Exploring the Perceptions and Concerns of Canadian International Students (IS)

by

Nagina Parmar

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PROJECT REVIEW INFORMATION

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The Project was approved **on July 31, 2023** the following review committee:

Review Committee:

Research Supervisor   Dr. William Hunter

Co-supervisor   Dr. Joe Stokes

Second Reader   Dr. Catherine Drea

The above review committee determined that the project is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field was covered by the work submitted. A copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions may not fully understand the challenges faced by international students (IS), such as housing, mental health, and discrimination. The present study looked at factors that influence IS's decision to study abroad, using a push-and-pull framework. The study began after approval from Ontario Tech and Toronto Metropolitan University ethics boards. 95 students completed an online questionnaire and 10 were interviewed for more details. Our findings suggested various factors, which can either attract or deter IS, and impact their decision to pursue their education in this country. Information collected will be used to shape policies and practices at participating universities.

Keywords: Globalization; Internationalization; Perceptions; microaggressions; International students

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this paper entitled, "Exploring the Perceptions and Concerns of Canadian International Students (IS) consists of original work of which I have authored. This is a true copy of the work, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my committee.

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The research work in this project paper that was performed in compliance with the regulations of the Research Ethics Board under **REB Certificate number #17080**

Nagina Parmar

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                                                                                        Nagina Parmar

DEDICATION

As someone learning as an adult, I often think of Maya Angelou's quote, "I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better." This quote resonates with me because I constantly strive to learn, and I know I will. Although I had always dreamed of obtaining an MEd degree, I was unsure of when I would be able to achieve it. However, throughout my journey, I felt a guiding light that I believe was a sign from my late father, encouraging me to keep going. This project is dedicated to my family - my parents, Bikramjit Grover and Kuldip Grover, my children, my partner, my sisters and all the friends.

I want to express my gratitude to my dad, who was always my unwavering support and inspiration throughout my academic journey. His belief in me and constant encouragement have always pushed me to strive for excellence and pursue my dreams. He used to say, "No one can steal your education... so keep going," that has motivated me to continue learning despite various challenges. His sacrifices and tireless efforts to provide me with the best opportunities have shaped the person I am today.

To my mom, whose unconditional love and strength have been my guiding light. Her endless patience, understanding, and belief in my abilities have given me the confidence to overcome challenges and reach for the stars. Her wisdom and nurturing nature have shaped my character and instilled in me the values of perseverance and determination. Thank you for being my pillar of strength.

To my daughter, Neha, you have been my greatest joy and inspiration. You have motivated me during the late nights and the challenging moments. I am immensely proud of the person you are becoming, and I dedicate this thesis to you as a symbol of my deep love and appreciation. To my son, Harry, you have been my constant source of love, joy, and inspiration.

Your presence in my life has brought immeasurable happiness and meaning to every step of this academic journey. I want to express my deepest gratitude for your patience and understanding when my attention was divided. Your understanding and maturity have surpassed your years, and I am in awe of the remarkable person you are becoming. As you continue to navigate your path and pursue your dreams, know I am always here to support and guide you.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my partner, Bill, for your unwavering support. You have been my confidant and my biggest cheerleader. Your presence in my life has enriched every moment, and I am grateful to have you by my side.

To my sisters, as a representation of our unbreakable bond, the empowering strength of our sisterhood, and the significant influence you have had on my personal and academic development. I express my gratitude for guiding me, cheering me on, and providing me with love and support.

Finally, to all my friends and supporters, I sincerely appreciate your friendship, encouragement, and unwavering belief in my abilities. You have been my cheerleader, my motivators, and my source of strength, and I could not have accomplished this without you.

Nagina

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this work and that no part of this work has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this document.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

COVID-19   CoronaVirus Disease of 2019
IS   International students
OT   Ontario Tech University
TMU   Toronto Metropolitan University

Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

Prior to the COVID-19 (COVID) pandemic, Canadian universities and colleges observed a rise in the number of international students (IS) across all levels of education (Marom, 2021). In 2020, there were 528,190 IS in Canada at year-end (Jeudy, 2022), with a drop of 110,090 IS from 2019 due to the impact of COVID (Immigration, 2020). IS still prefers to immigrate to Canada over the US (Study International, 2021) due to its accommodative immigration policies and support measures, such as providing IS with access to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and work opportunities through Post Graduate Work Permit Program (PGWPP) (Government of Canada, 2023). The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) is a program that allows international students who have graduated from recognized Canadian institutions to work temporarily in Canada. It aims to assist international students in gaining work experience in Canada, which can eventually lead to permanent residency. The PGWPP also benefits the Canadian labor market by increasing the number of qualified candidates for immigration and making Canada a popular destination for studying (Crossman et al., 2022).

COVID has dramatically impacted how IS learn. Due to the pandemic, English-speaking study destinations required IS to attend classes fully or partially online. As a result, IS had to adapt to instructional methods designed by teaching faculty who did not fully accept online pedagogy (Stokes, 2020).

Canadian post-secondary institutions see international education as a means to supplement their revenue during a time when government funding for education is low (Scott et al. 2015). For the 2020/2021 academic year, international undergraduate students paid an average annual tuition fee almost five times more than domestic students ($32,041 compared to $6,610). As a result, this contributed to approximately 40% of all tuition fees and produced almost $4 billion in

yearly income for Canadian universities during 2017/2018 (Statistics Canada 2020, para 7). As part of its higher education strategy (Foreign affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014), Canada's government planned to work with provinces, territories, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to increase the number of international students. The aim was to raise the number of 239,131 in 2011 international students to over 450,000 by 2022 while ensuring that Canadian students were not adversely affected. This increase in international students will help to create fresh employment opportunities, boost economic growth, and bring prosperity to all regions of the country (Foreign affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014).

1.1 What is Internationalization?

Various studies have provided definitions of international education, comparative education, and other related terms (Cudmore, 2005; De Wit, 2013, 2019; Jones, 2017). Internationalization has been defined as the multidimensional process which includes exchanges of faculty, partnerships and linkages at the international level, internal mobility of IS, academic programs and research collaborations. Various rationales exist that support internationalization at the national and postsecondary institution levels. These include human resources development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation-building, social/cultural development at the national level, international branding and profile, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances, and knowledge production at the institutional level (Anderson, 2015; Knight, 2004). There are regions in Canada where internationalization is not a big priority at the national level, but institutional-level rationales take precedence.

1.2 International Education Strategy and Inbound Mobility of IS

The global count of IS has significantly increased over time. Canada has been at the forefront of this trend, outpacing other major English-speaking destinations. This growth in

international student enrolment in Canada can be attributed to various factors, including changes in the reception policies of other major receiving countries (especially the United States, which saw a 23% decline in new postsecondary international student admissions between 2016 and 2019) and the proactive measures implemented by the Canadian government and educational sector to attract IS (Crossman et al., 2021). The Canadian economy benefits from an influx of IS workers due to the increasing aging population. These workers are highly proficient in the Canadian system and are a great choice for employers, especially since they are young and can address current and future highly skilled labour market needs (Government of Canada, 2019; Howe et al., 2023).

1.3 International Students in Canada

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2020), the number of IS in Canada rose significantly by 185% from 2010 to 2019. Moreover, according to the same source, 60% of these IS expressed interest in applying for permanent residency (PR) in Canada (CBIE, 2020).

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) data show that Canada welcomed 67,000 IS from 156 countries between January and April 2020 (Crossman et al., 2021; Jeudy, 2022). Canada experienced a 43% growth at the end of 2022, compared to the previous five years, and a nearly 170% growth over the last decade. There are 807,750 IS studying in Canada at all levels as of the end of 2022 (CBIE, 2023). There is a 31% increase in IS in Canada from 2021 to 2022. These international students predominately originated from 5 countries: India, China, South Korea, Vietnam and Brazil. Of those countries, India and China account for about 30% and 25% of the enrollment, respectively (CBIE, 2023; Crossman et al., 2021).

If we look at the academic programs at colleges and universities across Canada, IS are attracted to various programs, with one-third of the IS enrolled in Mathematics, Computer, and Information Sciences. Other popular programs are in the fields of Business and Administration. Legal professions were less frequently chosen, with only 287 IS enrolled in those programs. According to a recent report released by CBIE (2020), Business-related disciplines were the most prevalent among participants, with 20.4% indicating their area of study fell within the realm of Business. Following closely behind were Engineering (12.5%) and Computer Science (12.1%), Social Sciences (7.5%), Health Sciences and Services (7.8%), and Applied Sciences (6.4%) rounding out the list of frequently cited areas of study (CBIE, 2020).

1.4 High Tuition Costs and International Students as "Moneymakers."

The internationalization policy of the Canadian federal government remains focused on the beneficial economic impact of IS and the goal of enhancing innovation by attracting talented foreign professionals (Immigration, 2023). IS are a vital part of Canada's economy and society, as they pay three times the tuition fees (Hegarty, 2014; Scott et al., 2015). Typically, in 2022-2023, international undergraduate students paid around $36,100 per year, while international graduate students paid approximately $21,100 per year, according to Statistics Canada's 2022 report (Statistics Canada Catalogue, 2022). Additionally, IS should budget for living expenses, which averages around $15,000 per year. (Statistics Canada Catalogue, 2022) Furthermore, Canadian postsecondary education has seen an increase in the proportion of tuition fee revenues compared to provincial funding thanks to the growing number of IS who pay higher tuition fees than Canadian students (Statistics Canada Catalogue, 2022). It has been reported by Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada Catalogue, 2020) that IS continue to pay an average of five times more in tuition fees than domestic students in Canada. It has also been noted that IS fees have

increased from $1.5 billion to $6.9 billion (both figures in 2019 dollars), accounting for 13% of the total system income of colleges and universities in Canada (Usher, 2020). Moreover, the Canadian government has estimated that IS contributed $22.3 billion CAD to the Canadian economy in 2018, including expenses on accommodations and discretionary spending (Global Affairs Canada, 2020).

Despite the higher tuition fees (Chen, 2008), Canadian postsecondary institutions are experiencing a steady increase in IS enrollment yearly. This may be attributed to Canada's marketing strategy of promoting itself as a tolerant, non-discriminatory, and safe country (CBIE, 2023). The Toronto Star and the St. Catharines Standard conducted a joint investigation into the rapid increase of international students in Canadian colleges. This surge has raised concerns about whether international education is being used as an easy route for immigration, a program for migrant workers, or a profit-driven business instead of a platform for higher education (Keung, 2019). IS are often targeted by various stakeholders, including the Canadian government, who view them as a means of generating revenue for the post-secondary education sector (Williams et al., 2015). Canadian post-secondary institutions often see IS as cash cows or money makers (Scott et al., 2015). More recently, during a student town hall at an Ontario community college, Prime Minister Trudeau was questioned about the high tuition fees for IS (Alper, 2023). He explained that, as Canada does not have unlimited funds, the government prioritizes providing accessible education for Canadian citizens. This leads to higher tuition fees for IS. Trudeau also emphasized that there are millions of IS and Canada cannot accept all of them, making admissions competitive. Additionally, the programs offered by the federal government that address IS's concerns were discussed. Trudeau acknowledged the efforts that

have been made to alleviate the difficulties faced by IS including extending work permit durations and allowing longer off-campus work hours (Alper, 2023).

1.5 Recruitment by Education Agents

The process of recruiting IS typically starts in IS's home countries. This is often facilitated by agents who charge high fees to handle paperwork, connect with colleges or universities in Canada, and facilitate visa applications. These agents have strong connections to Canadian post-secondary institutions, which may provide them with commissions (Coffey & Perry, 2013). It is unfortunate that some IS fall victim to fraudulent agents. Recently, the Canadian federal government issued deportation orders for 700 IS who had submitted fraudulent documents and fake acceptance letters in order to gain admission to various Canadian post-secondary institutions (Hornstein, 2023). Protests took place in multiple locations, putting pressure on the immigration Minister to pause deportations. In response, the Minister issued a statement that brought relief to IS facing deportation. A task force has been established to identify fraud victims, consisting of teams from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) (Mundie, 2023). Further, the government encouraged those impacted to come forward and report any fraud. (Bower, 2023; Coulton, 2022; Hornstein, 2023). Official data shows that in 2022, Canada had more than 800,000 foreign students holding active visas, with approximately 320,000 originating from India (Packer, 2023). The majority of students at risk of deportation are from the Punjab state in India (Niazi, 2023). Some of these IS claim that they came to Canada in 2018 without knowledge of the fraudulent nature of their admission letters. It wasn't until five years later, when they applied for permanent residency that the discrepancies were discovered (Bower, 2023).

1.6 COVID-19 Impact on Learning

In early 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, post-secondary institutions in Canada took various proactive measures to protect their students, staff, and faculty. They shifted from in-class to online learning, closed campuses, cancelled events, and, due to flight cancellations, many IS were unable to travel or be with their loved ones (Stokes, 2021). This created numerous academic, social, and emotional challenges for IS. Several studies have been conducted to describe the travel ban, Canadian post-secondary institutions' responses to COVID-19, and more (Coulton, 2022; Ebrahim, 2020; Gomes et al., 2014; Zhang & Sustarsic, 2022). In light of the difficulties faced by IS during the pandemic, many wondered if Canadian post-secondary institutions offered academic, financial, and emotional support to IS. More recently, a study (Zakharchuk & Xiao, 2023) identified several gaps between the institutional support in the academic and social needs of IS. Institutional support was quite evident in the academic domain, but there was a gap in communicating the availability of support to these IS (Zakharchuk & Xiao, 2023). Another issue was the perceptions of online learning during COVID-19, as most Canadian institutions had to shift learning to online teaching and learning abruptly (Conrad et al., 2022). Online learning had a noticeable impact on IS. Some found it challenging to be technologically prepared for online classes, as they had to purchase equipment, leading to financial strain. The learning process was affected by communication overload, technological demands, reduced social interactions, unclear class format, and ambiguous learning objectives (Conrad et al., 2022). Academic institutions shifted to online learning without considering the challenges that IS and faculty may face (Tzavara, 2021). Instead of simply copying learning materials into digital formats, it's important to re-evaluate teaching and learning approaches to better understand the needs and challenges of IS (Tzavara, 2021). According to an article in

Macleans magazine, IS shared their perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed difficulties related to technology, time zone differences, a lack of opportunities to explore Canadian culture and limited interactions with classmates and friends (Coulton, 2022).

1.7 Challenges, Perceptions and Concerns

Although Canada has successfully integrated IS into its society, research shows that these IS often face challenges when adjusting to the host country's culture, language, and weather. These challenges can result in feelings of isolation, marginalization, and depression (Stein, 2018; Yang & Noels, 2013). Additionally, IS may encounter difficulties in their academic, social, and personal lives. These challenges include cultural adjustments, language barriers, academic pressures, financial limitations, discrimination, social integration and mental health issues (Kuo, 2011; Legusov et al., 2023; Xu, 2015; Zhou et al., 2017; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

Evidence in the literature (Liu, 2016; Netierman et al., 2021) has shown that some IS find adapting to Canadian culture preferable or easier than earlier research (Guo & Chase, 2011; Scott et al., 2015). Many East and South Asian students have reported struggles being discriminated against and facing racism in the form of racial microaggressions or for having an accent (Yao et al., 2019). Evidence from the literature (Houshmand et al., 2014) has supported the notion that IS are often treated differently and need support from their network to create a space for themselves in Canadian society as a whole (Jones, 2017). Various studies suggest that IS from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America face racism and discrimination more than their white counterparts (Sohrabi, 2023; Yao et al., 2019).

Little is known about these challenges and discrimination faced by IS. Higher education institutions claim that they know IS's challenges, e.g., adapting to the environment, getting

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support from administrators, etc. However, these institutional systems are unaware of IS's

challenges, such as racism and discrimination (Yao et al., 2019).

1.8 Drive for International Study Push and Pull Factors Framework

Mazzarol et al (1998) posited that understanding what drives IS to pursue education in

Canada or study abroad is crucial. Interestingly, there are distinct stages of the decision process

these IS go through. Stage 1- IS decides to study locally or internationally, Stage 2-selection of

host country and this is dependant on some of the "pull factors" (making one country more

attractive than the other); Stage 3 – IS selects an institution, and this is impacted by additional

pull factors. The Push and Pull Factors Model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) outlines the factors

that motivate them and shape their choice of study destination. The model identified six key

factors impacting IS's decision-making, from initial consideration to final selection. When

considering studying abroad, IS consider the destination country's climate, its geographic

proximity to their home country, and their social connections, such as whether they have family

or friends living in the same country or if anyone, they know has previously studied in the

destination country (Mazzarol, 1998).

A recent study outlined key issues with the push and pull framework. The study identifies

the most prevalent push/pull factors that South Asian international student recruitment agencies

use to encourage IS to study abroad as well as the most popular services that these agencies use

to assist IS (Rust, 2023). Some of the factors mentioned earlier in this study (Mazzarol & Soutar,

2002) were – not listed on these agencies' websites, such as difficulty in accessing local higher

education, a better understanding of the West and course availability (Rust, 2023). Furthermore,

certain negative aspects were not disclosed, possibly to avoid deterring prospective IS. The

primary reasons for IS's decision to migrate were career readiness, high-quality education, and

their inclination toward migration. This study has also identified several ethical concerns that are quite concerning (Rust, 2023). These include manipulating the application process, providing applicants with misinformation and disinformation, and taking advantage of IS and their parents through information asymmetry (Marom, 2023).

Objectives and Rationale

This prospective study aims to address the perceived unmet needs of IS's learning experiences and their perceptions and concerns during their education in Ontario. We aimed to connect with IS students from two universities, OT and TMU, each with its distinct features and strengths. Both universities prioritize diversity and inclusivity, welcoming students from various backgrounds and cultures and offering support services to promote inclusivity.

The objective of this study was to gain insight into the factors that influence IS's decision to pursue overseas education using the push and pull factors framework (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), See Figure 1. Push factors may include a desire for better educational opportunities, career prospects, geopolitical instability, economic uncertainty, or dissatisfaction with the educational system in their home country. Pull factors may include the reputation and quality of education at the chosen destination, costs, safety, opportunities for research or internships, cultural diversity, or the chance to experience a different lifestyle. Through the investigation of these push and pull factors, the study's aim was to understand the underlying motivations and influences that shape individuals' decisions to pursue international education. The project's findings will be shared with academic and institutional communities that have experienced a rise in international student enrollment, potentially helping them improve their policies and practices.

Figure 1.1

Push and Pull Factors

Push Factors:
1. Lack of quality education opportunities at home
2. Increasing higher education competitiveness
3. Geopolitical Instability
4. Economic uncertainty

Pull Factors:
1. Awareness of host country
2. Referrals to host country
3. Costs associated with study destination
4. Safety
5. Environment/Climate
6. Geographic proximity
7. Social link (family/diaspora)
8. Immigration and work opportunity

Note. Author's graphic is based on a model described by (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Ethics Approval

The detailed proposal was submitted to and approved by the research ethics boards at both Ontario Tech University (OT) and Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). Participant screening and recruitment commenced in March 2023 following approval from the TMU ethics board.

2.2 Participants and Procedures

We sent email invitations to all IS without permanent residency at OT and TMU. Both universities' registrars provided us with a letter of support that we submitted to the REB before starting the study. The registrars sent a recruitment email (Appendix A) to invite about 5000 IS enrolled at both universities to participate in the online survey (Google Form). The recruitment process took place from April 1st, 2023, to May 30th, 2023. We received a total of 95 responses. For Phase 2 of the study, we randomly selected ten participants from the group of 80 who consented to be interviewed.

The criteria used to screen participants for eligibility in this study are listed below, including inclusion and exclusion factors.

Inclusion Criteria

- At least 18 years of age;

- International students who are not permanent residents of Canada enrolled in either Ontario Tech University or Toronto Metropolitan University;

- Willing to provide consent to complete the online questionnaire and participate in an interview if selected.

Exclusion Criteria

- Permanent Residents of Canada (PR)

- Status Refugee

We are excluding PR and Status Refugee students from the study since it is specifically focused on IS who are paying international tuition fees and are currently on study visas.

2.3 Screening

The study included preliminary screening questions to determine if participants met the inclusion criteria. Specifically, the questions asked if the person was an international student without permanent resident status, enrolled in either Ontario Tech (OT) or Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), and willing to provide consent with a Yes/No response. Those who answered "No" were not eligible to participate and were directed to exit the questionnaire.

2.4 Consent Process

To participate in the online survey and interviews, all study participants were required to provide informed consent. We ensured that the consent form in Appendix B was written in plain English to ensure easy understanding. To protect confidentiality, the consent forms were signed virtually and was accessible to the project team through password-protected folders. Before answering the main interview questions, participants had to agree to the online consent form. The consent form was designed for easy access, requiring participants to check a box to agree to the terms and conditions, which is the standard for online forms. Once they had read through the study information, they could simply click send. Participants didn't need to provide a signature, as checking the boxes on the online consent form and agreeing to participate in the online survey was sufficient. Finally, all data collected were stored in a database managed by the student lead.

2.5 Data Collection

2.5.1   Quantitative Measurements

For phase 1, we collected various demographics of the IS, such as age, gender identity/sex, educational level, ethnicity, citizenship/immigration status, country of origin, duration of their stay in Canada, and employment status through case report forms. Additionally, we gathered information about their family background, including their parents' education levels, employment, schooling, family income, and household location (urban or rural). We utilized Google Forms to gather most of the data, which we sent to the participants after they agreed to participate and provided their consent to the student lead. The majority of the questions were answered using a Likert scale. For further details, please refer to the data collection form located in Appendix C.

2.5.2   Qualitative Measurements

For phase 2 of the study, 95 IS who finished phase 1 were asked to take part in in-depth interviews. Ten IS who expressed interest from 80 IS were randomly chosen and contacted to confirm their willingness to participate. The student lead organized the online interviews, ensuring the details and schedule were convenient for the participants. During the interviews, we also asked the participants to gather their thoughts on how COVID-19 has affected their views on education and learning. The results of this inquiry will be discussed in the findings section. Please refer to the data collection form for more detailed information (Appendix D).

In this project, the student lead conducted interviews using the Zoom meeting platform. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, participants were requested to join the meeting from a quiet, private location without any background noise. Additionally, participants were advised to

use headphones/earphones to ensure that their conversations with the researchers remained confidential.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

IS demographics were collected using the case report forms. All the participants were given subject ID numbers. With our sample size, we primarily used descriptive statistics to analyze the online survey data. NVIVO software was used to analyze emergent themes in this study (QSR International, 2021). Qualitative data with participants' responses were imported and labeled for efficient management. During the initial coding phase, the data was segmented and assigned descriptive codes to represent the ideas, experiences, or perspectives of the participants in relation to the research question. Codes were grouped that were related into categories or themes. This allowed us to identify broader themes that were emerging from the data. The emergent themes were continuously reviewed and compared against the data to ensure accuracy. This resulted in further refinement and validation.

Chapter 3 Findings

3.1 Online Survey Responses

Ninety-five participants from both OT and TMU responded to the online survey after emails were sent out by both universities. In this section, we will refer to these respondents as "participants" and provide an overview of the findings from online surveys.

3.1.1. Students' Demographics

Of all the participants, 40.9% identified as male, while 47.7% identified as female. Another 1.1% identified with a different gender, and 10.2% did not disclose their gender. The age range of 18-21 had the highest number of participants, accounting for 45.5% of the total. The next largest group was the 22-24 age range, with 20.5% of participants falling into this category. 17.0% of participants were between 25-34 years old, while 6.8% were in the range of 35-55. The age group of 9 participants (10.2%) could not be determined due to missing information.

It is important to note that most of the participants who took part in the survey, amounting to 63.6%, were currently registered in an undergraduate program. 26.1% of the participants were pursuing their graduate studies. However, 10.2% of the individuals who completed the survey failed to specify their program of study or opted to leave it blank.

According to the survey results, it was found that out of all the participants, the majority (73 respondents, 83.0% of the total) were full-time students. Only a small percentage (2.3%) of participants stated that they were part-time students. Moreover, 3 participants (3.4%) indicated they were not enrolled in the current term, while 1 respondent (1.1%) seemed unsure about their course load. These findings suggested a significant number of individuals pursuing full-time education, while a small minority opt for part-time, and 7 participants (8.0%) reported being doctoral students.

Most of the IS from OT and TMU were enrolled in a Bachelor's degree program, followed by Master' or doctoral degree. None of the individuals were enrolled in any Diploma or certificate or are in Trades or apprentice programs. Some of the participants were doing English language training, and 2.5% of participants fell under the category of "Other." (See Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1

Program Currently Taken at the Current Institution.
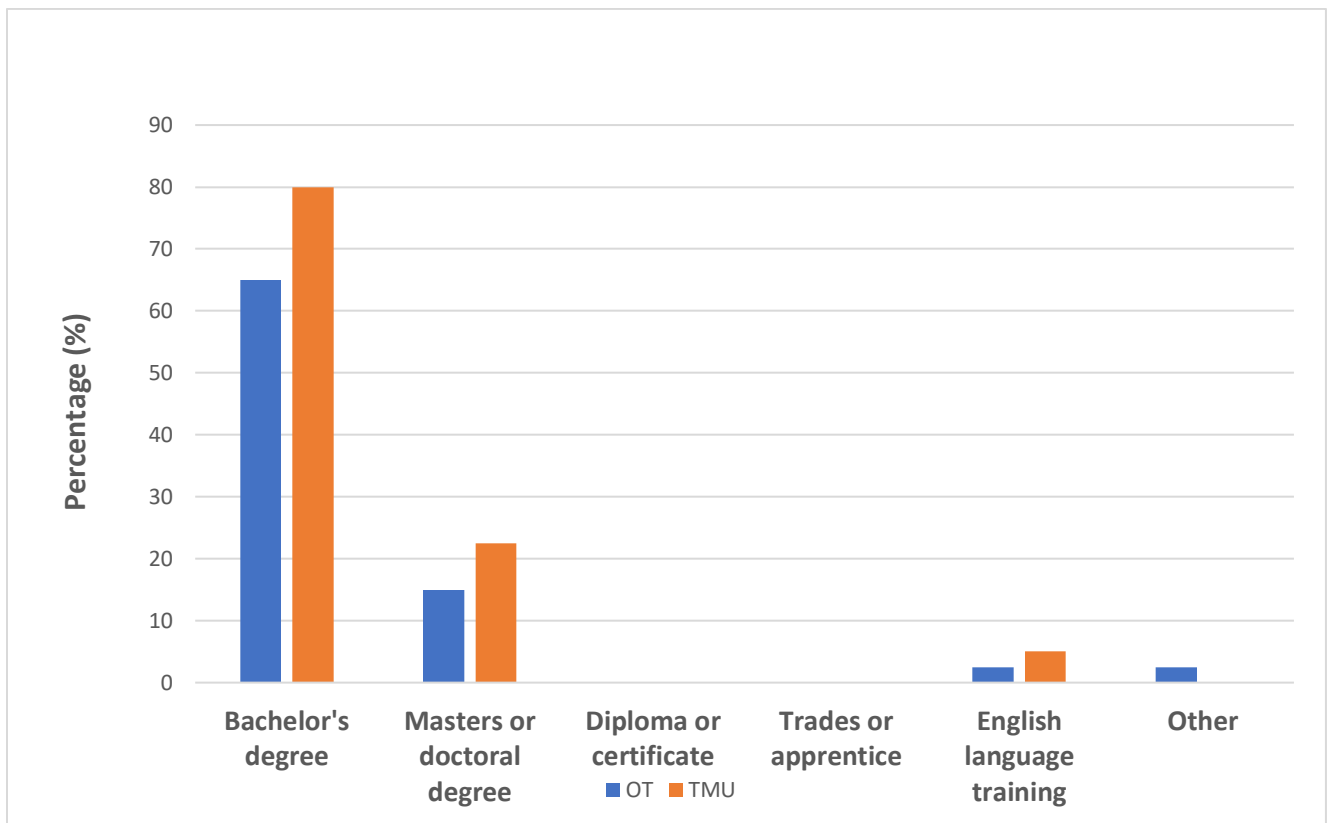
3.1.2. Location and Family Background

The survey gathered information on the geographical region and location of the participants. South Asia had the highest representation, with 21.6% of the participants, followed by the Middle East with 13.6%, and Latin America and the Caribbean with 11.4%. The

Southeast Asia region was represented by 17.0% of the participants, while 15.9% fell under the "Other" category.

In this survey, the participants were asked to specify their home location by indicating their respective regions. The survey results showed that the majority (52.3%) of the participants reported living in urban areas. On the other hand, 8.0% of the participants indicated that they lived in rural areas, while 20.5% reported that they resided in suburban areas. It was noted that only a small percentage of the participants, accounting for 8.0%, were unsure or did not know the specifics of the location.

Further, participants were asked about their family's work history. According to the findings, a considerable portion of IS (10.2%) were raised in single-parent families with only one parent employed, while a small proportion (1.1%) have an unemployed single parent. The results also indicated that 34% of IS have both parents employed in two-parent families, whereas 34.1% have only one employed parent in a single-parent household. Additionally, a small percentage (5.7%) of families do not have any employed parent, while another 4.5% did not disclose their parents' employment information.

IS were asked to share information about their parents' educational backgrounds. Most IS fathers (34.1%) had obtained at least a bachelor's degree. 15% IS reported that their fathers had a master's degree, while 13.6% had completed secondary school education. 10% of IS reported their father having some kind of diploma. In contrast, only 7% reported their fathers having a doctoral degree. A few participants were unsure about their fathers' educational levels. In comparison, 4.5% had mothers with less than secondary school education, 20.5% had secondary school education, 15.9% had mothers with a diploma, 36.4% had mothers with a bachelor's degree, 10.2% had mothers with a master's degree, and 2.3% had mothers with a doctoral degree.

It is evident that 22% of the IS were from families in which their fathers held a Master's or doctoral degree, and 12% were from families in which the mothers had graduate degrees.

3.1.3. Years in Canada

The IS were asked to provide the date of their arrival in Canada. Different IS gave varying answers about their arrival in Canada, ranging from 1 month to 9 years. One IS stated that they arrived in August 2003, but we are uncertain if this could be a typo. It was clear that IS had been in Canada for different lengths of time, with some being new arrivals and others having been in Canada for a long time. and others have been in Canada for a long time.

3.1.4 Living Accommodations

Based on the survey findings, 12 individuals (13.6%) confirmed residing on campus. Additionally, 6 participants (6.8%) stated they lived off-campus with a homestay family. Moreover, the survey disclosed that 20 participants (22.7%) presently resided independently, while 15 (17.0%) mentioned living off-campus with their acquaintances. Notably, the largest group of 26 participants (29.5%) revealed living off-campus with their relatives, spouses, or family.

3.1.5. Students' Decision to Study in Canada

IS were also asked about their reasons for choosing Canada as their study destination. (See Figure 3.2) The largest group of IS cited the lack of quality education in their home country as a motivating factor. They hoped to gain access to excellent educational institutions and programs in Canada. Another important factor was the increasing global competitiveness in higher education. IS believed studying in Canada would give them a competitive edge in their academic and professional pursuits. Additionally, economic uncertainty played a role in their decision. Canada's strong economy and potential job prospects provided a sense of economic

stability and opportunities for career growth. Finally, IS from regions experiencing geopolitical instability were motivated to study in Canada for a secure and peaceful learning environment. It's important to note that these factors may not apply to all IS, and individual motivations for studying in Canada can vary based on personal circumstances, goals, and preferences.

Figure 3.2.

Motivational Factors to Study in Canada
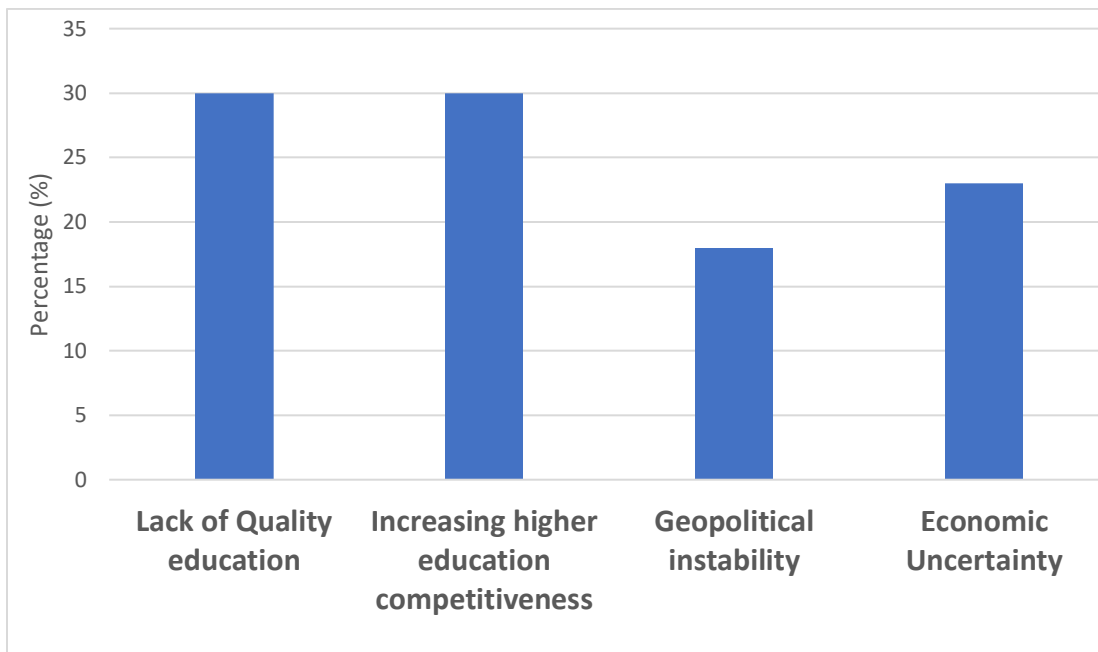
Note: Please note that all the factors mentioned are originating from the home country of IS.

In an online survey, IS were asked if they were open to studying in countries other than Canada. (See Figure 3.3) The data showed that many IS considered various countries and regions for their studies. The top three choices were the United States with 21 IS, Australia, and the United Kingdom with eight IS each. Other countries and regions that were also considered included Canada, China, Germany, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, France, Japan, India, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Belgium, Brazil, Qatar, Jordan, Singapore, Netherlands, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Nigeria, and Norway.

Figure 3.3

Consideration of Other Countries Besides Canada for Studies
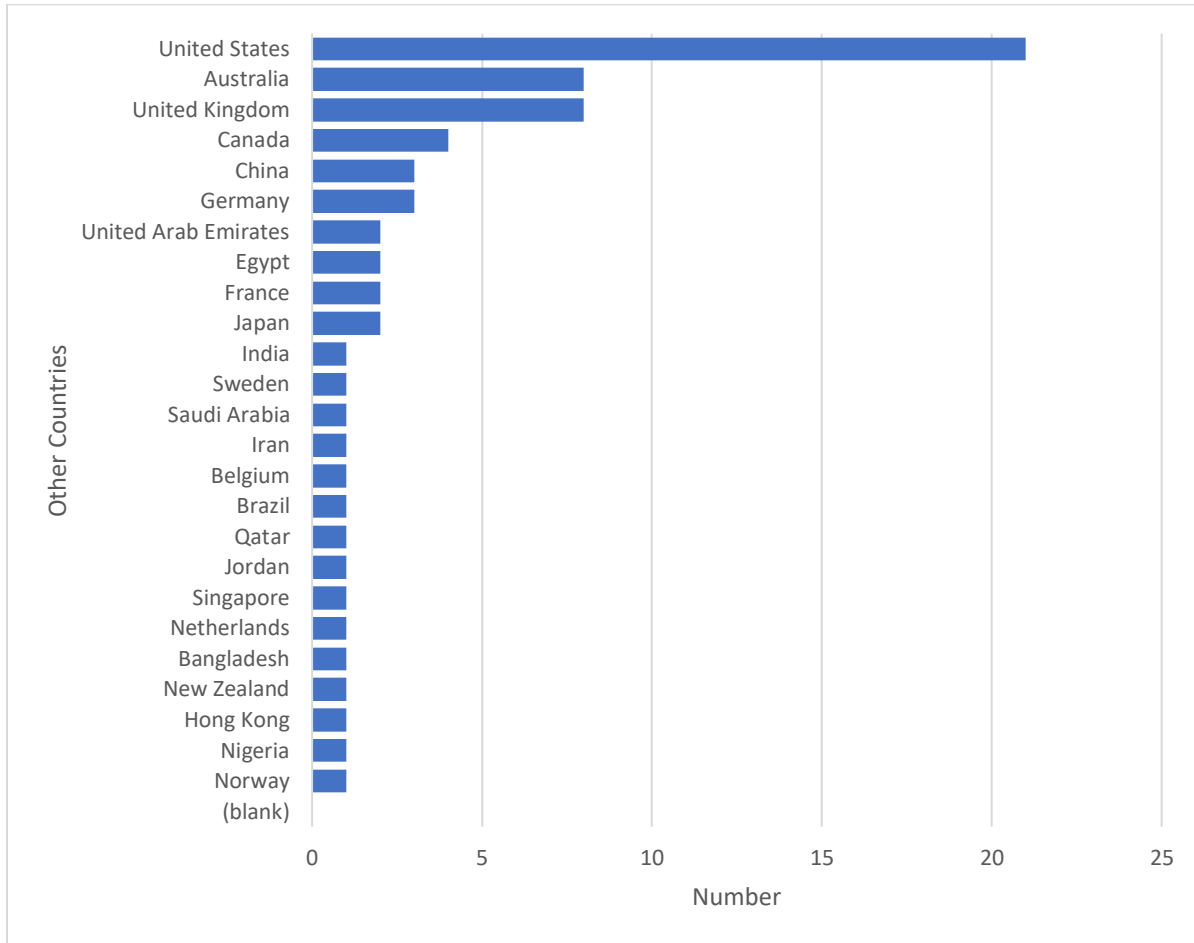
To understand why IS choose to stay in Canada and what factors are important to them, this survey asked questions about various aspects, such as their familiarity with the host country, referrals, costs, safety, environment, location, social connections, and immigration and work opportunities. The responses from both institutions (OT and TMU) will be considered in our findings.

During the survey, IS were asked how they found out about their current institution. (See Figure 3.4) The results showed that for both OT and TMU universities, most IS heard about their school from family and friends. However, for TMU, the school's website was the second most

common source of information, followed by someone from the institution. Interestingly, some IS

also reported learning about TMU from workshops or school fairs in their home country. TMU

IS has also mentioned school counsellors and education agents as sources of information. In

contrast, OT IS primarily learned about their university from education agents and other

websites.

Figure 3.4

How Did You Hear About Your Current Institution?
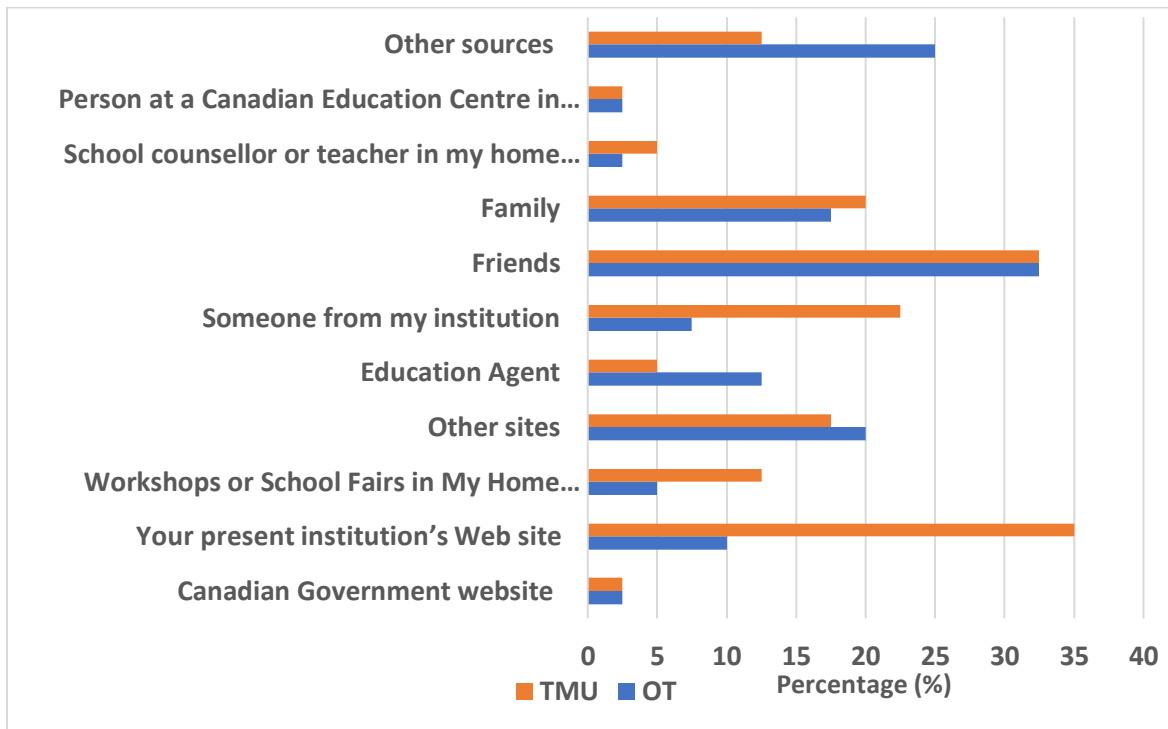
Note: The percentages indicate the proportion of students who cited each source as how they heard about their current institution. Students may have chosen more than one option; therefore total exceeds 100%

In the online survey, IS were asked if their current institution was their first choice. The

data collected showed that nearly half of the IS (48.9%) are studying at their preferred

institution, while 41% reported that the institution they are attending was not their first choice.

Once IS have decided to come to Canada, they must complete paperwork, which could affect

their journey. According to responses (See Figure 3.5) from IS when asked about their

experience with completing paperwork in Canada, while some found it simple, easy, clear, or

difficult, a significant percentage (18% each) found it complicated. A considerable portion of IS

(32%) described the paperwork process as time-consuming. These responses suggest that the

most of IS found paperwork in Canada to be time-consuming, while opinions were divided on

the level of simplicity, ease, clarity, and complexity.

Figure 3.5

Experience Completing Paperwork in Canada
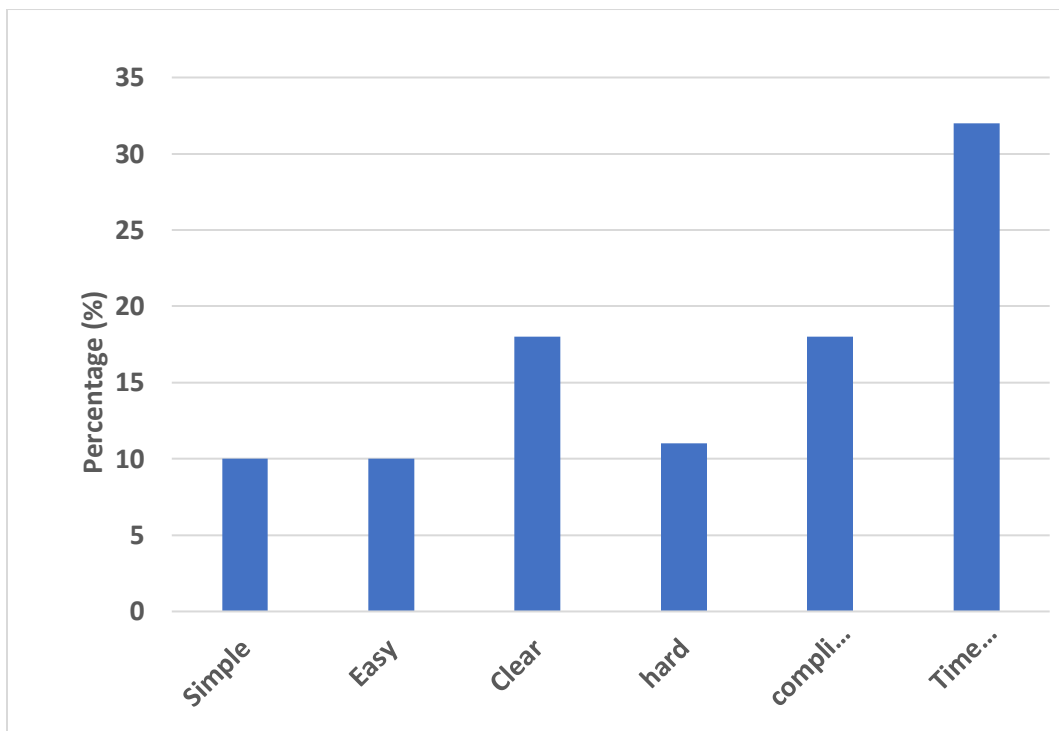
Note: The percentages indicate the proportion of students who chose each option of their experience in completing the paperwork in Canada. Students may have selected more than one option; therefore total exceeds 100%

3.1.6 Factors that Impacted Students' Decision to Stay in Canada

IS were asked how important these factors are for their decision to stay in Canada. (See Figure 3.6) The IS perceptions regarding the importance of various factors when choosing their educational institution in Canada are as follows.

Among the top priorities were post-graduation employment (96%), a multicultural environment (66%), and the ability to work while studying (68%). Other factors, such as the beautiful landscape and the reputation of the institution, had more mixed or neutral responses. It's important to note that opinions vary among individuals, with some factors being more important to certain IS than others. Overall, factors like quality of education, costs, and safety and security were deemed important by most IS.

Figure 3.6

Significance of Various Factors in the Decision of International Students to Continue Living in Canada.

FACTORS IMPACTING DECISION TO STAY

■ Not Important ■ Neutral ■ Important

Factor	Not Important	Neutral	Important
REPUTATION OF INSTITUTION	11%	22%	67%
POST GRADUATION IMMIGRATION	5%	15%	80%
ABILITY TO WORK WHILE STUDYING	16%	15%	68%
POST GRADUATION EMPLOYMENT	3%/2%		96%
MULTICULTRAL ENVIRONMENT	13%	22%	66%
BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE	29%	35%	35%
FRIENDLY PEOPLE	13%	22%	66%
SAFETY AND SECURITY	4%	11%	85%
COSTS	6%	15%	78%
QUALITY OF EDUCATION	%5%		94%

3.1.7 Institution Familiarity

IS were asked how difficult or easy to find the information on the institution's website (See Figure 3.7). With respect to visa requirements, the majority (55.70%) found them easy to navigate, while a smaller percentage (16.46%) faced some difficulties. Regarding the "lifestyle" in postsecondary education, opinions were split among IS. About 32.91% found it easy, 41.77% were neutral, and 25.32% encountered challenges. Regarding English admission requirements,

most IS (86.08%) found them easy to locate, while only a small percentage (5.06%) found them difficult. Program availability was also seen as easy by the majority of IS (70.89%), with only a few (5.06%) finding it challenging. Admission deadlines and program/course information were generally accessible, with 79.75% and 75.95% of IS finding them easier to find, respectively. However, finding suitable housing was a challenge for many IS, with 39.24% facing difficulties. Financial assistance and scholarships were also a struggle to find for many IS, with 48.10% finding them challenging and were not able to locate the information on OT and TMU websites.

Figure 3.7

Process to Access to Locate Information About Student's Institution.

How difficult was to find information

	Difficult	Neutral	Easy
Financial assistance and scholarships	48%	27%	25%
a place to live	39%	20%	41%
Program and course information	6%	18%	76%
Admission deadlines	6%	14%	80%
Program availability	5%	24%	71%
English admission requirements	5%	9%	86%
Institutional student "lifestyle"	25%	42%	33%
Visa Requirement	16%	28%	56%
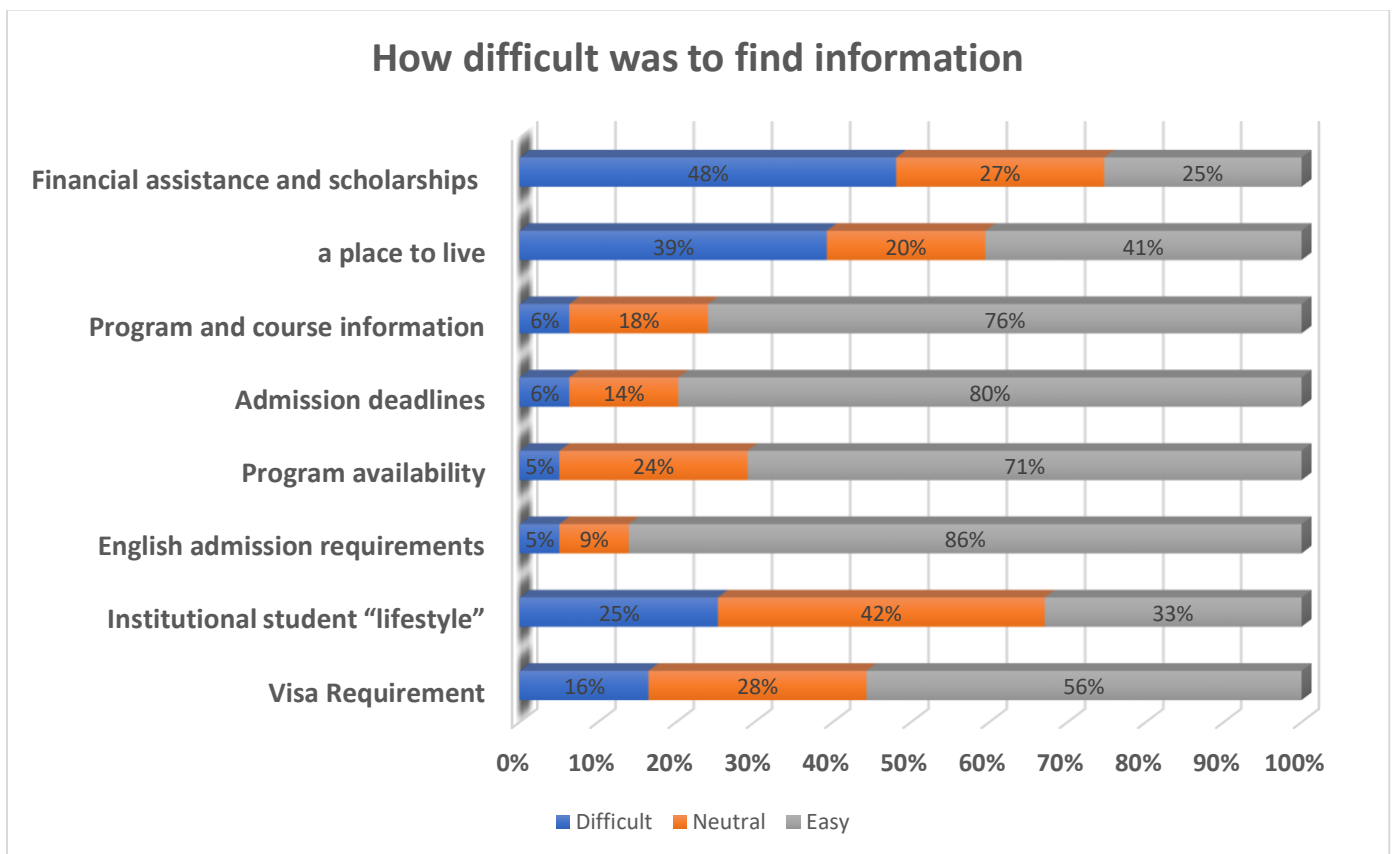
Note: Please note that the percentages indicate the proportion of students.

3.1.8. Adjusting to Canadian Life as an International Student

Students were asked how difficult or easy it was to adjust to Canadian life as International students (See Figure 3.8). IS responses indicated that adjusting to life in the community posed a challenge for 26% of IS, which included adapting to local culture, understanding community dynamics, and navigating daily life in a new environment. One-third (33%) of IS found it tough to make friends with other IS while building connections and forming social circles with other IS classmates. Participating in extracurricular activities was a challenge for 39% of IS. These IS had to make adjustments to engage in non-academic pursuits such as sports and clubs outside of the classroom. On the other hand, most (38%) of IS found it easy to make friends with Canadians, indicating a welcoming and inclusive social environment. However, 44% of IS encountered difficulties establishing friendships with Canadian peers. While 43% of IS found it easy to meet the academic expectations placed on them, a significant proportion expressed difficulties. This suggested that some IS may have experienced challenges in meeting the rigorous academic standards in their respective programs. Most IS (61%) reported that they find it easy to interact with their instructors and professors.

Figure 3.8

Adapting to Life in Canada as an International Student

HOW DIFFICULT TO ADJUST AS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IN CANADIAN LIFE?

Category	Difficult	Neutral	Easy
MAKE FRIENDS WITH CANADIANS	44%	19%	38%
MAKE FRIENDS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	33%	21%	46%
LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY	26%	29%	45%
MEET ACADEMIC EXPECENTATIONS	40%	18%	43%
INTERACTION WITH INSTRUCT AND PROFESSORS	13%	26%	61%
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	39%	23%	39%
TEAMWORK	18%	26%	56%
TEACHING AND LEARNING	28%	26%	46%

■ Difficult ■ Neutral ■ Easy

3.1.9 Support Systems for International Students in Canada

The IS were asked if they had any academic or personal questions and how much support they received from their peers and community. The results showed how IS view the effectiveness of different support systems (See Figure 3.9). Based on their perceptions, they find Canadian classmates, IS from their own country, other IS, institutional faculty and staff, and academic advising the most helpful resources for academic questions. However, Canadians in the community and homestay families are not viewed positively for this support by international students. Few IS in each category also indicated that a particular support system does not apply to their situation.

Figure 3.9

Academic Support Systems

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Legend: Not helpful, Neutral, Helpful, Doesn't apply to me

Category	Not helpful	Neutral	Helpful	Doesn't apply to me
ACADEMIC ADVISING	14%	6%	59%	21%
HOMESTAY FAMILY	15%	3%	35%	47%
CANADIANS IN COMMUNITY	18%	16%	37%	29%
INSTITUTIONAL FACULTY AND STAFF	10%	13%	68%	9%
OTHER IS	9%	19%	52%	20%
IS FROM MY OWN COUNTRY	6%	11%	41%	42%
CANADIAN CLASSMATES	8%	20%	56%	16%
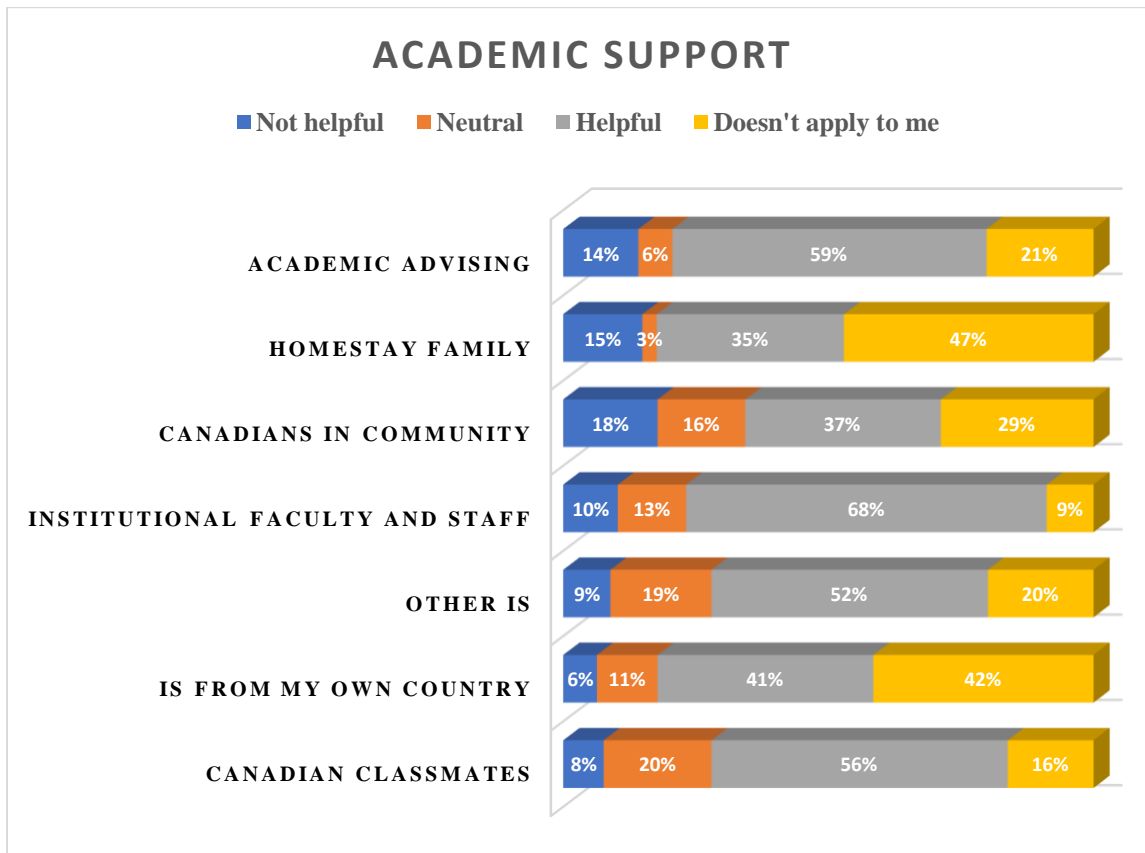
For personal support or personal questions, responses revealed that most IS were able to obtain support from all categories, as shown in Figure 3.10. About half of the student participants (43-56%) sought help from their Canadian classmates, other international students, their home country's international students, institutional faculty and staff, Canadians within the community, host families, and counselling professionals at their institutions. However, a small percentage of IS (21-25%) reported not receiving support from these sources. Most IS did not have any additional comments to provide.

Figure 3.10

Personal Support Systems

PERSONAL SUPORT

■ Not helpful ■ Neutral ■ Helpful

	Not helpful	Neutral	Helpful
COUNSELLING PROFESSIONAL AT MY INSTITUION	21%	32%	48%
MY HOME STAY FAMILY	26%	25%	49%
CANADIANS IN THE COMMUNITY	25%	32%	43%
INSTITUTIONAL FACULTY AND STAFF	23%	26%	51%
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM MY OWN COUNTRY	22%	22%	56%
OTHER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	21%	24%	55%
CANADIAN CLASSMATES	24%	33%	44%
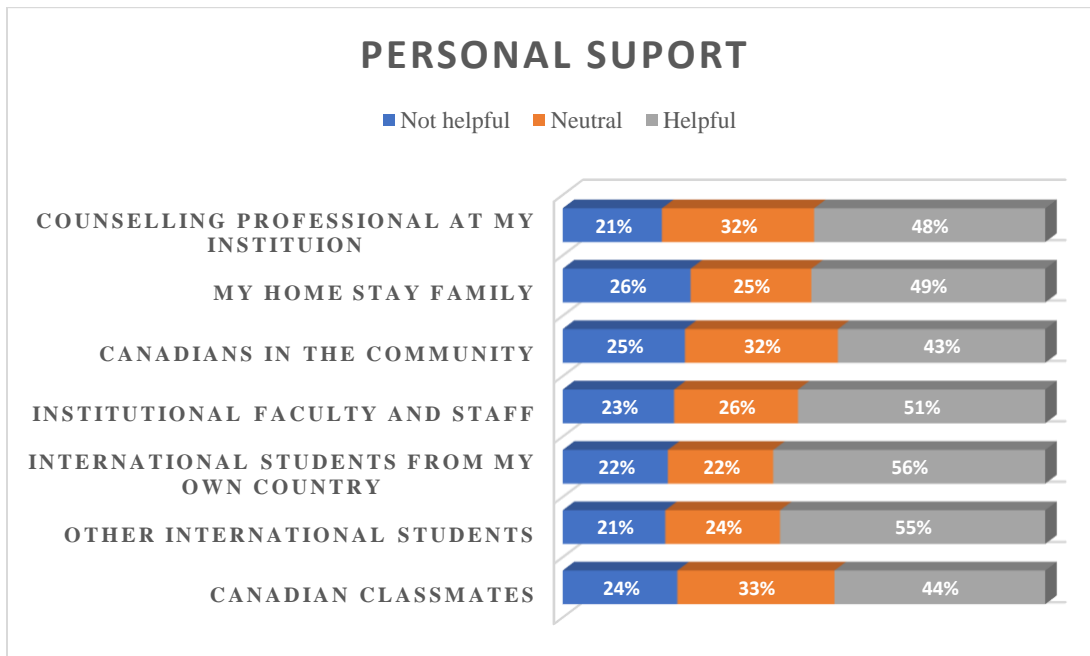
3.1.10 International Student Satisfaction with Institution and Facilities

IS were asked to report their contentment level with the institution and the facilities in various categories such as admission process, student services, educators and recreational facilities. For the summary of their responses, see Figure 3.11.

Around 60-70% of IS were content with the admissions process, student services, and overall quality of education at both OT and TMU institutions. It's encouraging to see that both schools have a majority of satisfied IS when it comes to their program, teaching staff, admissions, and registration process. In this limited sample of participants, most students from OT expressed satisfaction with student services (80%) and facilities (71%), whereas TMU had a lower satisfaction rate for these areas at 63% and 55%, respectively. Interestingly, when it comes to recreational facilities, OT IS are generally more satisfied, with 65% expressing contentment, compared to only 50% of TMU IS. Notably, a small percentage of IS, between 7-13%, have

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expressed dissatisfaction. These responses indicated that satisfaction levels varied across different aspects of the institutions.

Figure 3.11

Satisfaction with Institution and Facilities

Satisfaction with Instituition and facilities

Percentage (%)

TMU ■ OT
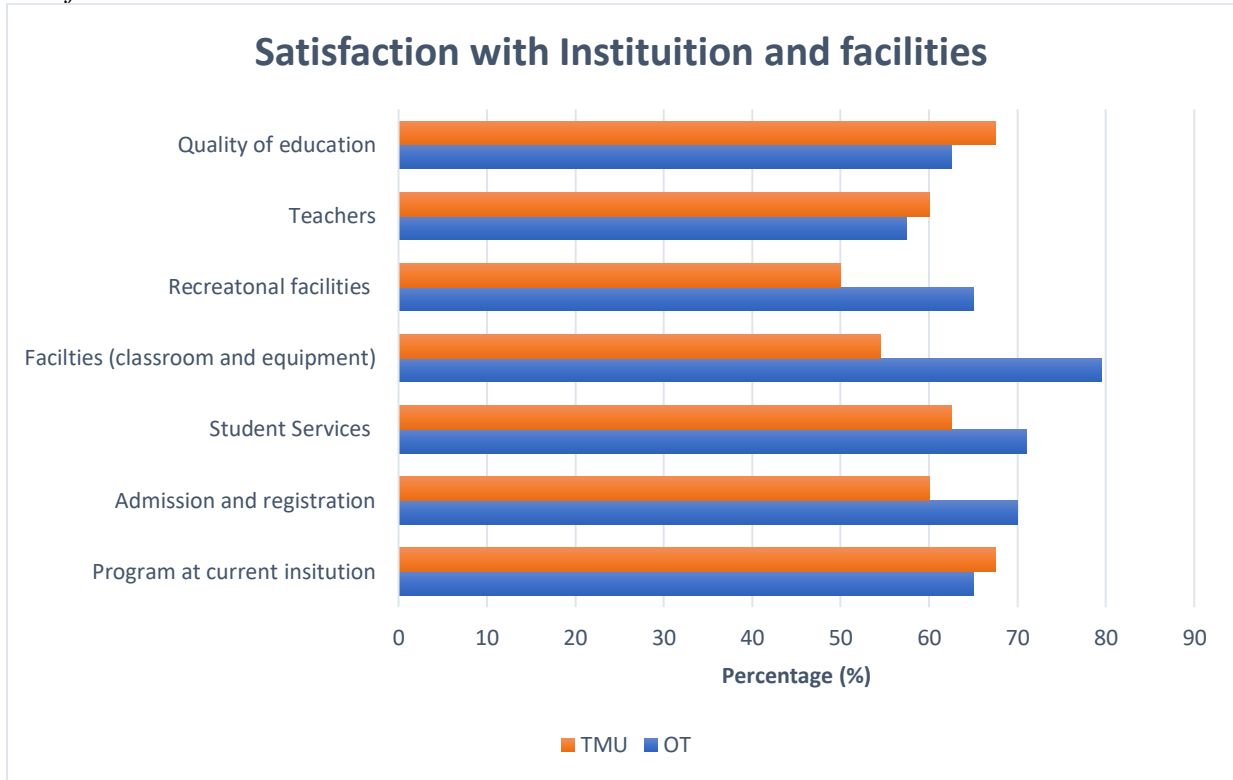
3.1.11 Satisfaction with Lifestyle and Living Conditions in Canada

Participants were asked about their satisfaction with lifestyle and living conditions in Canada (See Figure 3.12). Survey responses indicated that most participants were content with their current lifestyle and place of stay. However, there were still some who had a neutral or dissatisfied stance. More than half of the participants expressed satisfaction with their local social network, while a few had no opinion or were not satisfied. Interestingly, a higher percentage of IS in this sample were satisfied with their living situation. Overall, the study provided initial indicators of the satisfaction levels of Canadians with regard to their lifestyle and

living conditions. Most IS in Canada were satisfied with their living conditions and lifestyles, but some had neutral or dissatisfied viewpoints.

Figure 3.12

Satisfaction With Lifestyle and Current Living Conditions

SATISFACTION WITH LIVING CONDITIONS

■ Dissatisfied   ■ Neutral   ■ Satisfied

	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
CURRENT LIVING SITUATION	21%	21%	58%
LOCAL SOCIAL NETWORK(FRIENDS, FAMILY AND FELLOW STUDENTS)	18%	28%	54%
PLACE WHERE YOU STAY	19%	21%	60%
LIFE STYLE IN CANADA	16%	28%	56%
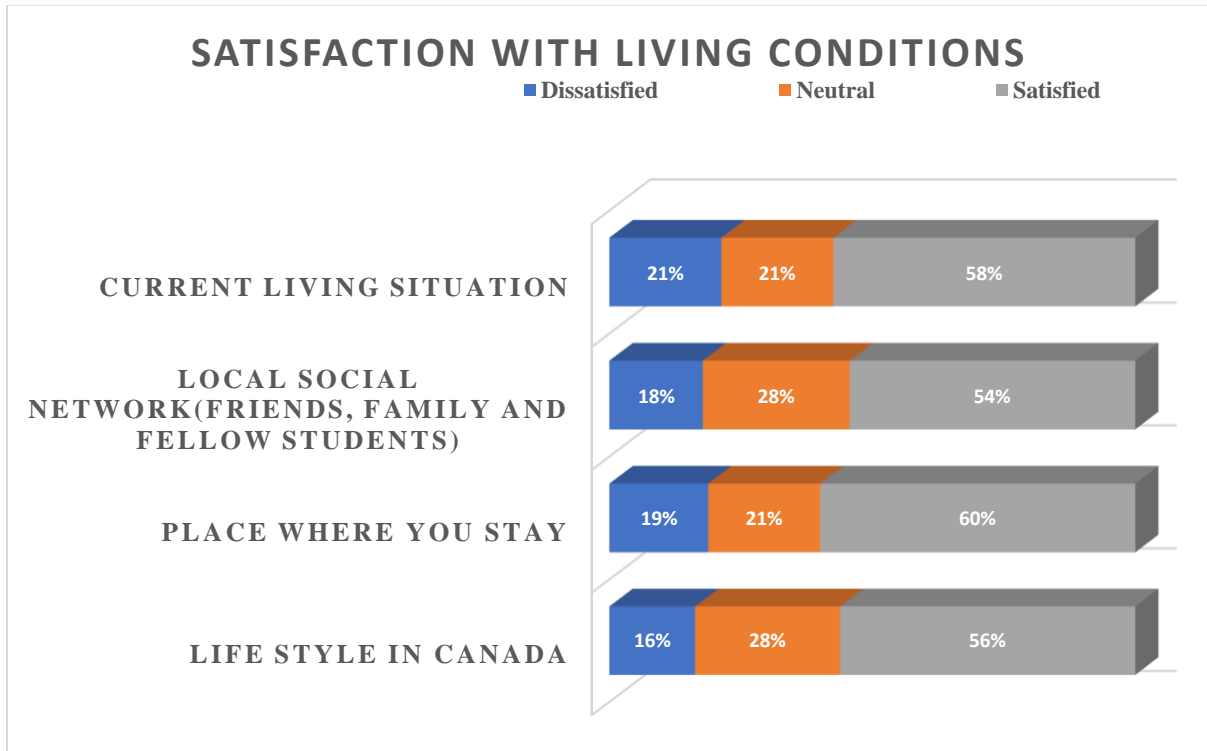
When asked about their experience obtaining a study permit, student participants provided feedback on their level of satisfaction. The results revealed that 70% of IS were content with the process, 19% felt neutral, and 11% expressed dissatisfaction. (Data not shown)

3.1.12 Program Recommendations

Additionally, student participants were asked how likely they were to recommend their current program of study and Canada as the study destination to others (See Figure 3.13). A small percentage of IS, 11%, were hesitant to recommend their program, while 7% showed mild reluctance. On the other hand, 25% of IS were likely to recommend their program, and 29%

were highly likely to do so and 27% remained neutral. Similarly, only 4% of IS strongly opposed recommending Canada as a study destination, and another 4% had mild opposition. Twenty-three percent had neutral feelings, while 27% were likely to recommend Canada. Most IS (43%) were highly likely to suggest Canada as an excellent study destination.

Figure 3.13

Recommending Program and Canada as Study Destination
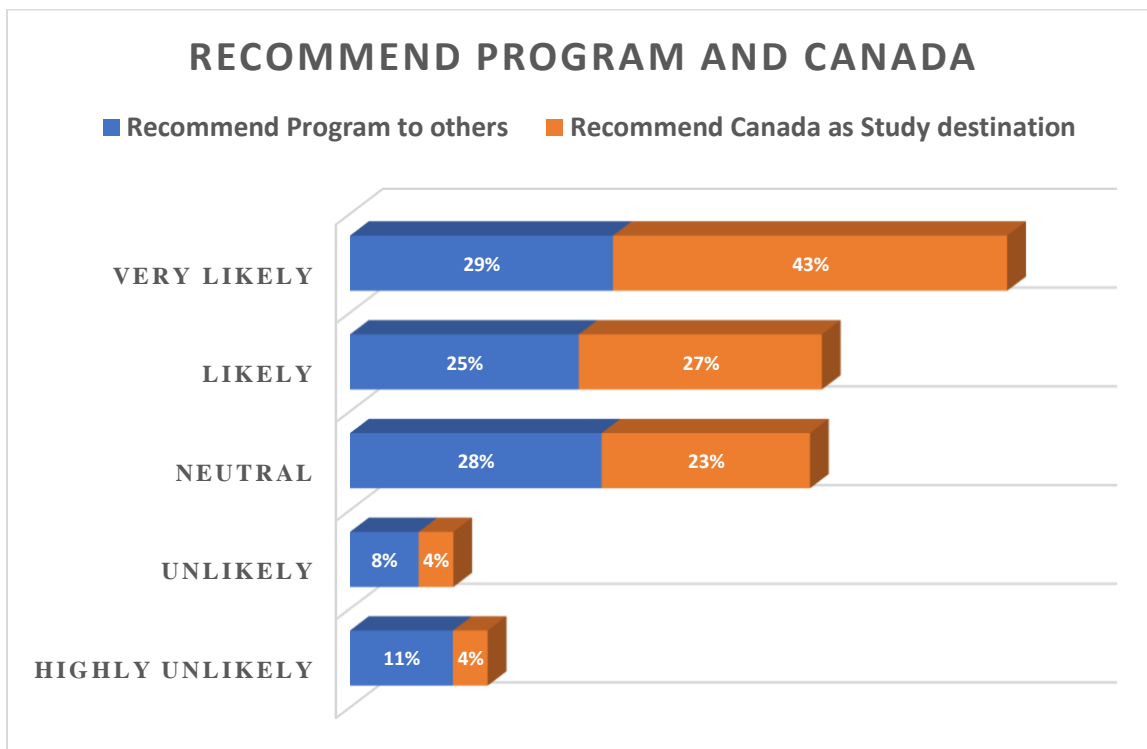
3.2 Interview Responses

Five commonly discussed themes were identified for each question from the interview responses. We have chosen to present a selection of testimonials from IS rather than including all of them. It's important to note that some themes may have only one or two testimonials, which could be unique to those individuals. Additionally, there may be some overlap between certain themes and other interview questions, but we have included them to maintain consistency with

the data collected from the online survey. In this section, we will address these study participants as "interviewees."

3.2.1 Motivations for Studying Abroad.

It is important to understand that the testimonials shared only reflect the experiences and motivations of a few selected IS and may not represent the views of all participants. Many IS we interviewed for this study chose to study abroad for various reasons (Table 3.1). Some seek high-quality education and better opportunities than what their home country offers, as expressed by IS1 interviewee, who said that the research facilities abroad are well-funded and provided more opportunities. Others prioritized hands-on experience that would not be readily available in their home country where education relied mostly on textbooks. Networking and global connections were also motivators for some IS study participants, like IS1, who recognized the superior job opportunities available in Canada and the potential to connect with a global network. One of the IS interviewees emphasized the benefits of studying in Canada when applying for jobs, considering the quality of education and the multitude of opportunities.

For some IS interviewees, economic and political instability in their home country negatively impacted the quality of universities and educational opportunities, leading them to pursue studies abroad. For instance, one interviewee shared:

> "My home country experiences various crises related to political and economic instability, which has affected the quality of universities there. This drove me to apply to universities abroad."(IS 5)

Curiosity and the desire for personal exploration also motivated studying abroad. IS interviewees expressed a strong interest in immersing themselves in a new culture, exploring a different country, and gaining new experiences. As one IS interviewee stated,

"I had a strong desire to immerse myself in a new culture, explore a different country,

and learn new things. I believe that taking risks can lead to greater rewards." (IS 9)

Table 3.1

Motivations for Studying Abroad

Themes	Student Testimonials
Better Quality Education and Opportunities	"Like the research facility here is well funded other than mine, this country and the job opportunities here are better" (IS1)[a] "It's definitely the more hands-on experience that I'll get from here back in my place. They're all just based on textbooks, and you won't get much experience. And this was a better option for me." (IS 2)
Networking and Global Connections	"Like the job opportunities here are better... going abroad will give me the opportunity to connect with a global network." (IS1) "It was the quality of education and the amount of opportunities that you have abroad... you have a good edge over other people and applying to jobs." (IS4)
Economic and Political Instability	"... my home country faces a lot of crises pertaining to political instability, economic instability, and which leads to not as good universities as it could have had by now." (IS5) "If you consider from where I am, my home country, it faces a lot of crises pertaining to political instability, economic instability... That played the most important part in my applying to different universities abroad" (IS9)
Curiosity and Exploration	"I wanted to explore a new culture... explore a new country, and then learn a lot of new things... I believe in how many ever risks I take, the more the rewards will be." (IS9)

[a]International students' participant number -IS

IS interviewees were further asked if they were more motivated by other factors, e.g., country status, education system, or something else (Table 3.2). Many IS we interviewed for this study were motivated to study abroad to gain international experience, learn new things, and have a unique experience. The reputation of a country's education system and available opportunities also influenced some IS interviewees to study abroad. Personal growth and development, as well as family and social factors, also motivated IS to study overseas. However, it's important to note that these were just some examples and not representative of all IS's perspectives. Many IS we interviewed for this study were motivated to study abroad to gain international experience. They view it as an opportunity to acquire new knowledge, learn about different fields, and have a unique experience. For example, one student stated:

"I opted for another master's degree so that I could learn more things, such as gaining more knowledge about other majors based on the language and having a different experience."(IS2)

Personal growth and development were significant motivators for studying abroad. IS we interviewed for this study value becoming independent and self-sufficient. One IS interviewee emphasized the importance of making one's own choices for growth and development, saying:

"That was the first motivational factor... My parents were like, you should be an independent person, and when you come out at like 20 when you are independent, nothing makes them happier than me being independent and then maybe being self-sufficient."(IS 6)

In our data, studying abroad was a popular choice for many IS interviewees seeking international experience, new knowledge, and a unique adventure. The education system and the opportunities offered in a different country play a significant role in a student's choice to pursue

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studies abroad. Furthermore, personal development, family dynamics, and social influences

could also have had an impact. However, it is important to note that these are just a few

examples and do not represent every IS perspective.

Table 3.2

Motivation Due to Education System or Other Factors

Themes	Student Testimonials
International Experience	"I decided to take another master in the United States because I can learn more things, like getting more knowledge about other majors based on the language and having a different experience." (IS2)[a]
	"If you are going to study and contribute as an international student, you will feel more welcome. Living in a metropolitan city like Toronto, with people from all around the world, makes it easier to feel comfortable and have an international experience." (IS4)
Country Status and Opportunities	"Canada has one of the best education systems, and I am witnessing it first hand over here, which is quite nice. It was mostly the system that brought me to Canada, despite the huge fees or being away from my country." (IS1)
	"When you live in a metropolitan city like Toronto, it's really easy to just fit in with others. It's kind of make it easier to feel comfortable, and maybe the study more easy. But it's kind of really expensive compared to my country." (IS4)
Independence and Personal development	"When I have to number it or like order, it first would be my individual, personal choice, because I wanted to grow and develop myself, right? That was the first motivation factor... My parents were like, you should be an independent person, and like when you come out at like 20, when you are independent, that nothing makes them more happy than me being independent and then maybe being self-financed. So that's like my other motivation factor." (IS6)
	"Specifically, I know the education system here is more organized than other countries, and it's connected somehow to the industry. So the work that you do actually benefits someone, it's actually contributing to developing solutions." (IS8)
Family and Social Factors	"Everybody felt that in Canada education, especially for children, is quite good. Children find very friendly. So, I mean, what was also an additional factor that influenced my decision to come and have this education." (IS1)
	"My family wanted me to go for higher education. They thought it would be better for me to come here and study. They had the vision that I would have a better life and more opportunities if I came to Canada." (IS7)

[a]International students' participant number - IS

3.2.2 Student's Perceptions of Online Learning During COVID-19

We asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their perceptions of online and distance learning (Table 3.3). A few common themes emerged from this discussion, such as adaptation and flexibility, technological challenges, engagement and personal connection and loss of loved ones.

IS interviewees acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has required them to shift to online and distance learning. Despite the challenges, they have realized the need to adapt and find ways to continue their education. One IS interviewee stated:

"COVID-19 made us realize that even in such situations, we can find a way to keep going." (IS1)

During our study, we found that some IS interviewees faced technological challenges when transitioning to online learning. These interviewees mentioned limited connectivity and access to technology as potential obstacles. The shift to online learning has also presented difficulties in maintaining motivation and productivity. IS interviewees s noted that the classroom environment provided a different level of motivation and immediate support from peers and instructors. One interviewee mentioned:

"Online classes cannot provide you with the same level of connection as in-person classes... You might not feel as motivated to do as much work as you do in a classroom." (IS2)

However, some IS we interviewed for this study shared experiences of rediscovering their motivation and becoming more active in their studies during the online learning period (IS6). IS interviewees expressed the importance of personal connections and engagement in

their learning experiences. Collaborating with peers and having someone who understands the topic were valued. While online learning provided comfort and convenience, it lacked the same level of interaction. One student (IS3) preferred studying with others, and another (IS7) highlighted the benefits of easily noting important information and reviewing recorded sessions. COVID-19 has had emotional and personal impacts on IS study participants. Some have experienced the loss of a family member, which has significantly affected their overall experience. One student (IS7) shared the loss of a parent due to COVID-19.

Table 3.3

Impact of COVID on Your Perceptions of Online and Distance Learning

Themes	Student Testimonials
Adaptation and Flexibility	"So Covid kind of made you realize that even if something like this happens, you find a way, and then you keep going on" (IS1)[a] "So I think it's actually a positive... because, like, it gave much flexibility... So like working from home or studying from home, or studying at your own pace... I think it's a positive impact like it's like, it helps you manage your time" (IS5)
Technological Challenges	"And I mean, these are ignoring all the other problems that usually connectivity, or something like that. But yeah, sitting in... you are restricted to whatever the technology can do and whatever technology you have at your hands." (IS2) "So sometimes I feel like it's a little bit difficult when you communicate with your classmates and, Professor, but I think the most difficult thing for me is the course time because I have to take it like, you know, really early time after like that."(IS8)
Motivation and Productivity	"But yeah, sitting in. And when you are in a classroom, you are already in an environment where you know a study environment and your with somebody who can, you know, answer doubts there and then, who, like? It's. It's a connection that an online class cannot just give you because the environment is different in online, you're at your own home. You're in your own comfort zone. You might not be motivated to do as much as you're doing in class and all that." (IS2) "I became a really lazy and lousy person before, I should say, but like nowadays, like, I'm okay, I have to get back. I should be active and stuff like that." (IS6)
Personal Connection and Engagement	"I'm a person who really likes working with other people, basically, when I'm trying to learn something, I need to study with someone else. Not like they're gonna teach me something, it's the way my brain is kind of wired. I kind of prefer to talk to someone when I'm dealing with an issue. It's just a person who can just understand the topic. That's all I need, need someone to just understand the topic." (IS3) "I still feel that online is more comfortable as compared to in person. It saves time in traveling sometimes, you know, we get tired while we travel, and once we are in front of the computer, we can easily note down what is important, what is not. And sometimes, even professors allow recording of the sessions. So those recordings can be reviewed, and it helps. It helps in a better way. I guess." (IS7)
Loss and Emotional Impact	"Even I lost one of my parents in Covid. So, in that sense, there is a lot that has changed." (IS7) "And like being in another country, this notion that I was sitting in my living room and still paying full price for education was kind of hard to do. But, on the other hand, after things got better, it was surprising to see how much I could actually learn when I was doing online." (IS9)

[a]International students' participant number

3.2.3 Financial Limitations and Studying Aboard

We asked interviewees about their decision to come to Canada for international education despite financial constraints. They were also asked to compare the quality of education in their own country. The results showed that IS participants prioritized the quality of education over financial factors (Table 3.4). The quality of education was a major theme for IS we interviewed who desired to study abroad despite financial limitations. They considered the value of obtaining a degree and receiving a high-quality education as a worthwhile investment. In their own words,

"So money was, I mean, initially, yes, getting that huge sum of money was troublesome. But then, I believe you know, getting that money back will not be much of a this. So the main goal in mind was to, you know, get that quality of education, get that degree..."(IS7) IS study participants appreciates having international professors who bring diverse knowledge and experiences.

Another IS interviewee added:

"The variety, I mean, you have a lot of international professors over here who bring a lot of their knowledge, their experience to the university. So you get to have that variety with professors... back home it was just most of, I think, yeah, almost all of them were Indian professors." (IS5)

They also noted significant differences in the education systems between their home and destination countries, including a more practical and hands-on approach in the host country's education system.

Table 3.4

If Financial Limitations, Why Do You Want to Come to Study Abroad? How is Your Country's Education Comparable?

Themes	Student Testimonials
Quality of education	So money was, I mean, obviously, initially, yes, getting that huge sum of money was troublesome. But then, I believe you know, getting that money back will not be much of a this. So the main goal in mind was to, you know, get that quality of education, get that degree..." (IS7) "The variety, I mean, you have a lot of international professors over here who bring a lot of their knowledge, their experience to the university. So you get to have that variety with professors... back home it was just most of, I think, yeah, almost all of them were Indian professors." (IS5)
International Exposure and Cultural Experience	"The quality of education in my country, especially the higher education, the graduate system for Masters and Ph.D., it's not very comparable to Canada in particular and the rest of the world in general. Right? So that's one of the main reasons... even if it's expensive for most people." (IS8) "I think one of the main reasons why I wanted to come here was to get that international exposure, to interact with people from different countries, different cultures, and understand their perspectives. It's been a great experience so far, and it has broadened my horizons in many ways." (IS4) "One of the best things about studying abroad is the opportunity to travel and explore new places. I've been able to visit neighboring countries, and experience their cultures firsthand, and it has been an incredible adventure." (IS3) "Being in a diverse environment with people from different countries has been eye-opening. I've learned so much about different cultures, traditions, and ways of thinking. It has definitely expanded my worldview and made me more open-minded."(IS7)
Differences in education system	"Coming from a different country, I noticed significant differences in the education system here. The emphasis on practical learning and hands-on experience is much greater, compared to the more theoretical approach in my home country. It's been refreshing to learn in such a dynamic and interactive way." (IS2) "I was surprised to see the flexibility in the curriculum here. Students have the freedom to choose their courses and tailor their education according to their interests and career goals. It's a departure from the rigid structure I was used to, and it allows for a more personalized learning experience."(IS1) "The education system here places a strong emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. I've noticed a greater focus on analytical reasoning and practical application of knowledge, which I believe better prepares students for the real world challenges." (IS8)
Long-Term Goals and Return on Investment	"When I enrolled in this program, my long-term goal was to advance my career and increase my earning potential. I can confidently say that the investment I made in my education has paid off. I have seen significant career growth and have been able to secure better job opportunities with higher salaries." (IS2) Investing in education is an investment in yourself and your future. I knew that by obtaining a degree from this prestigious institution, I would be equipping myself with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in my chosen field." (IS10)

The IS interviewees acknowledged that studying abroad could result in long-term advantages, such as career advancement and increased salaries. They appreciated the chance to engage with individuals from diverse countries, cultures, and viewpoints, embracing inclusivity and acquiring a broader worldwide outlook. Despite financial limitations, studying abroad provided access to quality education and exposure to professors from different countries with a wealth of knowledge.IS interviewees appreciated the practical and hands-on approach of the host country's education system. They also valued the opportunity to interact with people from different countries and perspectives.

3.2.4 Immigrate and Study Online

IS interviewees were further asked about their perception if they were given the online option, would they still opt to immigrate or study internationally? (Table 3.5) Interviewees expressed that studying abroad offers more than just a degree. They valued the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, make connections, and explore new things. They enjoyed interacting with other IS and professors in person, offering them a broader life perspective. One of the IS interviewees:

> "it's not just about the degree for me. It's about getting to know people over here, making connections, and being in an environment that pushes me to do new things. I wouldn't have gone on to do all those things if I was just back home in India and doing things online. Being surrounded by students and professors motivates me and gives me a broader perspective on life." (IS3)

IS interviewees preferred physically studying abroad because of face-to-face interactions and networking opportunities. They believed being in person allows for better networking

opportunities and a more immersive environment with attractions and activities. Exploring the country, meeting new people, and making friends was an important aspect of the experience. One of the interviewees mentioned,

> "My personal choice would be to physically come over here. I can explore the country, meet new people, make new friends. If I stay in my country where there's a time difference of like 24 hours, it wouldn't be the same. I feel like being here in person allows for better networking opportunities and experiencing the environment and attractions." Some students consider the financial benefits of studying abroad, such as earning in a stronger currency and potential work opportunities in the host country. If the program offered the option to work and stay in the country after graduation, they would be more inclined to choose the online option." (IS6)

IS interviewees valued the university experience and the opportunities for international exposure and global perspective that come with studying abroad. They believed that living in the country, interacting with people, and forming connections with locals would provide them with better opportunities and more enriching education. One of the interviewees added:

> "I think, like, a lot of it comes from the university experience, being like actually living in the country and like being able to interact with people in Canada, form connections with people in Canada. So, I think I would still choose to immigrate because it would give me like the better opportunities out of the education that I'm getting."(IS8)

Table 3.5

If You are Provided with an Online Option and Would You Still Opt to Go International?

Themes	Students Testimonials
Experiential and Cultural Immersion	"it's not just about the degree for me. It's about getting to know people over here, making connections, and being in an environment that pushes me to do new things. I wouldn't have gone on to do all those things if I was just back home in India and doing things online. Being surrounded by students and professors motivates me and gives me a broader perspective on life." (IS3) "Living in the country and interacting with people, forming connections, and exploring the culture gives you better opportunities for job prospects after graduation." (IS10)
Face-to-Face Interactions and Networking	"My personal choice would be to physically come over here. I can explore the country, meet new people, make new friends. If I stay in my country where there's a time difference of like 24 hours, it wouldn't be the same. I feel like being here in person allows for better networking opportunities and experiencing the environment and attractions." (IS6) "If it has the option to immigrate after graduation, I will do it online. But if it doesn't have the option, if it doesn't give me the work permit, for example, I don't think I will do it because the main reason is to find a job after the study. Face-to-face interactions and networking are important for career prospects." (IS9)
Financial Benefits	"If you could do it online and get paid in Canadian dollars and stay here, you can have a great life. The exchange rate in my home country is kind of crazy, and being able to work and study here would provide financial benefits." (IS2) "If the program doesn't give me the work permit or the option to immigrate after graduation, I don't think I would choose to do it online. The main reason for me is to find a job after studying and having better financial prospects." (IS9)
Global Perspective and International Exposure	"I think, like, a lot of it comes from the university experience, being like actually living in the country and like being able to interact with people in Canada, form connections with people in Canada... So I think I would still choose to immigrate because it would give me like the better opportunities out of the education that I'm getting." (IS8) I will still immigrate and come to study over here because for me, it's not just about the degree. It's more about getting to know people over here, making connections... It wouldn't be efficient enough when it's held online versus when it's actually held in person... I feel more motivated to do new things... I wouldn't have gone to do all those things if I was just back home in India and just doing things online. So I still would have taken the option to immigrate over here and attend the classes over here." (IS3)

3.2.5 Demographics and Role in Success

The IS interviewees shared their views on how demographics, family status, or background affect their success (Table 3.6). IS interviewees recognized the importance of their family's support in their success. Some had parents who were educators or teachers, which instilled in them a strong work ethic and motivation to study hard. Financial support from their parents also helped them pursue higher education and achieve success. They believed their parents' support would continue to contribute to their future career success (IS2, IS3, IS4, IS9). Several IS interviewees mentioned that familiarity with the culture of the country they were studying in played a role in their success. They found it easier to transition to their new environment because of similarities between their home and host country's cultures. Knowing the language and cultural practices helped them adapt and feel more comfortable. They also appreciated the friendly and welcoming nature of the people in the host country (IS6, IS10, IS8).

IS interviewees in this study acknowledged that academic expectations in their host country were often higher compared to their home country. They felt pressure to perform well and face intense competition. The rigorous and demanding education system pushed them to work harder and strive for excellence in their academic pursuits (IS2, IS3, IS7). Some of the IS interviewees were grateful for the accessibility of resources and opportunities in their host country. They appreciated the availability of various support services, extracurricular activities, internships, workshops, and networking opportunities. These resources allowed them to explore different fields, enhance their skills, and connect with professionals in their respective fields, contributing to their overall success (IS2, IS3).

Table 3.6

Role of Demographics and Family Status in Student's Success

Themes	Students Testimonials
Family Support	"my father is an educator, and my mother is a teacher. So like my early days, I used to work a lot, study a lot. It was only like the basic motivation was just to study, study, study and work, to secure a better future. So I think that's what I grew up doing... Now it's a normal routine for me just to study hard and work hard." (IS2)
	"And since my parents helped me out, I think it'll help me succeed in my career." (IS3)
	"Well, I think I'm pretty fortunate overall... my parents are middle class, so they are like they will be able to pay for things for me... That's definitely like that may be able to come here afterwards." (IS4)
Cultural Familiarity	"The culture is quite familiar... so it's not much of a change... the language is, of course, English, but as I said before, it's quite similar to Indian languages. So that made it easy." (IS6)
	For me, it's the culture... the people are very friendly and very open, so that's really nice." (IS10)
	And I feel like because there are so many international students, you don't feel out of place... they make sure to celebrate different cultural events, so you always feel connected." (IS8)
Academic Expectations	"The academic expectations here are quite high... there's a lot of pressure to perform well, and there's a lot of competition... you have to really work hard to meet those expectations." (IS2)
	"The academic expectations are definitely higher compared to where I come from... the workload is intense, and there's a lot of pressure to excel in academics... but I think it pushes you to do your best." (IS3)
	"The academic expectations are very different... the education system here is more rigorous and demanding... it's definitely challenging, but it also pushes you to strive for excellence." (IS7)
Accessibility and Opportunities	"One of the things I appreciate about this new environment is the accessibility of resources... there are ample opportunities to explore different fields, engage in extracurricular activities, and access support services." (IS2)
	"The opportunities available here are incredible... I've been able to participate in internships, attend workshops and conferences, and connect with professionals in my field... the accessibility of these opportunities is remarkable." (IS3)

3.2.6 Positive and Negative Study Experiences

The IS interviewees shared opinions on their positive and negative study experiences, as shown in Tables 3.7 and 3.8. During their discussion on positive experiences, a major theme that emerged was the quality of education. IS interviewee in this study were pleased with the education they received in Canada. They appreciated the detailed courses, the attention given to IS, and the opportunities to collaborate with industry partners for research. Overall, they felt that the learning experience was positive and enriching (IS1, IS2). Studying in a foreign country allowed IS interviewees to grow personally and gain independence. They mentioned that studying in Canada challenged them to step out of their comfort zones, navigate new environments, make independent decisions, and adapt to different cultures. They felt that this experience helped them develop a sense of self-reliance and discover their own interests and passions (IS2).

IS interviewees in this study appreciated the inclusive and supportive community in Canada. They noted the willingness of professors, IS classmates, and university support services to provide assistance and create a sense of camaraderie. The presence of academic and personal support systems contributed to their overall positive study experience (IS9).

IS interviewees valued the positive relationships they developed with faculty members in Canada. They noted that professors not only focused on delivering lectures but also took the time to get to know them personally. The friendly and supportive approach of faculty members fostered an encouraging learning environment. IS felt supported and mentored by their professors, leading to a positive academic experience (IS9, IS6, IS2).

Table 3.7

Positive Student Study experiences in Canada

Themes	Student Testimonials
Quality of education	"I said the learning over I mean the care and attention they give to students, and the way the courses are made, and the different events that are in the college like outside of the curriculum, that is like, you know, the whole experience has been quite good." (IS1) "The most positive part, I think, is that I can discuss and meet with the industrial partners that are funding my research and understand what to achieve and what the problems they are facing in the industry and how to think of a solution for it." (IS2)
Independence and personal growth	"Living in a foreign country has pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me develop a sense of independence. I have learned to navigate new environments, make decisions on my own, and adapt to different cultures. It has been a transformative journey for me." (IS2) "The college encourages students to take initiative and explore their interests. Through various extracurricular activities and clubs, I have been able to discover new passions and develop my skills. It has fostered my personal growth." "The freedom to choose my own courses and customize my academic path has been empowering. It has allowed me to explore different subjects." (IS5)
Supportive and inclusive community	"One of the things I appreciate the most about my study experience in Canada is the supportive community. From professors to fellow students, everyone is always ready to lend a helping hand. There is a sense of camaraderie and a willingness to support each other in academic and personal endeavors." (IS9) "The university has created a welcoming and inclusive environment for students. There are support services available for various needs, such as academic support, counseling, and student clubs. It's reassuring to know that there is a strong support system in place to ensure our well-being and success." (IS9)
Positive student-faculty relationships	"I appreciate the friendly and supportive nature of the faculty members here. They are not just focused on delivering lectures but also take the time to get to know their students personally. This creates a positive and encouraging atmosphere for learning." (IS9) "The professors in Canada have a more friendlier approach compared to my previous study experience. They treat students as equals and foster an open and collaborative learning environment. It's refreshing to have such positive relationships with the faculty."(IS6) "I have had the opportunity to build strong relationships with my professors. They have been mentors and guides, providing valuable insights and advice."(IS2)

A few themes emerged when IS interviewees shared their negative study experiences (Table 3.8), such as academic pressures, financial concerns, uncertainty over career prospects and mental health issues. Some of the IS interviewees found the academic pressures in Canada, such as heavy workloads, tough exams, and short deadlines, were overwhelming and stressful. Managing assignments, papers, and exams was challenging and negatively impacted their study experience (IS2). The high cost of tuition for international IS was seen as a negative aspect of studying in Canada. IS interviewees felt concerned about the financial burden and the pressure to find part-time jobs to support themselves while studying. Financial constraints and balancing work responsibilities with education were seen as challenges (IS10, IS8). Some IS interviewees were uncertain about their career prospects in Canada compared to their home countries. They mentioned the difference in job opportunities and the need to search for employment and engage in networking actively. Navigating the job market and finding job opportunities themselves were seen as challenging aspects of their study experience (IS4, IS3).

Managing work alongside university studies and the financial pressures associated with education were mentioned as sources of stress. IS interviewees highlighted the struggle to balance work commitments, financial responsibilities, and academic demands, negatively impacting their overall experience. The pressure to make money and the associated mental health challenges were mentioned (IS1, IS5). Fortunately, universities and support services in Canada offered resources to help IS with these challenges and support their well-being. However, it seems that some IS were not aware of these resources.

Table 3.8

Negative Student Study Experiences in Canada

Themes	Student Testimonials
Academic pressures	"The worst thing, for now, is sometimes feeling stressed with all the assignments and papers. Some professors give tough exams with short deadlines, which can be overwhelming and stressful." (IS2)
	"Managing work with the university has been a struggle and has made my study experience less enjoyable. Balancing work responsibilities while pursuing my education has been challenging." (IS4)
Financial concerns	"Yeah, so I think that should be the funding, because the tuition here for international students, especially at Antarctic, is very, very, very expensive." (IS10)
	"Yet, it puts a lot of pressure on me. From my research work to find a part-time job to support myself. So it introduces a big distraction to my work and adds a lot of pressure, besides the pressure of the masters itself." (IS8)
Uncertainty about career prospects	"Well, I the only negative that I would say is that back home in India I never had to look for any job so when I work, and I studied there so rather than we going to organizations and searching for job, the organizations used to come to us." (IS4)
	"So I mean, this is the part where I find navigating a bit challenging because here I have to apply to the organizations myself, and then have to keep on doing networking, which I am particularly not good at." (IS3)
Mental health challenges	"I'll I mean, I'll definitely say, managing like work with university and kind of like the sense of. Being here like, you know, paying for an education in like a certain area." (IS1)
	"But like constantly working in like other areas, just like make some money. And that kind of stuff. So I think, like managing work with university is definitely being struggled. And yeah, has, like, definitely made my experience less fun."(IS5)

Chapter 4 Discussion

Canada views IS as ideal immigrants who can fulfill the demands and trends of the job market while also helping to address the declining population issue. According to Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (2014), IS individuals are seen as valuable contributors. Additionally, Knight (2004) has given a unique definition to the term "internationalization." Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization.

Further, Knight (2004) weaved this definition of internationalization into Globalization even though the terms are very different. Globalization is defined as "the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, [and] ideas . . . across borders. Globalization affects each country differently due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities" (Knight & de Wit, 1997). Our project connects inbound IS mobility to globalization, as these students choose to immigrate for their studies due to push and pull factors. This has been supported by research (Choudaha & De Wit, 2014; Gribble, 2008; Simpson et al., 2010) which further confirms our own results.

Our study had a diverse group of participants, with equal representation of males and females, and both undergrad and graduate students. The majority of participants were between 18-21 years old. One participant identified with a different gender identity. The responses from the IS provided valuable insights into their perceptions and concerns before, during, and after coming to Canada. Other studies have also analyzed the challenges that IS face when arriving in Canada, with a focus on challenges, support and improvements (Lee, 2010; Worae & Edgerton, 2023; Wu et al., 2015). Most of our IS study participants come from educated families where both parents have at least an undergraduate degree. Their motivation for joining the program is

influenced by their family support system, job security, career prospects, and the quality of education provided. Studies (Findlay et al., 2012; Waters, 2009) support these findings. When deciding to study abroad, IS heavily relied on their social networks, such as their friends and family (Beech, 2014, 2015). In our study, we found that IS study participants relied on information provided by their close friends as their primary source of information about the destination country.

The decision of IS to migrate to Canada is influenced by forces described in the push and pull model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Several studies have examined this model and its impact on IS's choice of country (Geddie, 2013; Guan et al., 2023; Kim Khanh & Ngoc, 2023; Lee, 2017). However, some argue this model is too simplistic, as it fails to account for individual characteristics and social relationships (Geddie, 2013; Lee, 2017). Our study identified specific push factors, such as economic uncertainty and geopolitical instability, as well as pull factors, including Canada's strong economy, quality of education, and opportunities for career growth.

Canada is a popular destination for IS worldwide due to its high-quality education and diverse culture (Esses et al., 2018). Our research has shown that IS decisions to stay in Canada after completing their studies vary, with many citing factors such as the quality of education, cost of living, safety, and the possibility of obtaining permanent residency as important considerations. Other studies have found that the decision to come and stay in Canada is a gradual process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including family responsibilities, career prospects, and the desire to obtain permanent residency (Flynn & Arthur, 2013; Netierman et al., 2021). Our group of IS study participants prioritized post-graduation employment, a multicultural environment, and the ability to work while studying as important factors in their decision to stay in Canada. This may be due to the need to pay off student debt resulting from

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high tuition costs. Interview testimonials were consistent with the online survey data where IS study participants cite similar reasons for choosing to study abroad. Some IS sought better education and job opportunities, while others wanted hands-on experience, networking, and global connections. Curiosity and personal exploration, as well as escaping economic and political instability in their home country, are also common motivations.

The destination country's education system, personal growth and development, and family and social factors play a significant role in their decision-making process. IS decision-making process is very complex (Netierman et al., 2021) and some studies have indicated that some IS chose to stay in Canada due to their family responsibilities (Geddie, 2013; Wu et al., 2015). There are other IS whose decisions are based on access to employment opportunities and obtaining PR (Flynn & Arthur, 2013) and also if they face racism and discrimination (Dam et al., 2018; Netierman et al., 2021). Our study findings clearly showed that despite financial constraints, IS prioritizes the quality of education and sees it as a valuable investment. They appreciate the international exposure, practical approach, and diverse knowledge from international professors. This is consistent with the findings discussed here (Esses et al., 2018).

Overall, OT and TMU groups of IS who responded to our online survey and interview were very satisfied with the quality of education they received. While both institutions had areas of strength, such as program satisfaction and quality of education, there were also areas where improvements could be made, such as admission and registration processes, recreational facilities, and facilities/equipment at TMU. These findings can help institutions identify areas for improvement and enhance the overall student experience. This is the most effective recruiting strategy the universities are using to attract IS to their campuses where IS can be satisfied with the facilities and the process (Smith et al., 2013). Research in the literature indicates that

universities are presented with various challenges when transitioning IS and IS face the challenges such as academic support (Fitzgerald, 1998; Sandeen, 2004), cultural-related learning differences (Carter & Xu, 2007; Rice et al., 2009; Tas, 2004) and language-related difficulties (Barron et al., 2010; Carter & Xu, 2007).

Academic and personal support systems are critical factors in international students' success in their destination country. Our findings from online and interview responses indicated IS in Canada found their Canadian classmates, other international students in their class, institutional faculty and staff, and academic advising to be helpful resources for academic questions. These findings are consistent with the descriptive study (Worae & Edgerton, 2023), which states that IS are hesitant to make friends with Canadians but seek support from other IS in their class. A study by Wu et al. (2015) also describes how tends to adjust to different value systems, communication patterns, signs and symbols of social contact, and interpersonal relationship patterns. When seeking personal support, they turned to Canadian classmates, other international students, institutional faculty and staff, Canadians in the community, host families, and counselling professionals. However, some IS study participants felt that certain support systems, such as Canadians in the community and homestay families, were not useful for personal or academic support. Some support areas available in universities include academic advising, academic acculturation, academic integrity, academic support, and verbal and written communication (Findlay et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). The success of IS is also influenced by the culture of the university they attend. The university should ensure that IS are integrated well with domestic students, faculty and the larger community. To achieve this, the university needs to meet the independent needs of faculty and IS and assist each stakeholder towards increased success and retention (Smith et al., 2013).

Our study's findings highlight IS diverse experiences in various aspects of studying in Canada, underscoring both the positive aspects and the challenges they face throughout their academic journey. It has become apparent that many IS studying in Canada have found that certain aspects of the process have proven to be relatively straightforward. For instance, many IS who participated in the online survey have commented that completing a visa application and access to English admission requirements have not presented any significant challenges. However, it has also been noted that a considerable proportion of IS have faced difficulties when it comes to finding accommodation that is suitable for their needs. The institutions website did not offer any helpful information or resources for finding accommodations. Our findings are consistent with the recent study done at the University of Manitoba (Worae & Edgerton, 2023) where participants were not satisfied with the support they received from the university in areas in the areas of career (28.4%), academics, integration, and information on settlement and immigration issues.

Additionally, many IS have struggled to access financial assistance and scholarships from their respective institution websites, which has made studying in Canada more challenging than they may have initially anticipated. Our cohort of IS participants we interviewed also expressed concerns about the lack of financial assistance and scholarships available to them. Specifically, they cited the high cost of tuition when converting from their home currency to Canadian dollars. However, most of the participants mentioned receiving financial support from their families. Various other studies have mentioned that the IS have limited access to financial assistance and scholarships and inadequate support available from the institution's websites (Calder et al., 2016; Mehra, 2017). This adds an extra burden on the IS who are already paying the high tuition costs, high costs of textbooks, rent and other expenses during their stay in Canada (Howe et al., 2023;

Worae & Edgerton, 2023). To ensure that IS have easy access to accommodations and academic resources, institutions and organizations should collaborate with them and provide additional resources on their websites (Kıroğlu & Kung, 2023).

Even though IS study participants acknowledged the significance of adjusting to online and distance learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they still place great importance on physically studying abroad for the university experience, in-person interactions, and cultural immersion. This is consistent with the findings in the literature (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Dong & Ishige, 2022) that the participants demonstrated mixed emotions of both frustration and appreciation/thankfulness and isolation–connectedness emotional trajectory during their learning process. Even though online and blended learning were highly utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic and IS still prefer on-campus instruction. A recent survey of US University students revealed that most students prefer some form of on-campus learning, as the social aspect of campus life is a crucial part of the overall student experience (Burke, 2020).

Many international students choose to study in Canada for several reasons, including quality of education, personal growth, work opportunity, a supportive community, and positive relationships with faculty members. These factors are significant in attracting students to pursue their education in Canada. These push factors are important in attracting international students to pursue their education in Canada. It's crucial to recognize that international students may encounter challenges and factors that affect their experiences. Academic pressures, financial worries, looking for accommodations, uncertainty about career prospects, and mental health issues are some of the most common pull factors. These obstacles can make it difficult for international students during their study abroad journey in Canada. Despite these challenges, IS participants in our study appreciated the support system that was available through community,

homestay families, approachability and willingness of institutions faculty and staff. Moreover, the significant number of IS individuals in this group who would recommend Canada as a study destination indicated that they have had a satisfactory and positive experience with the country's education system and living conditions. This aligned with several studies that have found that IS have identified various forms of support available to them, such as positive relationships with faculty and peers, the assistance provided by International Student Advisors (ISAs), activities, orientations, academic support centers, and volunteer and cooperative education opportunities (Calder et al., 2016; Howe et al., 2023; McGregor et al., 2022).

In summary, the results highlight how crucial it is for international students to have access to good quality education, opportunities for personal development, exposure to different cultures, and reliable support systems in order to thrive and feel fulfilled while studying in Canada. These various factors, which can either attract or deter students, significantly shape their experiences and impact their decision to pursue their education in the country. Based on our research with a small cohort of IS at only two of the post-secondary institutions, it is evident that there is a need for more support to overcome the challenges faced by international students. Additionally, there is a need to gain a better understanding of their experiences. However, it's likely that international students at other universities face similar challenges. We hope that our study will encourage further investigation into the experiences of international students across Canada, as they are an essential part of our university communities.

Chapter 5 Study Limitations and Future Directions

Our study has limitations due to the small sample size, institutional environment, and lack of questions about discrimination and racial challenges. During the interview, IS discussed social support, academic pressure, mental health issues, and financial constraints. However, we did not ask specific questions about financial constraints and other mental health issues in the online survey. As our study was ongoing, news emerged in the media about Canadian IS being deceived by fraudulent agents and fearing deportation. For many IS, their dreams were shattered, and they faced a harsh reality. We aim to investigate, in future, the challenges, racial and discrimination issues, and how these IS could fall prey to fraudulent agents. Our study may be limited and biased as the participants come from stable backgrounds, and the chances of them falling victim to fraudulent agents are low. We also plan to extend our research to other colleges and universities to understand the IS's perception and concerns better.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Based on this study's findings, it can be concluded that IS studying in Canada come from diverse backgrounds and choose Canada as their study destination for various reasons, including the lack of quality education in their home countries, global competitiveness in higher education, economic stability, and a secure learning environment. Post-graduation employment opportunities, a multicultural environment, and the ability to work while studying were important factors in choosing a university in Canada. However, IS faced challenges adapting to the community, making friends with international and Canadian students, participating in extracurricular activities, and meeting academic expectations. Support systems were sought from various sources, including academic advising, faculty and staff, Canadian classmates, and counselling professionals. IS have a variety of motivations for studying abroad, including seeking high-quality education, better opportunities, personal growth, and escaping economic and political instability in their home countries. The reputation of the country's education system and personal factors also play a role in the decision to study abroad. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced IS to adapt to online learning, which has presented challenges such as technological issues and a lack of motivation. Despite financial constraints, IS still prioritizes the quality of education and views it as a worthwhile investment. Physical studying abroad is preferred over online due to the university experience and cultural immersion, but online programs may become more attractive if they offer work and permanent residency options after graduation. Family support and familiarity with the host country's culture and language are important factors in success and IS appreciates the quality of education, personal growth, and supportive community. However, some negative experiences, such as academic pressures and financial concerns, were also reported. Overall, institutions should prioritize support systems, create a more inclusive

environment for IS studying abroad, and improve their support services for IS. Such efforts ensure that IS feel welcomed and supported throughout their academic journey, which, in turn, enhances their overall experience. Therefore, institutions must invest in creating a conducive environment that promotes diversity, inclusion, and equity for all students, regardless of their background.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Recruitment email

Date to be sent: <insert date>
Sender: Nagina Parmar
Target audience: International Students
Subject line: Optional Research Study: Exploring the perceptions and Concerns of Canadian International Students
Header: Perceptions and Concerns of International Students
Body:

This message is being sent on behalf of Dr. William Hunter. My name is Nagina Parmar, and I am a Master of Education Student at Ontario Tech University. You are invited to participate in an **optional** research study titled **"Exploring the perceptions and Concerns of Canadian International Students."** Participation is entirely **voluntary,** and there is no obligation or need to participate if you do not want to do so. Please direct inquiries to Dr. William Hunter at bill.hunter@ontariotechu.net

We are reaching out to all International Students (IS) who are not permanent residents of Canada, that is, who do not have PR status, and who are attending Ontario Tech University and Toronto Metropolitan University, to ask if they are willing to share their learning experiences and perceptions as IS in Ontario.

This study is conducted in two parts:
Part 1- All international students who are eligible and who consent will be asked to complete an online questionnaire.

Link to Online Questionnaire.

This questionnaire will collect information on demographics, your decision to study and your experiences as an international student. This will take around 15-20 minutes of your time. During the first part of the study, you will also be asked if you are willing to participate in part 2. We will select first 30 students for this part of the study from among those who provide their consent.

Part 2- You will be notified if you are selected to participate in the interview part of the study through your preferred contact method. You will meet the student lead and share your experiences as international students in an interview style over zoom. This will take approximately. 30 minutes of your time.

As a participant in this study, your name will be entered in a random draw to win one of ten $20 gift cards. If you are interested in participating or have any further questions, please contact Nagina Parmar at nagina.parmar@ontariotechu.net.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant or have any concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office at researchethics@ontariotechu.ca or 905.721.8668 x3693.

This study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board **[REB #17080] on Dec 21 2022 and the Toronto Metropolitan University REB (REB 2022-002) on March 16 2023.**

Sincerely,
Nagina Parmar Ph.D. CCRP, MEd(c)
Email: nagina.parmar@ontariotechu.net

Appendix B.

Informed Consent Form

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Research Study:
Exploring the Perceptions and Concerns of Canadian International Students.
Name of Principal Investigator (PI)
Dr. William Hunter
PI's contact number(s)/email(s)
Ph: 905-721-8668
E-mail: bill.hunter@ontariotechu.ca
Names(s) of Co-Investigator(s)
Dr. Joe Stokes
Email: joe.stokes@ontariotechu.ca
M.Ed. Project Student Lead
Nagina Parmar
Email: nagina.parmar@ontariotechu.ca
Departmental and institutional affiliation(s): Faculty of Education
External Funder/Sponsor: (if applicable): NA

Introduction
You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Exploring the Perceptions and Concerns of International Students in Canada*. Please read the information about the study presented in this form which includes details on the study's procedures, risks and benefits that you should know before deciding if you would like to participate. You should take as much time as you need to make your decision. You should ask the Principal Investigator (PI) or study team to explain anything you do not understand and ensure that all of your questions have been answered before signing this consent form. Before making your decision, feel free to discuss this study with anyone you wish, including your friends and family. Participation in this study is voluntary.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Ontario Tech University) Research Ethics Board REB # 17080 on Dec 21, 2022. This study has also been reviewed and approved by the Toronto Metropolitan REB (REB 2022-002).

Purpose and Procedure:
Purpose:

Canada is very successful in bringing international students(IS) to its post-secondary education institutions; however, it is evident in the literature that these students face challenges while adapting to the host country's culture, language and weather. Little is known about these challenges and discrimination faced by international students. Higher education institutions claim that they know students' challenges, e.g., adapting to the environment, getting support from administrators, etc. This study will provide information that may lead to improvement in their policies and practices.

This study aims to examine the unmet needs and the learning experiences of IS and their perceptions and concerns during their stay in Ontario.

We are reaching out to all International Students (IS) with non-PR (not Permanent Resident of Canada) status from Ontario Tech University and Toronto Metropolitan University who are willing to share their learning experiences and perceptions during their studies in Ontario. The total number of participants required for this study is 250. We will reach out to the first 30 students for the second phase(interview phase) of the study who provide their consent and a contact email address.

Procedures:

This study is conducted in two parts:

Part 1- All international students who are eligible and consent will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. This questionnaire will collect information on demographics, the student's decision to study and their experiences as international students. This will take around 15-20 minutes. During the first part of the study, you will also be asked if you are willing to participate in part 2.
We will reach out to the first 30 students for the second phase (interview phase) of the study who provide their consent and a contact email address.

Part 2- You will be notified to participate in the interview part of the study by email. You will meet the designated student lead and will indicate your consent by signing another informed consent form and share your experiences as international students in an interview style over zoom. This will take approximately 30 minutes.

Potential Benefits:
You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. This study will help us learn and address the unmet needs of the learning experiences of international students and their perceptions and concerns during their stay in Ontario.

Potential Risk or Discomforts:
Potential risks are very low. Some survey questions are of a personal nature and may require you to reflect on unpleasant memories. Should you feel any discomfort when completing this survey, you should inform the student lead to end the interview.

Use and Storage of Data:

This survey uses Google Forms, which is a USA company. Consequently, US authorities under the provisions of the USA Freedom Act (formerly known as the Patriot Act) may access the survey data. To further protect your information, data stored by the researcher will be password protected and/or encrypted. Ontario Tech Google Drive will be used to share electronic data amongst members of the research team only. All the information collected during the study will be deleted after the publications of the study,

Confidentiality:

Your privacy shall be respected. No information about your identity will be shared or published without your permission unless required by law. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent by law, professional practice, and ethical codes of conduct. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit over the Internet.
This research study includes the collection of demographic data, which will be aggregated (not individually presented) in an effort to protect your anonymity. Despite best efforts, it is possible that your identity can be determined even when data is aggregated.

Information collected during the study will be stored in separate research files maintained by the research staff. Your research data will be given a confidential unique identification number. Data for this study are stored at a secure and password-protected computer. The project staff involved in the study will only be able to access the data with the use of a password. Research data will rely on a unique identification number and will not be associated with University records.
The data and audio recordings produced from this study will be stored in a secure, locked location. Only members of the research team and REB members will have access to the data. Following completion of the research study, the data will be kept for 10 years as long as required and then destroyed as required by Ontario Tech University. Published study results will not reveal your identity.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may partake in only those aspects of the study you feel comfortable with. You may also decide not to be in this study or to be in the study now and then change your mind later. You may leave the study at any time without affecting your academic standing with the institution. You will be given information relevant to your decision to continue or withdraw from participation. Such information will need to be subsequently provided.
You may refuse to answer any question you do not want to answer or not answer an interview question by saying 'pass.'

Right to Withdraw:

If you withdraw from the research project at any time, any data you have contributed will be removed from the study, and you do not need to offer any reason for making this request. While answering questions on an online survey, you can close your browser, and no data will be

collected, and the records will be deleted from google drive   If you answer questions in the interview, you can let the student lead know, and other data will be deleted if you decide to stop. If you wish to withdraw from the study then you must skip to the end of the survey to receive the incentive.

Conflict of Interest:
The researchers' interests in completing this study are to advance knowledge about foreign students in Canadian universities and to provide information that might improve university policies. Their interests should not influence your decision to participate in this study.

Compensation, Reimbursement, Incentives:
You will not incur any expenses due to your participation in the study. As a participant in this study, your name will be entered in the random draw to win one of ten Tim's $20 gift cards. You will be notified by email if you win the gift card.

Debriefing and Dissemination of Results:

The study's results will be presented at research conferences. We will also share the findings through peer-reviewed journals and inform you when the study is published. If you wish to know about the study findings, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Hunter, at any time.

Participant Rights and Concerns:
Please read this consent form carefully and feel free to ask the researcher any questions that you might have about the study.

This study has been reviewed by the Toronto Metropolitan University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact: Research Ethics Board c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Ryerson University 350 Victoria Street Toronto, ON M5B 2K3 416-979-5042 rebchair@torontomu.ca

If you have any questions concerning the research study or experience any discomfort related to the study, please contact the researcher project student lead Nagina Parmar at naginap@torontomu.ca

By signing this form, you do not give up any of your legal rights against the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions for compensation, nor does this form relieve the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions of their legal and professional responsibilities.
Consent to Participate in Online Survey:

Online Consent
By checking 'I agree, I indicate that:
1. I have read the consent form and understand the study being described.
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered. I am free to ask questions about the study in the future.
3. I freely consent to participate in the research study, understanding that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. A copy of this Consent Form has been made available to me.

□ I agree

For an interview portion of the study, please consent by checking 'I agree' to participate in an interview

□ I agree

I agree to participate in the research study by participating in a research interview.

Please provide your email below to contact for the interview.

_____

Appendix C.

Data Collection Form Online survey

The data collection form is very long. We are adding a link to the Google form from OT

and TMU.

Link to Online Questionnaire. OT

Link to Online Questionnaire: TMU

Appendix D.

Data Collection Form-Interview

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION	
This section is for Researchers only. This will be completed after the participant content to the study	
Participant #	
Faculty / Program / Certificate Name	
College/University	
Date Informed Consent signed	D D M M M Y Y Y Y
Date of Enrolment	D D M M M Y Y Y Y
Date of Interview	D D M M M Y Y Y Y

Part 2 -Interview

Script:

Thank you for your consent to participate in this study section. In this section, please share your experiences in more detail. This part of the questionnaire will take around 30 minutes to answer these questions. Please be very specific while answering these questions.

Please note: You can skip any question if you are not comfortable answering it. We will be doing an audio recording of this interview. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable and you would like to stop, please let the student lead know. We will stop the recording, and all the information collected will be deleted.

1. What were your motivations for studying abroad?

2. What is the impact of COVID on your perceptions of online and distance learning?

3. If there are financial limitations, why do you want to come to study abroad? How is your country's education comparable?

4. Are you more motivated due to the system or other factors? (e.g. country status, education system etc.)

5. If you are provided with the online option, would you still opt to immigrate or go international to study?

6. Please describe in your own words how your demographics and background (family status, background etc.) play a role in your success.

7. What has been the most positive part of your study experience while in Canada

8. What has been the most negative part of your study experience while in Canada?