



## Calling for Equitable Access to the Canadian Labor Market: Exploring the Challenges of International Graduate Students in Canada

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### ABSTRACT

*In this paper, we identify the main challenges faced by international graduate students seeking employment in the Canadian labor market after completing Canadian Master of Education programs. We approach this issue from our combined perspectives: a professor of higher education and a recent international graduate with a Master of Education program. Drawing on the theoretical framework Responsibility of the University in Employability (RUE) (López-Miguens et al., 2021), we argue that universities play a significant role in preparing international students for successful integration into the Canadian workforce. After conducting a thematic analysis of the relevant literature, we identify the five most common key challenges faced by international students: racialized complexities of a credential regime, problems of deskilling and devaluation of immigrants, the triple glass effect, foreign accent bias, and a lack of soft skills according to the Canadian norm. In response to these thematic findings, we offer two key recommendations for Canadian universities: helping international students build networks and employment contacts and helping international students take part in work-integrated learning and vocational programs that ease their transition into employment after graduating from a Canadian Master of Education program.*

**Keywords:** Canada, employability, international students, Master of Education, postsecondary

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## INTRODUCTION

Employability is the ability to get and keep a paid job. Employability is a major concern for international students who come to study in Western countries (Zhao et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). According to Guo (2015), in 2005, the Canadian government introduced the express entry program to speed up the process of skilled immigrants' applications in less than six months so that they could begin to contribute to Canada's economy and job market after a shorter period of time. The Canadian Experience Class (CEC) stream was introduced in 2008 to account for the proportion of economic immigrants admitted to Canada (Nunes & Arthur, 2013). The CEC has allowed skilled foreign workers and international graduates of Canadian postsecondary institutions with work experience in Canada to apply for permanent residency without the need to leave Canada to complete the application process. Before 2008, international graduates were required to return to their home country to apply for permanent residency (Tamburri, 2019). In 2013, the government further eased CEC requirements by reducing the work requirement period from fourteen months to twelve months in three years, instead of two years, after graduation (Tamburri, 2019). After spending at least three of the last five years working and residing in Canada, permanent residents may apply for Canadian citizenship (Government of Canada, 2024).

Conducting research on international students' integration into the Canadian workforce, Nunes and Arthur (2013) stated that international students were positioned as potential skilled immigrants, owing to their past work experience, by the Canadian government, which has enacted policies to ease the immigration process for international students. To properly recognize the importance of international students to Canada in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and help Canada become more competitive in significant competition with other developed countries, the AUCC suggested that the Canadian government should enhance and simplify the policy related to international students and facilitate the recruitment of international students (in terms of the complexity involved and the related public debate; see also Omidvar, 2024). In particular, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act should focus on facilitating international student recruitment as an important objective for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Finally, the federal government should take a government-wide approach to international student recruitment and prioritize increasing resources for CIC's processing of student visa applications (AUCC, Ottawa (Ontario), 2001).

However, according to Reitz et al. (2014), in Canada, highly skilled foreign workers (including international students) often have trouble finding jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Two possible reasons for those difficulties are as follows: first, employers do not recognize foreign credentials and work experience; second, their language skills are still developing according to employers. Drawing on the lived experiences of the authors, the paper argues that despite the richness that international students bring to Canada's society and economy, they encounter significant difficulties in obtaining employment opportunities after completing their studies in Canada. The edited volume of Raby, Singh, and Bista (2022) presents many cases that illustrate the challenges

that many international graduates and highly skilled immigrant professionals in Canada encounter when attempting to integrate into the Canadian labor market.

Importantly, there is no policy available at the university level that addresses the university's responsibility of providing employment opportunities during or after graduate students complete their Master of Education program. In this paper, the driving reflections from the authors are from one particular university's Master of Education program, but these are comparable to other Canadian university programs that have created a Master of Education program with a financial motivation to assist the university. Notably, no guarantees of work or employability are offered to international students upon the completion of the Master of Education program; rather, it is seen only as a potentially viable pathway to gain permanent residency in Canada, which is currently at risk, as evidenced by international student protests across Canada (Pandher & Dhami, 2024).

## **POSITIONALITIES**

As this paper originated from the authors' experience with the topic, it is important to provide this experience as well as their positionalities.

The first author, who self-identifies as a Vietnamese male, was a graduate of the Master of Education program at a mid-sized university in British Columbia. After graduation, he stayed in Canada to look for jobs and struggled in the process. He has experienced and witnessed the challenges that international racialized people faced in their integration into Canadian society and the labor market after various unsuccessful attempts at professional long-term full-time employment positions.

The second author identifies as a South Asian Canadian as she was born and raised in Toronto as a second-generation immigrant. Over the past five years, she has worked with several international students at a mid-sized university in British Columbia and thus has secondhand knowledge of the trends and challenges that many of her students face in finding stable and meaningful employment. She has supported Author 1 as a graduate student and now as a colleague in the field of postsecondary education.

Following Author 1's (and many other international students') experience of challenges going into the employment sector after graduation, it is important to turn our attention to the following questions: Why does Canada want international students? What does the literature say about the matter? How, if any, can the challenges faced by international students be mitigated by higher education institutions? It is with this line of questioning that we have decided to embark upon this paper. When reflecting upon the lack of accountability toward international students by graduate programs that are often in existence due to international students' financial contributions and comparing this back to the challenges faced by international students in the Canadian employment market, we wonder if this reflects a deficit in attitudes toward the capabilities and assets that international students bring to Canada. We hope to provide insights from our

own narratives both as a mentor to international students (Author 2) and as an international student with lived experience (Author 1). We would like to further explore the ethical responsibility of universities and Canadian employers toward international students who graduate from Canadian universities and seek equitable working opportunities at fair wages for their international experience and education.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper uses the theoretical framework of López-Miguens et al. (2021), who measured the responsibility of the University in Employability (RUE) as the ability of a university to impart general and specific values, skills, and mindsets to its students and to carry out matching activities with employers as much as it enhances the employability of future graduates. The research was grounded in positional conflict theory (Brown et al., 2003, as cited in López-Miguens et al., 2021) and the resource-based view (Barney, 1991, as cited in López-Miguens et al., 2021). It also considers broader employability studies, such as career studies, management, and psychology.

According to international students, the main motivation for pursuing studies abroad is to find work in the country in which they are studying (Fakunle & Pirrie 2020; Gribble et al., 2015; Soares & Mosquera, 2020); thus, employability matters. The term employability has a wide range of definitions in this paper; we draw upon Römgens et al.'s (2020) work, which states that all employability definitions focus on a competence-based approach that is centered on an individual's skills and ability to obtain and maintain employment throughout their career. Thus, this definition of employability and the theoretical framework of RUE need to be a cornerstone in programs such as a Master of Education to ensure that the long-term benefits of the program are given to both the university and international students.

However, López-Miguens et al. reported that the quality of teaching staff and the mismatching activities between universities and employers played more important roles than university reputation in terms of graduate employability. In other words, if the teaching staff and the opportunities to match international students with potential employers are not aligned, then the RUE cannot be fulfilled. According to López-Miguens et al. (2021), universities bear some of the responsibility for the results that their students achieve in their social, local, and international communities. They have the ability and potential to equip students with necessary skills so that they can become responsible citizens in society and improve their employability for future employment. Therefore, López-Miguens et al. (2021) maintained that the main objective of universities is prioritizing employability.

According to López-Miguens et al. (2021), multiple parties are interested in RUE. For sustainable human development, society wants universities to provide competent students. On the other hand, government organisations want to achieve fruitful results in their investments in universities through the integration of

graduates in the workforce and the prevention of unemployment. Additionally, employers need graduates with not only domain-relevant knowledge but also attributes such as empathy with their surroundings, flexibility, adaptability, and teamwork. In summary, RUE is one of the primary objectives of the Bologna Process for universities within the framework of the European Higher Education Area, despite the interest of multiple parties (Paris Communiqué, 2018). As a result, López-Miguens et al. claimed that universities are becoming increasingly socially responsible, and we use this theoretical lens to inform our paper.

## **METHOD**

We used literature review to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing research on the employment challenges faced by international graduate students in Canada. To find relevant literature for this paper, the following keywords were used: immigrants, employability, barriers, challenges, postsecondary, Canada. The search engines used were Google Scholar, PubMed, and the local university's library database, which draws upon JStor and Scopus and relevant government and institutional reports. For the years of the search, we aimed for the past ten years (2014--2024) but ended up having to review the most relevant articles that went back to 2006 and included studies beyond the Canadian context. The relevant studies we included (a) focused on international graduate students in Canada, (b) addressed employment challenges, (c) were published between 2006 and 2024, and (d) were written in English. Studies focusing on undergraduate students or those published before 2006 were excluded. After the review and analysis of the relevant literature, the following five themes emerged as the five key challenges: credential recognition, deskilling and devaluation, the triple glass effect, foreign accent bias, and a lack of soft skills.

## **FINDINGS**

We provide the following literature review on the five most common challenges that immigrants face when trying to integrate into the Canadian workforce.

### **1. Racialized complexities of a credential regime**

Guo (2015) contested that there was a racialized skills regime in Canada through the lens of critical race theory and argued that the knowledge and skills of recent immigrants in Canada were racialized and materialized on the basis of ethnicity and nationality. According to Guo, a racialized regime of skill has produced normative, white, docile corporate subjects who adhere to Canadian norms and organizational cultures.

Liu and Guo (2021) reported that

Recognition of international qualifications in Canada involves 13 jurisdictions, 55 ministries, more than 50 regulated occupations, more than

400 regulatory bodies, 5 assessment agencies, more than 240 postsecondary institutions and a large community of immigrant service agencies, not to mention numerous employers (p. 740).

Multilayers of authorities and myriad policies created an institutional complexity that governed the local settings in which immigrants must wait a long time to conform to the qualification assessment process or look for other lines of employment whose skills are unappreciated. Institutional complexity diminishes immigrants' prior social investments in education and work experience. During the prolonged recognition process of their international qualifications, many of them had to work in 'survival jobs' not commensurate with their prior professional experiences or related to their skills, enduring low pay and precarious working and living conditions.

Raza et al. (2013) confirmed that the devaluation of foreign qualifications was one element that impacted the labor market outcomes of visible minority immigrants in Canada. According to Raza et al., visible minority immigrants are more likely to be stuck in low-income jobs than other immigrants are. One of the reasons for their earnings disadvantage was discrimination against visible minority immigrants (Pendakur & Pendakur, 1997, as cited in Raza et al., 2013).

According to Guo, immigrants' international qualifications, job skills and work experience tend to be devalued and denigrated based on their skin color (Guo 2015). Liu and Guo (2021) claimed that the color of the skill associated with immigrants' skin color caused deskilling and devaluation, which will be discussed in the next section. In summary, the knowledge and skills of recent immigrants in Canada have been racialized and led to white privilege and dominance.

## **2. Deskilling and devaluation of immigrants in Canada**

In contemporary workplaces, skill has been denoted as a strategy to achieve high employability, productivity, and economic competitiveness. However, the definition of skill was problematic and contested by Guo (2015) in the circumstances of immigrants looking for employment in Canada. Guo argued that skill is nothing but an ideology, 'skill is not neutral; it is socially constructed'. It was necessary to consider skill as a relational concept that was entailed in social, cultural, and economic organizations. In fact, Guo tried to answer the following questions: "Why are immigrants' knowledge and skills devalued? What counts as legitimate knowledge and skill? Whose knowledge and skills are considered valuable? Whose knowledge and skills are silenced? Are knowledge and skill racialized..." (p. 237) on the basis of immigrants' races or ethnicities?

Liu and Guo (2021) and Guo (2009) reported that while trying to have their international qualifications and professional experiences recognized, immigrants in Canada faced denigration, devaluation, and deskilling. Despite Canada's need for highly skilled immigrants, many of them encountered deskilling and downward social and occupational mobility after arriving in Canada (Guo, 2015). According to Guo, even when knowledge and skills are considered legitimate, the skills and work experience of internationally trained professionals are often doubted or considered inferior. Some immigrants had to shift to low-skilled jobs

in sales, services, and manufacturing, even though they had previously worked in science, engineering, business, and management positions. This situation posed challenges to their integration and eliminated the benefit of their skills.

In another research study, Reitz et al. (2014) investigated the situations of immigrants who arrived five years before 1996, 2001, and 2006. The proportion of immigrants with university degrees was always greater than that of the Canadian-born population, from nearly two times in 1996 to at least two-and-a-half times in 2006. Despite this, immigrants have difficulty accessing high-skilled occupations such as managerial or professional occupations. Reitz et al. reported that for immigrant men with university degrees, the percentage in high-skilled jobs was 50.4% in 1996, increasing to 54.2% in 2001 but then decreasing to 43.5% in 2006. For immigrant women, the percentage of highly skilled employees was 34.6% in 1996, increasing to 42.3% in 2001 but decreasing to 34.4% in 2006. Reitz et al. also discovered that the proportion of highly skilled immigrants in the lowest-skilled jobs, such as cashiers, kitchen helpers, and cleaners, increased steadily, from 1.5 times the proportion for the Canadian-born population to 2.3 and 2.4 times over the same period. While skilled immigrants constitute an expanding segment of the Canadian workforce, they find it harder to obtain professional and managerial jobs over time (Reitz et al., 2014). Reitz et al. demonstrated that the devaluation of immigrant skills resulted in lower salaries than did their equally qualified Canadian-born counterparts in jobs at the same skill level. They reported that racial and cultural differences, in addition to country of origin, gender, age and other qualities, play a vital role in devaluing the qualifications and skills of immigrants (Li, 2008).

Reitz et al. (2014) estimated the total incomes that immigrants failed to obtain due to unused or underutilized skills as \$4.8 billion in 1996, \$6.02 billion in 2001, and \$11.37 billion in 2006 in Canada. This demonstrated that immigrant skill underutilization not only exists in Canada but also has deepened. The inferior value of immigrant skills caused immigrants to receive lower salaries than equivalently qualified Canadian-born professionals even when they work at the same skill level. Reitz et al. concluded that racial discrimination was the cause of the devaluation and denigration of immigrants. Similarly, Maitra (2015) noted that the requirement of the Canadian experience or credentials is euphemisms for hiding the references for race or gender.

### **3. Triple glass effect**

Guo (2015) claimed that immigrant workers encountered a 'glass gate' that prevented them from entering guarded professional communities. Professional associations and prior qualification assessment agencies were among the institutions and players who guarded the professional communities by devaluing immigrants' foreign qualifications and work experience. They acted as gatekeepers and deemed immigrants' skills and experience deficient.

Even after immigrants' skills and experience were successfully recognized by the mentioned gatekeepers, immigrants hit the second layer, called the 'glass door', which blocked their job opportunities at high-paying companies, which are

key players in the labor market. The employers rejected immigrants because they lacked Canadian work experience, or their past work experience was considered inferior to the Canadian experience. Furthermore, immigrants faced difficulties in securing high-paying employment because of their skin color or nonnative English accents. Oreopoulos (2009, 2011) stated that a foreign-sounding name such as Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani might cause the number of job interviews to be 40% lower.

Guo (2015) called the third layer, which blocks immigrants from moving into management jobs due to their different ethnicities and cultures, the 'glass ceiling'. Guo stated that some immigrants worked at the same positions as their white colleagues but were unable to be promoted and paid less. Guo referred to those situations as racialized disparities in earnings.

The triple glass effect is a metaphor that symbolizes multiple structural barriers that cause immigrants to be unemployed or underemployed (Guo, 2015). As such, immigrants encounter unemployment, underemployment, low incomes, and downward social mobility from their social levels in their home countries.

#### **4. Foreign accent bias**

Framing immigrants' foreign accents as a lack of communication skills also played a vital role in the racialization of skills. This strategy, according to Creese and Kambere (2003), acts as a justification for disclaiming any employment offer or social inclusion for immigrants without touching the subtlety of equality in the liberal context. Research by Creese and Kambere with African immigrant women revealed that an African accent was usually a rationale for them being rejected in the labor market, although most of them had advanced postsecondary degrees from English language universities or colleges. According to a participant, her foreign accent was a large barrier when it came to jobs such as receptionist, teacher of English, and customer service. Owing to their accents and skin colors, they were marked as 'other'. Creese and Kambere showed that language skills were used as a systematic barrier that prevented immigrants from crossing to become Canadian, even though formal citizenship processes were in place. They claimed that accents were just a euphemism to exclude, marginalize, and discriminate against African immigrant women.

Li (2008) studied the effect of foreign skills, including language fluency, on the incomes of immigrants in Canada and reported that not all foreign skills are devalued in Canada. In particular, foreign skills held by British, North and West European immigrants brought about advantages in their incomes, whereas foreign skills held by black, Chinese, or South Asian immigrants produced disadvantages. On the basis of Li's findings, we can assume that such racialization of foreign skills was also reflected in the judgment of immigrants' foreign accents. It could be said that not all foreign accents bring disadvantages, but the identity associated with the accent is the problem.

As foreign accents of immigrants from certain origins were not acceptable, some career bridging programs were provided by service agencies to help immigrants reduce their accents (Guo, 2009). These types of programs admit that



there was racism against foreign accents in the job market. Instead of going against racism, the service agencies influenced immigrants to take part in their programs and find ways to assimilate into the workforce. The intention of those programs of accent reduction was to improve immigrants' presentability and employability through achieving accentless English proficiency. One of the program administrators said that the voice tone of an immigrant made her sound defensive and confrontational, and they guided her to reduce her accent and make her properly understood by the native. According to the program administrators, nonnative accents were not only different but also signal that the speakers were incompetent and deficient in the workplace. Therefore, they needed to be corrected and normalized to sound as native as possible. This practice of accent reduction highlights a colonial mentality in which native accents are perceived to be superior to nonnative accents.

### **5. Lack of soft skills according to the Canadian norm**

Even though immigrants might have competent qualifications and skills, they were viewed from a deficit view as lacking soft skills such as communication and decision-making skills and hence could hardly be promoted to management positions (Reitz et al., 2014). Many soft skills training programs in Canada have adopted a list of nine important skills comprising interpersonal, communication, behavioral and organisational skills (Noorani, 2011). In Canadian ways of thinking, immigrants need to acquire those skills to integrate into the Canadian workplace. For example, it was the Canadian norm to 'make direct eye contact', 'shake hand firmly', and 'have water cooler chit chat' at the workplace. It was important to avoid 'religion, politics, sex, money' or 'getting too personal in the workplace'. Other soft skills that immigrants need to acquire belong to their presentation: suitable dress, hygiene, facial expressions, and body language.

Soft skills are often discreetly defined by employers, so they tend to vary from company to company and from context to context. Employers determined soft skills as a strategy for boosting employees' performance. Guo (2015) asserted that soft skills or personal qualities and attributes, in recent years, may be emphasized to promote discrimination, legitimizing gender inequalities and racism. According to Guo, the racialization of skills was also seen in soft skills training for immigrants. This reflected that high-skilled immigrants' rich soft skills were devalued and deskilled; then, they were assumed to lack soft skills, which are usually locally defined by employers and vary according to specific contexts. In other words, immigrants are thought to lack behavioral competencies in the workplace (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009).

In fact, a campaign was launched nationally by numerous service and training agencies to advertise soft skills training. The banners of these soft skills training campaigns read as 'Nine soft skills no immigrant should be without!', 'Learning to fit in the workplace: Soft skills training', 'Enhance skilled immigrants' essential soft skills to boost success', and 'Soft skills are the keys to success at work'.

These soft skills training programs shifted the blame for being unemployed to immigrants by implying that they lacked skills. The hidden objectives of the programs were to ‘whiten’ immigrants and to inject Canadian ways of thinking, acting, and behaving into their minds. The result of this whitening process was the formation of white, docile workers who would leave out their past skills and adopt Canadian culture at workplaces to become real Canadians.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

According to UNESCO (2019) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020), the number of international students increased from two million in 2000 to over 5.6 million in 2019. The three key host countries with 39% of all international students in higher education are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (OECD, 2020). The financial contribution of international students is vital for host countries’ universities and, later, the workforce. In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international students enrolled in Canada decreased by approximately 17% (Statista, 2021a). Nevertheless, international students still accounted for more than 25% of total postsecondary enrollments (530,540 out of 2.15 million; Statista, 2021b).

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (2001) wanted to discuss the topic of international students in response to the deliberations of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration Canada on Bill C-11, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and three main reasons for recognizing the importance of international students to Canada in this Act. First, international students help bring an international perspective and diversity to classrooms and internationalize the campuses of Canadian colleges and universities. Second, there would be significant economic benefits from foreign students for both higher education institutions and the communities they serve (AUCC, 2001). Universities and colleges would gain additional revenue to support their academic endeavors. Local communities gain economic benefits from international students’ expenses for house/room rentals, food, books, and other costs of living expenses (AUCC, 2001). In another study on the benefits from international students, Nunes and Arthur (2013) estimated that international students contributed more than \$6.5 billion to the Canadian economy each year in the recent period. In 2018, it was estimated that international students contributed \$22.3 billion to the Canadian economy and \$4.7 billion to British Columbia’s province’s economy (Global Affairs Canada – Canmac Economics Limited, 2020). Third, Canada lagged behind its counterparts, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, because of a lack of coherent international recruitment strategies, promotions and advertisements, and a reasonable approach to immigration policies and practices. There was a need for Canada to catch up with other countries.

Many countries have become ethno-culturally diverse due to an increasing number of immigrants in their population (which also raises the problem of cross-cultural challenges; see Astley, 2024). In 2013, the United Nations estimated that

232 million people lived outside their countries of birth. Fifty-nine percent of them lived in developed nations, and 41% lived in developing countries (United Nation, 2013). On another note, the foreign-born population in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries accounted for 10% of the total population in 2014 (OECD, 2014). That of Canada reached 20.6%, which was double the OECD average. Canada is safe in that it is twice as culturally diverse as other OECD countries.

On the other hand, according to the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (2005), people with graduate degrees are referred to as 'highly qualified personnel'. Based on Author 1's experience, at the graduate level, international students deepen their knowledge, acquire the ability to conduct research, and develop professional skills considered valuable assets in today's knowledge economy. The professional skills that complement disciplinary knowledge and technical skills remain the most important aspects of any graduate training. According to the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS), two important skills in which graduate students are trained are communication and management skills. These skills allow graduates to work efficiently in a wide range of situations involving projects with different objectives, timelines, and stakeholders. A highly skilled workforce was necessary to fuel Canada's ambition for, and achievement of, healthy economic growth, enhanced quality of life and quality of democracy (CAGS, 1999).

To resolve its shortages of labor and the effects of an aging population, Canada has competed to attract the most talented, skilful, and resourceful international workers. International workers benefitted Canadian workplaces in terms of global knowledge, enhanced diversity, and multiculturalism. However, their knowledge, skills, and work experience have not been fully respected and utilized in Canada.

In light of the above further context, we believe it is important to ask the following question: What is the institution's responsibility toward international students in regard to finding work after the completion of their degree/program? (see also McCowan, 2015; López-Miguens, et al., 2021; Sin et al., 2016).

Research has shown that universities have rolled out programs to improve the employability of their graduates, but international students still receive little support from their institutions in finding jobs after graduation (Han et al., 2022). In the most recent article about international student recruitment, Crawley and Ouellet (2024) stated that Canadian institutions have prioritized filling seats in business programs over meeting the need for workers in the skilled crafts and health care industry when recruiting international students. According to Crawley and Ouellet, experts have shown that the federal government, provincial governments, Canadian colleges, and universities themselves have not directed their efforts toward recruiting international students in a way that would primarily address employment shortages in the nation. According to Rupa Banerjee, an associate professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, graduates of programs that are not desirable in the labor market are not able to find relevant jobs and face difficulties in transitioning to and becoming lawfully permanent citizens of Canada (Crawley & Ouellet, 2024).

Perić and Delić (2016) suggested that universities concentrate their social responsibility efforts on improving their graduate employability. In this context, the question is whether universities are implementing strategies that are accountable to their internal (students) and external stakeholders (employers, society, government), considering that they play a critical role in developing their internal stakeholders, building human capital such as high-order thinking, self-management, and career-building skills, and social capital such as networking skills and professional networks before students transition to the workforce (Clarke, 2018). As organizations with social responsibility, universities hold greater responsibility for their internal and external stakeholders than many other organizations do (Claver-Cortés et al., 2020; See also Petruzzello et al., 2023). This social responsibility manifests in multiple key areas: first, sustainable human development by providing competent graduates for society; second, return on investment for governments by helping graduates successfully integrate into the labor market and reducing unemployment; and third, meeting employer needs by providing well-rounded graduates who are competent at not only domain-relevant knowledge but also essential qualities such as flexibility, adaptability, teamwork, and empathy. Universities not only provide educational services but also create a platform for active involvement in economic and social development (Peric, 2012; Quezada, 2011; Sánchez-Hernández & Mainardes, 2016, as cited in López-Miguens et al., 2021). Therefore, the important question is to what degree universities carry out this obligation and produce graduates who are employable.

Sin and Amaral (2017) and López-Miguens et al. (2021) determined that universities play a primary role in the development of student employability, but only humble levels of activities are carried out to improve student employability. Sin and Amaral (2017) reported that there is a low level of collaboration between universities and employers. Therefore, universities must change strategies and incorporate a responsible approach into both their operations and curricula. In this context, López-Miguens et al. suggested a way to quantify RUE by considering three formative factors that fall under the accountability of university managers: university reputation, teaching staff and matching activities with employers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS**

The authors would like to revisit the following question: how can educational institutions help mitigate the challenges faced by their international graduate students during workforce integration? In response, we offer two recommendations: (1) Helping international students build networks and employment contacts and (2) helping international students take part in work-integrated learning and vocational programs.

### **1. Helping international students build networks and employment contacts**

The participants in Nunes and Arthur's (2013) research advised that career services personnel assist international students in building networks, especially with local people, professional contacts by part-time jobs or internships, and

meeting prospective employers before they graduate. Personnel should know how to help international students achieve their goals in terms of career development and permanent residency. They could organize career fairs and invite large companies to attend fairs and interact with international students, who often do not have networking activities such as local students. Part-time jobs and internships helped international students gain Canadian work experience and become accustomed to the Canadian workplace. Furthermore, career service personnel must act as a link between enterprises and CICs and advise them on how to hire international students. It would also be beneficial if universities and colleges could ask for funds from the Canadian government to increase headcounts and improve services and activities for international students.

Career counsellors could set up workshops to help students develop networking skills, understand professional networks, and assist them in building their networks through attending career fairs and volunteering. These activities could target international students in their first or second years. Counsellors might inform international students about on- and off-campus resources and stimulate them to develop their skills and confidence in networking in Canadian culture and the workplace. Nunes and Arthur (2013) also recommended that current international students act as peer mentors for new international students. Career services personnel should consider rolling out various types of mentoring programs for international students. The mentoring programs could focus on social networking, career development and strategies for accessing the Canadian labor market.

Nunes and Arthur (2013) noted that graduate students lacked information about employment opportunities and received less support from career service personnel than undergraduate students did. Therefore, career services are advised to pay more attention to the needs of graduate students and help them more. They might consider developing additional resources for international graduate students. The resources might consist of information about companies that are interested in recruiting persons with graduate degrees. In addition, they could organize workshops that teach graduate students to market their skills and train their networking skills.

## **2. Helping international students take part in work-integrated learning and vocational programs**

Han et al. (2022) mention that postsecondary institutions also play an important role in international graduates' integration into the labor market by equipping them with transferable and marketable skills through work-integrated learning and vocational programs. Nourpanah (2019) conducted a study of international graduates who took part in vocational nursing programs and then went to work and became permanent residents. Nourpanah reported that vocational programs provided relevant work-related skills and put international graduates at an advantage in looking for employment after graduation (see also Goodwin & Mbah, 2019; Pham et al., 2018; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Tran & Soejatminah, 2016).

In light of these recommendations, the authors hope to shed light on the situation that many international students encounter as they attempt to enter the Canadian labor market and thus call upon universities and the Canadian government for an ethical response that helps provide an employment opportunity that contributes in a meaningful way to Canadian society and, at the same time, upholds and respects the talents and skills that international graduate students bring with them.

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