

Introduction from the Lead Editor of the Special Issue: A Spotlight on Newcomer Graduate Students' Research

Lena Barrantes

University of Calgary

The number of newcomer students in Canadian universities has increased significantly over the last two decades. This population grew over 99% between 2000 and 2011 (Anderson, 2015) and the Canadian Bureau of International Education (2018) reported that by 2017, the percentage of international students in Canadian universities increased 17%. It is anticipated that this number will continue to grow as higher education institutions seek to keep their programs competitive in a globalized market (Zhou & Zhang, 2014). Such a scenario makes the understanding of internationalization of key interest in order to enrich the newcomers' and host country's journey together. De Wit, Hunter, Egron-Polak, and Howard (2015) explained internationalization as:

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (p. 29)

With this in mind, newcomer students in postsecondary education in Canada come with a wide array of contributions. They bring intellectual and cultural capital in the form of strong connections between different countries, opportunities for communication with people from all over the world, cultural richness to host institutions, and substantial revenues in the form of higher tuition fees than domestic students. Additionally, their diverse cultural perspectives, backgrounds, and worldviews add to the conversations on diversity and inclusion in education and in their respective fields.

Newcomer graduate students have many different reasons to undertake a rigorous program in a different country and in a different language. Their reasons include the pursuit of high academic goals, in-depth immersion in academic life, acquisition of specialized knowledge, the development of strategic research skills, and broader employment opportunities. Once in the host country, they all carry distinct life history that informs their decisions prior to their arrival and their participation in the new country.

During their immersion process, their social integration experiences are situated within complex in-school and out-of-school practices where they usually deal with homesickness and difficulty in coping with day-to-day particularities of the new country, such as weather conditions, transportation, and financial and health care systems. Added to these, social-cultural behaviours like culture shock, discriminatory practices, loss of identity and confidence, and new social customs may influence newcomer students' experiences. Guo and Guo (2017) identified discrepancies between internationalization policy and practice and reported students' challenges in academic and living environments. Difficulty in making friends with local students, little internationalization of the curriculum, and problems dealing with stereotypes and racism are difficult barriers to break.

As a diverse group that is ever increasing on Canadian campuses, understanding newcomer students' experiences deserves attention in order to create a comprehensive picture of their challenges

and successes. As a newcomer student myself in Canada, I felt that one way of doing this was to open a space where research that results from newcomer students' initiatives could find a way of bonding with the Canadian land. As such, I led the creation of this special issue, entitled "A Spotlight on Newcomer Graduate Students' Research". Just as the Tree of Togetherness on the cover of this Special Issue reflects the similarities and nuanced diversities of newcomer students' stories, research shared in this issue traces authors' home roots and invites attentive listeners and readers to see how they put down new roots in Canada.

For the readers of *EPIGREP*, some themes in the articles may be unfamiliar, as this Special Issue covers research done in three different faculties: Social Work, Education, and School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures, and Cultures. We invite our readers to be perceptive as these articles can enrich their understandings of newcomers' research interests and contributions. Each article in this Special Issue draws on different aspects of social science research in the form of a research brief.

What is a Research Brief?

For *EPIGREP* Journal, a research brief is an opportunity for authors to share what they consider to be an interesting aspect of their research project. We believe research briefs are an opportunity to share a brief summary of completed or in-progress study. This type of manuscript does not report the full study findings and does not undergo the full peer-review process. For this Special Issue, the five research briefs navigated different topics that include experiences of immigration in Canada, re-integration to the home country, repatriation, and French language teaching and learning.

Authors in this Special Issue represent a variety of cultural backgrounds whose diverse nationalities represent the common rich diversity present in Canadian universities. The authors come from China, Ghana, Uganda and Kosova. In this list of countries, Costa Rica, my home country, adds to the diversity as well as Canada, the nationality of the two editors supporting this initiative.

Overview of the Papers

The first two articles are studies conducted in Canada while the next three are situated in the newcomer students' home country China, Uganda, and Kosova, respectively.

The first article *Weaving Identities: Experiences of Bereavement among Chinese Immigrants in Calgary* by Qianyun Wang and Christine Walsh address the lived experiences of spousal bereavement among older Chinese immigrants living in Calgary. Their research findings, interwoven with Qianyun's own grief stories, resulted in understanding how migratory grief may contribute to vulnerability to mental health issues. This study contributed by calling for culturally appropriate bereavement supports and family/community involvement.

In the second article, *The Experiences of Ghanaian Male Immigrants in Canada*, Benedict Kojo Otoo shares his personal struggles as an immigrant to Canada and explores the stories of Ghanaian men in Canada looking for professional work. This paper contributes to the newcomer experience of Ghanaians by calling for changes and improvements for immigration reform for skilled immigrants.

In the next article, Ling Lei authors *Returning "Home"? Exploring the Re-integration Experiences of Internationally Educated Chinese Academic Returnees* and identifies competing powers of recognition in China that value cultural knowledge differently from Canada. Her contribution suggests that for sustained academic development, China's higher education internationalization should focus attention on working on local academic community-building that recognizes and supports returnee academics' ways of knowing and doing.

Next, Harriet Haggerty in her article *Integration of Culture in the Teaching of French as a Foreign Language at The University Level in Uganda* uses a case study approach and shares that language and culture are interdependent and interrelated so teaching the two separately may lead to losing the essence of either language or culture. Her study made a contribution to the realization that the teaching of the French language may enable the students to appreciate the French and francophone culture(s) and to identify the differences between the French/francophone culture(s) and their own culture(s).

In the final article, *The 'In-betweenness' of Emerging Newcomer Scholars*, Kaltrina Kusari explores how the identity of emerging newcomer scholars is shaped by transnational research. Her article is informed by personal experiences when navigating tensions that emerge from living a transnational life. She suggests that the hegemony in this context relies on colonial practices that uphold Western dominance, and she invites readers to be reflexive about their role in perpetuating and/or resisting hegemonic ways of being.

Conclusion

Combined, these five articles comprise the special issue of EPIGREP Journal *A Spotlight on Newcomer Graduate Students' Research*, which provides what we believe is, a window to see the contribution newcomer graduate students bring to Canada and to their fields. Their contributions attain the internationalization purpose of enhancing the quality of education and research to make a meaningful contribution to society. The articles speak to the myriad opportunities that exist for other graduate students.

As you engage with the work in this special issue, I hope you will consider the context in which the articles, the various methodologies, and this body of knowledge are taken up and applied, and bring your critical reflective practice to the process of international integration and global dimension learning of post-secondary education.

References

- Anderson, T. (2015). Seeking internationalization: The state of Canadian higher education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 45(4), 166-187.
- CBIE (Canadian Bureau of International Education) (2018). *International students in Canada*. Ottawa: CBIE.
- de Wit, H., Hunter, F., Egron-Polak, E. & Howard, L. (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Guo, Y., & Guo, S. (2017). Internationalization of Canadian higher education: Discrepancies between policies and international student experiences. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5), 851-868.
- Zhou, G. & Zhang, Z. (2014). Study of the first year international students at a Canadian university: Challenges and experiences with social integration. *Canadian and International Education*, 43(2), Article 7.