

Research Note

Postgraduate International Students' Living and Learning Experience at a Public University in British Columbia

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Canada is a rich and diverse country that attracts many international students and immigrants to expand their horizon. According to Statistics Canada (2017), nearly 30% of British Columbia total population speak a mother tongue that is a language other than English. The statistics indicate that besides Caucasian Canadians, other ethnical groups can live in Canada without barriers.

Canadian higher education institutions attract many international students for educational and research purposes and provide a welcoming community, due to their well-known educational qualities. Currently, there are 11 public higher education institutions and five private higher education institutions in British Columbia. According to Global Affairs Canada (2016), the international student population has increased significantly. From last decade, the total population of international students has increased from 114,093 in 2000 to 218,245 in 2010. The increasing percentage was nearly 100%. The report also indicated that the student population classified as university students had an 8% of annual growth rate. Based on the above statistics, Canadian higher education institutions are considered as one of the most popular destinations for international students to seek degrees.

The Purpose of the Research

International students increase the overall diversity of higher education institutions in Canada. According to Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2010), language, culture, finance and social difficulties create a disadvantage for international students in a foreign country (Dos Santos, 2018). However, once international students overcome these difficulties, they may be able to gain positive advantages due to their inter-cultural backgrounds (Dos Santos, 2017). This research attempts to understand the living and learning experience of postgraduate international students who are enrolled at a public university in the Province of British Columbia. This research also explores postgraduate international students' experiences handling difficulties and disadvantages.

The result of this research will be beneficial to three parties. First, after the completion of this research, school administrators will be able to understand how to establish targeted support, psychological counseling and academic assistant for postgraduate international students on and off campus. Second, governmental agencies will benefit from international postgraduate students who have the skills and intelligence to assist Canadian communities. Third, the research will provide a map for future international postgraduate students to understand the

overall living and learning experiences that they face in Canada.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Stress by Lazarus (1991) indicates that there are two directions of psychological stress, which are appraisal and coping. The appraisal concept can be divided into primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Goal relevance, goal congruence and types of ego-involvement are the three components of primary appraisal. Internal options and external options are considered as secondary appraisal. Within the coping concept, problem based-coping and emotional based-coping are the two primary coping models. This research will follow the Theory of Stress by Lazarus (1991) to explore the learning experience of postgraduate international students' learning experience at a public university in British Columbia.

Methodology

This study seeks to answer three research questions:

1. How do postgraduate international students make sense of their living and learning experience as foreigners in a public university in British Columbia?
2. What types of advantage and disadvantage do postgraduate international students face during their academic voyage in Canada?
3. How does Canadian culture change and influence their perspective and conception during their living and learning experience in a public university in British Columbia?

This research will employ hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (Rappaport, 1987) to explore the lived and learning experiences of international postgraduate students at a public university in British Columbia. Phenomenological analysis tends to explore, explain and understand a social event or behavior.

Sampling Strategy

This research will employ the snowball sampling strategy to invite international postgraduate students as potential participants (Creswell, 2012). First, the researcher will invite one participant into this research for data collection. After the data collection process, the participant will refer at least two potential participants for this research. The advantage of snowball sampling strategy is that it reduces the potential bias from one network. The ideal number of participants is 8-20 (Creswell, 2008). To protect the participants, pseudonyms will be given to mask their identity.

Data Analysis

Data will be primarily collected through individual in-depth interviews and focus group activities with an individual member checking interview after the data analysis process. The researcher is the only interviewer and analyst in this study. All the data and information will be locked in a password-protected computer (Creswell, 2008).

The research procedure is as follows. First, each participant will be invited to an open-ended structured, one-on-one, face-to-face interview for 70-120 minutes (Merriam, 2009). The open-

ended interview will be appropriate for this research because living and learning experiences are rich. The researcher will not limit the horizon of experience and information sharing (Maxwell, 2013). Second, once all the participants have completed the interviews, the researcher will organize a four to six person focus group to collect ideas and experiences from participants who share similar situations (Tang and Dos Santos, 2017). During the focus group, the researcher will serve as a coordinator to mark field notes and handle potential conflicts and arguments. Third, after the researcher completes the data analysis process, a 30-minute member checking interview with each participant will follow to confirm the validity and reliability (Merriam, 2009).

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