

## Employability Expectations and Discrepancies: The Experiences of International Student-mothers in Canada

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The current landscape of higher education has been tremendously transformed by a growing population of non-traditional adult learners, particularly, when they resort to study-abroad experience to enhance their competitiveness on the global market and widening employment opportunities. Canadian universities have experienced a steep rise of foreign postsecondary students: From 2008 to 2015 the percentage of these students increased by 92%, and by 2015, there were 353,000 international students in Canada, among which 48% of them were women (CBIE, 2016). Despite the considerable size of this population, their particular needs and experiences are largely ignored since international students are usually taken as a homogenized group. It is unclear if female international students in Canada are well supported in achieving their human resource potentials despite public recognition of them as a valuable source of well-qualified future workers. Among these women, 61% affirmed that their Canadian studies have helped them to acquire worked-related skills, but related research has found that local work experience in Canada, rather than skills, weighs more in importance in securing jobs after graduation (Guo, 2009; Shan, 2009). Another concern is the challenges these students are facing as they attempt to competitively (re)position themselves after returning to home countries or in the global market in general (Anderson, 2015). Therefore, as international student mothers ourselves, we are interested in discovering the motivations, challenges, opportunities and strategies related to employability from the perspectives of student-mothers studying abroad in Canada.

The study applies intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1995; Grzanka, 2014) as the theoretical framework to understand the lived experiences of a particular group of non-traditional students juggling their multiple roles and identities as mature female students pursuing international credentials in Canada and highlight the impact of intersected positionalities in terms of age, gender and immigration status on their personal pursuit of employability, which can not be fully captured by any single dimension alone. A narrative inquiry was the chosen methodology for this study since it is the intention of the researchers to collect, report and discuss the experiences as expressed and told by international student-mothers themselves. Through oral and written narratives participants will share an account of their stories. As our research will be situated within a broader socio-cultural and socio-economic context of globalization and internationalization of higher education, we will discuss our findings of the subjective perceptions of the participants in relation to such global trend to deepen understanding as regard to how people's lifelong learning trajectories are profoundly shaped by the necessity of sustaining and improving employability in an increasingly competitive and globalized labour market. The study will contribute to the scholarship of higher education and adult learning by enriching the academic dialogue with perspectives of international students in Canada, specifically, those with dependents. It calls on educators and policy-makers to take into account the practical and emotional needs of this growing population in designing and implementing programs and better facilitate such students in accumulating the cultural and social capitals for increased employability in the global labour market.

Keywords: International student mothers, employability, intersectionality, non-traditional adult learners

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