
Falling Through the Cracks: Academic and Career Challenges Faced by Immigrant Graduate Students Les mailles du filet : les défis scolaires et professionnelles des étudiants immigrants de cycle supérieur diplômés

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ABSTRACT

The goals of this study are twofold. First, it aims to understand immigrant graduate students' experiences in higher education and how these influence cultural transitioning and social integration to Quebec society. Second, the study examines the career counselling and mentoring needs of immigrant graduate students while attending university. Implications and recommendations for career counselling and mentoring programs are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude a deux objectifs principaux. D'un côté, il vise à comprendre les expériences des étudiants immigrants de cycle supérieur durant leurs études universitaires et la façon dont ces expériences influencent leurs transitions culturelles et leur intégration dans la société Québec. De l'autre côté, l'étude examine les besoins de ces étudiants immigrants en terme d'orientation professionnelle et de sages conseillers pendant leur séjour à l'université. L'implémentation de ces services y è discutées en plus de recommandations afin d'assurer leur efficacité.

Cultural transitioning is the process of an immigrant adapting from their culture of origin to that of a new country. Successful cultural transitioning occurs when individuals are able to achieve sociocultural and psychological adjustment within the new culture (Berry, 2003). Additionally, it is well documented that successful employment contributes to immigrants' sense of accomplishment and connects them to society at large (Blustein, 2008; Brown & Lent, 2005; Vinokur, Schul, Vuori, & Price, 2000). Unfortunately, unemployment rates of immigrant populations are significantly higher than those of individuals born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008). In fact, despite immigrants' rising level of qualifications, their employment success is on the decline (Reitz, 2001; Wald & Fang, 2008), thereby hindering participation in the new society in meaningful ways (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Unique to the career challenges faced by immigrants is the interrelation of these hurdles to their cultural transitioning (Suto, 2009; Yost & Lucas, 2002). Specifically, culture shock, loss of social networks, shifts in traditional gender roles

post-immigration, and reliance on children as “cultural brokers” may affect career outcomes (Dion & Dion, 2001; Kwak, 2003; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Furthermore, language proficiency greatly impacts immigrant integration into a new workforce. Even if there is linguistic fluency in social settings, this does not necessarily translate into language mastery specific to certain fields of work (Sakamoto, Ku, & Wei, 2009; Suto, 2009). Technical, professional, and managerial positions often require higher levels of language proficiency, making the attainment of occupational status equivalency difficult (Neault, 2005). For example, in Quebec, where bilingualism in English and French is often a workplace requirement, the lack of this competence can contribute to challenges to integrating into the workforce (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassin, & Lerner, 2009).

As well, attitudes within the host society can hinder successful cultural transitioning (Berry, 2003; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, and Armstrong (2001) argued that perceived competition for resources is the primary source of negative attitudes toward immigrants. These attitudes toward immigrants result in a “fundamental dilemma” (Esses et al., 2001, p. 391) wherein immigrants are viewed as straining social systems such as welfare or the marketplace, regardless of the veracity of this view. Negative attitudes toward immigrants result in a type of discrimination called skill-discounting, whereby those with a foreign education and work experience are less valued (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006). Canada’s immigration selection method often attracts those with high levels of foreign education and skill, yet these assets are often considered insufficient or non-equivalent when compared to those of a Canadian (Esses et al., 2006). As a result, many educated and skilled immigrants cannot practice their chosen occupation in Canada. As occupation is central to immigrants’ self-worth and identity, this occupational failure causes tremendous psychological distress and frustration (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Neault, 2005; Sinacore et al., 2009).

Given these circumstances, many immigrants decide to retrain at postsecondary institutions. Although there are no current data available regarding the number of immigrants attending postsecondary institutions per se, according to Statistics Canada (2007), 439,650 immigrants over the age of 15 attended high school or postsecondary school full-time in 2001, while 267,585 immigrants attended school part-time. These figures suggest that hundreds of thousands of immigrant youth may likely make their way to postsecondary institutions.

As is true of adult immigrants, young adult immigrant students likewise deal with the aforementioned immigration stressors (e.g., culture shock, language barriers; Berry, 1998). Similar to adult immigrants in the workforce, immigrant students are often unfamiliar with how to negotiate the very Canadian institutional systems that should lead to them to academic and future occupational success (Sinacore et al., 2009). Scholars have demonstrated that this failure to navigate Canadian higher educational systems contributes to three times higher immigrant academic attrition rates (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003; Sagy, 2000).

Rationale

Despite the specific challenges that immigrant students in higher education face, these concerns have received little attention from researchers, school administrators, and service providers. Instead, the research that exists merely indicates that immigrant students who attend postsecondary institutions face difficulties in higher education (Gitlin et al., 2003). Given the numbers of immigrants seeking postsecondary education, it seems logical that postsecondary institutions should serve as one of the locations to facilitate successful cultural transitioning and integration of immigrants into Canadian society. Specifically, these institutions could address the primary concerns of students in higher education relative to advancement in a program or field of their study, as well as career development post graduation.

Moreover, mentoring and career services are pivotal resources for assisting students with their academic and social integration in university, along with professional development. To this end, it has been well documented that mentoring has been effective in enhancing academic performance and cultural adjustment of international students (e.g., Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007) and ethnic minority students (Gloria & Kurpius, 2001). As for career development after graduation, the existing literature indicates that immigrants lack the knowledge and resources necessary to obtain successful employment in Canada (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009). Even though attending university may give immigrants Canadian educational experience, there is no evidence to suggest that this alone necessarily prepares immigrant students to enter the Canadian job market. Given the occupational and educational challenges identified in the literature, the goals of this study are twofold. First, it aims to understand immigrant graduates students' experiences in higher education and how these influence cultural transitioning and social integration. Second, the study examines the career counselling and mentoring needs of immigrant graduate students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research has two foci: multicultural career development and mentoring. Thus, the theoretical frameworks that guided this research were (a) the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004), and (b) Kram's Developmental Model of Mentoring (KDMM) (Kram, 1985). These frameworks were chosen because of their specific attention to cultural and contextual factors. Additionally, incorporating these theoretical frameworks will provide the structure for understanding the mentoring and career counselling needs of the immigrant student population.

The STF model focuses on the interaction between the individual (internal variables) and the system (external variables) such as family, community, market trends, and geographic location. This framework allows theorists and practitioners

to understand individuals' career development within the social cultural context of their lives. The STF model is suited for immigrant students in that they are constantly attempting to negotiate external variables such as academic, occupational, and immigration requirements, as well as cultural/linguistic barriers. In addition, the STF model views individuals as active agents who are capable of changing and influencing their environments.

In addition, the KDMM recommends that "a constellation" of mentors is an ideal form of mentoring, such that mentees have access to a variety of information from diverse sources. That is, the model contends that individuals need a diverse set of mentors in order to have more satisfactory mentoring experiences (Benishek, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004; Higgins & Thomas, 2001). As such, this model pays particular attention to an individual's support system (e.g., peers, coworkers, friends, subordinates) and the context in which mentoring occurs. The research questions in the current study are as follows:

1. What are the perceived and real institutional, societal, and psychosocial barriers faced by immigrant students in graduate school?
2. What are the unique academic and career counselling needs of students seeking graduate studies?

Research Team

The research team comprised four women who represent four different ethnic groups, three different races, four nationalities, three religious affiliations, and two sexual orientations. Two members of the team are doctoral candidates, and two are university professors. Three members of the team are immigrants to Canada and have been through the Canadian immigration process. The fourth researcher had personal experience with the immigration experience through her parents' immigration history, as well as her own community involvement. Given the researchers' subjective stance, one of the underlying assumptions of this study is that immigrants experience societal prejudice that negatively influences their ability to integrate into higher education and society.

METHOD

Research Design

This research project utilizes the psychological approach within the phenomenological tradition of inquiry, which focuses on the meaning of individuals' experiences as opposed to those of groups, while emphasizing the subjective, existential, and noncritical experiences of individuals, one person at a time (Schwandt, 2001). This tradition of inquiry aims to describe the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals regarding a particular concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and allows researchers to capture the participants' point of view, gather contextual data on their experiences, and offer rich descriptions of the phenomena being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The phenomenon being investigated in this study is the cultural transitioning and integration experience of immigrants who are graduate students in Quebec. Hence, this research design allowed for a deeper understanding of each participant's ideas, values, beliefs, perceptions, memories, evaluations, and experiences of being immigrant graduate students in Quebec.

Procedure

Purposive selection of the participants was employed in order to ensure that the sample represented the phenomenon under investigation (Wertz, 2005). Participants were recruited from universities in a large metropolitan area through advertisements on campus, listservs, and word-of-mouth. Participants for this study represent immigrant graduate students who had lived in Canada between two and five years. Two years was chosen because it typically takes this long for an immigrant to receive permanent residency or landed immigrant status, thereby granting immigrants many of the same rights as Canadian citizens, except for the right to vote. Five years was chosen because it typically takes up to five years to receive Canadian citizenship.

After potential participants were identified, they met with a research assistant who reiterated the purpose and procedures of the study. Upon agreeing to participate, participants completed an informed consent form and a demographic information sheet. Participants then proceeded to the semistructured qualitative interview. These interviews were approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length, were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then checked to ensure transcription accuracy. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, only the researchers had access to these data.

Interview Protocol

A semistructured interview protocol was created to assess the participants' cultural transitioning, career counselling, and mentoring experiences within the university community and society at large. The interview protocol was piloted and revised in order to ensure that the appropriate information was being garnered from participants.

Data Analysis

Data collection resulted in approximately 600 pages of interview data for analysis. The data analysis process followed systematic steps for the analysis of phenomenological studies (e.g., Creswell, 2007). First, major and minor themes in the transcripts were identified and then verified through a process of peer review. Once a consensus was reached between two researchers on the major and minor themes, data charts that listed all of the data units (data units were defined as sentences or paragraphs) that supported each of the themes were created and again subjected to a review process by a third member of the research team. If consensus could not be reached between two researchers, a third member of the research team would provide feedback for consensus and the data chart procedure

would follow. Next, a case summary and flow chart that indicated the relationship between the themes was created. The resulting relationships between the themes were then collapsed into categories based on the career, mentoring, and cultural transitioning literatures. Those themes that were not consistent with the literature or different from the majority of cases were collapsed into separate categories and then analyzed as unique findings, ensuring an accounting for all the data units in the transcript.

Once each transcript was analyzed, data were reviewed across transcripts and triangulated against demographic information. The process of triangulation involves validating information provided in the interview against that which was provided in the demographic information. This process was carried out to ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the data. Additionally, catalytic validity was established through a debriefing process with the participant, and, finally, systems to ensure data management, accuracy, and dependability were employed to establish a clear record of each step of the analysis for all of the data.

Participants

In order to ensure manageable and transferable participant information as well as saturation of the data (Choudhuri, 2003; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), recruitment was concluded with 20 participants representing immigrants from 12 different countries. All participants from non-English speaking countries identified their second language as English. Eleven participants indicated that they had immigrated with a partner, and 9 participants had immigrated alone. Seven participants indicated that they had children, 5 immigrated with their children, 1 immigrated alone followed by his children, and 1 had children who were born in Canada.

Ten of the participants came to Canada for the purposes of continuing their education and moved to Canada once accepted in a university as an international student. Six of these participants came to Canada to pursue a master's degree, and the remaining 4 came for a PhD. At the time of the study, 2 participants were in master's degree programs and the remaining 8 were in PhD programs.

The other 10 participants enrolled in university after immigrating to Canada ("re-careering"). When they arrived in Canada, these participants all had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, with four holding master's degrees and one with a PhD. At the time of the study, 8 of these participants were in MA programs, while the remaining 2 were in MBA programs. Only 3 of these participants were pursuing a degree in Canada in the same profession they had in their home country. See Table 1 for several of these and other demographics in table format.

RESULTS

Data analysis resulted in identifying two distinct groups of students, that is, "re-careering" immigrant students and those who initially came as international students and then decided to immigrate to Canada. Participants in the "inter-

national student” group came to Canada for the purposes of continuing their education, and their career development pattern was similar to that of typical Canadian students. These international students were approximately the same age as their Canadian counterparts (age range = 26–33). As well, these individuals were pursuing their graduate degrees immediately after or within a year of completing their BA. Moreover, these participants tended to be optimistic and hopeful about their future. For example, a participant from Cyprus stated, “After I found that I could get permanent residency easily, after that I did an internship even. I wasn’t worried at all about being able to get a job. I mean why would I?” This optimism may be due to the fact that these participants have not tried to pursue a job in Canada and as such did not experience the rejection and discrimination experienced by the “re-careering” group.

Table 1
Selected Demographic Characteristics of 20 Graduate Student Immigrants Participating in One-on-One Interviews

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Education in country of origin (highest level completed)</i>	
Male	14	Bachelor’s degree	6
Female	6	Master’s degree	13
<i>Age</i>		Doctorate	1
Range	26-45	<i>Occupation in country of origin</i>	
<i>Sexual orientation</i>		Engineer	5
Heterosexual	18	Teacher	3
Bisexual	2	Professor	1
<i>Relationship status</i>		Medical doctor	1
Married	14	Computer software developer	1
Single	6	Journalist	1
<i>Country of origin</i>		Junior architect	1
China	9	Research scientist	2
Algeria	1	Student	4
Argentina	1	Declined to state occupation	1
Bulgaria	1		
Columbia	1		
Cyprus	1		
Germany	1		
Netherlands	1		
United Kingdom	1		
United States	1		
Zimbabwe	1		
Yugoslavia	1		

On the other hand, participants in the re-careering group typically immigrated to Canada for a “better life.” However, upon arrival, these individuals were unable

to secure a job in their chosen occupation, which led them to return to graduate school to increase their job prospects. This re-careering group was older than the international student group (age range = 34–45), and the majority of them were married (9 out of 10). The re-careering participants were not optimistic about future job prospects and were oftentimes not convinced that they would find a job, even with a Canadian education. One Chinese participant, who was a civil engineer in China, explained, “I’m a civil engineer ... but now I’m studying finance. For immigrants like us, whose mother tongue is not English, already manager is not good, it’s hard to find manager position.”

Cultural Community

Participants in both groups reported having mixed feelings about their relationship with their cultural community. Likewise, participants in both groups indicated that they turned to their cultural community for social support, part-time jobs, assistance with governmental paperwork (e.g., Social Insurance Number), and information about cultural activities outside of the university (e.g., seasonal events). Some participants indicated that they found it helpful to turn to their cultural community so they could speak in their mother tongue, alleviate cultural isolation, and get basic information about how to apply for social services. For example, one participant stated, “At first we had some supports from the Chinese community in Montreal. But just for giving the basic information about how to apply for the SIN card or the Medicare card.”

Others reported that they did not feel connected to their cultural community in Canada because it did not reflect the community in their home country. As one participant noted:

Actually the Chinese community in Canada is very complicated. We are from different parts, different periods, and different backgrounds! Some came here maybe 100 years ago ... some from Hong-Kong, Taiwan, and I’m from mainland China. So we have too much difference in cultural background. So no—I didn’t join any Chinese community.

Some in the international student group sought out members of their community through campus social clubs, while others indicated that they did not interact with their cultural community because they were concerned about judgement or traditional roles being imposed upon them. Still others indicated that they wanted to interact with Canadians so they could learn about Canadian culture and improve their English.

Alternatively, many of the re-careering participants felt a great deal of ambivalence as to whether or not they should approach their cultural community for support when dealing with discrimination and finding a job. Some felt that being involved with their cultural community was limiting, as they believed it might result in increased discrimination and thereby compromise their ability to achieve a job at the level of their education. As one participant discussed:

At the beginning 100%. Then at some point, when you are good enough with either English or French . . . , you have brief window of opportunity, this dilemma—whether or not you continue sticking to your ethnic community or to integrate into the larger host society. And this is an important point 'cause if the host society isn't ready to take you, you remain perhaps for the rest of your days in this close ethnic community . . . so if you stick [with your community] then this will jeopardize your chance of promotion, because this window of opportunity won't last for too long.

Trajectories of Transitions

Thus, these two distinct groups of students (international and re-careering) immigrated to Canada for very different reasons and through different processes. The specifics of each of these two groups will be discussed in detail below.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GROUP

Some of these participants chose to study in Canada with the hope of ultimately immigrating to Canada permanently, believing they would have better job opportunities. Others came strictly in pursuit of educational opportunity and did not initially intend on staying permanently. For example, a participant from Cyprus and one from China indicated that they came to Canada to study because their families and communities encouraged them. In one of these cases, the participant's family did not anticipate that he would immigrate to Canada and were disappointed at the participant's decision to stay:

I know they are not happy for me to leave family, very far from them. Even though at that time we were living in different cities in China, but leaving the country is a totally different story, so they are not happy.

Another participant, from Serbia, came to Canada to study and then returned home only to find difficulty getting a job. As a result, this individual returned to Canada to seek a job, but when this did not happen, pursued an advanced degree and then applied for permanent residency.

In summary, most of the participants who came to Canada as international students ultimately immigrated for the following reasons: (a) lower Canadian tuition, (b) access to socialized medicine, and (c) increased career opportunities. When asked why she decided to apply for permanent residency, one participant responded, "Financial reasons. Yes, because I came here as an international student and now I pay Quebec fees and I have Quebec health care. So those are the primary reasons."

RE-CAREERING GROUP

All of the participants in this group indicated that they came to Canada for a better quality of life, which included variables such as (a) to escape political unrest and economic instability in their home country, (b) greater economic stability and

opportunity, and (c) spouses' jobs. Regardless of their reason for immigration, re-careering participants reported that when they landed in Canada their foreign credentials were not recognized. Furthermore, they could not find a job and they felt betrayed by the Canadian Government. As a participant from Bulgaria reported:

Immigration sites are saying that Canada needs people. Canadian and Quebec governments are saying they're in need most. So, when someone is going through this procedure, going through checking if his or her professional experience, these people are hoping that this is enough, it's like the government says "we need people and you are the people we need" and when these people are coming here, the reaction is "well, we need people but we don't need you."

Discrimination. All re-careering participants reported barriers to their integration to Canadian society, with prejudice and an inability to secure employment being cited as the primary reasons. Moreover, these individuals indicated that they expected Canada to be an open and friendly society, free from prejudice and discrimination. As well, these participants believed that their lives would improve in Canada, especially in securing employment in the occupations for which they held a postsecondary degree. Yet, all these re-careering participants indicated that these expectations were not met and that discrimination was the key reason they could not secure a position in their chosen occupation. Specifically, participants identified several types of discrimination including xenophobia, racism, skill-discounting, and language barriers.

All of the participants experienced the marketplace requirement of having Canadian work experience as a form of xenophobia. In addition, one participant from China indicated that immigrants were blamed if Canadians were unemployed, despite immigrants' difficulty in getting jobs: "My impression is that she thought I come here ... and then I got the job and that is something like resource occupation. I occupy the resources here." Additionally, connections or a "Canadian network" were cited as a primary reason that participants had difficulty finding employment. As one Argentinean stated, "It's just that if you don't have someone that lived here that has worked with you and who can give you a reference it's very difficult. You can have the most wonderful portfolio and they still won't hire you."

In this regard, country of origin did not differentiate whether or not participants could find jobs. For example, one individual from the United States and one from China reported that their expectations of being able to secure a job went unmet due to xenophobia. The American participant reported being confronted with a great deal of anti-Americanism, leading to an inability to find work. Although this person had 18 years of experience in a highly technical and sought-after field, lack of Canadian experience, no recognition of his American credentials, and insufficient language proficiency in French were cited as barriers. Similarly, a Chinese participant's quote aptly captures the cycle of discrimination: "It's very hard to find a job, but you can't find a job how can you get experience? It's a circle, a bad circle."

In addition to xenophobia, participants reported experiences of racism. For example, one Chinese participant who was working in a factory indicated that a

manager stated that “Chinese people eat like pigs” and told the workers they could not bring Chinese food to work. When one of the Chinese workers argued that he had to eat, that worker was fired. A Serbian participant reported that at a job interview he was told, “Oh, you’re from Serbia? A lot of people don’t like Serbs.” Explaining why this occurred, he noted:

Well, first of all the main factor [for not being hired] was that I was an immigrant.... After that, one of the main reasons was that I didn’t finish my undergraduate here. And when I finished my master’s, they said “Well, we’re not looking for a person that has a master’s, we’re looking for bachelor in engineering.”

Likewise, other re-careering participants reported being accused of stealing Canadian jobs, ignored by clerks at stores, and mistreated by bus drivers. Regarding skill-discounting, all re-careering participants reported that their credentials and work experience were not considered equivalent to those of Canadians, which resulted in their inability to secure employment. One participant stated:

The worst thing that I always come across is foreign credentials and how they make you believe that it’s very important for them to choose you because of your background, your professional background, and what your resume is like. But once you’re here you’re on your own.

Additionally, all of these individuals reported language-based discrimination, even those whose mother tongue was English or French. As such, they reported that they were expected to be fully bilingual to find a job and that language was used as the primary selection criteria. A participant from Cyprus stated:

What I hadn’t really anticipated was the fact that, especially with French Canadian society, it would be so difficult to sort of penetrate. I mean I could speak French but I couldn’t speak Quebecois French. It’s not really that easy to follow a conversation among Quebecois, and for this reason in a certain sense it becomes, I mean there’s a divide.

An American participant echoed this sentiment:

But there’s a certain kind of people who kind of keep to themselves until something happens that makes them really think they should interact. At least this is my impression. I believe it may come partially from the language thing. People aren’t sure whether you’re an Anglophone or a Francophone right away so there’s always some sort of [hesitation].

Thus, these participants experienced the two languages as an invisible divide, leaving immigrants as outsiders regardless of language ability.

Psycho-social implications. These reported experiences of discrimination, combined with immigrants’ loss of educational and occupational identity, resulted in re-careering participants questioning their decision to immigrate to Canada. Participants expressed losing confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities,

which consequently affected their self-worth. As such, participants reported being discouraged and experiencing despair. They discussed re-evaluating their identity and wondering if they wasted their time pursuing higher education in their country of origin. For example, as one re-careering participant indicated:

I graduated from the university in China; I get a master's degree. So I go to a big company, it's a top one of my province. It's in expressway design and I have a little bit over average my income. So I don't worry about my leaving China but in Canada I am just a labourer.

Another stated:

I am an agricultural engineer. I worked for 13 years before I came here. I studied for my master's in China and I liked it. I was the deputy director in my institution. Now I'm just a student. . . . I liked my life before better.

Another Chinese participant who also worked as a manual labourer in Canada stated, "I cannot say that I don't like the general job—but it's not for me I guess. I was an engineer! And I will be an engineer!"

Other psychosocial implications resulting from experiences of discrimination are that participants reported feelings of anger, hatred, and an urge to isolate themselves from Canadian society. As one Chinese participant suggested:

Because they are discriminated [against] they feel angry, anger to the country and the society. So how do they make the hatred disappear and especially if they have some bad feelings, they want to isolate within this society, and [they] think, "You discriminate me and you look down on me, I don't want to communicate with you, I just want to stay in my community and my group."

Transitioning back to university. All re-careering participants decided to return to university to get a Canadian credential in order to secure a better-paying job. One Chinese participant indicated, "If you just work at the company as a mechanic assembly, my life is 20 years almost gone. But if you study here maybe I have bright future." In addition to getting a marketable degree, participants' choices of programs were based on whether they could secure educational equivalency for the degree they received in their home country. One participant from Bulgaria had to redo his bachelor's degree before going on for his master's degree. A second participant with a PhD from China had to redo his master's degree before being able to apply to a PhD program. Another participant from Argentina was able to secure equivalency for his bachelor's degree but had to redo his master's degree. Only the participant from the United States and the one who completed an MA in France (Algerian) were not required to repeat their degrees. Accordingly, not only did participants feel frustrated returning to school, they often felt humiliated and discriminated against by members of the university community. An Algerian participant reported:

They were saying at the beginning, okay now you're in Canada so you have to learn more about the Canadian environment ... But it ended up being

discrimination because basically they are never talking to you, if you're not English-speaking or if you're not very fluent in English.

Reflecting a similar sentiment, a Chinese participant reported, "Some people are just 'not polite' and 'rude,' for example a secretary at [name of university] who are nice to professors and other students but not to foreign students."

Categories Representing University Experiences

To further paint a picture of the immigrant students' reality in higher education in Canada, the following section will discuss participants' experiences within the university community. Analysis of this type of data resulted in three major categories: (a) social support, (b) career services, and (c) mentoring.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The participants who came to Canada as international students reported that the university community served as a place wherein they could receive social support. That is, they immigrated into a university community where they made friends, had an instant social network, and had access to university services designed for them. These international student participants reported that these custom-tailored services were particularly helpful to their learning how to negotiate the university system and the broader Canadian society. A student from Zimbabwe stated, "When I was first accepted, I was an international student. As an international student through the buddy program, I was assigned a buddy when I first arrived. He showed me around campus and a little bit around the city."

For the re-careering participants, no campus service specifically designed to assist students who were immigrants to Canada existed. As a result, these individuals faced enormous challenges in learning how to negotiate the university system, which they reported to be very stressful. In addition, being new to the Canadian educational system, these students were often non-traditional in that they were older than their classmates and had familial responsibilities, for which the university provided little or no support. One re-careering participant stated:

I spent the first year and a half trying to socialize with all my [classmates], so I did try but it was during that time that I discovered that I was just at a different stage in my life.... I was almost 10 years older than them.

Thus, re-careering participants reported high levels of stress and frustration with their university experience, stating that they were repeating a part of their life that they thought was behind them. As one participant said, "So they [student colleagues] were doing what I was doing when I just finished my undergrad and I was doing my first job. I didn't want to go back and do that."

Additionally, re-careering participants did not find it easy to integrate into university communities due to discrimination. For example, one participant shared, "I feel, yes, I am a minority woman, I am not very young, and I have a child. I think I am already into that category. That category I mean, a woman, [speaks]

a different language and [looks] different.” Re-careering students also reported experiencing a lack of patience on the part of university community members designated to help them to integrate. As one participant reported:

I understand different classes, economic classes, it’s natural I think, it’s also because we think so differently so that’s why maybe they don’t like to talk with me. Because otherwise they have to tell me everything from the very beginning, so what’s the point?

CAREER SERVICES

A careful review of the data indicates that participants who came as international students were more likely to seek career services than were re-careering students. All international students sought assistance from career services, yet only some of the re-careering students did so. Nonetheless, most of the participants reported only attending career services once and noted that the type of services they used were typically résumé writing, mock interviews, workshops, and career fairs. None of these individuals sought individual career counselling.

Although participants reported finding some aspects of the career services helpful (e.g., resume writing), for the most part they did not find that they met their needs. One participant stated, “Yeah, some services, I think, ... maybe the service is provided for the local students... Yeah, I think the service is more for the English-speaking students and the French-speaking students.” Some participants would have liked career services to be expanded to address the specific needs of immigrants, such as language acquisition and understanding the Canadian job market. As one participant from Cyprus stated:

New immigrants may not know what the job market looks like in the new country. They may not know what types of jobs they are able to get in their field besides what they did in their country of origin. This information would be very helpful to immigrants who may not know what opportunities are available to them.

For some, dissatisfaction with career services was a result of the participants’ misguided belief that this campus service should find them a job. Other participants reported that career services were designed for undergraduate students and did not offer appropriate services for graduate immigrant students: “For undergraduates they have a lot of internships, and co-ops, things like that. But for graduate students they don’t have any chances of that. But for the immigrant students they do need that.”

MENTORING

Results indicated that mentoring and securing a supervisor was extremely important to these students’ success in graduate school. Several participants identified supervisors and fellow students as their mentors, while others reported having no mentor at all. All those without a mentor were in the re-careering group and

reported having a much harder time in finding a supervisor than the international students.

The participants who identified their supervisor as a mentor reported that they were very satisfied with their academic experience, as they felt their supervisor provided them with both academic and personal mentoring. An international student from Zimbabwe said:

My mentor was extremely helpful when I first arrived. I didn't have accommodation when I first arrived. He was good enough to put me up for a couple of days while I sorted out my accommodation thing and then again showing me around—pointing out the sort of things that I needed to do. I still ask him for things that are not related to my work.

Participants who relied on fellow students for mentoring reported that while these colleagues provided invaluable support, they still were not getting sufficient advising. Finally, those who had no mentor reported being extremely frustrated with their academic experience.

I think I had pretty realistic expectations about what level of hand-holding I would get, but there's very little of that here in my experience. The department does not offer a great deal of advising. I know a number of students, especially international students, who seemed quite lost for quite some time.

In addition to a lack of advising, participants without mentors indicated struggling with how to succeed academically. One student from China, who had a great deal of difficulty securing a supervisor for her master's thesis, reported that there was a general lack of supportive individuals on campus to help her learn about the unwritten rules: "There are a lot of unwritten rules you don't know about. You don't know about it, and after I experience everything I learn about it. But it's too late."

Interestingly, a lack of support on campus was noted by a number of participants, with some indicating that the university should ensure that all students have mentors. As such, having a mentor appeared to be extremely important to the participants. In fact, those without formal mentoring from a supervisor or professor appeared to have the greatest challenges negotiating the university system.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the cultural transitioning, career counselling, and mentoring experiences of immigrant graduate students in Quebec. Two distinct groups of immigrant graduate students emerged from the data: those who came to Canada as international students and decided to stay, and those who immigrated to Canada for economic and social security. Graduate students who came as international students had support integrating into the university community and Canadian society, as they had access to university services from the office of international students. In addition, the choice to stay in Canada was made after they had been a student for a number of years wherein they were knowledgeable

about the Canadian educational system and were adept at accessing campus services and securing a mentor.

By contrast, re-careering immigrant students all returned to university because they could not secure employment in the occupation for which they were trained in their country of origin. The narratives of these immigrant graduate students are consistent with what is reported in the cultural transitioning literature on immigrant populations (e.g., Sakamoto et al., 2009; Sinacore et al., 2009; Suto, 2009). That is, re-careering immigrant participants in this study experienced challenges such as culture shock, loss of social status, language difficulties due to the bilingual requirements in the job market, discrimination, and isolation.

In order to address these challenges, re-careering participants returned to university, only to discover that the university served as a second environment in which they would experience isolation and discrimination. These re-careering immigrant graduate students did not have access to the campus services that international students did upon arrival, and they identified several areas in which they felt particularly challenged at the university, including social isolation due to their age (as they were older than their fellow students), difficulty in securing a mentor, lack of academic advisement, lack of appropriate campus services, and discrimination on the part of university personnel.

Re-careering graduate students had to negotiate the challenges of immigrating to Quebec and all the problems therein, as well as the challenges of negotiating the university system with little social support within society and the university. Unfortunately, there are no data that specifically report the numbers of re-careering graduate students in Quebec, but given the influx of immigrants, collecting this type of data may be warranted.

Results of this study provide evidence that career services specifically tailored to immigrant graduate students can serve as a source of support in the process of social integration and re-careering for these students. That is, career services can serve as a mechanism whereby immigrant graduate students can get accurate information about the Canadian job market and occupational and educational processes. In addition, consistent with the literature (e.g., Yeh et al., 2007), results of this study indicate that those immigrant graduate students who had a formal mentor were more successful in integrating socially and academically into the university. Mentoring serves to buffer students from culture shock as well as provides an avenue whereby students can find social support, academic advising, and information about the university and broader community.

In summary, results of this study provide evidence that universities can serve as communities in which immigrants find support for their cultural transitioning and integration into broader society. Universities providing support seems particularly important in light of the ambivalence that the participants shared about seeking assistance from their own ethnic community. Moreover, university and other educational systems can provide a context within which immigrant students can come to understand educational and occupational systems in order to facilitate their economic and social success.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Given the results of this study, it is essential for higher education institutions to address the specific needs of immigrant graduate students. Universities, as confirmed by the participants in this study, have the unique opportunity to provide both career counselling and mentoring services, and in so doing change the future for Canadian immigrants. Specifically, institutions of higher education are well positioned not only to increase the academic retention of their immigrant graduate students but also to facilitate their re-careering and career development.

As such, university career counsellors should be provided with specialized training to ensure their comprehension of, and skill in, addressing the unique challenges faced by immigrant graduate students. Moreover, as this study revealed, there are two distinct groups within the broader population of immigrant graduate students, each with qualitatively different experiences.

To interpret this result within the framework of the STF model, the interaction between individual factors (e.g., initial motivation to move to Canada) and external factors (e.g., treatment by individuals in the receiving community, availability of resources) put the participants on different trajectories. Thus, it is important that career counsellors do not assume homogeneity among this immigrant group, but rather consider a variety of factors such as age, pre-immigration status, career identity, and family status. Moreover, the STF encourages career counsellors to pay close attention to the impact of cultural and contextual factors on one's subjective experience.

In addition, the STF focuses on individuals' agency and their ability to overcome challenges. To that end, career programs can be developed to address the unique needs of immigrant graduate students and help them develop skills and mobilize resources in their environment. Workshops illuminating the Canadian job market and hiring practices, along with skill development sessions to address employer discrimination, are warranted. Further, providing internship programs and work-study options, wherein immigrant students can garner Canadian work experience, would likely increase their success in the job market.

In addition to improving campus career services, universities are advised to provide both formal and informal mentors for immigrant graduate students. In particular, as the study's data imply, mentors can prove essential in linking mentees to members of both the university and the broader community and in providing ongoing social support. As proponents of the KDMM suggest, one mentor cannot meet all the needs of a mentee (e.g., Benishek et al., 2004). Thus, it would be important to help graduate immigrant students to establish a network of mentors.

Given the integral role academic supervisors play in the lives of their graduate students (Manathunga, 2007), universities should ensure that all students have a suitable academic mentor to facilitate their successful completion of their studies. Academic mentors can also help students with professional networking, which is an important component of professional development of graduate students. Finally, informal student mentoring programs specifically designed for immigrant gradu-

ate students can likewise facilitate graduate students' social success and decrease their social isolation.

Overall, this study identifies the university campus as a multicultural community wherein immigrants can possibly find support for integrating into society. Given the influx of immigrants to Canada, and the widespread recognition that postsecondary education is an effective pathway to improve post-immigration occupational outcomes (Anisef, Sweet, & Adamuti-Trache, 2010), university career and mentoring services can serve as the gateway to developing a campus community that addresses the needs of its immigrant graduate students.

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