you select Xxxxx University for your study?

Why did you decide to study for an M. Ed. Degree in Educational Administration?

Why did you decide to study in the International Student Program, not in the regular (domestic) program?

Upon graduation, do you plan to stay in Canada, or return to your own country?

Upon graduation, what career or education goals do you have?

Section II. Overall Experience

1. Please rate the following statements that best summarize your overall experience in the M. Ed. (ISP). For each item, please circle the number that best corresponds to your response:

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

The whole program is well structured.	1	2	3	4	5
The M. Ed. (ISP) offers sufficient English language support.	1	2	3	4	5
The conversation colleague opportunity is very helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
The program has increased my understanding of Canadian education.	1	2	3	4	5
It has broadened my understanding of different approaches to education.	1	2	3	4	5
The courses are well organized and are connected in a meaningful way.	1	2	3	4	5
The amount of group work required in the program is valuable.	1	2	3	4	5
Feedback is prompt.	1	2	3	4	5
The support necessary to succeed in the program is sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5
The duration of the M. Ed. (ISP) is adequate in length.	1	2	3	4	5

The objectives of the M. Ed. (ISP) are clearly specified.	1	2	3	4	5
The program includes adequate culturally enriching experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
The program offers sufficient academic supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
The opportunity to meet Canadian students is adequate.	1	2	3	4	5
The program offers enough social activities.	1	2	3	4	5
I would recommend the program to other international students.	1	2	3	4	5
My homestay experience is positive.	1	2	3	4	5
The program has met my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
My graduate studies experience at Xxxxx has been a positive one.	1	2	3	4	5
The program has helped me achieve my academic goals.	1	2	3	4	5
The program started at a convenient time of the year.	1	2	3	4	5
I have gained a better understanding of academic research in education.	1	2	3	4	5
I have learnt a great deal about academic writing.	1	2	3	4	5
I am better able to inquire, question and reflect.	1	2	3	4	5
I am better able to do a presentation.	1	2	3	4	5
I am better able to take part in a discussion.	1	2	3	4	5

Section III. Reflections

The Master of Education - International Student Program at Xxxxx University is designed to provide international students with an opportunity to improve their academic background in administration and leadership in education.

- 1) Please comment on the focus of the program being placed on “administration and leadership in education”.
- 2) What key ideas have you taken from the program?
- 3) Which parts of the program did you find **MOST** valuable?
- 4) Which parts of the program did your find **LEAST** valuable?
- 5) Are there things that you would like to see **added** to or **deleted** from the program? If so, please specify.
- 6) Please include any additional comments that you would like to share. Use the back of this sheet if necessary.