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International Students’ Perceptions of Factors Affecting Academic Success in Post-Secondary Studies

by

Anna M Bartosik

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Centre for Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

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2017

Abstract

This multiple case study examines international students' perceptions of factors affecting academic success in post-secondary institutions in southern Ontario. The study used snowball sampling and a semi-structured interview format. Various factors in the literature, which are used as a framework for this thesis, demonstrate an influence on international students' academic preparedness and success. They include: proficiency tests, length of time in host country, prior learning experience, acculturation, tolerance of ambiguity, and motivation. Other factors influencing students' academic success are EAP programs, faculty and students' own perceptions of academic preparedness and needs, international student centres, communication with domestic students, and immigration plans. The study revealed that, in addition to the listed factors, participants also identified mental health and identity as influencing factors. The study addresses the gap in existing research by providing a college setting for international students from various nationalities, in a Canadian context, studying in a range of post-secondary programs.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CanTEST	Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees
CELBAN	Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
DM	Direct Messaging
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
FI	Field Independence
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
HE	Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
L1	Native Language
L2	Second Language
LMS	Learning Management System
MA	Master of Arts
NES	Native-English Speakers
NNES	Non-Native English Speakers
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
PR	Permanent Resident
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TAPE	Technical and Further Education
TESTCan	French Language Test of Scholars and Trainees
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL iBT	Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test

Prologue

A few years ago, ennui best described my feelings about teaching reading and writing in an English for Academic Purposes program.

For inspiration, I invited a former student to share his experiences with my class about his current life as a college student.

Had I not asked, the story which he and subsequent visiting students shared in my classroom community wouldn't have been heard.

> *Just because I'm an international student*
> *doesn't mean I'm stupid*
> *and I don't understand racism.*
> *doesn't mean I don't want to talk with you.*
> *doesn't mean you have to speak loudly.*
> *doesn't mean I don't speak English.*
>
> *Just because I'm an international student*
> *doesn't mean I will return to my home country.*
> *doesn't mean I eat rice all day.*
> *doesn't mean you should ignore me.*
>
> *Just because I'm an international student*
> *doesn't mean you should charge me huge fees.*
> *doesn't mean you should ignore my sadness.*
> *doesn't mean you should teach me like a child.*
> *doesn't mean I ought to know everything about my home culture.*
> *doesn't mean I can't develop critical thinking skills.*
>
> *Because I'm an international student,*
> *I need support for my English.*
> *I need to learn about how to do things here, like negotiating a salary.*
> *I need a social network.*
> *I need to learn practical things when you teach me English.*
> *I need to be visible.*
> *you need to tell me why a "knock" joke is funny.*

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Internationalization in post-secondary education institutions is managed in much the same way as people say Mark Twain spoke about the weather: everyone talks about internationalization, but no one does anything about it. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, institutions are actively recruiting students from other countries (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2016). Lee and Wesche (as cited in Andrade, 2006), say that in Canada, international students are acknowledged as an important revenue source. This phenomenon is dependent on international factors, and in the months following the United Kingdom's Brexit vote of June 2016, both Canada and Australia have benefited (Husbands, 2016) and saw an increase of international students from China. After the United States election of November 2016, even more interest in Canada was expressed by international students, although economics also played a role in this upsurge of international students (Harris, 2017; Hosmar, 2017; Marcus, 2017; Smith, 2017). Most recently, the Donald Trump administration's plan to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DOCA, as it is better known, has raised more suggestions and questions about whether to welcome to Canada these youth as international students (Cain, 2017; Lopes, 2017; Malcolm, 2017; Perkel, 2017; Puzic, 2017).

As per the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Canadian government values international students' presence and sees internationalization of education in Canada as an economic business model (Foreign Affairs, Trade & Development Canada, 2014). To this end, it has identified international education in Canada as one of its top 22 priorities. Institutes of higher learning have adopted internationalization as a model for their mission statements and development as well (Colleges Ontario, 2014; University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2012; Universities Canada, 2014). This development of multi-faceted internationalization of North American campuses is vague and not unified across all sectors of Canadian higher education. Some common elements exist in the language used with internationalization: words such as *globalization*, *economic benefits*, and *rate of return* (Colleges Ontario, 2014; Universities Canada, 2014). Internationalization is listed under "Operating Funding/Areas of Investment" in the Colleges Ontario submission for the 2015 budget. This definition of internationalization does not meet the sociocultural, economic, and academic needs of international students (Andrade, 2006).

In this economic and policy model, international students are presented as a homogeneous group, and in a critical examination of research on international students, most research has defined international students similarly (Andrade, 2006; Vasilopoulos, 2015). This is a simplistic and inaccurate picture of students studying abroad, who may be studying:

- on short-term study visas;
- to improve language skills in a short period of time for future academic studies or employment opportunities in their home country;
- in private language institutions as international student "tourists";
- in higher institutes of education to complete graduate studies in the host country, with plans to return to their home country;
- in higher institutes of education to complete education and training, with plans to remain in the host country for an extended period of time;
- in higher institutes of education to complete education and training, with plans to remain in the host country as permanent residents.

A more granular definition of international students is also possible. In Ontario, for example, international students studying at institutes of higher learning can be categorized into four distinct groups, each group potentially selecting different pathways for entering programs of post-secondary study (collegesontario.ca, n.d.). However, definitions of international students in research literature characterize students without encompassing their needs, motivation, status, or potential in an international or Canadian context (Vasilopoulos, 2015).

A significant amount of international student research focuses on international students' acquisition of the host country's language, and studies delve into an examination of motivation in learning. However, there has been a binary approach to studying identity and motivation of international students. On the one hand, there is the psychological positivist/post-positivist epistemology that approaches the study of motivation and learning from a problem-solving approach, focusing on quantitative data. On the other, there is the post-structuralist/constructivist framework, focusing on language socialization and language identity, from a qualitative perspective (Vasilopoulos, 2015). Further research ought to focus on the voices of international students by providing an opportunity for students of various backgrounds to address the factors which affect and influence their perceptions and academic readiness.

Context for Research

The government of Ontario has a mandate for institutes of higher learning in the province to provide differentiation of education (Colleges Ontario, 2014). As a result, Ontario colleges have identified key factors in future job market trends and offer programs which will address Ontario's labour market by training and educating the future skilled work force for Ontario. According to the Colleges Ontario 2014 budget report for 2015, employers surveyed indicated that, in the future, they will be looking for workers with a college rather than a university education (Colleges Ontario, 2014). In order for colleges to provide a stable source of workers, Ontario colleges require a steady source of income. This is why internationalization is identified in the Colleges Ontario report under "Operating Funding/Areas of Investment."

In the Colleges Ontario 2014 Report, the fiscal focus for Ontario colleges links Ontario's economic future to the success of college education. Ontario's niche in the education market is the ability for post-secondary institutions to provide career-specific training and education (Colleges Ontario, 2014). Ontario's 24 colleges fill the need for this type of specialized training and strive to provide Ontario with skilled workers who are able to fill the workforce. However, even though Ontario colleges provide distinct instruction to attract local individuals who would not necessarily fit the traditional higher learning structure of university studies, (Colleges Ontario, 2014), current global economic conditions indicate that Ontario colleges have to vie for students in order to remain competitive. The Colleges Ontario 2014 Report reveals that out of its 24 Ontario colleges, only five, centralized in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), receive the majority of international students.

International students can apply to study in programs at Ontario colleges with an international student visa and sufficient scores from recognized language proficiency tests. In Ontario, the paths which international students take are the same across all 24 colleges. An international student can enter an Ontario college through these methods:

- Study in an Ontario high school for three years or longer and enter a college program directly;
- Take a recognized language proficiency test and receive a score acceptable for entry into a program without any additional language courses;
- Receive a conditional offer from a program of study, provided that the student enrol and complete an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, for those whose language proficiency scores were too low;
- Successfully pass the Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST), a language proficiency test that is not available to students until they are registered in a Canadian post-secondary institution, for those who began an EAP program but did not complete it (ontariocolleges.ca, n.d.).

In addition to these four separate streams of international students, all college students in Ontario study in various programs, ranging from certificate to degree to bachelor programs. All of these factors can play a role in defining students’ perceptions. A visual representation of the four streams of international students is characterized in Table 1. Note that the streams are presented in order of efficiency; that is, International Student A enters a program the quickest, whereas International Student D can take up to two years to complete the stages to enter a post-secondary program.

Table 1. Visual Representation of International Student Streams

	Studied in Canada for 3+ years	Language proficiency test (IELTS, TOEFL)	Passed language proficiency test	EAP program started	CanTEST taken and passed	EAP program completed and certificate earned	Enter post-secondary program
International Student A	✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓
International Student B		✓	✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓
International Student C		✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓	✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓
International Student D		✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓ ⟶	⟶	⟶ ✓	✓

Moreover, colleges and universities in Ontario have porous boundaries. Many collaborative programs between universities and colleges exist, offering additional options for students to achieve unique degrees and diplomas (Ontario Universities' Application Centre, 2017). In addition to the unique position Ontario colleges find themselves in, the existing landscape of southern Ontario colleges is shifting; some colleges in the GTA are seeking polytechnic status and partnering with universities to accomplish this (Moodie, 2016).The impending changes in colleges' statuses, along with the concentration of international students studying in a localized area of southern Ontario, create a unique learning context for international students studying in southern Ontario, which is not replicated in other geographical regions.

Rationale for Research

This research examines international students in post-secondary college programs in southern Ontario, using a multiple case study. International students studying in different programs were interviewed, in order to uncover perceptions about academic preparedness. Most studies focus on the international student experience at a university level; few studies demonstrate the differences in perceptions about academic achievement at the college level, and international students are examined as a homogeneous group in existing studies, or are classified as domestic second language (L2) learners. Students may have concerns about their academic preparedness, even though they have demonstrated a level of English that is satisfactory for study at a community college level. Moreover, existing Canadian research does not differentiate the effects different pathways international students choose to take. This multiple case study, interviewing students from various pathways in different areas of study, will address these gaps in the research.

Research Questions

This study addresses the gap in research by focusing on international students studying in post-secondary community colleges in southern Ontario, and by examining students' perceptions of academic preparedness in their programs of study.

Accordingly, these are the research question for my study:
How do international students enrolled in various academic and professional post-secondary programs in Ontario community colleges perceive their academic preparedness for post-secondary studies?

a) What academic activities do international students feel prepared for?
b) What factors do international students perceive as having an impact on their academic success?

Significance

This research aims to fill the gap in existing research in a number of ways. Most international research focuses on international students studying in graduate university programs. In Canada, the role of motivation and perceptions of preparedness in the host country may present themselves differently because of immigration laws and guidelines for international students (Government of Canada, 2015). Many international students who arrive in Canada, especially in southern Ontario, study in Canadian institutes of higher education with the intention of applying for permanent residency (PR) status. The Canadian government recognizes students' contribution to the labour market, even though exact numbers are not available (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2012). Additionally, existing research does not distinguish between the effects of different pathways of study, and how that affects aspects of student success. This aspect can play a role in defining research of international students in a Canadian context. In addition to the four separate streams of international students identified earlier, college students in Ontario study in various programs, ranging from certificate to degree to bachelor programs, which is illustrated in Figure 1 below. All of these contributing factors within a Canadian and southern Ontario context may impact international student research differently than previous research.

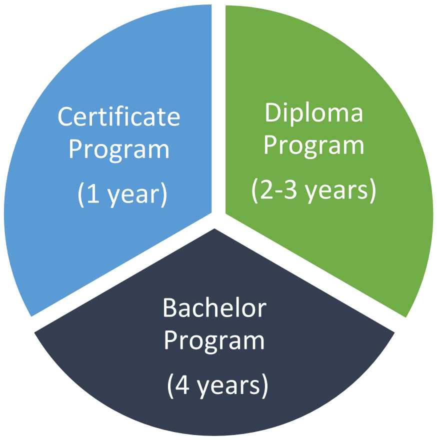


Figure 1. Contextualizing International Students in Programs of Study. This figure visualizes the different types of programs in which international students study at the post-secondary college level.

Positionality of Researcher

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioner with over 20 years of experience teaching ESL, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), I am familiar with language teaching in three major areas: newcomer language instruction, ESL non-credit programs run by school boards, and academic preparation language programs, offered in community colleges in southern Ontario. My classroom background includes 10 years of delivering ESL instruction to newcomers in LINC programs, a Citizenship and Immigration project. I have 16 years of experience in the college setting, 11 of which have been in a blended learning environment. The majority of my classroom student body for the past nine years has been comprised of international students. During my time as an EAP faculty member in a southern Ontario college, I have had the opportunity to teach in four out of the five levels of EAP classes offered to students, across all four skill levels: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Additionally, I have maintained personal relationships with former students who have exited the EAP program, whether they completed the EAP program or not. Over the years, I began an informal information series, and invited previous students back to my classroom to address the questions current students had about post-secondary studies in community colleges. As I conversed with current and former students, and in personal communications with former students, a picture of the unique situation international students found themselves in began to form. Eventually I used the international student situation for an analysis of a problem in an educational setting. Using Checkland’s Soft Systems methodology (Naughton, 1984), I attempted to identify the issues and pathways facing international students studying at community colleges, and the challenges they faced in their journey, by drawing what Checkland calls a “rich picture” as a part of my analysis. Figures 2 and 3 are the product of my initial analysis.

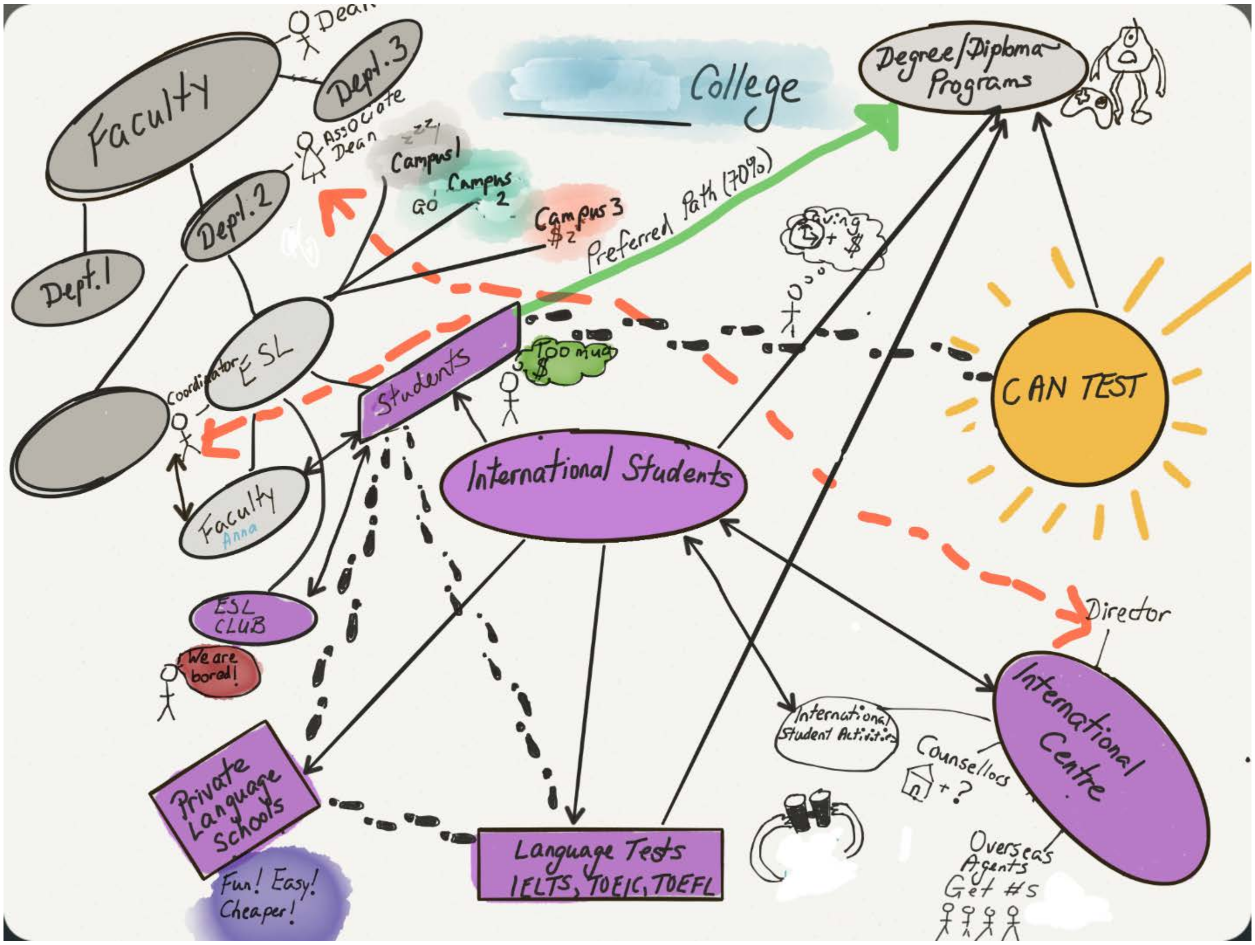

Dean
Faculty
Dept.3
Associate Dean
Dept.2
Dept.1
zzz
Campus1
Campus 2
GO
Campus 3
$2
College
Degree/Diploma Programs
Preferred Path (70%)
Saving + $
ESL
Coordinator
Students
Too much $
CAN TEST
International Students
Faculty
Anna
ESL CLUB
We are bored!
Director
International Centre
International Student Activities
Counsellors
+?
Private Language Schools
Fun! Easy! Cheaper!
Language Tests
IELTS, TOEIC, TOEFL
Overseas Agents
Get #s

Figure 2. A Rich Picture of International College Student’s Pathways for Post-Secondary Studies. This illustration was my first attempt at conceptualizing the different pathways which international students can take, as well as some of the challenges they face. The rich picture also presents pathways of communications across a college setting. Identifying characteristics have been omitted.

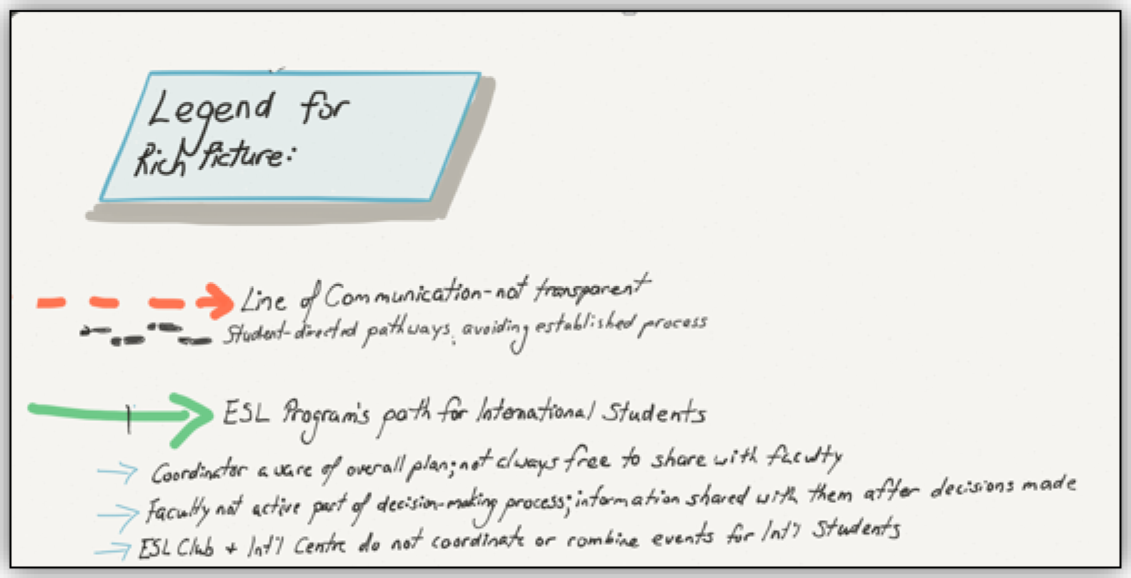

Legend for Rich Picture:
Line of Communication - not transparent
Student-directed pathways, avoiding established process
ESL Program's path for International Students
Coordinator aware of overall plan; not always free to share with faculty
Faculty not active part of decision-making process; information shared with them after decisions made
ESL Club + Int'l Centre do not coordinate or combine events for Int'l Students

Figure 3. Rich Picture Legend, explaining the pathways and lines of communication in Figure 2.

My initial reaction, as an EAP classroom practitioner, was that EAP programs are the best paths for preparing students for academic success in their post-secondary studies. However, as years passed and former students talked about successes and challenges of studying in post-secondary programs, I began to wonder if a "one size fits all" was the best approach for all students. This inspired a personal exploration of post-secondary college classes. I began to use my network to ask permission of faculty members teaching post-secondary classes to observe their teaching practice and I asked them about the types of assessments they had in their courses.

As a college EAP educator, I am aware of the different challenges facing international students and those challenges affect how I interact with students and how I personalize my curriculum to meet their needs. The participants in my study, however, are not current ESL students, but former international students or international students who have never studied in my class. The experiences of international students studying in post-secondary programs are not well known to me personally.

Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 provides the necessary background information for this study; specifically, the rationale for the study and the research questions, the context for the proposed study, the significance of the proposed research, and the positionality of this researcher. Chapter 2 examines the conceptual framework for the study and discusses the major themes the literature review uncovered. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the research study is explained, including data collection. Chapter 4 discusses factors impacting international students’ academic success, and categorizes them on three levels: personal, institutional, and global. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings and offers a discussion, as well as implication of findings and suggestions for future research in specific contexts.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Chapter 2 outlines the necessary framework for this research study by reviewing the relevant literature for the research questions. The themes examined in the literature review were informed by reading about issues affecting international students, but also by participants in my study, who raised some themes which I had not initially identified. In lieu of a theoretical lens, the identified themes will act as a framework to understand international students' perceptions about their readiness and to explore aspects of their present and their past, uncovering why some are feeling more/less prepared. Some of the themes in the literature review may reveal how all of these factors might fit together differently for each international student.

Conceptual Framework

International students arrive to study at Ontario colleges in all manners and experiences. The acculturation process for each student is different; cultural backgrounds, age, gender, and prior learning experience are unique to each international student. To suggest that all international students undergo the same process and encounter the same experiences, achievements, and challenges is neither true nor plausible as a proposition, and yet numerous studies examine international students as a homogenous group. For example, attributing experiences and factors that international students studying on short-term visas in post-graduate studies in Australia to undergraduate students who are non-native English speakers (NNES) in Canadian contexts ignores the unique situations international students find themselves in. Numbers of international students studying globally vary widely, as do reasons for international study, not to mention revenue plans nations have for international student enrolments (Andrade, 2006). In a study comparing international and domestic students, results of students' academic writing were difficult to interpret because the study did not differentiate whether NNES participants were immigrants, international students, or domestic students (Ramburuth, 2001). Another study at a Canadian university examining perceptions of native-English speakers (NES) and NNES about lectures and notetaking failed to separate the NNES into different categories (Mendelsohn, 2002). Yet another study at a Canadian university combined new immigrants and international students together and suggested that productive tasks were the most difficult academic tasks (Cheng, Miles, & Curtis, 2004). Numerous studies have identified that students studying abroad face bigger social challenges than local students (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Rajapaska & Dundes, 2002).

One of the purposes of asking participants about feelings of readiness at different stages of their learning journey is to uncover a better understanding of the impact which multiple factors have. This impact operates beyond which program or which test or which courses a student has taken, or which research has demonstrated an effect on academic preparedness. What is the combination of factors that makes one person not feel confident and successful while another person perceives being prepared for academic success? An analysis of the literature begins to frame the answer.

Literature Review

The following literature review contains the themes which build my conceptual framework. Within some of the large themes, I have identified subthemes, which are addressed separately.

Language Proficiency Tests and Construct Validity

Many high-stakes tests are criticized for not focusing equally on all qualities necessary for a solid assessment. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), an assessment fails if it focuses on one quality at the expense of the others. Bachman and Palmer identify the six qualities as: reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality. Although they admit that tests cannot focus on all qualities equally, they advocate that test developers not ignore any of them, and each testing situation will determine which combination of qualities will be best used for each test (Bachman & Palmer). A test’s usefulness should be evaluated on the combined effect of these qualities within the context of the test. Issues of validity about standardized language proficiency tests abound. Depending on the institution, whether it be in Canada or elsewhere, students take internationally recognized language proficiency tests to gain admission into their desired programs of study. These tests include: the International English

Language Testing System (IELTS); the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or TOEFL iBT, delivered via the internet. Once students are registered in a Canadian institution, they can also take the Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST). Because institutions use them as a condition for admissions, it is relevant to compare tests to types of activities and assignments most likely encountered in post-secondary studies, which include group work, presentations, and short answers (Dunworth, 2008). Proficiency tests do not assess these tasks; moreover, the types of questions students answer on language proficiency tests, in particular multiple choice questions, indicate that the students use problem-solving strategies, not language comprehension strategies (Rupp, Ferne, & Choi, 2006).

There are mixed results about the IELTS accurately predicting academic performance. Whereas some studies do not demonstrate a positive correlation between IELTS scores and academic performance (Dooey, 2010), others have revealed a connection (Elder, 1993; Feast, 2002; Hill, Storch, & Lynch, 1999; Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001). Additionally, variation amongst how IELTS interviewers elicit answers can result in different perceptions of a test taker’s ability (Brown, 2003). This questions the construct definition of tests which claim to measure communicative competence (Brown, 2003). Recent studies examining TOEFL scores and academic performance also both support and weaken the validity narrative. A United States study noted a trend between TOEFL scores and grade-point averages (Wait & Gressel, 2009). However, an Australian comparison of TOEFL and IELTS scores and academic performance found weak links between TOEFL scores and grade-point averages (Hill, Storch, & Lynch, 1999). In another study of graduate students at a Canadian university, students’ performance on the TOEFL iBT were compared to real life academic speaking activities (Brooks & Swain, 2014). Both similarities and differences in performance were found among the students in their grammatical complexity, discourse features, and vocabulary use (Brooks & Swain, 2014). In another Canadian study, Berman and Cheng (2010) found that NNES undergraduate students studying in university were as successful as NES, but graduate NNES had lower grade-point averages—was not related to TOEFL scores—because the TOEFL scores of the NNES were significantly higher than the TOEFL scores of the undergraduate NNES. The premise that language proficiency, as measured by a language proficiency test, is linked to academic achievement appears stronger in some contexts than others. Developing an alternative that accurately measures proficiency within a certain context, however, is challenging.

Measuring Language Proficiency

There are various approaches that can address the issue of measuring language proficiency in higher education with respect to college and university students. One approach, as outlined by Dunworth (2010), suggests that, when institutions make internationalization a focus for future financial benefits, they should reconsider what type of English will be acceptable, since most of the students will not remain as permanent residents. Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl (2006) admit this would be a big challenge and would question long-held beliefs of a definition of language. Colleges and universities have tried to take steps to ameliorate such situations for students. In Australia, for example, the Australian Universities Quality Agency developed a set of guidelines that has opened a discussion among universities to move from preventing students accessing higher education to taking international students' language needs into consideration while students are studying at Australian universities. This resulted in good practice principles, but did not address how to measure language proficiency, how language proficiency should be developed, or whether English language proficiency has the same definition or level across institutions. (Dunworth, 2010). Dunworth addresses the challenges of these unanswered questions, but falls short of addressing acculturation, motivation, or the culture of a given institution. These factors play a large role in the academic success of students.

Another approach to assessing language proficiency is creating an assessment within a relevant context. In Canada, the CanTEST/TESTCan and the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN) are two examples of proficiency tests built for specific purposes in a pertinent context. The CanTEST is a language proficiency test which is not well-known outside of Canada. The CanTEST was the result of a pilot project by the Canadian International Development Agency to encourage Chinese students and professionals to study in Canada. It was first created at the University of Ottawa, together with St. Mary's University

(Bayliss & Raymond, 2004). The project initially took place in China (Burnaby, Cumming, & Belfiore, 1986), with program implementation conducted in Canada, and program design in Canada with input from information of potential Chinese trainees. In its initial stage, the CanTEST would have been considered fair because of the homogeneity of test takers; the test had been developed for participants from the same country of origin and cultural bias was not an issue. The CanTEST largely represents test takers' abilities in simulated situations where they would be using English for academic or professional purposes. Its distinctive feature is its attempt to assess candidates who will be working or studying in Canada, and the tasks and texts on the test endeavor to reflect that. (University of Ottawa, 2006).

Invariably, institutions want to compare small-scale tests such as the CanTEST to tests that are familiar and traditionally used (Des Brisay, 1994), making test validity problematic. Correlations between the CanTEST and TOEFL have been modest, (Des Brisay, 1994), but the study occurred in 1994, and the TOEFL test has undergone revisions since then. The fact that internationally-recognized language proficiency tests are weighed more heavily than small-scale tests results in students being tested twice by many institutions (Des Brisay, 1994), as is the case at many colleges in southern Ontario.

Communication amongst higher institution levels is important, but the delivery of content differs from institution to institution. Instead of producing a standard definition of language proficiency, institutions should be focusing on how best to support additional language learners and set standards for entry based on learners' needs, and not use language proficiency tests as a leading guideline for standards.

Defining Academic Readiness – Can it be Defined?

Defining what constitutes academic preparedness/readiness is problematic. Because institutions use language proficiency tests as a condition for admission, it is relevant to compare them to types of activities and assignments that will most likely be encountered, but, as stated earlier, proficiency tasks do not address these tasks and students do not use language comprehension strategies when taking these. (Rupp, Ferne, & Choi, 2006). An additional challenge to defining readiness is that faculty members define preparedness differently, regardless of the discipline they teach in. In a study of faculty in various disciplines, preparedness was defined in linguistic terms, as well as holistically, as a student's self-sufficiency (Seifried & Tjaden-Glass, 2010). The University of Melbourne had concerns about both international and English speaking background (ESB) students' readiness, in particular their writing skills (Ransom, 2009). The school developed its own post-entry test, focusing on academic English in reading, writing, and listening.

Readiness can also be defined as the absence of remedial coursework. It has also been defined in prolonged terms: completion of a degree (Porter & Polikoff, 2012). However, there is no standard for academic preparedness or readiness across institutions, nor disciplines. For the purposes of my study, I have defined academic readiness as the ability to perform academically and succeed socially as students, as well as the ability to complete a program or not drop out of it.

Factors Affecting a Student's Language Ability and Academic Performance

In this section of the literature review, I examine various factors which can affect a student's language ability and academic performance, including: prior learning experience, the length of time spent in a host country, tolerance of ambiguity, acculturation, motivation, and participation in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs. All of these factors can play a role in a student's language ability, but some of them play a more prominent role when the language learner is an international student.

Prior Learning Experience and Length of Time in Host Country

Learning an additional language is shaped and affected by prior learning experience and cultural traditions (Gonzalez, Chen, & Sanchez, 2001; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Although we should be careful about labelling one group of learners as having a particular issue, Sawir's 2005 study of Asian students studying in Australia showed learners face learning difficulties in Australian universities because of their prior learning experiences, which focused on writing and grammar in teacher-centred classrooms, resulting in learning difficulties and lower levels of confidence in speaking. Other studies by Wang (2006) and Hellsten (2002) indicate that passivity in the classroom can be linked partly to prior learning. Swain (1991) posits that, in order for language learning to develop, opportunities for sustained output are necessary in the classroom. These opportunities afford learners the chance to use the language in a variety of ways, with a focus on the manner in which information is conveyed. In a study observing classroom immersion students, Swain (1991) looked at the frequency and length of utterances amongst students; the study found that, on average, every minute there were two student turns, but only in 14% of the turns did the student speak more than a clause in an activity led by the teacher (Swain, 1991). Swain suggests that content teaching needs to adapt to the needs of language learners. Although the study was conducted on elementary school children in a Canadian French immersion classroom, students who learned English in other countries have often learned the language for many years, including content, beginning in elementary school. If students are encouraged to use language for authentic, specific purposes, Swain says, motivation would exist to force students to produce accurate meanings, including “grammatical accuracy, coherent discourse, and appropriate register.” (p. 244). This study examining the use of English to deliver content subjects, referred to a 1985 Hong Kong study by Ho, in which two groups of students were instructed in their curriculum in either (a) their first language (L1), or (b) 60% in English (as cited in Swain, 1991). Although the study had some limitations, chiefly with the methods in which students’ language acquisition was measured, Swain (1991) pointed out that after the course of five months, there was no difference in proficiency between the two groups on language tests. Had task-based instruction been implemented, with opportunities for meaningful exchanges and production of real-life tasks, perhaps the students’ language acquisition would have been better and there may have been a noticeable difference between the two groups. Thus, how a student acquires the target language, from the school system and the teachers within it, can influence proficiency.

Various studies have demonstrated that English ability and length of time spent in the host country can affect a student’s academic performance, especially in their first year abroad. The length of time after the first year of study lessens the effect of language improvement. Not all studies, however, support these outcomes. Wright and Schartner (2013) anticipated that international students spending more time in the host country would lead to more interactions with local people and better language skills, but instead revealed a more complex relationship. Other factors, such as motivation, tolerance of ambiguity, and acculturation, play a greater role in determining language proficiency after the first year of study.

Tolerance of Ambiguity

In the field of cognitive psychology, tolerance of ambiguity has long been examined in various contexts, and it has been applied and studied in the context of language acquisition as well. In broad terms, according to Witkin, Moore, Goodenough, and Cox, field independence is a cognitive variable which is the “extent to which a person perceives part of a field as discrete from the surrounding field as a whole” (as quoted in Chapelle & Roberts, 1984, p. 28). Ambiguity tolerance is seen as an ability to accept ambiguous situations when not all elements of a situation are clear, as well as a willingness to seek out such situations (Chapelle & Roberts, 1984). Field independence and ambiguity tolerance are significant predictors of language proficiency for international second language learners (Chapelle & Roberts, 1984). In recent ambiguity tolerance studies, a higher tolerance for ambiguity was found amongst participants who studied abroad more than three months, with effects levelling after 12 months. Dewaele and Wei (2012) suggest that ambiguity tolerance among participants in a host country may be due to the abrupt immersion in a new culture and language (p. 237). However, because participants were part of an exchange program, the levelling of ambiguity tolerance may also be related to the imminent return of familiar cultures. Dewaele and Wei also found that multilingual study participants showed more tolerance for ambiguity than participants who were bilingual or monolingual.

Acculturation

Similar to tolerance of ambiguity, the study of psychological acculturation is broad and, historically, has examined acculturation as it pertains to the internal changes a newcomer experiences in a new environment. The research has now broadened to accommodate different categories of newcomers, such as immigrants, refugees, and international students. Acculturative stress is defined as the stress which people experience for various reasons while adjusting to a host culture (Cura & Isik, 2016). In addition to language proficiency, factors that affect acculturation can include social supports and networks, financial issues, stress, cultural separation and differences, self-efficacy, racism, discrimination, and gender (Berry, 1987; Berry, 1997; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2009; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Ward & Kennedy, 1995; Ye, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). A recent study on acculturative stress and social support has shown that as higher levels of support are perceived by international students, academic adjustment levels increase (Cura & Isik, 2016), whereas international students with a broader base of social support have lower levels of acculturative stress (Sullivan & Kashubek-West, 2015). When demographic variables such as English proficiency and length of time spent in host culture were controlled, “students’ acculturation status plays a significant role in sociocultural and psychological adjustment” (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006, p. 430). Adaption of certain Western values assists students in dealing with people and situations in the host country more effectively than those who have not yet integrated or assimilated. Therefore, it is better to connect with host country, not home country, friends to reduce acculturative stress, especially when there is a large cohort of home country support (Brown, 2009; Cura & Isik, 2016; Neri & Ville, 2008).

Motivation

Research into acculturation has not only broadened to account for different kinds of migrants to a host culture, but has also expanded to include social cognition. The motivation of international students studying abroad is important in predicting future acculturation (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao & Lynch, 2007; Chirkov, Safdar, de Guzman, & Playford, 2008). Motivation has been studied as an important element in each aspect of a language learner’s studies: at the initial stage, a student is motivated by internal or external factors to move abroad to study; this plays a pivotal role in the student's future academic achievement. Sociocultural factors play a role when learning a second language (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994). In the ESL classroom, students need to be motivated to see the value of language acquisition and how it will be relevant to future studies. English for academic purposes (EAP) instructors need to be aware of tasks ESL students will face in post-secondary studies, in order to make learning relevant (Dunworth, 2008). Tolerance of ambiguity, acculturation, and motivation all play a role in a student's language abilities.

Participation in EAP Programs

Participation in EAP/ESL programs is separated from prior learning experience because not all international students attend these programs, and as such, EAP programs can provide a unique learning experience. EAP programs are designed to improve students' critical thinking, improve academic writing, develop academic vocabulary, and generally improve language proficiency (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Empirical research on the effectiveness of EAP programs varies. Literature on the topic of EAP demonstrates the necessity of these programs, but there is little focus on how much EAP programs benefit participants in comparison with students who do not taken them. Participating in ESL reading and writing courses improves final examination performance and produces higher graduation rates in first-year students, compared to a control group (Kaspar, 1997). Students receiving language and tutoring support while attending classes also performed better academically (Mlynarczyk & Babbitt, 2002). Some studies in which students in specific disciplines received personalized support have reported mixed results (Hawthorne, Minas, & Singh, 2004; Wu, Griffiths, Wisker, Waller, & Illes, 2001) since the materials were too general, but another study which examined ESL architecture students participating in an ESL intervention program suggested that there are positive results with regular participation (Baik & Greig, 2009). A study that examined support classes for international students demonstrated a reduction in failure rate from 13.0% to 1.5% over six years (Beasley & Pearson, 1999). Terraschke and Wahid's (2011) Australian mixed-methods study of international students in tertiary education revealed that students who had taken EAP were better able to use study skills to manage reading and writing expectations of post-secondary studies than those who had not, and had more positive perceptions of their experiences, although participants were not asked why they had different perceptions of their achievements. Therefore, although the experience of international students' participation in EAP programs is promising, there is not a great deal of research exploring students' benefits in participating in these programs with those who have not, and the interpretation of participants' perceptions of their experiences is based on assumptions rather than collected data.

Perspectives of Needs and Academic Abilities

In addition to language proficiency tests and their validity—prior learning and factors which influence language learning—students' own perspectives and the perspectives of their instructors are necessary to examine. Students' perceptions of a learning context, their abilities, and the perceptions of their teachers can all influence the academic performance of English as a Second Language (L2) students studying in post-secondary programs. It is important to be aware of not only the factors that students have some control over, but also the perceptions of faculty and institutions, which students have much less control over, but which nevertheless influence students' performances in academic settings.

Students' Perspectives of Needs and Academic Abilities

There is research which suggests that students' perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses is linked to academic accomplishments. A study conducted by Berman and Cheng (2010) revealed that students perceived they needed help with productive skills, even after acceptance into graduate programs, and this need was directly related to academic performance. Conversely, in a study of undergraduate students, the methods of teaching reading were perceived as a barrier to motivation (Chomchaiya & Dunworth, 2008). When international students' perceptions of support services did not match their expectations, it led to a lower level of satisfaction in student experience (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, and Al-Timimi (2004) (2004) revealed social adjustment was correlated with academic achievement; therefore, students with lower levels of academic achievement have more problems adjusting to the host culture.

Language development is not seen in the literature as something which develops and changes over time, especially with the perceptions of learners regarding their ability to connect with local people and their confidence. There is little longitudinal research, even though there are studies which indicate that this process of perceptions of confidence is not linear and should be examined (Vasilopoulos). It appears that many factors contribute to barriers and success in scholastic achievement, as perceived by language learners.

Faculty/Institution Perspectives on Needs and Academic Abilities

Both institutions and their faculty need to consider their perspectives of international students' needs, as they pertain to their academic abilities. Institutions need to be aware of consequential validity and linguistic competencies that language proficiency test scores suggest when determining entrance qualifications (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006). Hyatt's (2011) study of United Kingdom higher education (HE) staff responsible for admissions into various faculties revealed that an overwhelming majority felt a standardized proficiency test like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was a helpful indicator of academic preparedness for the courses or programs represented by participants, but those who disagreed reflected that the competencies IELTS tested were not indicative of activities students would participate in. The limitations of using a language proficiency test as a single indicator of academic preparedness was noted by faculty (Trice, 2003), confirming research by Coleman, Starfield, and Hagan (2003) and Kerstjens and Nery (2000). An additional challenge is that faculty members define preparedness differently. In a study of faculty in various disciplines, preparedness was defined in linguistic terms, as well as holistically, defined as a student's self-sufficiency (Seifried, & Tjaden-Glass, 2010). Furthermore, Pantelidis' (1999) investigation uncovered that not all faculty are aware of the educational or cultural backgrounds of their students. Additionally, experienced faculty reported frustration that they were not experienced in dealing with students' language needs, and that supporting non-English speaking background learners consumed a lot of time, although they continued to provide support. Faculty may also not be aware of academic support available to international students at their own institutions or in the community (Trice, 2003).

Many factors exist which may influence a learner's perceptions about academic preparedness when studying in a post-secondary institution, including, but not limited to future goals, acculturation, ambiguity tolerance, time spent in Canada, prior learning experiences, EAP programs, and motivation. They are presented in Figure 4, with the caveat that some aspects may affect some learners more than others.

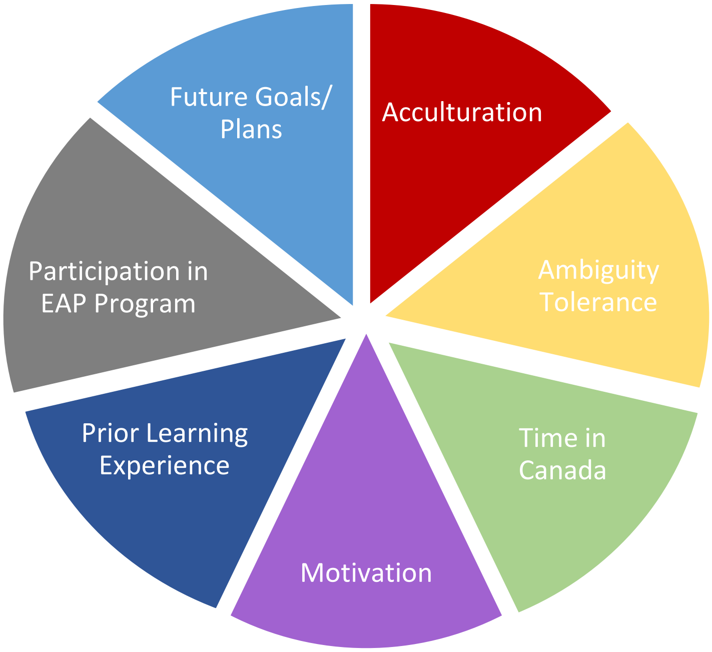

Future Goals/ Plans
Acculturation
Participation in EAP Program
Ambiguity Tolerance
Prior Learning Experience
Time in Canada
Motivation

Figure 4. Factors Which May Influence Students' Perceptions. These factors have been compiled from my literature review, used as a framework.

The literature review in Chapter 2 provided a context and a framework to situate my research; Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for my research study, which includes my research questions, the study participants, and the overview of my study design, as well as a description of my data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 — Methodology

This chapter describes my study in detail. I begin by restating my research questions, and then I describe the participants in the study. I provide an overview of my research plan, including the instruments, the methods, and the stages of my study. I describe how I piloted the survey, and how I collected data. The chapter ends with a description of my data analysis plan.

Purpose and Research Questions

The aim of this research study is to better understand the perceptions international students have about their readiness for academic performance in post-secondary studies at community colleges in southern Ontario. The research question which addresses this aim, and the secondary questions stemming from the main question, are as follows:

How do international students enrolled in various academic and professional post-secondary programs in Ontario community colleges perceive their academic preparedness for post-secondary studies?

a) What academic activities do international students feel prepared for?

b) What factors do international students perceive as having an impact on their academic success?

The Case Study

The case study is a research method used to understand the subtleties of a single setting (Santos, M. & Eisenhardt, K. M., 2011). A case study pursues answers to specific questions about phenomenon and why they might occur (Griffee, D. T., 2012); a multiple case study can observe repetitions of the same phenomenon (Santos, M. & Eisenhardt, K. M., 2011) and "how individual cases might be affected by different environments, and the specific conditions under which a finding might occur" (Chmiliar, 2010). The supposition of a case study design is that the researcher can understand a larger group in society if a smaller selection is examined (Griffee, D. T., 2012). In fact, descriptive case studies can provide a foundation to explore new knowledge (Merriam, 1998), although cases may fit into more than one category, such as descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative case studies (1998). Given that the aim of this study was to uncover how international students in Ontario perceive their academic preparedness and which factors have an impact on this preparedness, I chose to approach my study as an exploratory multiple case study.

Case Study Participants

I limited my sampling to international students studying in post-secondary programs in southern Ontario colleges. According to Chmiliar, "cases are carefully selected to develop a better understanding of the issue or to theorize about a broader context" (p.1, 2010). Participants in the proposed sampling frame were international students, categorized into four groups:

- Those who have been in Canada for three years or longer and did not have to take a language proficiency test, but are still classified as international students and pay international student fees.
- Those who have taken a language proficiency test (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL) and received a score high enough to enter their program of study without any additional college courses.
- Those who have not scored high enough on a language proficiency test and receive a conditional offer of acceptance from their program of study, provided that they enrol and complete an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, and complete the program with an EAP certificate.
- Those who have not scored high enough on a language proficiency test to gain entry into a post-secondary program and were enrolled and began an EAP program but successfully passed the Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST), a language proficiency test that is not available to students until they are registered in a North American school.

A skeletal representation of these four streams of international students and their profiles is represented in Figure 5 below. The content of these profiles is similar to Table 1.

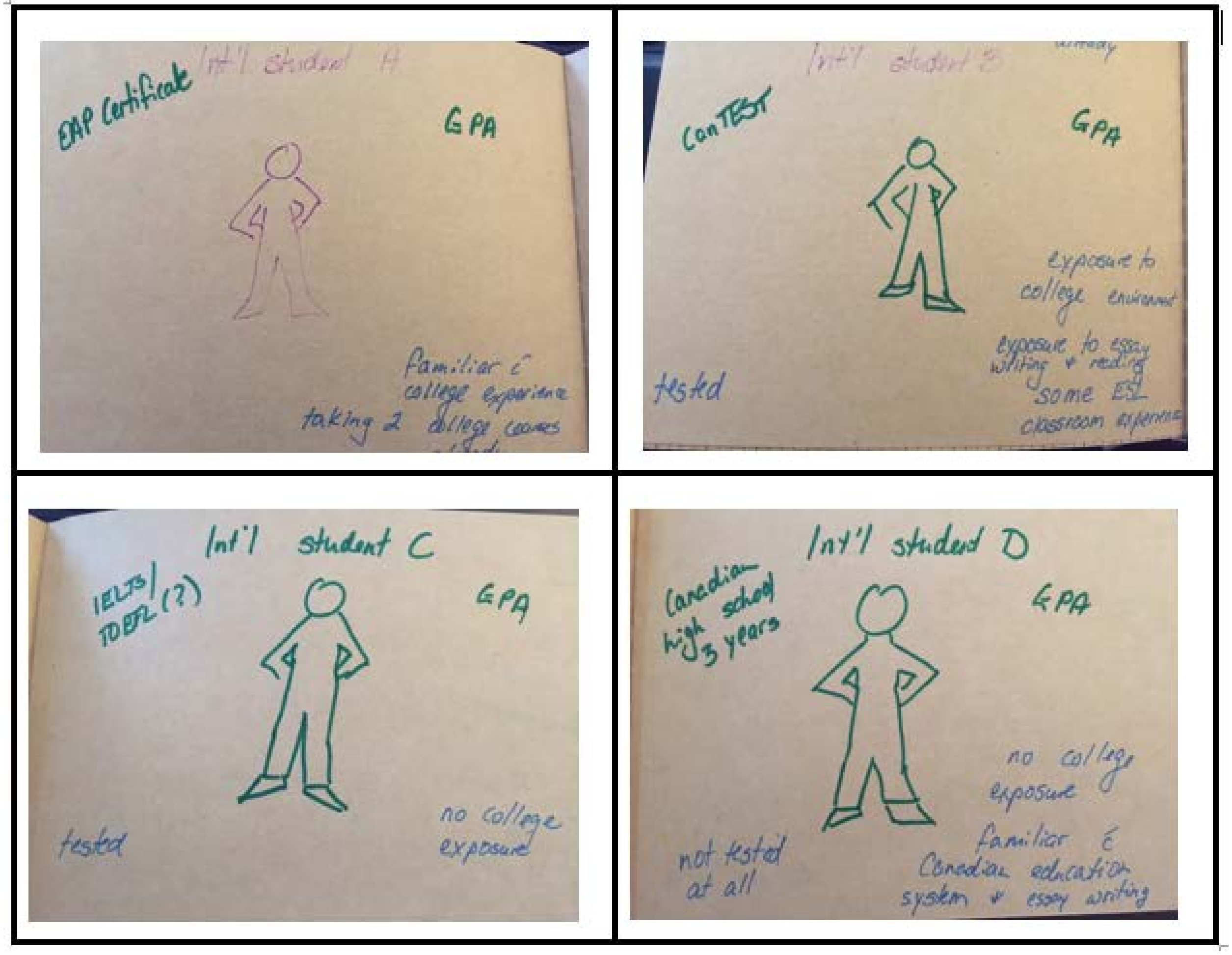

Int'l student A
EAP Certificate
GPA
Familiar c
college experience
taking 2 college courses
Int'l student B
ConTEST
GPA
exposure to
college environment
exposure to essay
writing + reading
some ESL
classroom experience
tested
Int'l student C
IELTS/
TOEFL (?)
GPA
tested
no college
exposure
Int'l student D
Canadian
high school
3 years
GPA
no college
exposure
familiar c
Canadian education
system + essay writing
not tested
at all

Figure 5. Skeletal Representation of International Student Streams. In the literature, international students are homogenized as a group. In fact, in the southern Ontario context, there are four different ways in which international students can enter their programs of study.

The expected outcome was to interview between nine to 12 international students for this study. Participants in the study came from a variety of programs, ranging from professional certificate programs, two- to three-year professional diploma programs, and post-secondary degree programs.

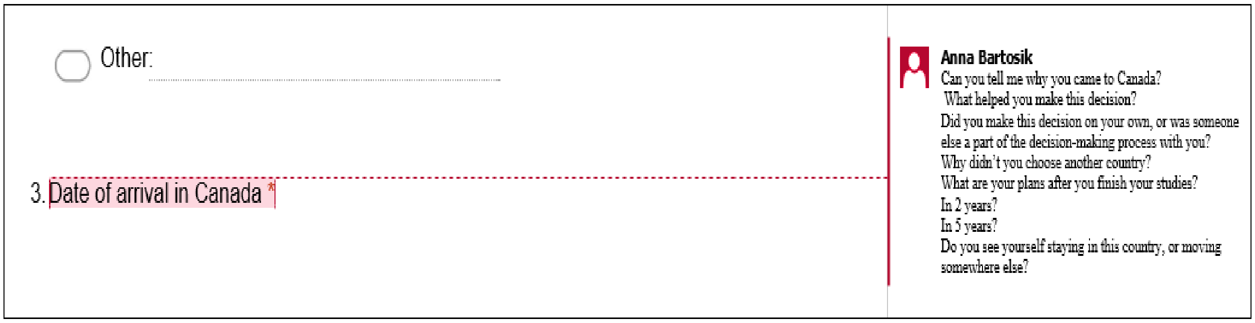
Overview of Study Design

I planned to use five types of instruments to collect data to answer my research questions:

1. Demographic information: an online questionnaire using Google Forms; it is contained in the first 10 questions of the survey that was sent out to participants. These questions were used at the beginning to ease participants into the more involved questions.
2. Survey: an online survey in Google Forms. The survey was developed to answer my research questions by modeling the survey questions on the major elements I uncovered during my literature review. The questions on the survey ranged from multiple choice questions to Likert-scale type questions to short answers. I developed the form so that participants would have to provide an answer to a question before moving to the following question. The full survey, together with the associated question prompts for the interview, can be found in Appendices A and B. The survey was developed as an entry point to encourage further discussion of themes.
3. Two pilot groups, each consisting of 40 advanced EAP students, were used to ascertain the clarity of the survey questions for second language learners. The pilot groups also offered suggestions for other questions.
4. Interview: the interview, conducted face to face or over the phone, delved deeper into the answers the participants had provided.
5. Artefact: I asked participants to bring or share a sample of work that had been marked. This would be an example of a good piece of their work, demonstrating academic accomplishment.

The research study contained two stages. Participants were asked to complete the survey in order to gather data and to help the researcher decide where to probe during the second part of data collection, the interview. The survey questions were designed to elicit answers that were easily discernible, such as language proficiency test scores, and questions were also designed as place markers in the survey that could be used to engage in a more nuanced discussion about topics such as motivation. For example, when checking the correct date of arrival in Canada, I asked participants what motivated them to come and study as international students: was it self-determined, or were the decisions made collectively with other people? I would also, at that point in the interview, ask about students' short-range plans (in the next two years) and in the next five years. The reasoning behind this was to gather information that I had come across in my literature review, which proposed that the reason for international students' motivation levels and tolerance for ambiguity plateauing after a year may be due to the temporary status of students in their host country. Because Canada provides international students an opportunity to achieve Permanent Resident (PR) status, this detail may play a mitigating factor in how students perceived their motivation and tolerance for ambiguity, since they knew they would be remaining in the country for a long time, perhaps permanently.

A visual representation of this section of my survey questions with prompts is found below in Figure 6.



○ Other:

3. Date of arrival in Canada *

Anna Bartosik
Can you tell me why you came to Canada?
What helped you make this decision?
Did you make this decision on your own, or was someone else a part of the decision-making process with you?
Why didn't you choose another country?
What are your plans after you finish your studies?
In 2 years?
In 5 years?
Do you see yourself staying in this country, or moving somewhere else?

Figure 6. Example of Survey Question and Follow-up Prompt about Motivation. In each interview, I used the answers on the completed survey questionnaires to delve deeper into participants' responses.

Piloting the Survey

Two groups of 20 students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, piloted the survey twice; the survey was altered after the first pilot with both groups to adjust questions which were perceived to be ambiguous, and additional questions were added based on the groups' suggestions. The second pilot was done to ascertain that ambiguity had been removed from the survey tool.

Data Collection

I decided to conduct a purposeful, non-random sampling because of the scale of my study, and because of my need to interview a variety of international students from different programs. In my planning, I endeavoured to reach out to a range of international students who were known to me personally because I wanted to have a representative sampling of the different types of international students who had entered their programs in a variety of ways and to learn more about individual students and delve deeper into their unique experiences. I also wanted to ensure that my purposeful sampling would include students who were studying in a variety of programs and which had different course requirements, ranging from certificate to graduate diploma programs. I contacted 40 individuals with the expectation that I would have between nine and 12 participants. I contacted them through social media private messages, and personal emails. These people were students I had known previously. In order to minimize any perceived influence, the email/message contained a copy of the informed letter of consent, which stated that individuals could choose to participate in the study or not, and were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Because I was soliciting former students, even though I was no longer in a position of power, interviews with participants took place in neutral places, such as coffee shops or over the telephone, so that participants did not perceive that the study was connected to the college where I work. I also asked participants if they could share my letter of recruitment with other students who matched the descriptors I outlined for my study.

One individual declined because he was concerned about the interview format. Five respondents replied that they had completed their studies and were not international students anymore – they had received permanent resident status. From this first outreach, six individuals agreed to participate in the study. Out of these six, two later declined because they were preparing for their final exams. Another individual decided against participating. Three participants from this first outreach were found. A secondary outreach went to acquaintances working at five colleges in southern Ontario, asking if they could share my letter with individuals they knew personally. They agreed to share my recruitment letter – I received five responses from this method. A participant I did not have on my list because I did not have his contact information reached out to me to talk about his successes – he fit my criteria and he became a participant as well. In summary, I interviewed four participants who were known to me, and five whom I met for the first time during the interviews.

Interviews were semi-structured, lasting approximately 45 to 75 minutes. Standard personal data such as age, sex, nationality, arrival in Canada, program of study, and language proficiency scores were requested prior to the interview via the Google Form. Any personal identifying data have been omitted in this paper, such as the name of the institutions the students were studying at, and pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant. All the interviews were recorded either on my phone using the memo feature or using VoiceRecord, an iPad application. The recordings were then compiled and converted to .mp3 format, and I stored them as podcasts in the application Downcast. The application is accessible to me across my personal devices, which are all password protected. Recordings would be deleted permanently if participants objected to the recording, even after signing the consent letter. This was clearly outlined in the letter to participants, in Appendix D. None of the participants made this request. With the first participant, I had a notebook and a pen to take notes during the interview, but I abandoned this process early during the interview and did not take notes in future interviews because it was interfering with making visual and personal connections with the study participant. To compensate for the lack of interview notes, I wrote a summary of each interview immediately afterwards in a Word document.

There was a set of standard questions on the survey, beginning with simple and easy questions to answer, and then questions became more detailed, delving into more personal issues. Because participants had voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, and because they knew there would be a follow-up interview about their answers, there were no concerns about a lack of optimizing on the survey questions, because participants were motivated to answer the questions (Krosnick, 1999). In fact, four of the participants explicitly stated at the beginning of the interview that they answered my study request precisely because the topic I was researching was of great interest to them. Concerns about satisficing by participants on the survey were allayed when the interviews took place. Three participants stated that they had specifically waited until the face-to-face or telephone interview to share information about the topic of certain questions because they wanted to tell their stories. This will also be addressed in the findings chapter.

In each interview I followed a similar technique, and probed with follow-up questions intended to delve into an interesting divergence from the initial question. In a semi structured interview, the questions are predetermined but open, and follow up questions can be improvised, based on the answers provided by participants (Given, 2008). In a semi structured interview, the topics for the questions are pre-selected, but the interviewer has no control over the responses to those questions (2008). Newer approaches to interviews divulges that everyone comes to meaning from their own experiences and interprets perceived ambiguous questions differently because many questions are "inherently ambiguous" and that they are "negotiated in everyday conversation through back-and-forth exchanges between questioners and answerers" (Krosnick, 1999, p. 540). This probing/willingness to go beyond the original scope was one of a variety of strategies used to achieve richer data. Participants were also asked at the close of the interview, when there were no more questions, if they wanted to add anything in addition to what they had already said or indicated on the survey. This was done to encourage a discussion of any more sensitive topics that did not emerge during the course of the interview.

As with most research, what took place diverged from what I had planned. Initially, participants were asked to bring to the interview some examples of their coursework, such as essays or written tests, as well as any rubrics which were used to assess the completed course work. This work was to be examined and assessed by the researcher through the lens of an English teacher, to establish whether the participants' perceptions of academic preparedness were reasonable in relation to completed coursework samples. Unfortunately, due to the nature of colleges' Learning Management Systems (LMS), and classroom teachers' policies, most coursework is either submitted electronically or instructors reserve the right to keep assignments on file. The former was a challenge for my data collection because faculty use an assignment box in a particular LMS. When faculty set up assignments and restrictions in this LMS, student work, with rubrics and grades, are deleted from the student's view at the end of a semester unless the default settings are changed by the instructor to allow students to keep their assignments in an e-portfolio. In courses such as computer animation, all work is submitted electronically. To access this information, an application to the Research Ethics Board of every school would have to have been submitted in order to attain access to student work, which is protected by academic privacy procedures. An additional challenge was course work that was physically submitted to faculty: many students did not receive their completed course work because faculty keep assignments. This is done when the same assignment is assigned each semester, in order to lessen cases of plagiarism.

Consequently, participants and I discussed courses in depth and I questioned participants about the courses they were taking, the types of assignments they had, and I asked them why some courses were easier for them than others. I asked questions about evaluation methods and how prepared they felt about the types of assignments they were completing for courses, based on their language abilities. I based the types of evaluations on Dunworth's (2008) empirical study of the range of assignments which students in post-secondary studies are likely to face in different disciplines. The information participants revealed about assignments, and how prepared they were for these types of assignments, as well as how their language abilities helped or hindered their evaluations, will be discussed in the findings section.

Once interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed in an Excel spreadsheet and the transcriptions were reviewed to identify recurring themes and points of interest. I initially used my literature review as a conceptual framework for identifying themes, but, as topics not covered by my literature review emerged, I added more themes and returned to earlier interviews to see whether those themes had been addressed by participants or not.

Data Analysis

My initial plan was to take notes during interviews, but I abandoned this strategy during my first interview when I noticed the connection I had with the participant was weakening. To compensate for lost notes, I kept an interview reflection diary that I completed immediately after each interview. In my reflection diary, I noted if participants looked uncomfortable, when they paused, which questions made them uncomfortable, and which questions caused participants to raise topics unrelated to my identified themes, so that I could pay attention to the recordings when I began transcribing. I made note of our small talk at the start of the interview, any physical behaviours that would inform my transcription, such as a lack of eye contact, or laughter. I also noted my own impressions of the interview and what surprised me or what I found insightful. I used these notes for two purposes: I read my notes before transcribing each interview to remind me of the "feel" of the interview, and I used these notes to compose the portraits of each participant, which appear in the findings section. They present a personalized introduction to each participant before the survey and participants' answers are analyzed.

When I began my analysis, my plan was to use the literature review as a framework and use a deductive method for my research. After collecting data from the interviews, I opened a spreadsheet and created a column for each factor, and a row for every participant. According to Chmiliar, "each case in the research is treated as a single case. All of the data in each single bounded case are carefully examined, and the data organized into a comprehensive description that is a unique, holistic entity" (2010). In the questionnaire, I had highlighted certain questions at which to probe more deeply during the interview; if a participant did not answer a particular question that was connected to a probing question connected to the literature, I would refer back to the question and confirm that this topic was not a factor which affected the participant.

I annotated the Google Form, after converting it to a Word Document, with probing questions connected to my literature review framework and research questions. I used the review feature in Word to add these questions. An example of this is in Figure 6, and the complete annotated interview form is found in Appendix C.

As I transcribed data into columns connected to the conceptual framework, I began to enter the inductive method of my research. As I filled in each column from each interview, adding to the conceptual framework factors, I used colour coding for certain portions whenever a participant said something insightful or linked factors, such as motivation and tolerance of ambiguity. I colour coded these links participants were making and make notes within columns to identify the connections participants were making, including my observations. I also created columns for newly unearthed themes, raised by participants. For example, during my third interview, the topic of identity was raised, and so I returned to my transcriptions to see if there were other instances of this, and I made a point of leading the conversation to the topic of identity in all subsequent interviews. During another interview, the topic of mental health and depression was raised; I made a note to look for openings to discuss this topic with participants. This inductive method allowed for an emergent analysis of my data to see how it fit with the deductive top down approach I had used to begin this study. This allowed me to synthesize my data and categorize those themes into factors which affect international students at a personal level, what factors affect participants which are connected to the institution they are studying in, and finally at a global level: factors which affect international students because of the conditions which exist and which affect students in Canada and Ontario.

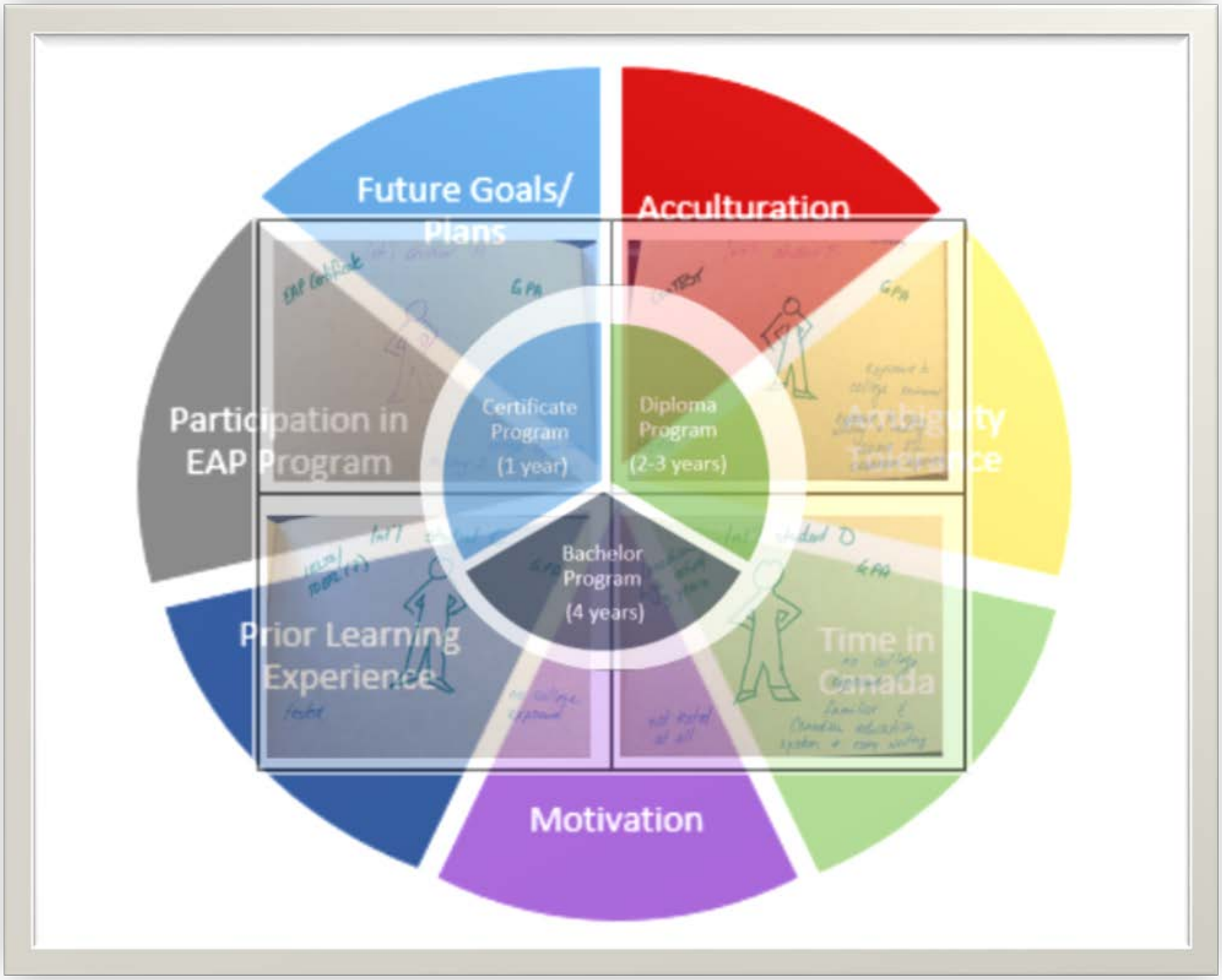

Future Goals/ Plans
Acculturation
Ambiguity Tolerance
Time in Canada
Motivation
Prior Learning Experience
Participation in EAP Program
Certificate Program (1 year)
Diploma Program (2-3 years)
Bachelor Program (4 years)
EAP Certificate
GPA
GPA
GPA

Figure 7. Visualizing Emerging Themes for Participants' Developing Profiles in Data Analysis

As I collected and analyzed data, a portrait of each international student interviewed emerged, to which I added content and context gathered from the literature and other documentary sources. The initial, deductive portion of my research, which was shaped by the seven major themes of my literature review, provided an initial structure for the start of my data analysis. The next stage of my research involved a bottom-up approach as the interviews revealed topics beyond the scope of what I had initially outlined as a conceptual framework. Figure 7 depicts the analysis like a set of game board spinners. Each spin reveals a different combination of participant, area of study, and factors which affect perceptions of academic success.

Chapter 3 outlined my methodology, which included selection of participants, the study design, my process, and data analysis plan. Chapter 4 contains my findings.

Chapter 4 — Findings

In this Chapter, I first present a summary of data collected from the surveys which participants completed. I then introduce each participant in a portrait, providing information which may not be apparent elsewhere in the data analysis and discussion. This is done to contextualize the participants within the study and provide the reader with an introduction to each participant. Chapter 4 then moves to a synthesis of factors affecting international students: first and most importantly, on a personal level; then an institutional level; and finally, at a global level.

Factors Impacting International Students' Academic Success

The information found in Table 2 is data which can now be combined with my initial visualization of emerging themes, and paints a more detailed picture of the study participants. The participants' names in Table 2 are colour coded and this is repeated consistently throughout my findings.

Table 2. Initial Survey Data of Participants

Name	**Gender**	**Time in Canada**	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Spoken Languages**	**Level of Education**	**Length of Time Studying English**	**Language Tests Taken**	**Program of Study**	**Studied in EAP**
Ben	Male	10 months	24 - 29	Chinese	Mandarin, English	College, with a diploma and/or degree	more than 5 years	Yes	Computer Animation Certificate Program	Yes
Wayson	Male	Almost 2 years	24 - 29	Chinese	Mandarin/ English	University degree	more than 5 years	Yes	Computer Animation Certificate Program	Yes
Rose	Female	2.5 years	24 - 29	Chinese	Mandarin, Shanghai Dialect, English, Japanese	University degree	more than 5 years	Yes	Early Childhood Education Diploma Program	Yes
Sana	Female	6 years	35 - 39	Yemeni	Arabic and English	University degree	more than 5 years	No	Pain Management Certificate Program	Yes

Name	**Gender**	**Time in Canada**	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Spoken Languages**	**Level of Education**	**Length of Time Studying English**	**Language Tests Taken**	**Program of Study**	**Studied in EAP**
Vincent	Male	7 years	24 - 29	South Korea	Korean, Japanese, and English	University degree	more than 5 years	Yes	Advertising and Marketing Communication Diploma Program	Yes
Mandy	Female	Almost 4 years	24 - 29	China	Mandarin, English	University degree	More than 5 years	Yes	Business Accounting	No
Clare	Female	5 years	24 - 29	China	Mandarin, English	University degree	More than 5 years	Yes	Business Administration	Yes
Yani	Female	6 years	24 - 29	South Korea	Mandarin, English	University degree	More than 5 years	Yes	International Business Management	Yes
Lief	Female	5 years	24 - 29	Venezuela	Spanish, English	University degree	More than 5 years	Yes	Classical Animation Program	Yes

Participants had studied or were studying at four post-secondary institutions in southern Ontario. All but one of the participants in the study had begun or completed an ESL/EAP program; three of the four streams of international students that I had outlined for my study were represented. This straightforward table provides a summary of the initial demographic data from the survey, but it does not reveal personal decisions participants made, which can have an impact on the interpretation of the data. On the surface, eight students attended an EAP program, but initially, two students began their programs without attending an EAP program. Vincent had arrived in Canada and entered his marketing and communication program without taking any EAP program. He had begun his program and withdrew within the first semester because he felt that he did not have the English skills necessary to succeed in a diploma program. Vincent entered the EAP program at the advanced level and completed the EAP program before re-entering his post-secondary program of choice. Three other participants graduated from an EAP program, and

Ben withdrew from the program to enter computer animation after having passed the IELTS test. He had been in the pre-intermediate level when he withdrew from the program. Rose passed the CanTEST successfully but received the results too late to begin her program, so she continued and completed the EAP program.

Three of the participants knew at least two languages in addition to English. Most of the participants had completed a university education, with the remainder possessing a college diploma. All participants except Sana had taken language proficiency tests. Of those participants, all of them had taken the IELTS, three had taken the CanTEST, and one had taken the TOEFL iBT. Vincent had arrived in Canada almost seven years ago, whereas Ben had been in Canada approximately ten months at the time of the interview. All of them had studied English for more than five years prior to their arrival in Canada. Rose and Yani mentioned that they had begun with a tutor at the age of five. Five of the participants were from China, two were from Korea, one was from Yemen, and one from Venezuela. Two of the students were in a one-year certificate computer animation program; another student was in a two-year diploma for early childhood education; the remainder of the participants were in degree programs.

I have edited my post-interview reflections as mini portraits of individuals to provide them with individual voices. I have prefaced each mini narrative with a graphic that is reminiscent of an individual straw being pulled out of a pack of identical straws. For a moment, this individual can share a piece of their story before being pushed back into the homogenous grouping. It is an opportunity to personalize and become intimate with the participants before we move into a more summary analysis.

Participant Portraits

Open to All Ideas, Open to Discovery – An Interview with Wayson

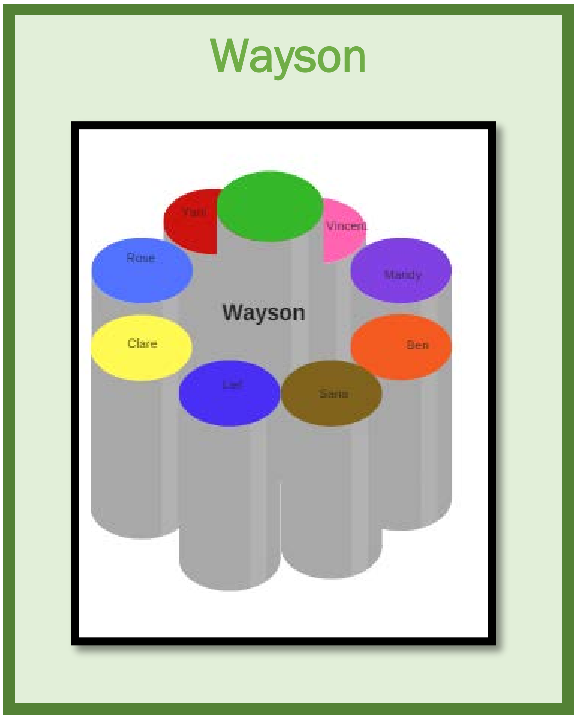


Figure 8. A Straw Figure of Wayson

A computer animation student, Wayson attributed his academic success to being connected with individuals and learning more social English. He did not feel that studying for a language proficiency test had helped his English at all, he said, laughing. The length of time Wayson spent in Canada and his participation in social events, which were directly connected to his homestay, were the biggest influences to his academic readiness, he said. Wayson's homestay family was very religious, and he appreciated that. He stated in the interview that he is very curious as an individual, so, even though Buddhism had played a dominant role in his past, he did not find the host family's bible reading as a form of indoctrination; he found it as a method to learn English and to connect with his new culture. He sought out a bible study group on his own and met them weekly, until he became too busy with course work. He said the reason for the study group was his natural curiosity about everything and the desire to be part of a group. Wayson continued to address the notion of identity and belonging to the host culture throughout the interview. He found that instructors outside of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program were not interested in his ability to contribute culturally to his host environment, nor were they curious to learn more about his culture. His final comments in the interview were a direct comment to international centres. He wished they would play a more active part in engaging students on campus, and make connections possible with non-international students, so that all members of the campus could experience and learn more about the international students studying with them in classes.

"My Perfectionism is Crushing me" – An Interview with Ben

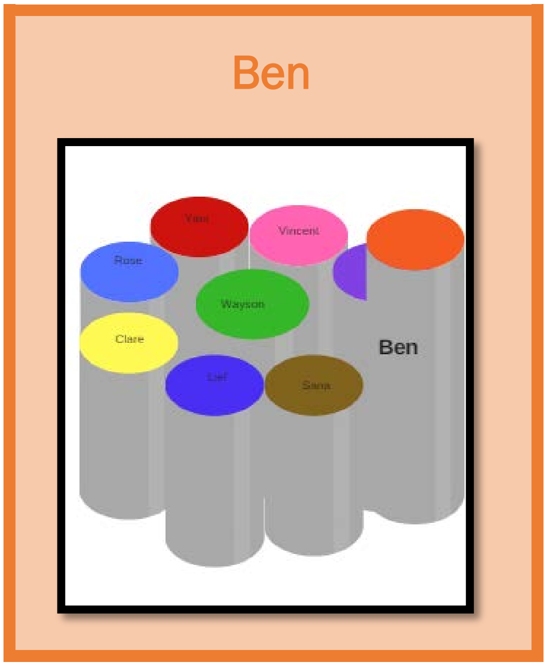


Figure 9. A Straw Figure of Ben

Ben's was the most difficult interview, for both parties. It was pregnant with long pauses, and I fielded many questions from Ben to clarify the meaning of the questions in the survey. Ironically, he had the best sentence structure and vocabulary of all participants. He had been in Canada the shortest amount of time – less than one year, and had only completed the second lowest level of an ESL program before passing the IELTS test. Ben became emotional whenever questions became personal – he said that his perfectionism was crushing him in school. He attributed part of his academic success to studying for the listening portion of the IELTS test, but he did not believe that the speaking portion of the test prepared him at all for regular communications with individuals. He attributed his improvement in speaking to his time in the ESL program. I felt it was interesting that he responded very quickly to participate in the study but didn't talk much – perhaps his brief sojourn in the ESL program and his recent arrival in Canada had some influence on his interview. At times, he tried to redirect attention away from himself and asked questions about my research and what benefit I thought it might bring the international student body. When he did answer questions, he thought for long periods of time, looked as if he wanted to say more, and then abruptly ended his answers.

"The Way You Listen to Us is not the Same as Listening to Local Students" – An Interview with Rose

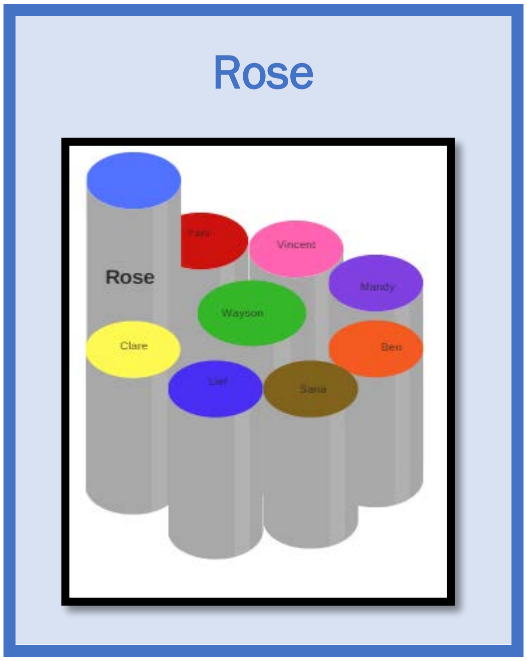


Figure 10. A Straw Figure of Rose

Rose's experiences as an international student had been positive, on the whole. Her ability to reflect and situate herself in her previous state of mind as a newcomer to Canada, as a new student in the EAP program, and as a student in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program provided a rich amount of data. She was able to laugh at her mistakes and I was most struck by her telling me about how four- and five-year-olds have been teaching her the necessary language skills she needs to play with them. She pointed out her language test scores laughingly and then said: “But I don’t even know the word for ‘giraffe’ when I am telling a story to children.” Rose was so happy to be able to start teaching young children with her dual perspective of an Asian education and her Canadian studies. She thought the learning experiences that children have in Canada should be experienced by children back home, and this had inspired her so much that she is planning an exchange student camp for pre-schoolers.

Rose’s enthusiasm about our interview was prevalent throughout the full 90 minutes. She ended the interview by telling me this was an opportunity for catharsis; she had wanted to tell her story and felt comfortable telling me. She thought it was something between an acknowledgement of her feelings and a confession. During the interview, I felt I had made a good choice as a researcher to reach out to individuals I knew because the level of intimacy between us was greater – quantifiable data can predict trends and show correlation and causality, but large-scale research studies often express that getting more qualifiable data would make the study stronger. Rose’s interview included the second mention of identity; Wayson was the first to mention his loss of self as he was becoming more proficient in English. After this interview, I returned to Wayson’s and Ben’s interview transcripts to look for any mention of this emerging theme, and was cognisant of it in the following interviews.

Rose also talked about the choice of content in her EAP classes and how it directly helped her with her post-secondary studies. As an early childhood educator, Rose has to be aware of differently-abled children, and the TED Talk she watched featuring Temple Grandin in her notetaking exercises helped her in her ECE classes. Rose was able to talk about different perspectives of students at the college, and clearly understood each point of view. She answered my questions with these perspectives in mind, prefacing many answers by summarizing a Canadian point of view before talking about her experiences through that lens.

Can You Ride the Conversation Wave before it Washes Over You? – An Interview with Clare

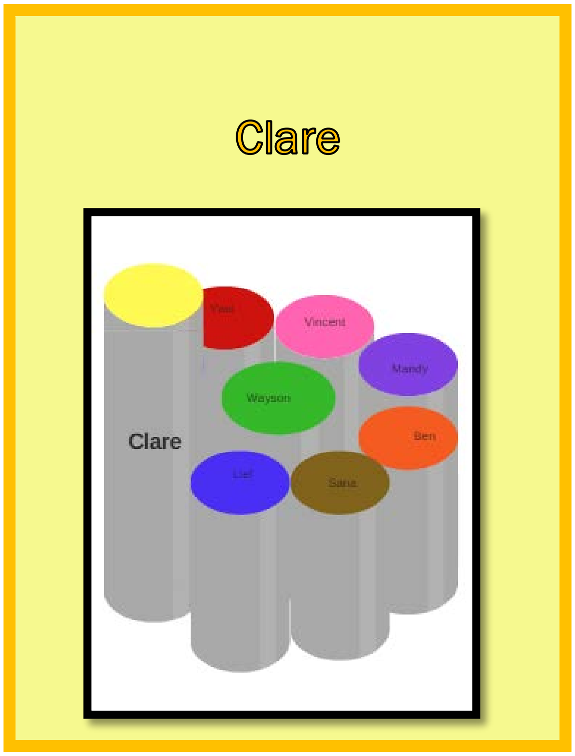


Figure 11. A Straw Figure of Clare

Clare's time in Canada had been almost five years at the time of the interview. Her studies in Canada were supposed to appease her parents, because they wanted Clare to complete a master's degree, and she did not want to get a post-graduate degree, so becoming an international student was a way to reach a compromise with her parents. Her brother had been an international student in the United States, and he did not enjoy his experience at all, she said. Clare felt that the quality of education she was receiving in Canada was much better than what she would have received in other English-speaking countries.

She felt that her hometown was in an economically disadvantaged part of China, so her English studies were not very good, even though she had been learning English since she was a little child. Food was a topic that she raised a few times: she thought that food is just a convenience in Canada, but food back home is a necessary element of culture, and this was something that she accepted in Canada, but missed from back home. Clare believed she was a better student because she had to study for a language proficiency test; it forced her to work on her weaknesses, she said. She compared speaking English in the classroom to trying to play “double Dutch”, the skipping game where two ropes are spun simultaneously. She laughed when she mentioned that sometimes, you hear a conversation about coffee, and you are preparing a statement in your head to join the conversation, but by the time you are ready to say something about coffee, the conversation has moved to hockey, and now you really can’t say anything if you don’t know the game.

Knowing English and Content-Specific English is not the Same – An Interview with Mandy

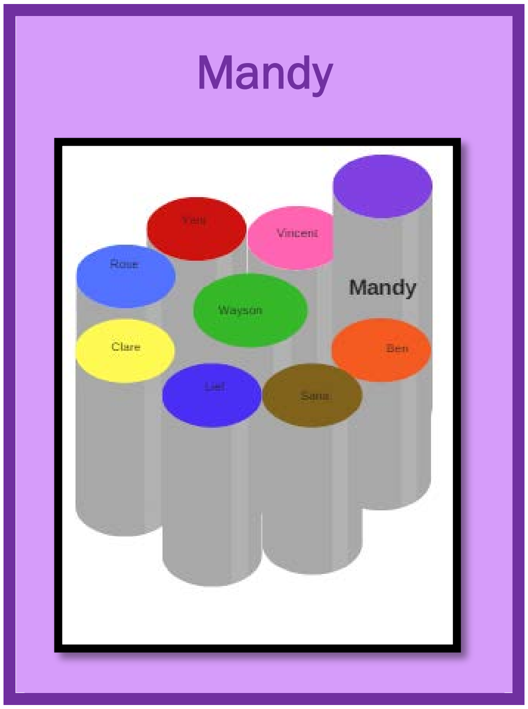


Figure 12. A Straw Figure of Mandy

Mandy’s choice to study in Canada was easy, she said, because her friend had gone through the process, so Mandy felt comfortable about what to expect when she moved to Canada. Mandy had made bi-weekly appointments with people who did not speak Mandarin so that she could focus on conversation before she took a language proficiency test. She said her English was “lucky” because no one in her program spoke Mandarin. She said she was enjoying the process of getting to know students from China now in a Canadian context, because she hadn’t had the chance previously. She noted that faculty were an important part of her experience; they gave her a lot of confidence and she was touched by the kindness of instructors here in Canada. They kept in touch with her after she was no longer in their classes, and that built her confidence a lot. She had felt that because she was not in a master’s degree program that the content of her program would be easy, but she was challenged by the content-specific vocabulary she needed to know, and by elements of Canadian law which other students knew, but which she had to discover on her own. Because Mandy went directly into her program and did not spend any time with people from her home culture, she used the international centre as a place to get to know other international students to see what the “real” international student experience was, because she had not encountered many stresses or problems with adjusting. She enjoyed getting to know these students and helping them adjust.

“I Sacrificed a Lot, Actually, to Get Good Grades “ – An Interview with Vincent

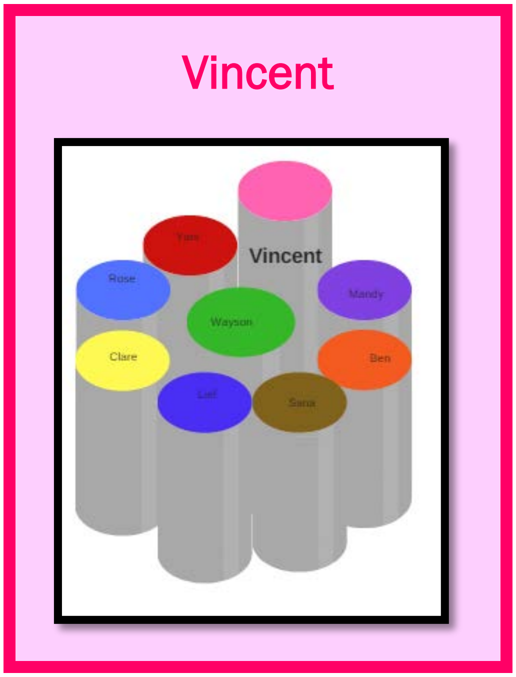


Figure 13. A Straw Figure of Vincent

I found Vincent’s story interesting because he had gained access to his program of choice immediately upon arrival in Canada, but then removed himself from the program and enrolled in an EAP program, which added an additional eight months to his studies. He credited his success in his program to his work in EAP, and noted especially one faculty member who really encouraged him. He said that this teacher, and one other teacher in his post-secondary program, were a strong motivating force and he reflects on his experiences with those teachers often. He had a very deliberate strategy, he said, which was to maintain distance between himself and other people from his native background while he was on campus, and it became automatic. As Vincent spoke with me, I noted the number of fillers he used, and they were the fillers that native speakers of English use. He felt this strategy of speaking to people not of his home country helped his English proficiency but did not make him many friends in his native group. He found the narrow focus of his home culture group stilting, saying that they were doing themselves a disservice by not communicating with others. As an international student, he felt he has made so many sacrifices to maintain keeping abreast with local students. His success has come at a price to his personal life, he said. He is looking forward to the day when he can relax a bit and become more social.

When She Found Out I was an International Student - An Interview with Sana

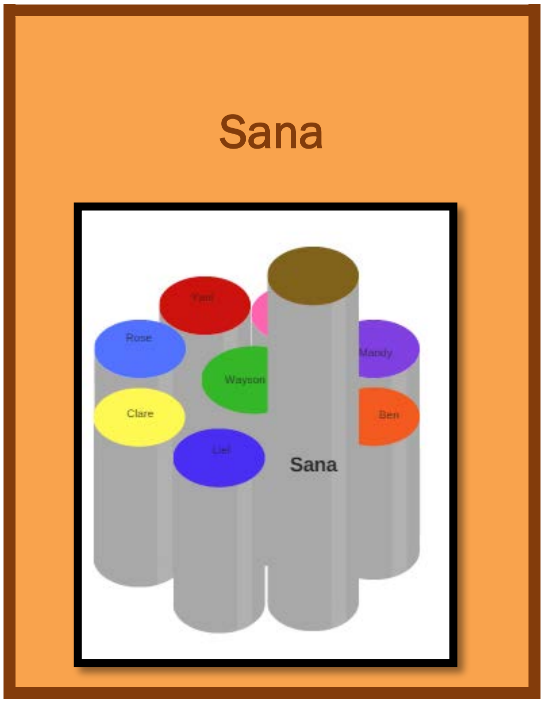


Figure 14. A Straw Figure of Sana

Sana was the oldest person participating in this study; she was the only one with a family and had additional responsibilities. Sana’s willingness to participate in this research study was due to the fact that the topic excited her, she said, and she wanted to share her story. She was clear that she owed her success to the EAP program she had attended. She was the only participant who was completing her post-secondary studies online. Perhaps because of this, she intimated that the reading and the writing she learned in an academic setting prepared her completely for her tertiary studies. However, she faced additional challenges, like ambiguity in instructions which were not always easy to resolve, since she could not speak face to face with her teachers. Sana said it was easier to prepare for lessons online, because she could plan what to write in discussion boards, but as soon as one of her instructors found out she was an international student, she felt she was treated differently. She intercepted this treatment because of her knowledge of pragmatics and semantics, learned in her EAP class.

Living Life for Herself, and not for Others – An Interview with Yani

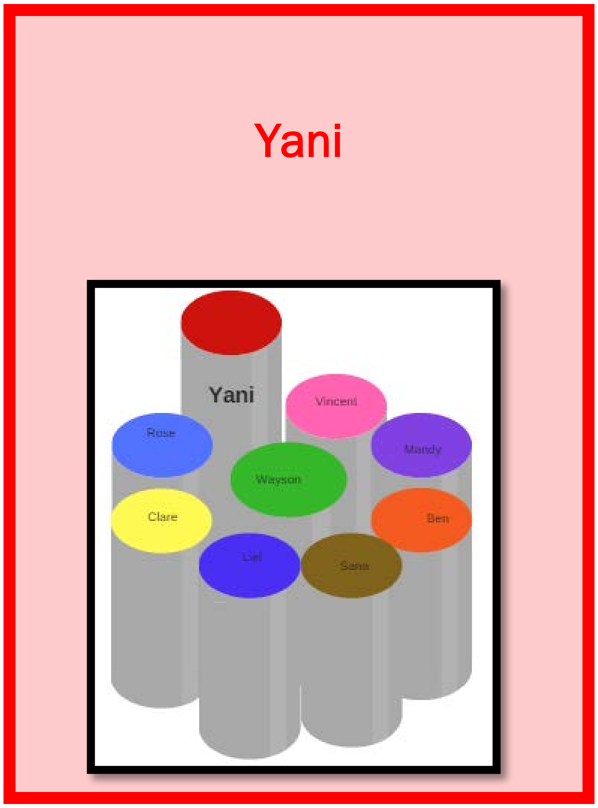


Figure 15. A Straw Figure of Sana

Yani, like Vincent, also stayed away from people in her own language group. Unlike Vincent, she did not regret spending little time with people from her native country. Her attitude throughout the interview was consistent: she came to study English and live in this context; she would be wasting time if she did not take advantage of the school system here, she said.

It was interesting to learn that her father owns a language school in her home country but she felt her chance to really learn English was to do it in an immersion environment. She had come to Canada initially as a visitor to see if she wanted to study here. Of all the participants, Yani was the most vocal about getting PR status in Canada – it was her sole purpose for everything. The international centre played a major role in her feelings of belonging while studying in Canada. She joked that she wore out her welcome at the international centre because she had visited so often. She used the international centre for help in accessing and understanding things pertaining to “Canadian culture” – things like getting her Permanent Resident status and such. She was concerned about finding a meaningful job after her studies, but determined to plan her future in Canada on her own, without influence from family.

How do You Make Someone Laugh? – An Interview with Lief

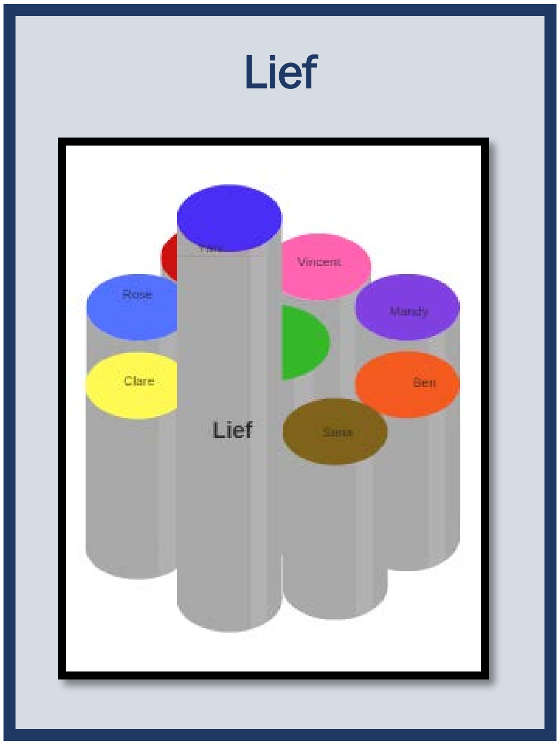


Figure 16. A Straw Figure of Lief

Lief felt very confident at the start of her four-year bachelor of animation program, but focussed on how that perception changed and she lost confidence as she continued her studies. Lief was paralyzed by developing content for a Canadian audience. She didn’t know what made Canadians laugh, she said, and asked me for TV show suggestions which contained Canadian humour. She was clear that she did not enjoy communicating with local students, she said, and it caused her a lot of concern, but she remained most comfortable with students in her native language group. Although I had noticed a large improvement in the way she expressed herself to me since I had first met her, she did not feel that her language abilities in English were good enough to share with local students. Her desire to stay in Canada after graduation was strong, but she missed the food and the camaraderie back home.

Personal Factors Impacting International Students

Although the literature review in Chapter 2 outlined factors which impact and affect international students' academic success, there were limits to a top-down data analysis approach of my interviews. In multiple case analysis, as data are examined, "patterns are noted and clarified, commonalities in essential elements or components identified, instances of variables counted, clusters developed and sorted along some dimension, and correlations between variables and intervening variables noted" (Chmiliar, 2010). As I sorted through the data which I had collected and transcribed, I compared cases and noted the connections among them. I identified commonalities and grouped the data in three categories, which I present below. The first category focuses on the micro, or the personal, level. Moving from the personal, a mid-level lens is applied to the institution, and finally a wide-angle lens is used to examine global factors impacting international students. I begin with the most granular level, which is pictured in Figure 17 below.

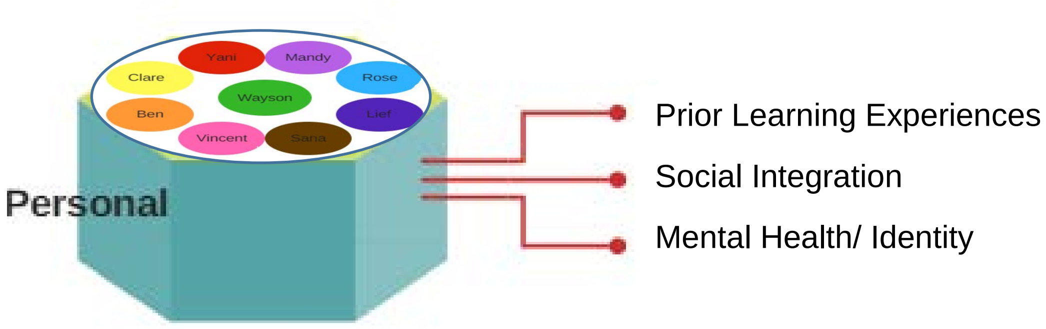


Figure 17. Cross-Sectional Analysis of Participants' Perceptions. These are personal factors which impact international students' academic success.

Prior Learning Experiences

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Programs

The evidence from my research strongly suggests that international students feel prepared for their studies at the beginning of their programs, but this feeling of readiness changes over the course of their studies and, as they look back, students admit that they were not prepared for all aspects of their studies. Various factors impacted students' perceptions of academic success. Rose, for example, said she felt "very" confident at the start of her program.

> I felt really comfortable doing presentations in EAP, but I lose all my confidence in front of local students. Also, when I talk with locals, it was hard to like, make them understand me. [laughter, touches interviewer's arm]

Eight of the nine participants had studied in an EAP program before entering their course of study. Of the eight who had studied in an EAP program, six found that the program had been beneficial to them at an academic level and that it had prepared them for certain aspects of their programs of study, as they reflected back. Sana, who was studying in her post-secondary program online, said:

> Writing essays was a good preparation- at an academic level - it was really helpful for the regular program in the college…like using citations and essay formatting was really good. And presentations: it's a good preparation for regular program.

At the beginning of their programs, all who had studied in EAP felt ready to read course-related readings. They also mentioned that EAP prepared them for things such as: technological demands of North American education, such as using a learning management system; essay writing; formatting academic essays; conducting library research; preparing presentations, and participating in discussions. Almost all participants felt ready to communicate with faculty, with the exception of one, who did not feel that her professor addressed her concerns. Many of these results are supported by empirical research on the usefulness of EAP programs, which demonstrate that EAP provides language learners with the ability to use study skills effectively in reading and writing tasks in post-secondary studies, (Terreschke & Wahid, 2011), produces higher graduation rates (Kaspar, 1997), and demonstrates a reduction in failure rates (Beasley & Pearson, 1999). In studies examining students' perceptions of EAP programs, students reported having benefited from pathway programs and that it was a good transition for them for studies in tertiary institutions (Dooey, 2010). It provided them with the opportunity to develop the necessary academic skills that students who do not take EAP would have to learn on their own.

However, not every participant studying in post-secondary programs requires the same preparation. What worked for the students in programs of more than two years was not important or necessary for the students studying for shorter periods of time. For example, Wayson was completing his certificate program in computer animation. He had completed a post-secondary education in China, and studied in a college EAP program for eight months, the average for the participants in this study. His discussion of his EAP studies and how they influenced his academic readiness brought light to the fact that, as Dunworth (2008) states, not every EAP program prepares students for success.

> The résumé writing – it was not useful to learn that. I think…um...it would be more interesting to do, like, a visual résumé…that is more useful because of computer skills learned.

His positive experiences in the EAP program were mostly related to socialization, and he found that his teachers' expectations prepared him for his program. His lectures in his computer animation program, he said, are always recorded, so there has never been a need to take notes, or complete academic readings or participate in group discussions. In general, his interaction in his program has been with his own work – students do not work in groups, faculty are only contacted to dispute grades, lectures are recorded, so he watches them until his concerns are addressed or questions are answered, and the overwhelming amount of work in his assignments does not allow him to do much beyond his coursework. The experiences of Wayson and Ben, who were both in the same program, support the results of Dunworth's empirical study: EAP programs do not meet the needs of all students.

Table 3. Academic Activities for which Students Feel Prepared

	Wayson Certificate program 1 year	Ben Certificate program 1 year	Rose Diploma program 2 years	Sana Diploma program 2 years, online	Vincent Diploma program 2 years	Mandy Diploma program 2 years	Clare Degree program 3 years	Yani Degree program 3 years	Lief Degree Program 3 years
Participating in group discussions	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Classroom presentations	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Conducting academic research	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A
Taking notes during class	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	X	✓	✓	N/A
Conducting observations	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	X
Writing summaries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A
Reading course-related readings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	N/A
Writing academic essays	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	N/A
Case studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Technological tasks	X	X	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Talking to classmates	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communicating with faculty	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Discussing grades with faculty	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

(✓) – This symbol indicates which academic tasks participants felt prepared for in their post-secondary studies.
(X) – indicates the activities which participants do not feel prepared for
(N/A) – indicates activities which participants do not feel are necessary for their program of study
These tasks are a combination of tasks which had been on the survey, and the tasks which participants mentioned which were not included in the survey, but participants raised during the course of the interviews.

Exam Preparation - Almost all the participants had taken a language proficiency test prior to their studies, with the exception of Sana and Yani. Out of the seven who had taken an IELTS test prior to studying in Canada, only the student who did not attend an EAP program thought that studying for a language proficiency test prepared her for her studies, because, Mandy said, it forced her to focus on her weakness, which was listening. Otherwise, with the benefit of hindsight, all of the participants who had taken IELTS, and later, the CanTEST, to enter their programs, did not find that studying for these tests prepared them for the reality of post-secondary studies. This is supported by research; in a study of Chinese international students in Australia, IELTS scores were not observed to be a noteworthy indicator of academic success among the Technical and Further Education (TAPE) stream of students, and the qualitative data confirm to some degree the statistical data, especially in connection to the reading, and to a lesser degree, the writing portions of the IELTS test, and the skills which they address (Kerstejens & Nery, 2000).

Social Integration

Tolerance of Ambiguity - International students are faced with many situations that are unfamiliar to them. Culture, teaching styles, and previous learning experience can influence comprehension and reactions to unfamiliar and complex classroom situations. A student’s response to these situations indicates their level of tolerance of ambiguity. Out of nine participants, seven recalled situations where they experienced such situations, and of those seven participants, six were able to see these situations as challenges to overcome. Mandy indicated that she had a professor who spoke very quickly, and at first, she said she “hated him, really.” But as the class progressed, she and her fellow language learners in the classroom discussed how their listening skills were improving just by trying to listen harder and understand the content of their lectures. Rose was faced with a placement in an early learning centre, where she realized that her level of vocabulary and previous knowledge of teaching children were completely different from what her situation dictated. She used her young learners, some as young as three, to teach her new vocabulary and she developed her learning even more by endeavoring to read stories to the children. Lief, however, when faced with an assignment that asked her to create a storyboard that was funny, expressed that she could not get past this challenge and did not know how to make her Canadian professor laugh. She said that it impacted her grade because she was not able to overcome this barrier and she did not attempt to complete the assignment, nor did she seek help from her professor on this assignment. Seven participants discussed classroom discussions and presentations as being new learning situations for them, and all seven enjoyed the challenge, except for Mandy, who said she tolerated group work because it was expected of her. Wayson and Ben did not discuss classroom experiences, because their computer animation program did not include group work or presentations. The seven participants' experiences reflect that tolerance of ambiguity (TA) is indicative of a good language learner (Dewaele & Wei, 2013). Their higher TA levels provided them with occasions for learning, and these occasions were not viewed as barriers or hindrances.

Acculturation - International students with high social connectedness experience less stress than students who do not have a strong social network (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Sociocultural adaptation for international students has been widely examined, but most research suggests a linear adaption model is the basic accepted pattern of sociocultural adaptation. Vincent, Yani, and Wayson all made efforts to interact with the host culture, and, in Vincent's and Yani's cases, avoided members who spoke their mother tongue during their studies. Vincent and Yani both indicated that their decisions to interact with the host culture and make friends with people whose mother tongue was different from theirs was a deliberate strategy from the beginning and was undertaken to improve their language abilities. Yani said this caused some strain with her home country friends, but she said

> …why would you come to Canada and not like, learn the local language? It's like, a waste of the time and money. That's why I come here – to learn the language here and the culture.

In fact, Yani and Vincent are both entering post-graduate studies at Canadian universities. The literature suggests that a moderate level of ambiguity tolerance is ideal for language learning, and that adopting a bicultural approach is associated with the lowest amounts of acculturative stress (Brown, 2003). I add to this that the more interaction an international student has with the host culture and language, the better prepared they are for academic success in the target language.

Mental Health and Identity

The evidence from my research suggests that mental health and identity are important factors which affect international students' performance in academic settings. An unexpected result of conducting semi-structured interviews was the revealing details participants were willing to share in person, although the opportunity to share additional details had been made available in the online survey.

Identity - As mentioned earlier, four participants announced that they had agreed to participate in the study because they were excited about sharing their personal stories, whether it was for personal reasons or to add to existing research. Rose was completing her two-year certificate program in early childhood education at the time of the interview, and she began our face-to-face meeting with a declaration that she wanted to talk about her experiences as an international student because she hoped it would be cathartic for her. Until this point in time, she had not articulated her feelings about being academically ready or about her experiences as an international student. This declaration was to repeat with three more participants during the interviews. Rose said at the beginning of her interview that this was the first time she was voicing her thoughts about her loss of identity in relation to her English abilities, and how that shaped her learning and success in the classroom and beyond.

> You know, I really changed here. I was a [long pause] social person back home in China. I didn't know who I was anymore. You know, my confidence is---was--- changed. I felt it really changed me, my language. I didn't want to talk a lot, make friends in class. I just…listened.

She said this impacted her ability to communicate with classmates and seek help when she needed it. This loss of identity in her new language extended to her personal life off campus. Whereas she had been a social person who organized events for friends, she had become very quiet during the course of her two-year program. She began to question who she was, she said, and had just recently come out of her shell as she was completing her program. She attributed this to her language abilities improving, and her future plans, which I discussed in the previous section. While Chirkov, Safdar, de Guzman, and Playford (2008) have argued that autonomous motivation has a positive impact on adaptation, it is not a sufficient explanation of students' academic readiness and success. Norton's (2013) concept of identity and motivation lies within the sociolinguistic realm of language acquisition. Norton's definition of identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Language acquisition is not an isolated event. One factor Norton discusses is identity research provides language learning a theory that connects the learner with the outside world. No longer are learners seen in binary formats – motivated/unmotivated, for example. It is important to consider there are other factors which can affect the language learner, such as multiple identities which can change across time and space, and power relations which are created by the society where the learner lives. The identity of the language learner can be fluid and multiple identities can co-exist within a learner, as appears to be the case with Rose. As she moved through her program, her perception of her abilities decreased, she felt a great deal of acculturative stress, and experienced a change in personality, in her identity. The acculturation process for each student is different, and multiple identities can co-exist because of fluctuating circumstances. The other participants did not discuss their loss of identity as much as Rose did, but different factors play stronger roles in achievement for all individuals.

Mental Health - The theme of mental health which arose during the interviews was tied to anxiety and depression. Research has revealed that international students experience mental health challenges, but are less likely to use services available (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Birgi, and Gould; Dafar, and Friedlander, as quoted in Yeh & Inose, 2003). The stigmas attached to mental health and seeking assistance for help can be exacerbated by cultural influences as well (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Three participants decided to share their experiences with mental health struggles as students. Each of them shared this at the end of the interview, when I had completed reviewing their answers from the survey. Although for six of the nine participants, mental and emotional health were not identified as important factors of academic success, three spoke about it, and these three who discussed it revealed different aspects that are important to unveil. Clare stated that her need to seek medical help for anxiety was difficult for her, because she felt shame and embarrassment about it. She said, “This is the time of life that is supposed to be easy, just study and live, the parents take care of everything, but it’s not like that.” This is a common cultural stereotype about mental health that many Asians have, she said, and said that international students need to feel safe in seeking help, not embarrassment.

> I had to take medication to calm down It is embarrassing to tell you but ...I was always down, I was always stressful…The doctor tell me I need medication – I feel better afterwards…For international students, you just tell them you don't need to be embarrassed and winter in Canada is so long...like...

This supports the research that international students’ difficulties in adjusting to life on post-secondary campuses are different from the challenges domestic students face (Andrade, 2006). Taking anxiety medication helped her complete her program, she said, and other students should seek help for anxiety as well. Clare was transparent about how she wanted to share information about her experiences. She made a clear statement during her interview that she did not want to write down anything about her experiences with mental health in the online form, but she wanted to tell me face to face that she had experienced a lot of anxiety as an international student and that she had to take medication to calm down, once she knew what was happening to her. She believed it was important information to share, and to tell that part of her story was important because she wanted other international students to know that mental health and depression are real things that we can talk about. When Ben began to talk about how the college could support students not only academically, he became very teary and we did not pursue this point any further. I tried to change the topic to something else to make him more comfortable, but that is how the interview ended. The other two individuals in the study who discussed depression said it was something they wanted to share with me in person when we met, and they had purposely not written it in their online surveys. Their stories were extremely personal, and I have not included more details at their request. It is interesting to note everyone who spoke about mental health waited to be prompted at the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything else they wanted to share. This indicates that perhaps students need to feel supported and listened to in order to divulge personal information. It does not necessarily need to be with individuals they know, but sharing sensitive information face to face with an interviewer can translate to institutions offering counselling at the point of contact, not just through email notifications about services.

Institutional Factors Impacting International Students

Analyzing factors which affect students personally does not address broader factors which can also affect students' perceptions of academic readiness. At the institutional level, three major factors were identified which played a role in the participants' perceptions: EAP programs; the quality of support from faculty and social connections within the classroom; and the part international and student centres play all contributed to affecting the participants in the study. A visual representation of this overview is offered in Figure 18 below.

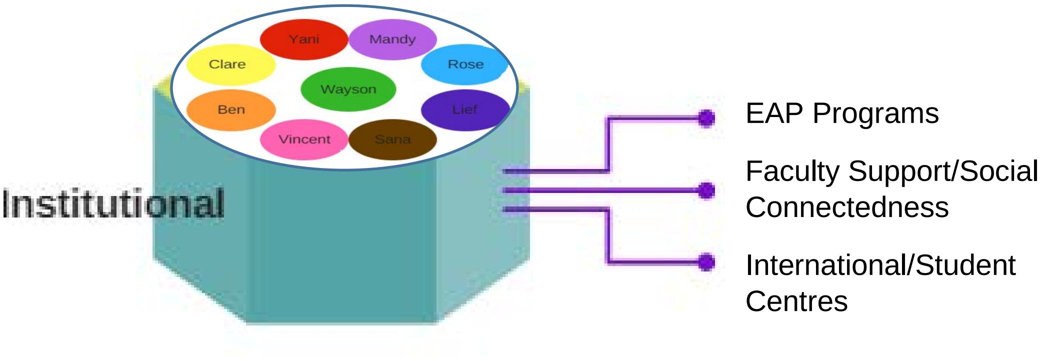
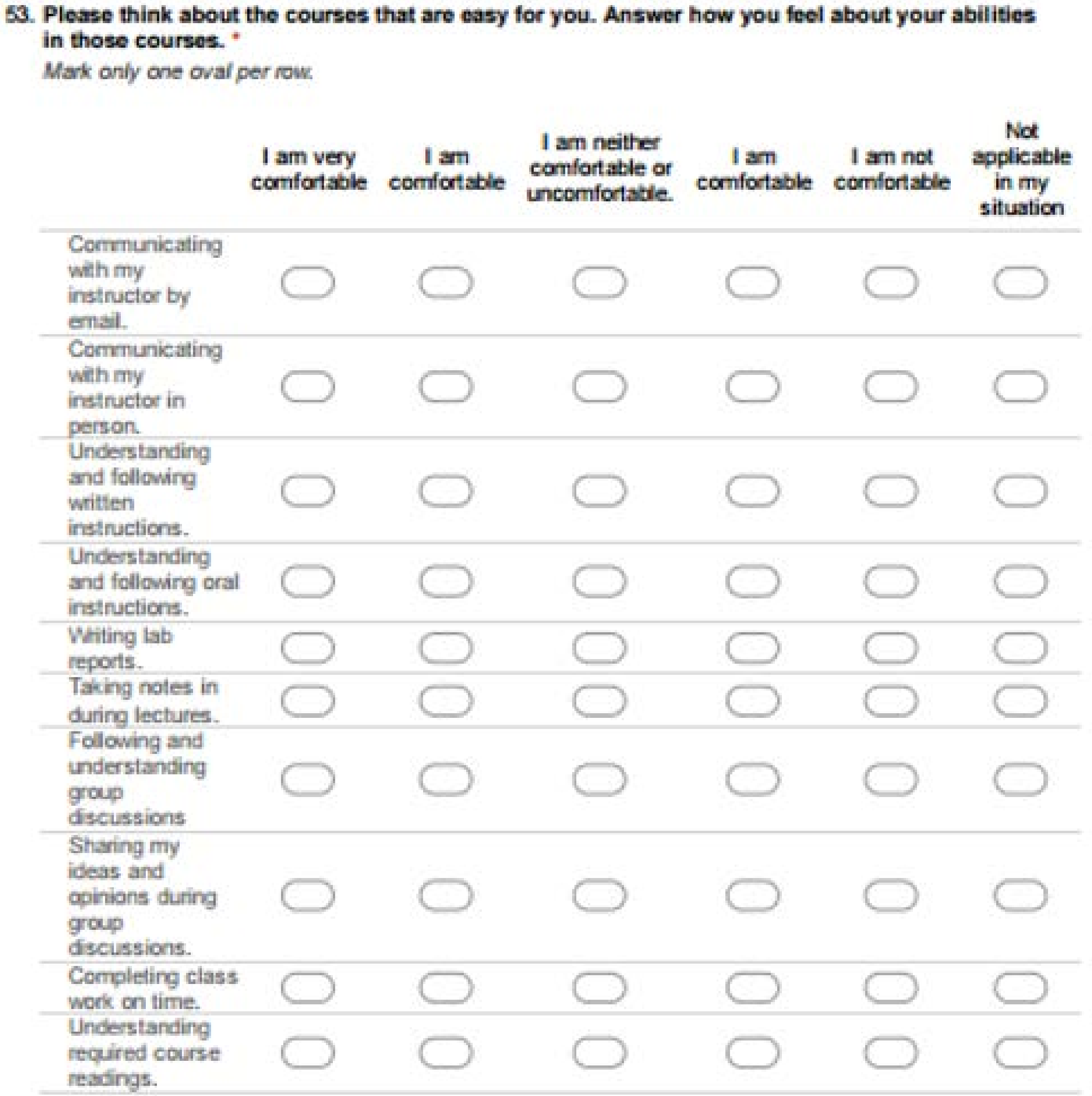


Figure 18. Cross-Sectional Analysis of Participants' Perceptions on an Institutional Level.

EAP Programs

As discussed earlier, an alternative predictor of academic readiness is to predict the types of assignments and exams students will have to perform in their post-secondary programs. Within this framework, students would have to be comfortable and familiar with the types of assignments expected of them in North American institutions. In my survey, I identified:

participating in group discussions, following instructions, taking notes, writing lab reports, reading course-related readings, talking to classmates, and communicating with faculty, as seen in Figure 19.



53. Please think about the courses that are easy for you. Answer how you feel about your abilities in those courses. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	I am very comfortable	I am comfortable	I am neither comfortable or uncomfortable.	I am comfortable	I am not comfortable	Not applicable in my situation
Communicating with my instructor by email.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Communicating with my instructor in person.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following written instructions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following oral instructions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Writing lab reports.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Taking notes in during lectures.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Following and understanding group discussions	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sharing my ideas and opinions during group discussions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Completing class work on time.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding required course readings.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 19. Comfort and Familiarity with Topics. This is a section of the online survey which addresses the different academic tasks participants felt comfortable with in courses which were not challenging for them.

During the interviews, I prompted participants to share more specific assignments and tasks they felt prepared for, which elicited: classroom presentations, drawings and portfolios, conducting academic research, conducting observations during class, writing summaries, writing academic essays, conducting case studies, technological tasks, talking to classmates, and discussing grades with faculty.

Dunworth's (2008) critical study outlines additional academic activities for students in tertiary institutions in Australia, such as annotated bibliographies, essays, critiques, extended essays, and library tasks, to name a few. I elected not to raise these with participants because Dunworth's study examined international students at Australian universities, and I did not think these would be tasks assigned to college students in Ontario.

The surveys revealed that EAP did not prepare students for things such as: technical vocabulary, talking with classmates, studying online, and everyday conversations. Additionally, although some participants felt that they needed to write academic essays and write summaries, not all the participants agreed. Ben, for instance, said, "It's kind of useless in my program, really. Like a waste of time." In these cases, the needs of the program dictate the tasks students need to complete. The summary of findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Academic Activities for which Students do not Feel Prepared, or Feel are Unnecessary

	Wayson Certificate program	Ben Certificate program	Rose Diploma program	Sana Diploma program (online)	Vincent Diploma program	Mandy Diploma program	Clare Degree program	Amy Degree program	Lief Degree Program
Participating in group discussions	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Classroom presentations	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Conducting academic research	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A
Taking notes during class	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	X	✓	✓	N/A
Conducting observations	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	X

	Wayson Certificate program	Ben Certificate program	Rose Diploma program	Sana Diploma program (online)	Vincent Diploma program	Mandy Diploma program	Clare Degree program	Amy Degree program	Lief Degree Program
Writing summaries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A
Reading course-related readings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	N/A
Writing academic essays	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	N/A
Case studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Technological tasks	X	X	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Talking to classmates	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communicating with faculty	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Discussing grades with faculty	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

(✓) – This symbol indicates which academic tasks participants felt prepared for in their post-secondary studies.
(X) – indicates the activities which participants do not feel prepared for
(N/A) – indicates activities which participants do not feel are necessary for their program of study

These tasks are a combination of tasks which had been on the survey, and the tasks which participants mentioned which were not included in the survey, but participants raised during the course of the interviews.

In all of the interviews, each participant raised the importance of communicating with other individuals extending beyond assigned classroom activities, and yet out of all the participants who had studied in an EAP program, it was the one need that EAP programs did not address. The length of their post-secondary program did not have an effect on how academically ready participants felt during and at the end of their programs. All participants went through a process of at first feeling quite confident that they were ready to participate in their field of study, and then experienced a change in perception, indicating feelings of being not as well prepared as they had thought they would be.

Clare had participated in a bridging program. Her first semester was strictly an EAP environment, but her second semester segregated all the language learners entering her business administration program into an English program specifically designed for English language learners studying business. She reported that she found the differentiated instruction helped prepare her for content-specific vocabulary and tasks that she would have to undertake in her post-secondary program.

> Clare: There were things, like…very specific words that I---we---needed to learn. And…like the rules in Canada…
>
> Interviewer: Which rules do you mean?
>
> Clare: Like, um…so, Canadian law is so easy for you, because you are a local. But I need to know about the Canadian law, so that was very important…yeah, that really help a lot.

These bridging courses are an alternative to standardized test scores for international students who have not met the language proficiency requirements of their desired programs of study (Dooey, 2010). These courses focus on a more inclusive education that includes language skills and specific academic tasks that students will encounter, to which Clare's experience attests. In Figure 20, I tallied the number of times each participant mentioned what they felt prepared for in their studies. All the items appeared in my survey. I used a word cloud software to create a visual representation of what students felt ready for. The software increases the sizes of words based on their frequency. The larger words indicate what students felt prepared for, whereas the smaller the letters, the less prepared students felt. Note the size of "talking to classmates."

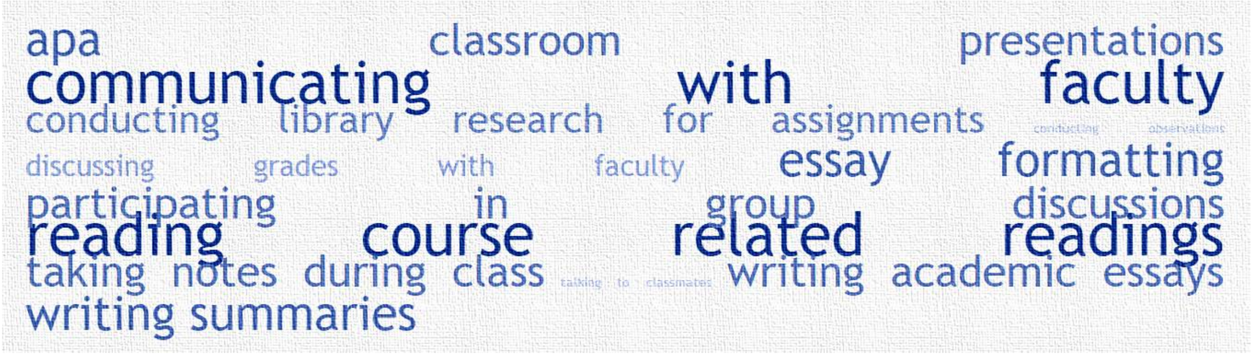


Figure 20. Visualization of International Students' Readiness for Academic Studies

Faculty/Institutional Perceptions – Faculty, Social Support/Connectedness

Faculty In the previous section, the activities which participants did not feel prepared for were listed. However, many participants were able to overcome some of their personal weaknesses in classroom skills, due to the help and dedication of their professors. Vincent and Rose each mentioned that particular EAP teachers played an important role in supporting them, and that the effect of this support carried on in their post-secondary studies. Vincent said,

> Yeah, that teacher who helped me in the EAP program - I will never forget that. It helped me so much. Really. She was so positive. It made me think it is all ok.

The belief that faculty perceptions of students' abilities can shape and affect academic performance appears to be justified because in most instances, participants made direct positive connections. Even teachers who challenged participants were praised. Vincent talked about a professor who had great skills:

> …always tried to encourage students to participate in discussions - he wanted the quiet students to participate – he was very, like, encouraging…like forcing someone to talk is quite useful.

Rose also described how, on one group assignment, her professor gathered the students for a special meeting to try and understand how they had misunderstood her instructions on an assignment.

> (The) teacher felt the group did not understand the purpose of the assignment so the teacher asked the group questions so that we had to explain how we understood the assignment - it was so difficult to get a mark from her (laughter).

Being forced to describe her thinking process as she re-read the instructions, Rose said, was an excellent activity for her because she had to justify and explain her rationale for how she completed her assignment. Rose said she appreciated the effort by the teacher to understand her and her classmates, who were not all from the same ethnic group. This is supported by the research that indicates that one of the most commonly observed challenges by faculty teaching international students is the language of instruction and integration (Trice, 2003). Although research has clearly demonstrated that international students face unique academic and personal challenges that native English students do not face, the efforts of faculty to empower students and provide them with the necessary tools for academic achievement is a recognition on the part of faculty that international students face different challenges from domestic students.

Negative experiences can also negatively impact students. Rose, who had reported a positive experience with a faculty member, went on in the same breath with a caveat:

> A lot of teachers don't understand us international students - sometimes what we are saying, they sometimes misunderstand us - the way you listen to us is not the same way as listening to local students. I don't think all teachers want to understand us - some misunderstandings are already there - they don't like us because they have previous misunderstandings with Chinese students.

In some cases, a lack of cultural awareness on the part of the instructor created challenges that were difficult to overcome. Wayson, for instance, said that sometimes in his computer animation program, professors would use culturally specific examples that permanent resident students understood, but he did not.

Sana’s story was a disturbing example of a faculty member who displayed a lack of sensitivity of language learners’ challenges, and the instructor made assumptions about Sana’s work based on the fact that she was a second language learner; therefore, the instructor did not conduct a real examination of her work. Sana was able to prove that she received an incomplete grade because of a misplaced citation, but received a mark of zero because the instructor had not read the assignment. Instead of challenging her instructor, Sana laboured over her assignment, using what she had learned in her EAP course about essay formatting and formal essay writing and rewrote her assignment. She said it was a matter of principle for her. Instead of assuming that Sana did not know what she was doing because she was a language student, this faculty member would have benefited from some cross-cultural communication training. Not all faculty are aware of the special challenges which language learners face (Dooey, 2010).

Social Support – Connectedness - As mentioned earlier, Vincent and Yani went out of their way to avoid their native language (L1) group and focused exclusively on forming meaningful connections with domestic or international students from other cultures in order to advance their language learning. Wright and Schartner (2013) refer to at least four studies which show that a lack of this type of integration is more the norm. Other participants reflected on the challenges they had in making connections with classmates from other cultures, as well as domestic students. Rose, Mandy, and Lief, participants from China, indicated that they sought out members of their L1 in classes to get assistance or translation in class. This has been confirmed in research that indicates international students feel social networks are important to them (Andrade, 2006), and this is observed most clearly with students from home collectivistic cultural backgrounds (Yeh & Inose, 2003), but Al-Sharideh and Goe claim that there is the potential for any ethnic group to form within a school community if there are ample members of one group (as cited in Wright & Schartner, 2013). Rose admitted that she understood the distance she sometimes encountered from domestic students, who feel that international students do not integrate. Rose described how support circles for Chinese students are formed. Students at the college Rose attends have created their own social groups on WeChat, a social media platform used for communicating, similar to WhatsApp, but used primarily in China. Within WeChat, Rose pointed out on her phone all the different groups that exist for Chinese international students studying at her particular college: a larger circle for those who are alumni and current students, a group for homestay information, and a separate group for students discussing study permits. She also showed me study groups that have been formed for specific classes. What I found interesting at the classroom circles level is that the WeChat group expanded to encompass all learners in the class – students of other backgrounds were invited to participate in these circles, and many classmates, Rose affirmed, were quite willing to download the app and be active participants in this self-directed learning group. One faculty member, Rose said, who was aware of the existence of the group, would enlist students' help in contacting missing students on the day of a test – students in the group would check in with each other and ask other members to come to class, or even inform the faculty member of the exact arrival time of a late student.

Three participants made suggestions for improvement to integrate international students into the school community. They called for domestic students to be more interested in getting to know them and their culture, instead of the learning of culture being the responsibility of international students alone. They said it would foster a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school and to the school community, and help international students integrate in the classroom. A variation of this idea has some support in the literature; Fasheh has suggested that programs should be developed to facilitate interaction among international student groups, and faculty should receive training to be more aware of international students' cultures, needs, and challenges (as cited in Zimmerman, 2009).

The sum of the research on acculturation, faculty perceptions of international students, and student perceptions points to a complex web of factors which influence students' success in higher education. Most importantly, faculty misinterpretations of students' behaviours and the types of support international students require are factors which influence students' academic success (Andrade 2006; Zimmerman 2009), pointing to more complex models of support than those which currently exist in institutes of higher learning (Wright & Schartner, 2013).

International/Student Centres

Current levels of support for international students studying in higher education institutions demonstrates little integration between support services that international centres provide for students (limited to items such as housing, fee payments, student visa information, and referrals) to college services that are available for all students. This is in spite of the growing awareness that integrated and relevant support for international students is needed because of their unique needs (Andrade, 2006).

Of the students who used services on the campus, only Yani, Mandy, and Clare were supportive of and had used the services the international centre had to offer. Mandy said she used it to gain a better sense of connection with other international students, because she said she didn't understand how it felt to be part of the EAP cohort – networking with them and having an agent working in the office who was familiar with her culture made the intercultural connections with other international students rewarding and meaningful. With Mandy, the sense of belonging became more important because she actively sought connections with international students who would have not experienced the same experiences that she had. She credited a liaison officer at the international centre, who shared Mandy's cultural background. This liaison officer was responsible for gathering together students who were Chinese and having them interact with each other, but also offer mentoring of more settled Chinese international students to new arrivals from China. Mandy found this experience extremely rewarding, as she was able to understand what ESL students were experiencing. The literature supports proactive counselling and integration of existing services for international students, as well as hiring counsellors who are trained in cross-cultural counselling (Zimmerman 2009) for effective use of services, and this is supported by my research.

Yani said that she wore out the floor between her classes and the international centre at her school. She said, "I thought they were tired of me [laughter] because…because I was always there, hanging out, you know?" Interestingly, Yani, Mandy, and Clare studied at schools where international centres were located close to their classes on campus. The other participants were more disparaging of the support they received from the international centre. Wayson, for example, had some very strong opinions:

> International students here are not supported here - should give us more help because we pay huge fees, they should give us more opportunities to make friends with local people here and help us get used to this community…create learning experiences by creating cultural exchanges. Use the communities to learn and teach about each other and build this activity here to see if locals are interested in other cultures - it is a kind of learning.

The six participants who were not satisfied with the support they received from the international centre stated it was too far physically from where they were studying, and that they only had face to face contact with them at an initial orientation event.

Global Factors Impacting International Students

Above and beyond the institution, a larger context embodies how employability, international students' ability to achieve Permanent Residency (PR) status, and the national policy of internationalization, all work to shape international students' behavior and motivation as they study in Canada. Figure 21 below conceptualizes this wide-angle lens, encompassing employability, PR status, and the policy of internationalization.

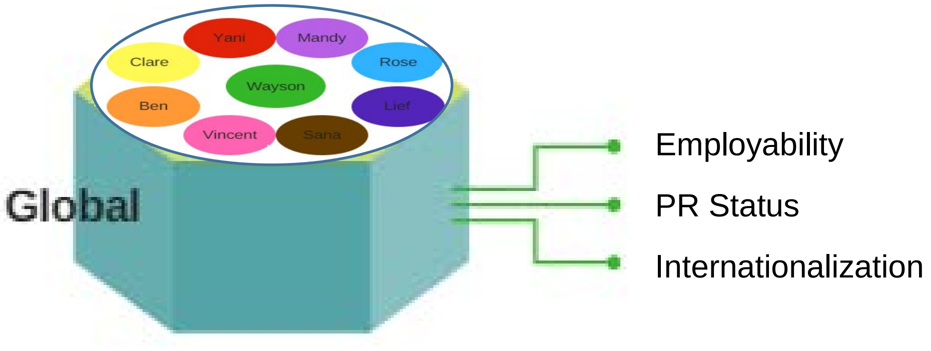


Figure 21. Cross-Sectional Analysis of Participants' Perceptions on a Global Level

Employability

The nine participants in this study were all employed in their area of study at the time of the interviews, or were continuing their studies. Wayson and Ben were already thinking about career options, even though they were still studying computer animation; Clare and Mandy, although they were working, were considering continuing their studies to find better employment. Research on international students classifies motivation as a factor in determining academic success among international students. The future success of Ontario colleges is the linking of Ontario's economic future to career-specific education (Colleges Ontario, 2014). Colleges Ontario has surveyed employers who say that, in the near future, employers will be seeking graduates with a college, not a university, education (2014). All nine study participants were taking programs that Colleges Ontario would classify as career-specific training. Although Sana was pausing her studies as she looked after her children, her ability to study online and complete her education to get a practical degree demonstrates this turn in the labour market. Rose, in her last months of her early childhood education program, had already developed a five-year plan with a few of her classmates to open a private child care centre. She said:

> I heard Canada has fresh air and opportunity. I never think I can be an educator, a child educator, here or in my country...but when I came here there is a lot of opportunity I can…that I can choose to be...

All of the participants listed employment in their chosen field of study when I asked them about their plans in two years. This short-term goal, stretching beyond graduation, is a motivating factor that can help students achieve academic success and pass their courses successfully.

Permanent Resident (PR) Status

Studies of international students studying in tertiary institutions across the globe state that international students' time in a host country time of acculturation levels off after the first year, attributing that to temporary visas or a return to the home country. All of the participants had selected Canada purposely as their place to study and attain PR status. Clare, when asked why she came to Canada, said, "Tuition fees in Canada are not as high as like UK, and this is a good country for immigration." Wayson said that Canada was his first choice, as did Ben, because of the opportunities after graduation. My research suggests that international students studying in Canada are in a unique position, and their motivation, time in the host country, and future plans, render studies of international students studying on short student visas in other countries not transferrable to the Canadian context. Since Brexit, Canada has seen a rise in interest among international students who seek stability and opportunity. Nevertheless, all of the participants in this study began and, in some cases, completed their studies before Brexit began. Their unanimous intentions to remain in Canada, and primarily in Ontario, to continue studies or achieve PR status, is a goal that links all of these participants; the only common thread besides not being able to communicate with other students.

Internationalization Policies

Norton's interest in research examining the notion of power in second language acquisition (Darvin & Norton, 2015) interconnects well with the notion of power, internationalization, and what position the learner has in internationalization policies in higher institutes of education and governmental policy models. Students need to see themselves as more than fee payers, and reestablish their identities in a new context, as they acquire language within a new school, and their relationship with that school.

Many studies have been conducted internationally on the construct of investment and identity, but the studies have examined investment and identity when students are learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or are immigrants, and few studies have examined this construct in international and/or exchange students, according to Darvin and Norton (2015).

Conclusion

This chapter concludes with a total of nine factors, organized into three overarching themes, which I identified as affecting students' perceptions of their academic success in post-secondary studies in Ontario institutions. Chapter 4 contained a discussion of my findings, and I used the overarching themes of a close-up, a mid-range, and a wide-range lens to organize factors which affect international students' perceptions. The next and final chapter summarizes the findings of my study, discusses some implications as well as limitations, and offers directions for future research on the subject of international students' academic success in Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Chapter 5 —Discussions and Implications

In Chapter 5 I summarize the findings of my study, providing a synthesis of the findings from Chapter 4, using my research questions to organize the summary. Chapter 5 then continues with a section discussing the implications of my study. I also discuss the contributions this exploratory study has made to the current body of research, as well as address its limitations. Finally, I offer suggestions for future directions for this body of research, and conclude with an overall summary.

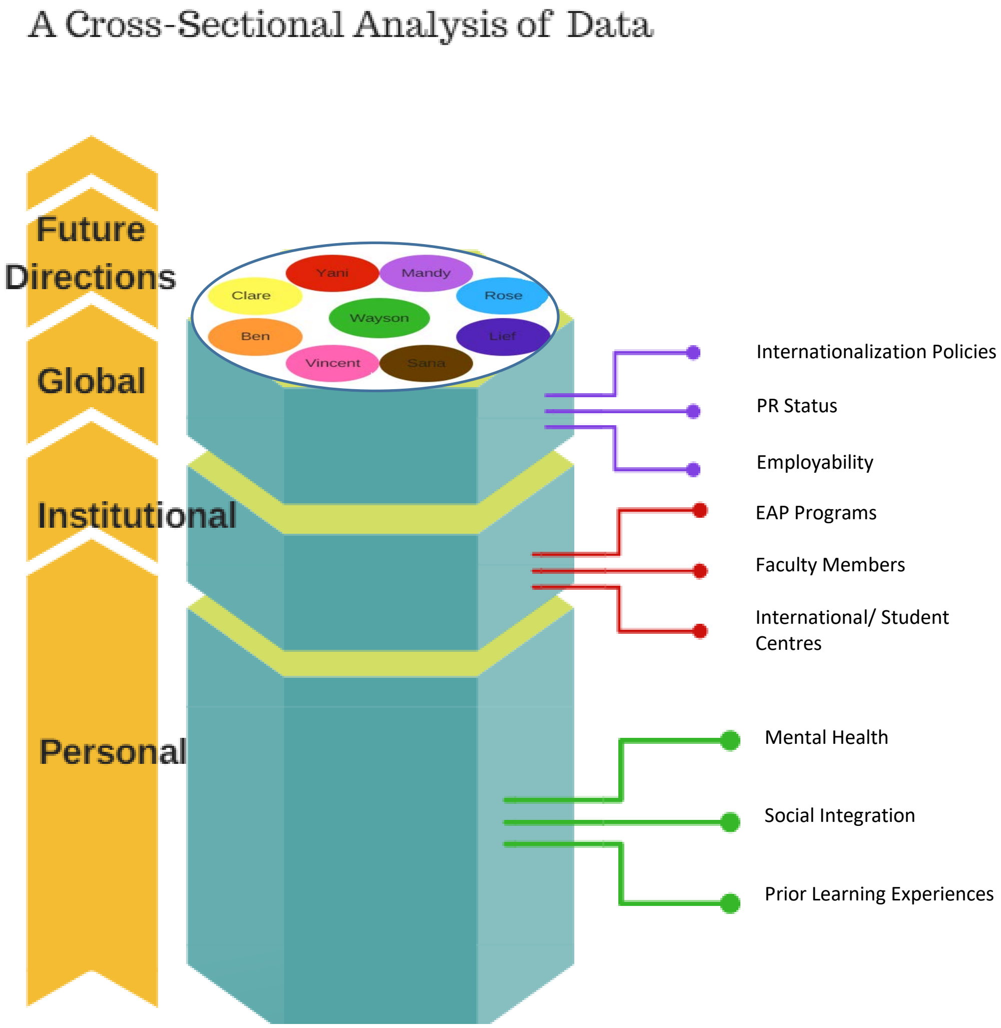

A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Data
Future Directions
Global
Institutional
Personal
Yani
Mandy
Clare
Rose
Wayson
Ben
Lief
Vincent
Sana
Internationalization Policies
PR Status
Employability
EAP Programs
Faculty Members
International/ Student Centres
Mental Health
Social Integration
Prior Learning Experiences

Figure 22. *Cross-Sectional Analysis of Participants' Perceptions on Personal, Institutional, Global Levels*

Summary of Data - Research Questions

While the research reviewed in the literature review suggested broad themes which initially framed my research, the process of interviewing participants broadened those initial themes beyond my primary research question.

How do international students enrolled in various academic and professional post-secondary programs in Ontario community colleges perceive their academic preparedness for post-secondary studies?

Multiple factors affect international students' perceptions of their academic readiness in post-secondary studies. For students studying in certificate programs, the length of time spent in the host country was more important for acculturation than studying in EAP programs, which did not offer students the necessary training needed for technical courses. Students studying in diploma or degree programs, however, attributed more importance to EAP programs for preparing them for post-secondary studies. The majority of study participants did not feel that studying for proficiency tests prepared them for post-secondary studies, but they had EAP programs with which to compare their experiences. Those participants who had not completed or studied in EAP programs reported more support for proficiency tests preparing them for post-secondary studies.

Participants all reported similar patterns of feeling prepared for post-secondary studies. All participants reported a higher degree of confidence of being prepared at the start of their studies, and their perception of academic readiness changed during the course of their studies; they felt less prepared as they continued in their programs, but also reported adjusting to their situations during their programs. With the benefit of hindsight, participants were able to report with a degree of certainty which academic activities they had been prepared for.

What academic activities do international students feel prepared for?

Almost all of the participants in the study reported that they felt ready for academic reading and communicating with their instructors. Those participants who had studied in EAP programs reported that they felt ready to use technology as part of their academic requirements; this included using word processing software, Learning Management Systems (LMS), library research, and evaluating resources for assignments. Presentations, academic essays, research writing, and group discussions were also reported as activities that international students felt prepared for. Many participants reported that listening to lectures was still challenging, but those who had taken EAP programs reported that they had the necessary skills to adjust and understand lectures because of their listening practice and notetaking skills, with the exception of the participants in the computer animation certificate program, who were able to listen to recorded instructors' lectures repeatedly if they did not comprehend the content. Those participants who needed to write academic essays reported that they felt prepared for these tasks, and were comfortable with essay formatting and using appropriate resources for research papers. Not everyone needed to write essays in post-secondary studies, nor participate in group discussions, however. Participants all reported that they felt less prepared for encountering academic vocabulary than they had anticipated, and all participants categorized communicating with classmates outside of classroom tasks as an important academic activity, and they all reported that they did not feel prepared for this at all, nor did they feel they were ready to understand Canadian life skills, such as understanding salary ranges in Canada or completing a rental agreement. None of their previous studies had prepared them for these types of tasks, which did not impact their academic success directly, but affected their quality of life and personal life.

What factors do international students perceive as impacting their academic success?

Participants reported various factors impacting their academic success; all participants indicated that acculturation played a large role in being successful on campus as a student. The participants who reported more interaction with domestic students and North American culture also reported a higher degree of academic success and satisfaction, although they mentioned that it came at a cost to their personal life in terms of leisure time. Some participants reported a loss of identity as they struggled with their L2, but this struggle abated as they progressed through their programs and gained more confidence in their L2. All participants indicated that their motivation to remain in Canada and get Permanent Resident (PR) status and become employed in their field of study played a major factor in feeling pressure to successfully complete their programs. Support from fellow students from collectivistic cultural backgrounds was cited as an important factor for success, because these groups provided the main chain of information for students from Asian countries. Being connected to the campus experience was also reported as an important factor for academic success, but it was reported as a negative factor for most of the participants, because they did not feel a connection to the campus or to domestic students on campus.

The role of faculty was also reported as having both a positive and a negative influence on academic success. Participants who reported faculty going out of their way to understand international students and their errors on assignments believed these experiences had a positive influence on their learning, whereas faculty who were dismissive of international students' needs or unaware of their needs had a negative impact on participants' academic performance, although they were able to overcome these difficulties, albeit at a cost in terms of time and lower grades. A similar influence was noted in the perceptions domestic students had about international students.

Finally, mental health played an important role in academic success. It is not an issue which many international students felt comfortable discussing, but establishing strong lines of communication with faculty, international centres, and student success centres, as well as an integration of these supports, will help international students succeed and seek help more willingly. The participants in this study who appeared more successful in academic life had spent an average of eight months in an EAP program.

Implications

In this section, I discuss the implications of my study within the context of Ontario post-secondary institutions. My composition follows a similar order to my literature review: I begin with the entry point, the language proficiency test, which is the first step students take before entering a country as an international student. I move through personal, then pedagogical, and finally institutional implications for this study.

Vocabulary knowledge and content-specific vocabulary play an important factor in academic success. Assessing vocabulary knowledge as a demonstration of academic “readiness” is featured on the CanTEST, the only language proficiency test to assess vocabulary acquisition. Whether language proficiency tests can accurately predict academic success is problematic; various factors affect the success of students, including the type of program they study in, and the various skills proficiency tests assess.

Faculty play an important role in students’ success and well-being. It is important for language teaching faculty to provide students with information that will help students beyond the narrow scope of academic vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Just as in settlement language classes, international students need to have access to information about housing, looking for employment, buying a used car, and having everyday conversations with individuals. Teachers do students a disservice when they focus only on students’ short-term academic needs, which may not be enough to lay the foundation for academic success. Additionally, the role of faculty beyond the language classroom is an important one. Faculty should receive training and be conscious of the needs of all of their students. At the moment, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is raising awareness of historical indigenous experiences within the Canadian education context, and thoughtful incorporation of indigenous knowledge is being added to curricula across Canada. Adding a component to make allowances for cultural knowledge gaps and cultural awareness training for faculty is necessary to foster a climate of success in every college classroom.

Acculturation plays an important role in assisting students in academic success. If students do not take language programs before they begin their programs, they will require a longer period of adjustment as they adapt to their new academic requirements, as well as their needs as students on campus.

Generalizations can be made about international students and the success and/or challenges they face, but each student’s experience is unique, and is based on a number of factors, which can include length of time in host country, participation in pathway programs to college programs, degrees of study, mental health, types of international students, and home country culture and education. Homogenization of international students’ needs and abilities is not reasonable or advisable if their presence in the host country is acknowledged as an important revenue source, by institutions and governments alike.

Although most language learning and post-secondary studies occur face to face, it is inevitable that students will encounter courses that are delivered online or in blended environments. The number of students who study online are growing, and international students are a part of that community. There were 73 000 students in *OntarioLearn* courses last year, but it is unknown how many of these were international students (“About OntarioLearn”, n.d.). The *OntarioLearn* policy is currently under review, but international students studying on Canadian campuses require technological knowledge as well as content knowledge in order to perform successfully as students.

Student success offices exist in higher education institutions for all students; they are available to provide answers about student services on campus, including accessible learning, career preparation, and counselling services. At the moment, student success offices interact with international students when students are introduced to their offices’ services, but international students do not have much interaction with these offices, which means that students underutilize the services that are available to them as registered students in Ontario post-secondary institutions. This disconnect can affect student success because international students are not accessing help for their needs as much as domestic students are.

Institutions need to focus on communication with international students through various channels, not just traditional, institutional ones. At the moment, most communication with international centres and students is one directional and is conducted through formal channels, such as emails and websites, or North American social media pages, such as Facebook. By having a social media presence where certain student groups prefer to communicate, such as WeChat, and being aware of where international students congregate online, the school can become a part of the conversation and become aware of discussions and issues concerning students, rather than just being a disseminator of information.

Contribution and Limitations

This multiple-case interview study is exploratory in nature because it fills a gap in existing research; multiple steps were taken, as outlined, to include various international students applying to post-secondary programs in Ontario. This small multiple-case interview study offers a local, emic perspective, in contrast to larger scale international studies which provide an etic perspective. The benefit of conducting a small-scale study is the scope of information that can be gathered by a single researcher, while covering a wide range of issues, ranging from SLA research, internationalization, and counselling psychology. Few studies examine a wide range of issues, focusing rather on intercultural communication, for example, or acculturative stress, or the predictability language proficiency tests have on future academic success. Although large-scale and critical studies of international students studying in post-secondary institutions exist, and some have delved into the Canadian university context, the burgeoning market for internationalization requires some responsibility on the part of institutions which covet and court the international student market. With global political conflicts and changes in flux during the time of this research, Canada stands as a more notable centre for international education, and is worthy of more detailed examination.

This study was not representative of the population and was limited to self-reported, perceptual data; participants themselves, and not an impartial observer, assessed their academic readiness. Despite these limitations, the questions the participants answered provided a voice for that is not often heard in research, and the study reflects the diversity of the international student population studying in community colleges across southern Ontario. The interpretation of this researcher, based on my positionality as an active faculty member who interacts with international students, is advantageous. Data, whether quantitative or qualitative, are meaningless without interpretation, and the interpretation depends on the experience and skills of the researcher. Objective truth is not possible with researchers' biases, interpretations, experiences, and knowledge. This also includes assumptions. Therefore, the information, stories, and themes which this exploratory study unearthed will provide areas for future research across all colleges in the Ontario context, and add to the existing literature, where little research exists on international students' perceptions of academic preparedness in Canadian community colleges. The publication of these students' stories reveals an emerging picture of the various successes and challenges international students encounter as they move through post-secondary institutions in Ontario. This emerging picture is worth investigating further.

Nevertheless, applying linear models of acculturation and social integration, and assuming all issues apply to all students, ignores the cultural differences each student brings to their host country and institute of higher learning. In the Ontario context, international students are here for long-term, even permanent, residency in this country. Institutions should support international students by providing them with more personalized support and treat them as contributing individuals to this society, not as a homogenized group of financial gains. Economic contributors need to be acknowledged, and internationalization models need to encompass students' needs, beyond existing as economic models for a future employable workforce.

Even with a modest number of respondents, three of the four identified streams of international students were interviewed in this study, and, although their stories were unique to an Ontario context, they represented a variety of experiences, areas and levels of study, as well as challenges.

Initially, I thought some participants were sharing intimate details with me because we had a personal relationship. As I was cognisant of this, I tried not to allow the interviews to veer into these topics. However, Rose’s interview, the third one I conducted, convinced me that I needed to listen to the interviewees and allow them to turn away from the interview questions in order to provide opportunities for participants to talk about more intimate subjects, such as loss of identity and mental health. The personal relationship, such as the one I had with Rose, was not the reason for these revelations. Half the participants had no previous connection with me, and yet the subject of mental health also arose with those participants. Different perspectives were sought and students’ contributions were valued, and they guided the direction of the research.

Suggestions for Future Research

As a result of this exploratory study, some key areas for future research emerged. The most important area of future research should be the examination of mental health and how it presents itself in international students. Students from many cultures are unwilling to self-identify with mental health issues, and as such, we need to learn more about how to support them. If more qualitative research is conducted in which more probing about mental health issues takes place, institutions will be able to use research results to serve the international student body more effectively.

Are EAP programs preparing students for post-secondary studies? It depends. Students studying in colleges take a variety of programs which are specialized, and these programs carry specialized language and task needs. As Dunworth’s (2008) critical study uncovered, the majority of faculty who teach EAP are themselves graduates of the humanities, and they may overemphasize the importance of certain assignments, such as essay writing. Programs which offer subject-specific courses for students to feel better prepared for their studies may be the best direction for EAP programs. Students in technological programs have different challenges facing them than humanities students. Additionally, a Canadian-based study examining the effects of English language courses, with a focus on tasks which college students must complete in post-secondary studies, would help assess how EAP programs can serve all English language learners better. EAP programs focus on academics, but do not address life skills. Students arrive in Canada with the prospect of becoming permanent residents, but EAP programs do not teach them the life skills and the cultural awareness which they will need as international students navigating a Canadian system: a driver's licence, applying for childcare, filing taxes, rental agreements, and the like, are not learning constraints which impede domestic students. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs in Canada teach settlement skills, but this is not addressed in EAP programs; perhaps it is time to rethink this as a Canadian context for preparing international students for academic success. International students have a real opportunity to remain in this country as permanent residents. Settlement language skills are not addressed in international studies of international students, and there is a benefit to looking at international students regionally because their needs and their situations are different. When international students are not identified as a separate group within research studies on language learners, any unique needs of international students are not identified.

Additionally, the number of international students choosing to study in Canada continues to grow as a result of both Brexit and the changing political landscape in the United States. News stories have regularly appeared since the fall of 2016, after the United Kingdom's Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. As of September 2017, various news sources report that international student numbers in Canada spiked suddenly after the results of the United States election, and have risen steadily since then (Harris, 2017; Hosmar, 2017; Marcus, 2017). Although official international student numbers in Canada have not been published since the fall of 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016), the information about international student numbers is not only appearing in media sources. Hotcourses Ltd, a multinational analytics educational guidance company, which shares its global trends and insights into future student enrolments with education providers, indicates an increase in global interest in Canada in its Brexit Report, published in June of 2017 (Hotcourses Insights, 2017). "Canada has increased from 4.9% of global share to 10.6%...Canada has increased from 7.7% of Indian share to 22.6%" (2017, p. 3). Hotcourses Ltd. attributes this surge in Canadian interest to the early efforts of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government to make Canada a more attractive destination for international students (2017), in line with the Canadian government's policy initiatives on internationalization as a business model (Foreign Affairs, Trade & Development Canada, 2014).

Additionally, there has been a new twist to the discussion of international students of late. The decision in the United States to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has resulted in conversations which both support and oppose the acceptance of DACA youth as international student applicants to Canada. Proponents of this idea state that, in addition to understanding North American work culture, these individuals already have a strong grasp of English, have studied in North America and some have even attended American universities and colleges (Harris, 2017). Opponents warn about screening DACA recipients, the influx of refugee claimants and their impact on government support (Perkel, 2017; Malcolm, 2017), although all of these individuals underwent a criminal check as a condition of becoming DACA recipients (Harris, 2017). Notwithstanding concerns about finances and safety, at least one Ontario school has seen an advantage to having these young people come to Canada, to the extent that it is offering a $60 000 scholarship to 12 potential DACA recipients (Ghonaim, 2017).

In light of these rapid, recent political changes and their potential consequences, a stronger research focus of the Canadian international student context is necessary, if the growing trend of increasing international student numbers continues to rise in Canada. Canada is in a unique position to offer international students the opportunity to become permanent residents, and this opportunity creates a unique learning context for international students, who are not provided with such options in other global contexts. This perspective should be included in research on international students studying in Canada and contrasted with the international student experiences in other international contexts, especially Australia and Ireland, which have also seen a rise in international students (Hotcourses Insights, 2017).

Conclusion

Internationalization on college campuses is lucrative and shows no sign of abating in Canada. Some college programs are in danger of being discontinued because the programs are not self-sufficient; that is, they do not collect enough revenue to be viable without additional funds, such as tuition from international students (personal communication, April 2017). International students provide colleges with the necessary funds to keep campuses vibrant and maintain growing programs. To this end, it is short-sighted of institutions to address international students’ needs separately, or identify international students as a homogeneous group, without providing faculty the necessary training to understand intercultural communication and international students’ needs, and without offering international students integrated and supported services.

Epilogue

So, where are they now?

As I wrap up my class at the end of the semester, I see Wayson walking past my door. He smiles and waves, and comes in to chat. He's finishing his program and is looking to apply for a one-year certificate program so that his student visa can be extended before he looks for employment. He asks about my study:

"Did my participation help you with your thesis? Do you think it will make it better?"

On my walk to the cafeteria, I run into Ben, who asks about my thesis. He is so busy with final assignments, he isn't sleeping much and constantly lives with this pressure.

Rose is in the cafeteria and insists on taking some selfies with me. Somehow, I end up with bunny ears on my head. We hug and she is all excited about making plans for her private daycare business.

Vincent is in the enviable position to make a decision between two job offers. He had applied, even though he didn't think he had all of the qualifications listed in the job descriptions. When we chatted, he told me he is looking forward to studying at the post-graduate level next.

Clare and Yani finished their studies and got their PR status. I lost track of Sana and Mandy, but Lief sent me an email recently. She put a knock-knock joke in it, and it was awful, but it made me smile.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Initial Questionnaire – Google Forms

Research Study of International Students Studying in Community Colleges in Southern Ontario

SES data collected to situate research participants with background information

* Required

1. What is your first name? *

   ....

2. Gender * Mark only one oval.

   ○ Male

   ○ Female

   ○ Prefer not to say

   ○ Other: ....

3. Date of arrival in Canada *

   ....

   Example: December 15, 2012

4. How old are you? * Mark only one oval.

- ○ 17-23 years
- ○ 24-29
- ○ 30-34
- ○ 35-39
- ○ 40-44
- ○ 45-49
- ○ 50-54
- ○ 55-59
- ○ 60-64
- ○ Prefer not to answer

5. What is your nationality?

....

6 Which languages do you know? Please list them in the order you learned them. For First Language, you can give more than one if you were raised in multilingual family. *

....

....

....

....

7. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? Mark only one oval.

- ○ High school
- ○ Some college courses, but I did not finish a diploma or a program
- ○ College, with a diploma and/or degree
- ○ Some university courses, but I did not receive a degree.
- ○ University degree
- ○ Post graduate studies

8. Have you taken any language proficiency tests?
* Mark only one oval.

○ Yes
○ No Skip to question 39.

IELTS

9. Have you taken IELTS? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken IELTS Skip to question 15.
○ I have taken IELTS Skip to question 10.

IELTS, continued

10. What was your IELTS listening band score? *

....

11. What was your IELTS reading band score? *

....

12. What was your IELTS writing band score? *

....

13. What was your IELTS speaking band score? *

14 What was your IELTS overall band score? *

....

TOEFL

15. Have you taken TOEFL PBT (paper-based test)? * Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken TOEFL PBT Skip to question 21.
○ I have taken TOEFL PBT Skip to question 16.

TOEFL, continued

16. What was your TOEFL PBT listening score? *

17. What was your TOEFL PBT grammar score? *

18. What was your TOEFL PBT writing score? *

19. What was your TOEFL PBT reading score? *

20. What was your TOEFL PBT total score? *

TOEFL iBT (internet-based test)

21. Have you taken TOEFL iBT? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken TOEFL iBT Skip to question 27.
○ I have taken TOEFL iBT Skip to question 22.

TOEFL iBT, continued

22. What was your TOEFL iBT listening score? *

23. What was your TOEFL iBT reading score? *

24 What was your TOEFL iBT writing score? *

25. What was your TOEFL iBT speaking score? *

26. What was your TOEFL iBT total score? *

CanTEST

27. Have you taken the CanTEST? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken the CanTEST Skip to question 32.
○ I have taken the CanTEST

CanTEST, continued

28. What was your band score for writing on the CanTEST? *

29. What was your band score for reading on the CanTEST? *

30. What was your band score for listening on the CanTEST? *

31. What was your average band score on the CanTEST? *

CELPIP

32. Have you taken the CELPIP? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken the CELPIP Skip to question 35.
○ I have taken the CELPIP

CELPIP, continued

33 What listening score did you receive on the CELPIP? Mark only one oval.

○ 35-38
○ 33-35
○ 30-33
○ 27-31
○ 22-28
○ 17-23
○ I do not remember my listening score.

34. What reading score did you receive on the CELPIP? * Mark only one oval.

○ 33-38
○ 31-33
○ 28-31
○ 24-28
○ 19-25
○ 15-20
○ I do not remember my reading score.

Other language proficiency tests

35. Have you taken any other language proficiency tests that were not included in this survey? (for example, a test to be placed into a program) If yes, please write the name of the test below and the scores you received.

Learning English

36. How long did you study English? *
Mark only one oval.

○ fewer than 2 years
○ 2-3 years
○ 4-5 years
○ more than 5 years

37 Where did you study English? Select all that apply. *
Check all that apply.

☐ elementary school
☐ high school
☐ college
☐ university
☐ Other: ....

38. Please select the answer that best applies to you.
* Mark only one oval per row.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I avoid settings where people don't share my values.	○	○	○
I can enjoy being with people whose values are very different from mine.	○	○	○
I like to surround myself with things that are familiar to me.	○	○	○
I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people.	○	○	○
A good teacher is one who makes you think about your way of looking at things.	○	○	○
Given a chance, I will surround myself with people from different backgrounds.	○	○	○

EAP - English for Academic Purposes (college or university English preparation programs)

39. Have you studied in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program since you arrived in Canada? *
Mark only one oval.

○ Yes Skip to question 45.
○ No

EAP, continued

40. Where did you study EAP? Select the answer that best matches your experiences. * Mark only one oval.

- ○ an EAP program in a community college in southern Ontario
- ○ an EAP program in a university in southern Ontario
- ○ an EAP program in a Canadian community college OUTSIDE of Ontario
- ○ an EAP program in a Canadian university OUTSIDE of Ontario

41 How long did you study in the EAP program? Select the range that applies to you. Mark only one oval.

- ○ 0-3 months
- ○ 4-6 months
- ○ 7-9 months
- ○ 10-12 months
- ○ 13+ months

42. If you studied in an EAP program, what level did you begin your studies?

43. Did you complete the EAP program? * Mark only one oval.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

After the last question in this section, skip to question 45

44. What is the highest level of EAP that you completed? *

Current Studies

45. How did you prepare for your studies to improve your English? Select all that apply * Check all that apply.

Practiced unknown vocabulary; kept a vocabulary journal

Tried to make friends with proficient English speakers

- ☐ Practiced speaking in familiar and unfamiliar situations (e.g. making small talk with cashiers, asking people for directions in the mall)
- ☐ Rented an apartment with a roommate from a different background
- ☐ Found a homestay with a family from a different background
- ☐ Read books and/or articles from English newspapers
- ☐ Watched North American movies and TV shows
- ☐ Took additional English courses
- ☐ Studied English grammar
- ☐ Made an effort to English with friends and acquaintances who are from my background

Other:

46 What college do you currently attend? *
Mark only one oval.

- ○ Algonquin College
- ○ George Brown College
- ○ Humber College
- ○ Seneca College
- ○ Sheridan College
- ○ Mohawk College

47. What is your program of study? *

48. What kind of program is it? Select the best answer.
* Mark only one oval.

- ○ One year certificate program
- ○ 2-3 year diploma program
- ○

3+ year degree program

49. Which year (of your program) are you in? * Mark only one oval.

○ First year
○ Second year
○ Third year
○ Fourth year

50. How many courses are you currently taking? * Mark only one oval.

○ 0-3
○ 4-5
○ 6 or more

51. Please list the names of the courses you are currently taking. *

52 Which classes are the easiest for you? Please list them. *

53. Please think about the courses that are easy for you. Answer how you feel about your abilities in those courses. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	I am comfortable	I am neither comfortable or uncomfortable.	I am not comfortable	Not applicable in my situation
Communicating with my instructor by email.	○	○	○	○
Communicating with my instructor in person.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following written instructions.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following oral instructions.	○	○	○	○
Writing lab reports.	○	○	○	○
Taking notes in during lectures.	○	○	○	○
Following and understanding group discussions	○	○	○	○
Sharing my ideas and opinions during group discussions.	○	○	○	○
Completing class work on time.	○	○	○	○
Understanding required course readings.	○	○	○	○

54. Which classes are challenging for you? Please list them.

....

....

....

55 Please think about the courses that are challenging for you. Answer how you feel about your abilities in those courses. * Mark only one oval per row.

	I am comfortable	I am neither comfortable or uncomfortable.	I am not comfortable	Not applicable in my situation
Communicating with my instructor by email.	○	○	○	○
Communicating with my instructor in person.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following written instructions.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following oral instructions.	○	○	○	○
Writing lab reports.	○	○	○	○
Taking notes in during lectures.	○	○	○	○
Following and understanding group discussions	○	○	○	○
Sharing my ideas and opinions during group discussions.	○	○	○	○
Completing class work on time.	○	○	○	○
Understanding required course readings.	○	○	○	○

56. Is there anything else you would like to share about language proficiency tests, your previous education, your classroom experiences, or anything else?

....

....

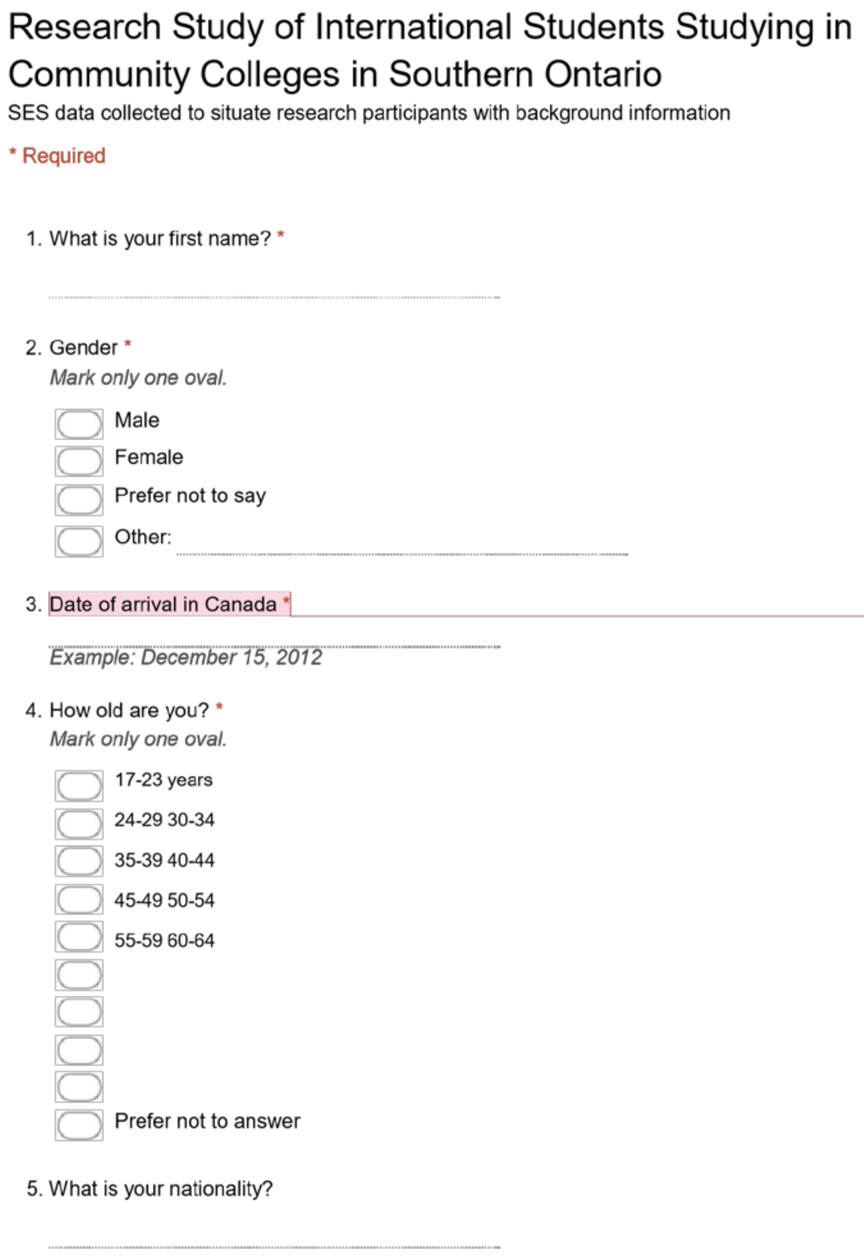
....

....

Thank you for completing this survey. We will have a chance to talk more about your answers in our one on one interview.

Powered by
Google Forms

Appendix B. Questionnaire for Semi-Structured Interviews



Research Study of International Students Studying in Community Colleges in Southern Ontario

SES data collected to situate research participants with background information

* Required

1. What is your first name? *

2. Gender *
Mark only one oval.
○ Male
○ Female
○ Prefer not to say
○ Other:

3. Date of arrival in Canada *
Example: December 15, 2012

4. How old are you? *
Mark only one oval.
○ 17-23 years
○ 24-29 30-34
○ 35-39 40-44
○ 45-49 50-54
○ 55-59 60-64
○
○
○
○
○ Prefer not to answer

5. What is your nationality?

Commented [AB1]: Can you tell me why you came to Canada?
What helped you make this decision?
Did you make this decision on your own, or was someone else a part of the decision-making process with you?
Why didn't you choose another country?
What are your plans after you finish your studies?
In 2 years?
In 5 years?
Do you see yourself staying in this country, or moving somewhere else?

6. Which languages do you know? Please list them in the order you learned them. For First Language, you can give more than one if you were raised in multilingual family. *

7. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
Mark only one oval.
   - ○ High school
   - ○ Some college courses, but I did not finish a diploma or a program
   - ○ College, with a diploma and/or degree
   - ○ Some university courses, but I did not receive a degree.
   - ○ University degree
   - ○ Post graduate studies

8. Have you taken any language proficiency tests? *
Mark only one oval.
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No *Skip to question 39.*

Commented [AB2]: How many times did you take (insert name of proficiency test). What did you learn from the experience of taking the test more than once?

Commented [AB3]: For any proficiency tests:
How did you prepare for the tests?
Possible follow up
You got:....(identify test score) You clearly did well on this test. The measure shows if you do well on a test you will be successful in academic studies. Did the test prepare you for your studies in your program?
Do you think it was the test itself that prepared you, or the extra studying?

IELTS

9. Have you taken IELTS? *
Mark only one oval.
   - ○ I have not taken IELTS *Skip to question 15.*
   - ○ I have taken IELTS *Skip to question 10.*

IELTS, continued

10. What was your IELTS listening band score? *

11. What was your IELTS reading band score? *

12. What was your IELTS writing band score? *

13. What was your IELTS speaking band score? *

14. What was your IELTS overall band score? *

TOEFL

15. Have you taken TOEFL PBT (paper-based test)? * *Mark only one oval.*

○ I have not taken TOEFL PBT *Skip to question 21*

○ . I have taken TOEFL PBT *Skip to question 16.*

TOEFL, continued

16. What was your TOEFL PBT listening score? *

17. What was your TOEFL PBT grammar score? *

18. What was your TOEFL PBT writing score? *

19. What was your TOEFL PBT reading score? *

20. What was your TOEFL PBT total score? *

TOEFL iBT (internet-based test)

21. Have you taken TOEFL iBT? * *Mark only one oval.*

○ I have not taken TOEFL iBT *Skip to question 27.*

○ I have taken TOEFL iBT *Skip to question 22.*

TOEFL iBT, continued

22. What was your TOEFL iBT listening score? *

....

23. What was your TOEFL iBT reading score? *

24. What was your TOEFL iBT writing score? *

25. What was your TOEFL iBT speaking score? *

26. What was your TOEFL iBT total score? *

CanTEST

27. Have you taken the CanTEST? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken the CanTEST *Skip to question 32.*
○ I have taken the CanTEST

Commented [AB4]: Follow up questions:
You said in your survey answers that you took the CanTEST.
1. Can you tell me why you took the CanTEST?
2. (possible) At what stage of your EAP studies did you take the CanTEST?
3. Did studying for the CanTEST help you to be successful in your current studies? Can you explain how?

CanTEST, continued

28. What was your band score for writing on the CanTEST? *

29. What was your band score for reading on the CanTEST? *

30. What was your band score for listening on the CanTEST? *

31. What was your average band score on the CanTEST? *

CELPIP

32. Have you taken the CELPIP? *
Mark only one oval.

○ I have not taken the CELPIP *Skip to question 35.*
○ I have taken the CELPIP

CELPIP, continued

33. What listening score did you receive on the CELPIP?
Mark only one oval.

○ 35-38
○ 33-35
○ 30-33
○ 27-31
○ 22-28
○ 17-23
○ I do not remember my listening score.

34. What reading score did you receive on the CELPIP? *
Mark only one oval.

○ 33-38
○ 31-33
○ 28-31
○ 24-28
○ 19-25
○ 15-20
○ I do not remember my reading score.

Other language proficiency tests

35. Have you taken any other language proficiency tests that were not included in this survey? (for example, a test to be placed into a program) If yes, please write the name of the test below and the scores you received.

Commented [AB5]: Follow up:
1. Can you tell me a bit more about this test?
2. Where did you take this test?
3. What was the structure of the test?
4. Who usually takes this test?

Learning English

36. How long did you study English? *
Mark only one oval.

○ fewer than 2 years
○ 2-3 years
○ 4-5 years
○ more than 5 years

37. Where did you study English? Select all that apply. *
Check all that apply.

☐ elementary school
☐ high school
☐ college
☐ university
☐ Other: ____________________

38. Please select the answer that best applies to you. *
Mark only one oval per row.

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I avoid settings where people don't share my values.		○	○	○	○
I can enjoy being with people whose values are very different from mine.		○	○	○	○
I like to surround myself with things that are familiar to me.		○	○	○	○
I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people.	○	○	○	○	○
A good teacher is one who makes you think about your way of looking at things.	○	○	○	○	○
Given a chance, I will surround myself with people from different backgrounds.	○	○	○	○	○

EAP - English for Academic Purposes (college or university English preparation programs)

39. Have you studied in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program since you arrived in Canada? *
Mark only one oval.

○ Yes *Skip to question 45.*
○ No

EAP, continued

40. Where did you study EAP? Select the answer that best matches your experiences. *
Mark only one oval.

○ An EAP program in a community college in southern Ontario
○ An EAP program in a university in southern Ontario
○ an EAP program in a Canadian community college OUTSIDE of Ontario an
○ EAP program in a Canadian university OUTSIDE of Ontario

Commented [AB6]: Why were you studying English at (name particular stage)?

Commented [AB7]: Follow up:
1. Can you tell me more about how you learned English?
Probes:
1. Think about: the size of classrooms, what age you were, how you were taught, private lessons:
2. Did you find this tyle of learning English helpful for your
   a. Writing? Why/why not? How?
   b. Reading? Why/why not?How?
   c. Listening? Why/why not? How?
   d. Speaking? Why/why not? How?

Commented [AB8]: Can you tell me a little bit more about this? For example, can you give me an example of a situation where you avoid people who don't have the same values as you?
Why do you avoid these settings? Do you feel uncomfortable in these situations?

Commented [AB9]: Tell me about a time when you enjoyed spending time with people who have a different background from you.
Probes:
1. Why was it enjoyable?
2. What made it enjoyable?
3. Were there people there from a similar background from yours?
4. Do you look forward to these types of events?

Commented [AB10]: You mentioned that(state answer that participant provided).
Probe:
Could you describe the types of things you keep that are familiar?
What motivates you to collect these types of things?
Are there ever times when you would like to have something unfamiliar, like a meal or a picture?
(perhaps use silence or nodding to encourage more answers)

Commented [AB11]: You mentioned that (repeat the answer the participant gave). Why do you think you are comfortable with people? Or
What makes you uncomfortable with different people? Is it culture, language, unfamiliar situations, for example?

Commented [AB12]: You answered this question (repeat what participant answered). Some people think that a good teacher helps students understand different points of view by: a) including readings that expose different points of view
b) ask students "why" when they state their opinions
c) pretends to support the opposite of what he/she believes in order to make students aware of other perspectives.
Can you think of any teachers you have had who have done these things, or something similar?
Did it change your classroom experience?
How?
Did you enjoy looking at things in a different way? Do you think it helped you learn?

Commented [AB13R12]:

Commented [AB14]: You said (repeat the answer which was given). Can you tell me more about why you said that?
Probes:
Do you have opportunities to spend time with people from other cultures?
...

41. How long did you study in the EAP program? Select the range that applies to you.
Mark only one oval.

○ 0-3 months
○ 4-6 months
○ 7-9 months
○ 10-12 months
○ 13+ months

42. If you studied in an EAP program, what level did you begin your studies?

43. Did you complete the EAP program? *
Mark only one oval.

○ Yes *After the last question in this section, skip to question 45.*
○ No

44. What is the highest level of EAP that you completed? *

Current Studies

45. How did you prepare for your studies to improve your English? Select all that apply *
Check all that apply.

☐ Practiced unknown vocabulary; kept a vocabulary journal
☐ Tried to make friends with proficient English speakers
☐ Practiced speaking in familiar and unfamiliar situations (e.g. making small talk with cashiers, asking people for directions in the mall)
☐ Rented an apartment with a roommate from a different background
☐ Found a homestay with a family from a different background
☐ Read books and/or articles from English newspapers
☐ Watched North American movies and TV shows
☐ Took additional English courses
☐ Studied English grammar
☐ Made an effort to English with friends and acquaintances who are from my background
☐ Other:

Commented [AB15]: You said that you did not complete the EAP program? Why did you leave it?

Commented [AB16]: If you could offer the associate dean of the EAP program some advice on how to improve it so that the student experience would be better, or what assignments should be offered, how the program should be organized, what would you suggest?

Commented [AB17]: How was the program structured? For example, how long was it?
Were you taught reading listening speaking writing separately?
Were there any other courses you took in the EAP program? What were they?
Did you have the opportunity to take any courses outside of the EAP program? What were they? Why did you take them? Did they help you with your language learning at the time?
Can you tell me about the types of assignments you had in your EAP courses? Have you completed similar assignments in your program?

As you know, I am an EAP instructor and we have an opportunity to talk with teachers who teach English Communication and other courses. I often hear professors say that they feel students who complete the EAP program are better prepared for studying in post-secondary course

Commented [AB18]: These are questions about before you started your studies.

Commented [AB19]: Where did you find this vocabulary? Did you do it regularly?

Commented [AB20]: Were you successful? Why do you think this didn't work for you? Have you kept trying to make connections with people who speak English well?

Commented [AB21]: I noticed you answered (repeat the answer). Was the experience a positive or a negative one? How was it positive/negative?

Commented [AB22]: You said that you had a homestay with a family from different background from yours. Can you describe your experience? Did the family encourage y

Commented [AB23]: What types of shows or movies?
Why did you watch them?
Did they help you develop listening skills in class?

Commented [AB24]: Why did you focus on this?
What aspects of grammar did you practice?
Were you able to teach yourself successfully? How? Has it helped you? In what way?

Commented [AB25]: Do you think this has been successful? How do you and your friends manage to avoid your common language?

Commented [AB26]: You indicated Other. What other things have you done to prepare for your studies?
Why did you do this?

Commented [AB27]: Which of these things are you continueing with? Have you tried other strategies for language learning that I have not listed here?

46. What college do you currently attend? *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ Algonquin College
- ○ George Brown College
- ○ Humber College
- ○ Seneca College
- ○ Sheridan College
- ○ Mohawk College

47. What is your program of study? *

....

Commented [AB28]: How did you choose the program? Was it your choice to study this? Probe to make sure you get at 6 choices and they were desparate – it will impact on how ready and successful you are
Did you get into your program of choice, or are you studying this so that you can try to get into .... At a later date?

48. What kind of program is it? Select the best answer. *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ One year certificate program
- ○ 2-3 year diploma program
- ○ 3+ year degree program

49. Which year (of your program) are you in? *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ First year
- ○ Second year
- ○ Third year
- ○ Fourth year

50. How many courses are you currently taking? *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ 0-3
- ○ 4-5
- ○ 6 or more

51. Please list the names of the courses you are currently taking. *

....

....

....

....

Commented [AB29]: I'd like you to think back to when you began your program. You had just passed the ILETS test/taken the canTEST/completed the EAP program. That part was over and you were ready to study what you came to study in Canada. What did you feel confident about? Did you feel that you would be able to do presentations in your courses, for example? Did you feel ready to write essays? Was there anything else that you felt ready for?

52. Which classes are the easiest for you? Please list them. *

53. Please think about the courses that you are doing well in, or courses that are easy? r you. Answer how you feel about your abilities in those courses. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	I am very comfortable	I am comfortable	I am neither comfortable or uncomfortable.	I am not comfortable	I am not Comfortable at all	Not applicable in my situation
Communicating with my instructor by email.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Communicating with my instructor in person.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following written instructions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following oral instructions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Writing lab reports.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Taking notes in during lectures.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Following and understanding group discussions	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sharing my ideas and opinions during group discussions.		○	○	○	○	○
Completing class work on time.		○	○	○	○	○
Understanding required course readings.		○	○	○	○	○

Commented [AB30]: Why did you say it was easy? Are you doing well? Is the topic familiar to you?

Commented [AB31]:

Commented [AB32R31]: Possible follow-up questions:
1. You indicated that you feel comfortable/very comfortable (repeat which statement student indicated). Is this true for all of the classes which are easy for you?
2. How often have you (repeat which statement student indicated).
3. Why do you think these things are easy for you? How are you successful in producing this kind of work for your courses? Can you describe your process? How did you learn to follow this process? Was it through trial and error or something else?

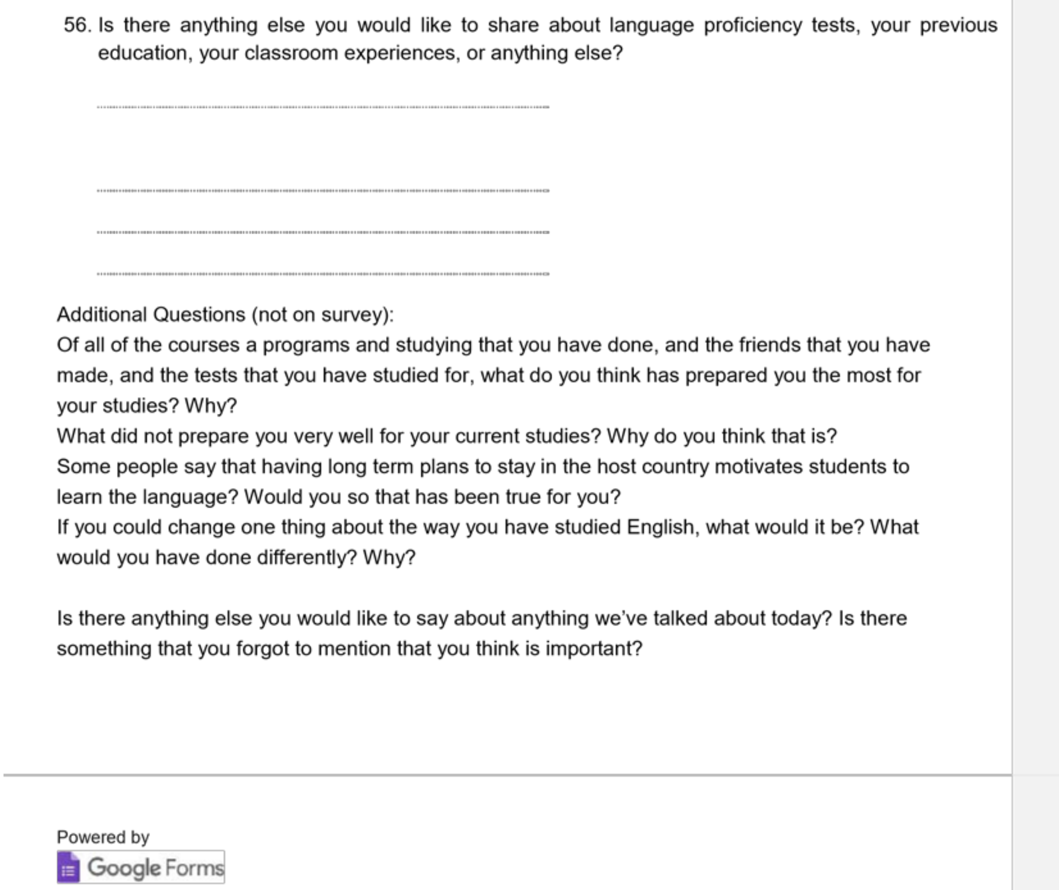
Commented [AB33]: Why is this something that you are comfortable doing? Do you know the students in your courses? Would you say that helps you be more comfortable sharing your opinions in groups, or is there another reason for that?

54. Which classes are challenging for you? Please list them.

55. Please think about the courses that are challenging for you. Answer how you feel about your abilities in those courses. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	I am comfortable	I am neither comfortable or uncomfortable.	I am not comfortable	Not applicable in my situation
Communicating with my instructor by email.	○	○	○	○
Communicating with my instructor in person.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following written instructions.	○	○	○	○
Understanding and following oral instructions.	○	○	○	○
Writing lab reports.	○	○	○	○
Taking notes in during lectures.	○	○	○	○
Following and understanding group discussions	○	○	○	○
Sharing my ideas and opinions during group discussions.	○	○	○	○
Completing class work on time.	○	○	○	○
Understanding required course readings.	○	○	○	○

Commented [AB34]: You've mentioned that you were not comfortable ..... Which class was that in?
Why do you think you are not comfortable... ?
Is there a skill that you need to develop more in order to be more successful doing this?
Did you ever learn how to .... In your EAP course/previous classes/etc? Were you able to do it successfully then?
If yes, why do you think you are having difficulties now with ....?



56. Is there anything else you would like to share about language proficiency tests, your previous education, your classroom experiences, or anything else?

Additional Questions (not on survey):

Of all of the courses a programs and studying that you have done, and the friends that you have made, and the tests that you have studied for, what do you think has prepared you the most for your studies? Why?

What did not prepare you very well for your current studies? Why do you think that is?

Some people say that having long term plans to stay in the host country motivates students to learn the language? Would you so that has been true for you?

If you could change one thing about the way you have studied English, what would it be? What would you have done differently? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to say about anything we've talked about today? Is there something that you forgot to mention that you think is important?

Appendix C. Letter of Consent – Email Recruitment

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled 'International Students' Perceptions of Academic Preparedness in Post-Secondary Studies' that is being conducted by Anna Bartosik. Anna Bartosik is an MA student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. You may contact her if you have further questions by email: anna.bartosik@mail.utoronto.ca

The purpose of this research project is to focus on international students studying in post-secondary community colleges in southern Ontario, and to examine students' perceptions of academic preparedness in their programs of study. The study may help to improve the student learning experiences and may assist institutes of higher learning to help develop their protocols for assisting international students in their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Research of this type is important because it provides a better understanding of how perceptions of academic preparedness affect international students in a variety of situations and it may assist institutes of higher learning to help develop their protocols for assisting international students in their academic, social, and emotional needs.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an international student studying in a community college in southern Ontario.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include: completing an online form which asks for data about your age, education, and language tests and scores; and in an interview of approximately sixty to seventy-five minutes. Interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device. No visual data will be recorded. Data will be stored electronically on a USB storage device. Data will be stored securely at the home of the researcher, and will be accessible only by the researcher. Please note the University of Toronto Ethics Research Board personnel have the right to access data in the case of a potential audit of researchers. The focus is to ensure that researchers are following proper procedure for data collection.

Data will be destroyed following the researcher's study program when no longer required by the institution responsible for the program.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, names of participants and any identifiable characteristics or names of institutions will not be included in the study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time by emailing the researcher, whereupon your data will be removed from the study and destroyed. Otherwise, your data will remain in the study.

Kindly let me know if you are willing to participate voluntarily in this study.

Thank you,
Anna Bartosik
MA Candidate
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6

Appendix D. Letter of Informed Consent for Participants

Date:

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “International Students’ Perceptions of Academic Preparedness in Post-secondary Studies” that is being conducted by Anna Bartosik. Anna Bartosik is an MA student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. You may contact her if you have further questions by email: anna.bartosik@mail.utoronto.ca

The purpose of this research project is focus on international students studying in post-secondary community colleges in southern Ontario, and to examine students’ perceptions of academic preparedness in their programs of study.

Research of this type is important because it provides a better understanding of how perceptions of academic preparedness affect international students in a variety of situations and it may assist institutes of higher learning to help develop their protocols for assisting international students in their academic, social, and emotional needs

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an international student studying in a program in a community college in southern Ontario.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include: completing an online form; submitting a sample of completed course work with any associated rubrics; alternatively, a writing sample will be requested if no course work is available; and participating in an interview of approximately thirty to forty-five minutes.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

In terms of protecting anonymity, names of participants and any identifiable characteristics or names of institutions will not be included in the study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed and will not be included in the study findings.

The results of this study will be shared with others in a published MA thesis, which will be available in a digital copy at the University of Toronto.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the above email, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you may have, by contacting the Ethics office:

McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Cres. W, 2nd Floor Toronto, ON M5S 1S8

TEL: 416-946-3273 FAX: 416- 946-5763 EMAIL: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

Principal Investigator Anna Bartosik

Researcher Signature Date

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher(s).

Participant Signature* Date

OR

Authorized Representative Signature** Date

**Where written consent is culturally unacceptable, or where there are good reasons for not recording consent in writing, the procedures used to seek free and informed consent shall be documented.*

***Free and informed consent must be obtained from an authorized representative for someone who is not legally competent to consent to be a research participant.*

Subject to applicable legal requirements.