Internationalization of Canadian higher education: discrepancies between policies and international student experiences

Yan Guo & Shibao Guo

Published online: 01 Mar 2017.

Submit your article to this journal ⤤

Article views: 52

View related articles ⤤

View Crossmark data ⤤

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Internationalization of Canadian higher education: discrepancies between policies and international student experiences

Yan Guo[*] and Shibao Guo

Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4

The internationalization of higher education in Canada is happening at a rapid pace. One manifestation of internationalization is the increasing enrolment of international students in Canadian institutions. There is little research on international undergraduate students' experiences from their own perspectives as they adapt to a new educational system in Canada. This research examines how internationalization policies at a university in Western Canada were interpreted and experienced by international undergraduates. Based on interviews with 26 such students from 9 countries, this study shows that students have multiple understandings of internationalization and view internationalization as a positive experience for academic and personal growth. Findings also indicated several persistent problems, including a neoliberal approach that treats internationalization as a marketing strategy, limited internationalization of the curriculum, and gaps between the internationalization policy and the experience of international students. The findings have important implications for providing appropriate support for international students and for internationalization policy in higher education.

Keywords: internationalization; higher education; international undergraduate students; policy and practice; adjustment and adaptation

Introduction

One manifestation of the recent development of internationalization is the increasing enrolment of international students in Canadian institutions of higher education. A study of internationalization conducted by Canadian universities showed that the number of international students reached 336,497 in Canada in 2014, representing 11% of the student population (CBIE 2015, 26). International students play an important role in producing and disseminating knowledge in Canadian universities, not to mention their role as remitters of substantial higher tuition fees than domestic students in some institutions. International graduate students in Canada have been well studied (Lyakhovetska 2004; Myles and Cheng 2003). However, there is little research on international undergraduate students' experiences from their own perspectives as they adapt to a new educational system in Canada, particularly for students who came from Asia (see Chen 2006). Inclusion of international undergraduate students' voices will provide policy-makers and educators with a nuanced understanding of international students' lived experiences in Canadian universities, inform policy decisions,

---

*Corresponding author. Email: yanguo@ucalgary.ca

and also challenge the deficit-centred perspective of Western narratives of international students. In particular, Asian international students were perceived via discourses of 'lack' of English proficiency, of specialized academic writing skills, and of critical thinking ability (Kettle 2007; Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2014). This article aims to address a gap in scholarship by investigating international undergraduate students' experiences in Canadian academic environments. Two research questions guided the study: (1) What does internationalization mean to international students? and (2) How do international students view their experiences of internationalization at the participating university?

Review of literature

Defining internationalization

Internationalization is a contested term. For some, it means a series of international activities (e.g. academic mobility of students and faculty), international linkages and partnerships, and new international academic programmes and research initiatives (Knight 2004). Critical scholars see internationalization as a reflection of 'a complex, chaotic and unpredictable *edubusiness*, whose prioritization of the financial "bottom line" has supplanted clear normative educational and, indeed, overtly ideological intents' (Luke 2010, 44). The literature on the internationalization of higher education presents two major discourses: market-driven (i.e. related to fostering economic performance and competiveness) and ethically driven (i.e. related to charitable concerns for enhancing the quality of life of disadvantaged students) discourses (Khoo 2011). Financial crises are driving profit-seeking policies of internationalization in higher education. As a result, international students are at risk of exploitation for being treated like 'cash cows' (CAUT 2016, A9). Ethically driven discourses of internationalization engage with alternative agendas such as human rights and building a global civil society (Kaldor 2003). Recent literature, driven by critical scholars such as Abdi and Shultz (2008) and Andreotti (2013), also indicates that concepts expressed in internationalization policies and initiatives such as governments' and institutions' social responsibility, transnational mobility of students, and students' interculturality that are associated with global citizenship have come to combine both market and ethical influences.

Knight defines internationalization of higher education as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight 2004, 11). This definition recognizes internationalization being carried out at the national as well as the institutional level. It acknowledges the relationship between and among nations, cultures, or countries and conveys that internationalization is an ongoing effort by government to make universities 'more responsive to the challenges of the globalization of the economy and society' (Elliott 1998, 32). The three concepts – purpose, function, and delivery – are carefully chosen to describe the overall role and objectives of institutional internationalization around teaching, research and scholarly activities, service, and provision of education courses and programmes. A recent study published by the European Parliament (de Wit et al. 2015, 29) revised Knight's widely cited definition of internationalization (Knight 2004). The new definition reads as follows, with modifications shown in bold:

> [Internationalization is] the **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary

education, **in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society**.

This revised definition places a focus on intentionality and broadens internationalization from mobility to include curriculum and learning outcomes. Internationalization of the curriculum aims to incorporate 'international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study' (Leask 2009, 209).

De Wit et al. (2015, 27) named four key rationales for internationalization: (1) political, (2), economic, (3) socio-cultural, and (4) academic. In the twentieth century, and in particular after the World War II, there was an increased focus on international cooperation and exchange in higher education. Although peace and mutual understanding were the declared driving rationales, 'national security and foreign policy were the real reasons' behind the expansion of internationalization (de Wit and Merkx 2012, 49). From the second half of the 1990s onwards, the principle driving force for internationalization has shifted from political to economic. International students and international activities were used by many institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia, and in the United States as revenue generation (Kelly 2000; Teichler 2010). In addition to international student recruitment, preparing graduates for the global competitive labour market and attracting top talent for the knowledge economy have become important pillars of the internationalization of higher education over the past decade (de Wit et al. 2015). Socio-culturally, internationalization was based on the hope that international mobility could enhance mutual understanding (Khoo 2011). Academically, internationalization was perceived as a means to improve 'the quality of teaching and learning and prepare students to live and work in a globalized world' (de Wit et al. 2015, 28).

Unlike European priorities that were driven by economic and political considerations (Elliott 1998), the rationales for the internationalization of Canadian higher education focused on socio-cultural and academic aspects: preparing graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent global citizens and enhancing scholarship for interdependence between Canadian and international students in addition to generating income for universities (Knight 2000). Knight also found the three rationales for having international students at Canadian institutions were to 'integrate domestic and international students in and out of the classroom, to increase the institutions' profiles and contacts in target countries, and third, to generate revenue for the institution' (2000, 53). Reflecting on the internationalization over the last decade, Knight (2014, 76) lamented, 'internationalization has become a catch-all phrase used to describe anything and everything remotely linked to the global, intercultural or international dimensions of higher education and is thus losing its way'. In response to this identity crisis of internationalization, Knight calls for an examination of the fundamental values underpinning internationalization. In this article, we respond to Knight's call for scholars and institutions to rethink the fundamental values of internationalization by examining one institution's internationalization policy and international students' experiences of internationalization at the institution.

International students in Canada

Internationalization has become a key focus area for many Canadian institutions. A 2014 survey of Canadian universities reported that 95% of responding institutions

identify internationalization as part of their strategic plan, and 82% consider it among one of their top five priorities (UNIVCAN 2014). Canada's federal policy on internationalization has a strong focus on international students as a market. Since the 1980s, Canadian universities have been utilizing the revenue from international student tuition to ameliorate financial shortfalls resulting from marked declines in government funding for higher education (Cudmore 2005; Knight 2008). In 2014, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) released Canada's first federal international education strategy. The strategy endorses the narrative of international students as a source of 'cash' for universities and for the country (Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti 2015), stating that 'international students in Canada provide immediate and significant economic benefits to Canadians in every region of the country' (DFATD 2014, 7). Citing the DFATD-commissioned study, Kunin (2012) reported that in 2012, international students' tuition, books, accommodation, meals, transportation, and discretionary spending was estimated to be about $8.4 billion per year, which in turn generated more than $455 million in government tax revenues. At the national level, international students are also seen as 'a future source of skilled labour' (DFATD 2014, 4, 12). They are critical to ensuring Canada's national prosperity in an increasingly competitive global environment. International education is perceived as one of 22 priority sectors for strengthening Canada's economy (DFATD 2013). It is evident that internationalization is primarily seen in terms of its economic benefits to Canada. As Shultz (2007) explains, this demonstrates clearly how the neoliberal approach is solely focused on increasing the transnational mobility of knowledge and skills. Yet, when international students arrive on Canadian campuses, they face a number of challenges including isolation (Chen 2006), alienation, marginalization, and low self-esteem. Similar problems are also reported in Australia (Marginson et al. 2010; Ryan and Viete 2009), New Zealand (Campbell and Li 2007), Singapore (McClure 2007), the United Kingdom (Gu and Maley 2008; Lillyman and Bennett 2014), and the United States (Heng 2016; Lee and Rice 2007). We hope that this article addresses an important gap in scholarship by examining how undergraduate students themselves interpret and experience the internationalization of higher education.

Methodology

Context

Forest University (pseudonym) is located in Canada's fourth largest destination city for immigrants. Forest launched the International Strategy in March 2013. Internationalization formed one of the priorities in the university's long-term strategic policy visions. The internationalization strategy document points to several rationales that can be summarized in three overarching themes: impact the world; leverage and legitimize the work of the university; and raise the institution's reputation (Forest University 2013, 1). Another stated rationale for internationalization was to produce 'graduates, both domestic and international, who have a global orientation, are competitive in a global marketplace, and who can adapt to diverse cultural, economic, and governmental environments' (Forest University 2013, 1). The province where Forest University is located also suffers from a shortage of professionals and skilled labour and the recruitment of international students is used as one of the strategies to attract skilled workers. Internationalization is framed in narrowly instrumental terms in the institutional

policies (Rhoads and Szelényi 2011), thus representing the neoliberal market imperatives of employability, mobility, and competitiveness (Stein et al. 2016).

A key target of internationalization goals was to increase the number of international students on campus to 10% of the undergraduate population by 2016. Forest University places value on the creation of a more diverse campus culture by increasing international representation among the student body, seeing this as a benefit to all. There were about 7.6% international undergraduate students at Forest University in the academic year of 2014–2015. The five countries from which the university received the largest number of international students in descending order of number were: China, Iran, India, the United States, and Saudi Arabia.

Research design and data source

Data for this study were collected from two sources: (a) policy analyses of public documents related to internationalization in Canada and at the university; and (b) individual interviews with 26 international undergraduate students studying at Forest University. The students were recruited for this study through the Centre for International Students and Study Abroad, the Faculty of Education's undergraduate listserv, personal contacts of the graduate research assistants via WeChat (a mobile phone APP), and snowball samplings. The students comprised a range of academic fields and cultural backgrounds. Students were from academic fields such as Arts, Education, Engineering, and Science. They came from China, Brazil, El Salvador, Hong Kong, Iran, Japan, Kuwait, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States, aged from 18 to 49 years old, with even gender ratio (Table 1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews focused on what internationalization meant to students, how internationalization was reflected in their course content and learning materials, what the benefits and challenges of studying at Forest University were, and students' own suggestions for better student services. Twenty-six interviews were conducted and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and then analysed by developing a list of thematic codes (Patton 2015). We employed an inductive analysis strategy to analyse the interviews and policy documents (McMillan and Schumacher 2001) by searching for domains that emerged from the data rather than imposing them on data prior to collection. Domains are large cultural categories that contain smaller sub-categories and whose relationships are linked by a semantic relationship (Spradley 1980). A four-stage process was developed for data analysis: identifying main points, searching for salient themes and recurring patterns, grouping common themes and patterns into related categories, and comparing all major categories with reference to the major theories in the field to form new perspectives (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Policy documents and interviews were initially coded and analysed separately. After major themes from interviews were identified, we brought in policy document analysis for comparisons with the experience of international students. Discrepancies between internationalization policies and international students' experiences of studying at Forest University were then identified and analysed.

Findings

Three major themes emerged from the data: (a) international students held multiple understandings of internationalization, consistent with the literature; (b) international

Table 1. Participant profile (all students' names are pseudonyms).

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Country	Major
1	Jane	Female	20–29	China	Education
2	Mike	Male	20–29	China	Chemistry
3	Leo	Male	20–29	China	Math
4	Heather	Female	20–29	China	Civil engineering
5	Yumi	Female	20–29	China	Electrical engineering
6	Reggie	Male	20–29	China	Chemical engineering
7	Tony	Male	17–20	China	Engineering
8	Alex	Male	20–29	China	Engineering
9	Monica	Female	20–29	China	Geophysics
10	James	Male	20–29	China	Geophysics
11	Liea	Female	20–29	China	Computer science
12	Peter	Male	20–29	China	Computer science
13	Ming	Male	17–20	China	Computer science
14	Krystal	Female	17–20	China	Computer science
15	Bruce	Male	20–29	China	Geomatics
16	Kimo	Female	20–29	China	Geology
17	Takuyu	Male	20–29	Japan	Political science
18	Cheer	Female	20–29	Japan	Open study/arts
19	Alice	Female	20–29	Brazil	Film
20	WX.	Male	20–29	Hong Kong	Economics
21	Sandy	Female	20–29	Taiwan	International relations
22	Amy	Female	20–29	South Korea	English
23	Dragon	Male	17–20	Kuwait	Health science
24	Tyler	Male	17–20	United State	English education/arts
25	Ana	Female	40–49	El Salvador	Education
26	Mery	Female	40–49	Iran	History

students identified positive aspects of internationalization; and (c) international students faced challenges in transitioning to student life in Canada.

Multiple understandings of internationalization among international students

In the interviews, most participants referred to internationalization as the increasing enrolment of international students in Canadian institutions of higher education and their international experiences. One student equated internationalization directly with her own experience:

> I think internationalization has something to do with me because I went to the United States for one year when I was in high school. Now I'm in Canada. I think if it weren't internationalization, it wouldn't have happened. (Amy, English major, South Korea)

Many of the participants shared a similar view. For example, Yumi, a Chinese student said: 'Even when I was in China, I heard about internationalization. To me, it means coming to Canada to study.'

Unlike Amy and Yumi, other students understood internationalization differently. For instance, Heather equated internationalization with developing a global vision:

> To me internationalization means to have an international vision. It is when you come across a problem, you do not simply look at it from the Chinese perspective. After you have traveled around the world and have been in contact with different cultures, you

develop a broader understanding of all issues, and you become more open-minded. (Heather, Engineering, China)

In response to the question about why the Forest University emphasized internationalization, Leo, a Chinese student commented that China is leading in petroleum geology 'because of its complex geographic conditions and the shortage of petroleum resources'. He felt that was why Forest University is 'willing to collaborate with us'.

Some participants were more critical about how the university used international students for revenue generation and branding purposes.

First, the university can make more money. Second, they can have a higher rank. (Heather, Engineering, China)

International students pay three times tuition fee. Local students pay six hundred dollars per course, but I have to pay two thousand dollars. (Reggie, Engineering, China)

Money … more Chinese students may bring more revenues. (Tony, Engineering, China)

Other students noted that the university wants to capitalize on their talents:

Most international students are really outstanding and smart in their country. I think the university wants these students, so they can increase the university's status. (Amy, English, South Korea)

One student perceived equated internationalization to Westernization:

Internationalization is not necessarily worldwide, but may become Westernized … For example, McDonald first appeared in the US, and now it is all over the world. I think this should count as internationalization. (Sandy, International Relations, Taiwan)

Positive aspects of internationalization: strong sense of independence in learning and life experiences

Most participants reported that they enjoyed the academic freedom in Canada. For example, all four Chinese students in computer science said they had more choices in their course selection from software, hardware, and network, three parts that were separated in China. Mike was one of the talented undergraduate students sponsored by the China Scholarship Council (CSC). As a fourth-year student, he was doing a required final project and noted that studying in Canada, particularly learning how to do a literature review, helped him develop his research interest.

The development of independence in learning was illustrated in Peter's comments:

The biggest achievement is that I learned how to work independently. When working on a project, I will start to gather data, then code step by step, and finally implement the whole program. Now I am familiar with the whole process. When I was in China, I was a bit confused … and I was not a good team leader [among classmates]. But after I came here, I worked on my own first and then communicated with others. (Peter, Computer Science, China)

Other students commented on the development of their hands-on ability by having more opportunities to conduct experiments in the lab and making equipment

themselves. For example, Kimo noted: 'If we need to use tubes [in the lab], we need to buy pipes, cut and assemble them.'

Most Asian students reported that they not only developed a strong sense of independence in learning but also increased their self-confidence and developed stronger communication skills. For example, James, a Chinese student in Geophysics noted his positive character change from being shy to not being afraid to talk to new people. Other students commented they matured as a result of their independent life experiences in another culture, such as learning how to budget for grocery shopping and learning how to cook. Similarly Krystal noted her growing maturity and her open-mindedness:

> I used to be more competitive … For example, I didn't tell other people which teacher I worked with or what project I worked on. I was afraid that they would become my competitor if they knew the information. But, here, if you ask your classmates about their projects, they will tell you all they know. Then I become more open-minded, more willing to help others, and more relaxed. (Krystal, Computer Science, China)

Challenges international students faced

Despite the benefits of internationalization, international students also reported numerous challenges in academic and life environments, including (1) difficulty in making friends with local students, (2) problematic relationships with instructors and supervisors, (3) little internationalization of the curriculum, and (4) dealing with stereotypes and racism.

Challenge 1: difficulty in developing friendships with local students

The international students in this study reported that it was difficult for them to make friends with local students. Lily, who spent four years in Canada pursuing her undergraduate degree, and was pursuing another undergraduate degree at Forest University, said that while she could develop working relationships with her classmates over one semester, it was difficult to become friends with them. She explained that university students in China stay in the same cohort for four years, attending the same courses together each semester, making it easier to become friends with her classmates. In Canada, however, as the students are different in each class, she noted it was difficult to be in touch with the same classmates consistently, making it difficult to develop friendships with local students. Lily added another reason, explaining that 'local students don't have patience. They don't want to understand international students'. Liwang similarly noted a lack of understanding among local students in that they 'never experience what we experience, learning a different culture and language'. A few students identified their low English language proficiency the main reason for difficulties in becoming friends with local students.

Other students indicated that even though they did not have language issues, it was still difficult for them to make friends with local students. One student who studied in English major noted the lack of opportunity for her to interact with local students: 'I don't even see any Canadian around me except in class … after class they just leave, not much opportunity to talk to them' (Amy, English, South Korea). Many students mentioned that they did not share the same interests. For example, Tyler, a native American from Alaska, reported that he enjoys going to the Native Centre in the university whereas his Canadian peers like to play hockey. Alex, a Chinese student in Engineering, said some local students like to go to the bar and he does not like the pub environment.

 Another reason why it was difficult for them to make friends with host university students was related to dealing with different life styles:

> I feel there are some conflicts in life styles. My roommates love partying. I can't stand their midnight parties. I often feel sleepy at 12. But their parties start from 1 am and it last until 6 am. Sometimes I asked them to stop. They said: 'easy brother, this is Saturday.' They will go crazy on Saturdays. (James, Geophysics, China)

James was surprised by the amount of partying and drinking involved in undergraduate life. He did not partake in his roommates' usual activities and suggested this could be one of the reasons he felt excluded from friendship. He further expressed discontent dealing with a roommate who did not clean up, which was another barrier to friendship. The students from Brazil, El Salvador, and Iran did not raise these issues of dealing with different life styles.

Challenge 2: relationship with instructors and supervisors

Many students indicated that language was another major challenge they faced in their transition to the Canadian environment. Jane, an international student from China perceived there were tensions between students' and teachers' expectations of teaching and learning:

> One of the instructors gave me C on my paper. I never got that in my entire life. I don't think my writing is so bad … I emailed the instructor, 'as an international student, I came here to learn academic content as well as to learn English, you are the instructor, it is your responsibility to help me with English, but not to punish the student with a very low grade.' I went to see the director of student services. Although the director raised my mark to B, she told me my email message is unprofessional.

Jane felt devastated. In addition to language issues, other students felt helpless when they were mistreated by their supervisors as perceived by Monica:

> I was so eager to learn when I first came here because I never studied construction before. But I felt my supervisor was not responsible. He did not involve me in his current research projects. He gave me a book published in the 1970s to read. I found more updated papers by myself. The more I read, the more I found the topic he gave me was outdated. I felt helpless. (Monica, Geophysics, China)

Challenge 3: little internationalization of the curriculum

At the policy level, the university emphasized the internationalization of the curriculum and enhanced 'teaching and learning resources to optimize the educational experiences of international students' (Forest University 2013, 8). In practice, however, international students reported that they felt there were few teaching and learning resources that were related to their experiences:

> It is more like I need to adapt myself to fit into the program. I feel like there is less understanding. (Liwang, Education, China)

> I don't see there are many materials on my international experience. They [instructors] seldom talk about things happening in China. I think only in X course I experienced a lot because the instructor is from the similar background. (Jane, Education, China)

Similarly, Alice, an international student from Brazil who studied film commented that in the courses mostly American and European film history was taught, but Brazil was

only mentioned in passing. Even when there were some teaching and learning resources that were related to their experiences, these resources appeared to portray their countries as backward:

> Westerners believe that China may be very backward. I remember I read in online discussions, it said 'can China's bullet train reach 275 kilometers per hour?' They thought we are so backward, but in fact, we are not. (Mike, Chemistry, China)

Amy mentioned that in her drama course, she was shocked to see how Korean surgery was portrayed in a video shown by the instructor:

> One of the videos she [the instructor] showed last week is about Korean surgery … It said that Koreans want plastic surgery because they want to be Caucasian, they want to look like White people. It is not true … Because everyone wants to be pretty in Korea, not look like Caucasian. (Amy, English, South Korea)

Mery was critical that Iran was portrayed as both backward and violent in students' discussion in class:

> They are so afraid to come to Iran. They said, 'oh everyday people kill you or arrest you.' No, many people live there and many of them have very luxury life. We have poor people as well. In many aspects, they are even more progressive than here. (Mery, History, Iran)

Challenge 4: dealing with stereotypes and racism

Feelings of hurt were exacerbated in classrooms where international students felt excluded or ignored by other students, illustrated in the following quote by Liwang who felt she was left out of students' study groups:

> The instructor was passing the paper to let us sign up. Everybody was taking turns according to where they sat. They put their names down, … Nobody knew each other at that time. A student sitting beside me got the paper first. He signed his name on the paper and he knew that if he passed the paper to me, I would be in the same group. There was only one spot left in that group … He passed the paper to another person … I was so hurt. (Liwang, Education, China)

Lily, on the other hand, felt even though she was physically included by other students in study groups, her ideas were ignored due to her accent:

> Maybe before you start talking with them, they already have assumptions in their mind that you couldn't speak good English. They don't pay attention to what you say … even you see something more important. They just think because of your accent, your English, they don't take me seriously. (Lily, Education, China)

Lily felt that her classmates were ignoring her due to her language level.

To Krystal, people in Canada appear to be friendly, but may discriminate against other people based on race:

> I actually feel that on the surface, people here will not discriminate against you; they are very friendly. If you have any difficulty, they will help you. But there is deep-rooted racism. One of my Chinese classmates was dating a White young man. When she proposed, he rejected her and told her that his parents will not accept a non-white girl. (Krystal, Computer Science, China)

Mery, an international student from Iran, had to deal with racism in the local community.

> I worked as a cashier in MacDonald … Some customers made fun of me. For example, they asked me, 'Do you have a cold, so that you get this scarf [her hijab]?' I said, 'No, it's my belief.' Sometimes I am so offended.

The students from Brazil, El Salvador, and the United States did not raise the issue of discrimination. For instance, Ana, an international student from El Salvador said she never experienced discrimination or bullying in the university.

Discussion

The results of the study demonstrate international students' multiple understandings of internationalization. Most participants felt internationalization had a positive effect on them in offering opportunities for development of research interests, independence in learning, and personal growth. The participants enjoyed acquiring information, research training, hands-on experience, and analytical skill. Despite such positive outcomes, the results of the study also reveal discrepancies between internationalization policy and the experience of international students.

Internationalization: student mobility, revenue generation, and branding

International students reported the challenge and difficulty of defining internationalization. The fact that they had mixed understandings of internationalization is not necessarily a problem, considering that the literature applies different definitions. In general, they referred to internationalization as student mobility and research collaborations between institutions. For many participants, there was a direct link between their understanding of internationalization and their personal experiences of studying in Canada. For some participants, internationalization offered an opportunity for them to develop a global vision. These aspects of internationalization identified by the participants were similar to academic and socio-cultural principles of internationalization discussed by Knight (2004) and de Wit et al. (2015). But for others, internationalization was about particular ways of thinking about the world or about Westernization. They critiqued that internationalization at Forest University is dominated by the global advantage of English and Anglo-Canadian culture. Marginson (2006, 25) made a similar point that 'the English-language universities exercise a special power, expressed as cultural colonization' and the displacement of the intellectual traditions other language support.

Most participants in this study represent two groups of elites in the source country the socio-economic elite (e.g. mostly self-funded students) and the educated elite (e.g. students funded by scholarships) (Wang and Miao 2013). Access to international mobility is often limited to students who have earned scholarships. Participants in this study reported that in the 2014–2015 academic year, the average international student at Forest University paid $21,932 CAD in tuition fees – a number that was three times higher than what domestic students paid. On average, international students spent about $40,000 on tuition and living expenses together annually. In light of this, most participants perceived that the university used international students for revenue generation, an 'internationalization as marketization model' critiqued by Luke (2010, 49). This is in part due to declining government funding for higher education that has

form the context for the internationalization of universities in many Western countries (Marginson 2006; OECD 2016). For example, between 2000/2001 and 2012/2013 the proportion of university revenues from provincial governments was decreased from 43% to 40% in Canada (CAUT 2015). Many of the Chinese students in the study represented the educated elite, receiving scholarships from the CSC. They had, on average, a grade point average above 85%, and passed the interview in English. In some cases, they represented the brightest students from their home universities. Given this context, some participants perceived the university wanted to capitalize on their talents and used international students to raise its profile nationally and internationally. This aligns with one of Forest University's rationales for internationalization: to 'position [the university] … as a global intellectual hub' and to 'increase international presence and impact' (2013, 1, 16). Khoo (2011) suggests financial pressures push universities towards marketized, competitive, and unethical interpretations of internationalization, whereas ethical development policies and programmes for mutual learning and benefit are eroded. Most participants in this study were critical about the university's tendency to view international students as 'cash cows' (Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti 2015), and its emphasis on raising revenue and branding purposes ahead of the care and education of international students.

Discrepancies between internationalization policy and practice

The results of the study indicate several gaps in internationalization policy at the institutional level and the experience of international students. One of the goals of the internationalization policy at the Forest University is to increase international representation among the study body on campus. For some time it was a commonly held belief that increasing the diversity of the student body would lead to understanding and friendships between international and local students (Leask 2015). However, this is something that does not just happen. Consistent with previous studies (Khawaja and Stallman 2011; Zhang and Brunton 2007), the international students in this study reported having difficulties in connecting with local students. There are many factors that influence engagement between international and domestic students, including linguistic, academic, and social factors. The participants in our study reported English language and communication challenges as major obstacles to forming meaningful relationships with students of the host society. Difficulty with English language is also reported in other studies (Aune, Hendreickson, and Rosen 2011; Scott et al. 2015). In addition to the language barrier, many international students felt there is a lack of common interests or different life styles between them and local students. For example, some international students did not want to partake in a social drinking culture among some young Canadian students. The international students in this study also reported there is a lack of opportunities for interaction between these two groups. Similarly, in Zhang and Brunton's (2007) study, they found that 55% of the 140 Chinese students they surveyed in New Zealand 'were dissatisfied with the availability of opportunities to make New Zealand friends' (132). Sometimes, the international students in this study also sensed unwillingness from local students to connect. This study shows that the mere presence of international students on campus does not necessarily lead to interactions and intercultural understanding between local and international students.

Another gap lies in the lukewarm reception of the local community. Many participants articulated that internationalization generates income by the recruitment of

fee-paying international students. This strategy has obvious economic benefits for the institution and national economies. However, after they came to the Canadian campus, the international students from Asia and Middle East felt that they were not well received and often felt alienated. In addition to the difficulty in making friends with local students, the international students in this study dealt with biases and outright discrimination from their classmates, instructors, supervisors, and the local community. Some reported that their supervisors excluded them from research projects and provided them with outdated information. International students who speak English with an accent, different from the so-called standard Canadian accent, felt they were perceived as unintelligent. Similarly, in Guo's (2009) study, participants were discriminated based on their accent, while Leask's (2009, 215) study corroborated the finding of alienation and discrimination as international students felt that 'domestic students often avoided working with them in class and interacted with them very rarely it at all outside class'.

At the policy level, most institutional internationalization efforts tend neutralize existing racial hierarchies in the realm of education and beyond (Stein et al. 2016). In reality, some international students in this study had to deal with deep-rooted racism from their peers and people in the local community in the form of verbal attacks, including swearing and being told to return to their home country. Mery was ridiculed because of the hijab she was wearing in part-time employment. From her perspective, the choice to wear a hijab remains poorly understood in Canada, partly due to Islamophobia, dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims. Mery stated that it is important to guard against equating difference in dress with cultural backwardness, similar to Zine's argument (2000). This finding is consistent with results of Lee and Rice's (2007) and Brown and Jones (2013) studies. Lee and Rice, in their study of the experiences of international students at a US university, found that students from Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East experienced neo-racism in the form of verbal insults and direct confrontation. Brown and Jones, in their study of international graduate students at a university in the United Kingdom, found that one-third of 153 surveyed experienced racism, including verbal assaults. The limited receptiveness of the local community may contribute to the sense of alienation among international students. de Wit et al. (2015, 29) identified the main purpose for internationalization is 'to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society'. It seems that from our findings, the university is not doing enough to enhance the quality of education and research for all students. Universities appear as unprepared as international students in handling the current cross-cultural encounters.

The third gap shows the contradictions between the internationalization of the curriculum across policy and practice. At the policy level, internationalization of the curriculum aims for 'the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study' (Leask 2009, 209). In practice, from the international students' perspectives, the internationalization of the curriculum is limited. For example, our findings revealed that students rarely encountered materials that reflected their experiences, and when they did, the materials tended to be dated or skewed. As Haigh (2009) argues, 'today, although many classes emerge as a cosmopolitan mix, curricula remain Western' (272). Some students felt that the effect of this lack of international content may be negative, in that it reinforces prejudices and stereotypes. For instance, Mike reported how China was perceived as

backward. Amy was critical about how Korean cosmetic surgery was misinterpreted. Mery commented how Iran was portrayed as backward and violent in the class discussion. These findings provide evidence for Leask's (2015) critique that 'one common misconception about internationalization of the curriculum is that the recruitment of international students will result in an internationalized curriculum for all students' (11).

Conclusion

Twenty-six international students at Forest University participated in the study and 16 of them were from China. No students from India and Saudi Arabia participated. Future studies could include more international students from different countries. The findings from this study are not intended to generalize the experience of all international students in Canada, since Canadian international students do not constitute a monolithic bloc, but rather to provide insights into the complex integration issues that were salient for these particular participants.

Many international students in the study have viewed internationalization as a positive experience for academic and personal growth. In its current approach to internalizing Canadian higher education, however, several problems persist. One pertains to treating internationalization as business opportunities and marketing strategies. Second, in internationalization of the curriculum, the current practice privileges Eurocentric perspectives as some international students did not see teaching materials that reflected their experiences. Third, despite the claim that internationalization is now an integral part of institutional strategies at Canadian universities, there has been a gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Although there is an interest in bringing in international students to internationalize Canadian campuses, in reality there has been a lack of support to help international students successfully integrate into Canadian academic environments.

This study suggests that host institutions need to be cognizant of how they put the internationalized curriculum into action. An internationalized curriculum with a cross-cultural focus helps students develop respect for cultural diversity and increase their awareness and capacity to analyse and see the world from different perspectives (Andreotti 2013). Its move toward such a goal enables students to move between two or more worldviews and enact a shift in the way that students understand the world. An internationalized curriculum demands that educators view international students not only as knowledge consumers but also as knowledge producers. This means that the knowledge and linguistic resources that international students bring need to be valued, and the internationalized curriculum needs to connect to international students' lived experiences. An internationalized curriculum is intended to address the new goals of internationalization suggested by de Wit et al. (2015, 29): 'the **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education … '

The study also has important implications for host institutions in providing appropriate levels of support to help international students with their transition and adaptation. Support for international students has to move beyond the usual one-time welcome orientation. It is important to combine students' academic needs with their social and cultural needs. Furthermore, integrating international students should not only require the participation of international students themselves but involve all faculty members, staff and host university students. 'Addressing issues of stereotyping

and discrimination' and racism should be the priority of such efforts (Myles and Cheng 2003, 260). As Otten (2003, 13) notes, 'the opportunities offered by a diverse context are not self-evident and self-fulfilling in terms of the expected educational outcome of intercultural competence'. Hence, it requires collective efforts of university administrators, faculty, staff, and students in building an internationally inclusive campus, where cross-cultural learning is encouraged. Practical strategies include increased opportunities for interaction across different groups and establishing buddy systems (Heng 2016).

This research addresses knowledge gaps related to internationalization policy as undergraduate international students' voices are not often heard in internationalization initiatives. The results of the research will provide useful insights into universities' internationalization practices. The results will also further the discussions on ethical protocols for international engagement and inform internationalization policy in higher education. The findings suggest that educators of higher education must make more purposeful attempts at the internationalization of research, curricula, and pedagogy that would accommodate diverse needs of local and international students.

In sum, this research argues for more ethically oriented policies and practices of internationalization in higher education as opposed to profit-seeking policies. Like Canada, many countries in the world are experiencing increasing enrolment of international undergraduate students who also encounter numerous challenges in adjusting to new academic environments. While many universities and colleges are searching for solutions to help international undergraduate students with their adaptation, it is hoped that this study will make a solid contribution to this ongoing collective effort. If institutions of higher education are serious about internationalizing their campuses, it is essential that they provide necessary support to assist international students with their transition and integration.

Disclosure statement

References
Abdi, A. A., and L. Shultz. 2008. "Continuities of Racism and Inclusive Citizenship: Framing Global Citizenship and Human Rights Education." In *Education and Social Development: Global Issues and Analyses*, edited by Ali A. Abdi and Shibao Guo, 25–36. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Andreotti, Vanessa De Oliveira, ed. 2013. *The Political Economy of Global Citizenship Education*. London: Routledge.

Aune, R. K., B. Hendreickson, and D. R. Rosen. 2011. "An Analysis of Friendship Networks, Social Connectedness, Homesickness, and Satisfaction Levels of International Students." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35: 281–95.

Brown, Lorraine, and Ian Jones. 2013. "Encounters with Racism and the International Student Experience." *Studies in Higher Education* 38 (7): 1004–19. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.614940.

Campbell, Jacqui, and Mingsheng Li. 2007. "Asian Students' Voices: An Empirical Study of Asian Students' Learning Experiences at a New Zealand University." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12 (4): 375–96. doi:10.1177/1028315307299422.

CAUT (Canadian Association of University Teachers). 2015. CAUT Education Review. https://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/education-review/caut—education-review-(spring-2015).pdf?sfvrsn=8.

CAUT (Canadian Association of University Teachers). 2016. CAUT Bulletin. http://www.caut.ca/bulletin/articles/2016/05/academics-warn-of-dangerous-dependency-on-international-fees.

CBIE (Canadian Bureau of International Education). 2015. *A World of Learning: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education*. Ottawa: CBIE. http://cbie-bcei.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/A-World-of-Learning-2015.pdf.

Chen, Liang-hsuan. 2006. "Attracting East Asian Students to Canadian Graduate Schools." *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 36 (2): 77–105.

Cudmore, Geoffrey. 2005. "Globalization, Internationalization, and the Recruitment of International Students in Higher Education, and in the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology." *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 35 (1): 37–60.

de Wit, Hans, Fiona Hunter, Eva Egron-Polak, and Laura Howard. 2015. *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Brussels: European Parliament. http://www.europarl.efuropa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU(2015)540370_EN.pdf.

de Wit, Hans, and G. Merkx. 2012. "The History of Internationalisation of Higher Education." In *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education*, edited by D. Deardorff, Hans de Wit, J. Heyl, and T. Adams, 43–59. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DFATD (Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development). 2013. *Global Market Action Plan*. http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/plan-eng.pdf.

DFATD (Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development). 2014. *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity*. http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf.

Elliott, David. 1998. "Internationalization in British Higher Education: Policy Perspectives." In *The Globalization of Higher Education*, edited by Scott Peter, 32–43. Philadelphia, PA: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Forest University. 2013. *University International Strategy*. Forest: Forest University.

Gu, Qing, and Alan Maley. 2008. "Changing Places: A Study of Chinese Students in the UK." *Language and Intercultural Communication* 8 (4): 224–45. doi:10.1080/14708470802303025.

Guba, Egon G., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2005. Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions and Emerging Confluences. In *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, 191–215. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guo, Yan. 2009. "Racializing Immigrant Professionals in an Employment Preparation ESL Program." *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry* 1 (1): 40–54.

Haigh, Martin. 2009. "Fostering Cross-cultural Empathy with Non-western Curricular Structures." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 13 (2): 271–84. doi:10.1177/1028315308329791.

Heng, Tang T. 2016. "Different Is Not Deficient : Contradicting Stereotypes of Chinese International Students in US Higher Education." *Studies in Higher Education* (July): 1–15. doi:10.1080/03075079.2016.1152466.

Kaldor, Mary. 2003. *Global Civil Society – An Answer to War?* Cambridge: Polity.

Kelly, Patricia. 2000. "Internationalizing the Curriculum: For Profit or Planet?" In *The University in Transformation: Global Perspectives on the Futures on the University*, edited by S. Inayatullah and J. Gidley, 162–72. Westport: Greenwood.

Kettle, Margaret. 2007. "Discourses and Academic Practice: Reconceptualising International Students in an Australian University." PhD thesis, University of Queensland.

Khawaja, Nigar, and Helen Stallman. 2011. "Understanding the Coping Strategies of International Students: A Qualitative Approach." *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 21 (2): 204–24. doi:10.1375/ajgc.21.2.203.

Khoo, Su-ming. 2011. "Ethical Globalisation or Privileged Internationalisation? Exploring Global Citizenship and Internationalisation in Irish and Canadian Universities." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9 (3–4): 337–53. doi:10.1080/14767724.2011.605320.

Knight, Jane. 2000. *Process and Promise: The AUCC Report on Internationalization at Canadian Universities*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Knight, Jane. 2004. "Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8 (1): 5–31. doi:10.1177/1028315303260832.

Knight, Jane. 2008. "The Role of Cross-border Education in the Debate on Education as a Public Good and Private Commodity." *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 1 (2): 174–87. doi:10.1080/17516230802094478.

Knight, Jane. 2014. "Is Internationalisation of Higher Education Having an Identity Crisis?" In *The Forefront of International Higher Education: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip G. Altbach*, edited by Alma Maldonado-Maldonado and Malee Roberta Bassett, 75–87. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-7085-0_5.

Kunin, Roslyn. 2012. *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update: Final Report*. http://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/economic_impact_en.pdf.

Leask, Betty. 2009. "Using Formal and Informal Curricula to Improve Interactions Between Home and International Students." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 13 (2): 205–21. doi:10.1177/1028315308329786.

Leask, Betty. 2015. *Internationalizing the Curriculum*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lee, Jenny J., and Charles Rice. 2007. "Welcome to America? International Student Perceptions of Discrimination." *Higher Education* 53 (3): 381–409. doi:10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3.

Lillyman, S. and C. Bennett. 2014. "Providing a Positive Learning Experience for International Students Studying at UK Universities: A Literature Review." *Journal of Research in International Education* 13 (1): 63–75.

Luke, Allan. 2010. "Educating the "Other" Standpoint and Internationalization of Higher Education". In *Global Inequalities in Higher Education: Whose Interests Are You Serving?* edited by V. Carpentier and E. Unterhaler, 1–25. London: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Lyakhovetska, Regina. 2004. Welcome to Canada? The Experiences of International Graduate Students at University. In *Student Affairs: Experiencing Higher Education*, edited by L. Andres and F. Finlay, 189–216. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Madge, Clare, Parvati Raghuram, and Pat Noxolo. 2014. "Conceptualizing International Education from International Student to International Study." *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (6): 681. doi:10.1177/0309132514526442.

Marginson, Simon. 2006. "Dynamics of National and Global Competition in Higher Education." *Higher Education* 52 (1): 1–39. doi:10.1007/s10734-004-7649-x.

Marginson, S., Chris Nyland, Erlenawati Sawir, and Helen Forbes-Mewett. 2010. *International Student Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McClure, Joanne W. 2007. "International Graduates' Cross-cultural Adjustment: Experiences, Coping Strategies, and Suggested Programmatic Responses." *Teaching in Higher Education* 12 (2): 199–217. doi:10.1080/13562510701191976.

McMillan, James H., and Sally Schumacher. 2001. *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction*. 5th ed. New York: Longman.

Myles, Johanne, and Liying Cheng. 2003. "The Social and Cultural Life of Non-native English Speaking International Graduate Students at a Canadian University." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 2 (3): 247–63. doi:10.1016/S1475-1585(03)00028-6.

OECD. 2016. *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD. doi:10.1787/eag-2016-en.

Otten, Matthias. 2003. "Intercultural Learning and Diversity in Higher Education." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 7 (1): 12–26. doi:10.1177/1028315302250177.

Patton, Michael Quinn. 2015. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Rhoads, Robert A., and Katalin Szelényi. 2011. *Global Citizenship and the University: Advancing Social Life and Relations in an Interdependent World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ryan, Janette, and Rosemary Viete. 2009. "Respectful Interactions: Learning with International Students in the English-speaking Academy." *Teaching in Higher Education* 14 (3)303–14. doi:10.1080/13562510902898866.

Scott, Colin, Saba Safdar, Roopa Trilokekar, and Amira Masri. 2015. "International Students as 'Ideal Immigrants' in Canada: A Disconnect Between Policy Makers' Assumptions and the Lived Experiences of International Students". *Comparative and International Education* 43 (3). http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol43/iss3/5.

Shultz, Lynette. 2007. "Educating for Global Citizenship: Conflicting Agendas and Understandings." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 53 (3): 248–258.

Spradley, James P. 1980. *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stein, Sharon, Vanessa Andreotti, Judy Bruce, and Rene Suša. 2016. "Towards Different Conversations about the Internationalization of Higher Education." *Comparative and International Education/Éducation Comparée et Internationale* 45 (1): 2. http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol45/iss1/2.

Stein, Sharon, and Vanessa Oliveira de Andreotti. 2015. "Cash, Competition, or Charity: International Students and the Global Imaginary." *Higher Education* 72 (2): 225–39. doi:10.1007/s10734-015-9949-8.

Teichler, Ulrich. 2010. "Internationalising Higher Education: Debates and Changes in Europe." In *Changing Educational Landscapes. Educational Policies, Schooling Systems and Higher Education – a Comparative Perspective*, edited by D. Mattheou, 263–83. Dordrecht: Springer.

Universities Canada. 2014. *Canada's Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey*. Ottawa: UNIVCAN. https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/internationalizationsurvey-2014.pdf.

Wang, Huiyao, and Lv Miao. 2013. *Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.

Zhang, Zhiheng, and Margaret Brunton. 2007. "Differences in Living and Learning: Chinese International Students in New Zealand." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11: 124–140.

Zine, Jasmin. 2000. "Redefining Resistance: Towards an Islamic Subculture in Schools." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 3 (3): 293–316. doi:10.1080/713693042.