CHAPTER SIX

Equality or Equity? Understanding Immigrant Student Needs in Canadian Higher Education

Alison D'Cruz

ABSTRACT

As Canada welcomes record numbers of immigrants, many of whom pursue higher education shortly after arrival, universities have become key sites of settlement, aspiration, and social mobility. Yet the needs of immigrant students are frequently misunderstood or oversimplified within institutional policies. This chapter traces the landscape of immigrant participation in Canadian higher education, drawing on demographic trends, labour market research, and migration policy. It interrogates the difference between equality (treating all students the same) and equity (meeting students where they are), arguing that immigrant students require support structures that account for their unique histories, challenges, and goals. By spotlighting the lived realities of immigrant learners, the chapter calls for a paradigm shift in how universities conceptualize access, success, and inclusion.

KEYWORDS: Equality, Equity, Immigrant, Higher Education, Canada

Immigrant students, also known as *foreign-born* students, are those who have immigrated to a country and are now pursuing education in that country. Canada has welcomed a record-high number of immigrants in the last few years, driven by the need to meet the demands of its economy (IRCC, 2024). These immigrants, who come from all over the world, adopt different strategies to assist their settlement in Canada; gaining a Canadian educational credential is one such strategy that sees them become students in Canadian higher education institutions (HEIs). Many new immigrants enrol in Canadian HEIs to increase their chances of employment (Banerjee & Verma, 2009). A study of the 2005 to 2009 immigrant landing cohort indicated that of the economic class immigrants (i.e., immigrants with the potential to economically contribute to Canada) who enrolled in HEIs, approximately 43% pursued higher education within the first year of their arrival in Canada. This trend of joining HEIs soon after arrival indicates that most of the immigrant students were relatively new to Canada when enrolling in higher education (Prokopenko, 2018).

Immigrant students have international backgrounds and come from other countries but are not international students. International students can be described as those who move to another country to pursue education (Statistics Canada, 2010). Notwithstanding recent regulations limiting international student enrolment in Canadian HEIs (Jack, 2024), international student recruitment has largely been a top priority for Canadian HEIs (CBIE, 2020; Liu, 2016). Considering the exponential growth in international student numbers over the past few decades (CBIE, 2020), several studies rightly so have been conducted on the experiences and needs of international students with the hope of best supporting this diverse group in its transition into Canadian academia and society (e.g., Liu, 2016; Scott et al., 2015). Contrastingly, immigrant students who have similar characteristics to international students, have not received much attention. I argue that it is worth understanding the unique needs of immigrant students because of the different contexts, challenges, and objectives of each group. Immigrant students fall under the domestic student category in HEIs and as a result are seldom recognized as immigrants, making their needs as students in Canadian HEIs remain largely unknown. It is important for HEIs to know their needs to ensure their development and success as students. Moreso, as future citizens ensuring their success is in the social and economic interest of both the immigrant and Canada (Pries, 2024).

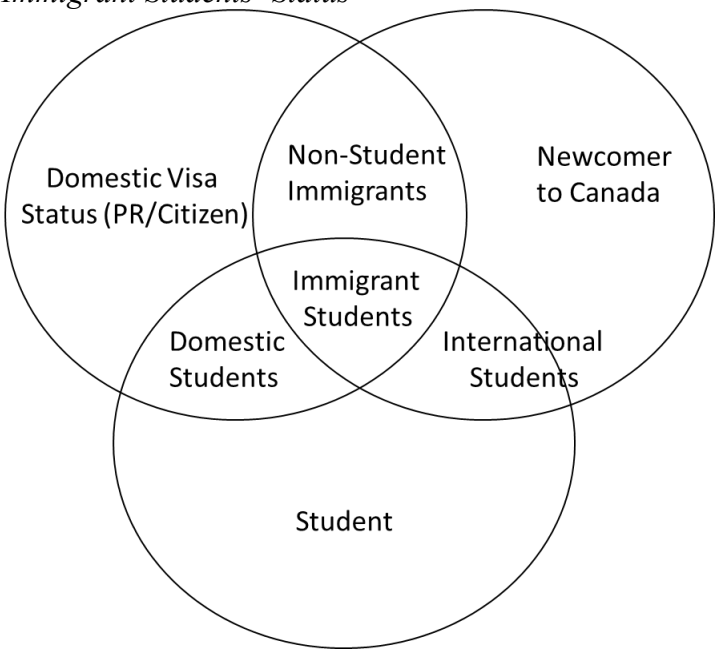
In this chapter, I explore immigrant student's needs in higher education through a social justice lens. Specifically, I use qualitative data collected by interviewing immigrant students from Asia to build a case for the need for equity when it comes to institutional support provided by HEIs. I begin with an introduction about the unique characteristics of immigrant students and explain the key challenges they face before discussing immigrant student needs from HEIs.

Immigrant Students in Canada

The immigrant student status in Canada includes an interaction of several overlapping identities, such as domestic visa status (permanent resident (PR)/citizen), student, domestic student, non-student immigrant, international student, and newcomer to Canada. This overlapping of related identities results in immigrant students having access to opportunities as well as facing the challenges afforded by each of these immigrant student status identities.

Figure 1 below summarizes the complexity of the overlapping identities of immigrant students in Canada.

Figure 1
Immigrant Students' Status



Literature about immigrant students in higher education is limited (Sinacore et al., 2011); however, substantial literature exists about two related groups: immigrants and international students. Immigrant students are part of the larger immigrant group, thus, characteristics and challenges of immigrants can in many cases reflect the experiences of immigrant students. Similarly, in the context of higher education, immigrant students most closely resemble international students. Thus, the characteristics and challenges of immigrants and international students (where applicable) are reviewed to substantiate the sparse literature available on immigrant students.

Characteristics of Immigrant Students

Highly skilled immigrants contribute to the economic development of a country; as a result, Canada's immigration system places considerable importance on an immigrant's educational qualifications (Statistics Canada, 2017). Per the 2016 census data, almost 40% of immigrants between the ages of 25 to 64 had a graduate degree and this trend of attracting highly skilled immigrants continued to increase. The 2016 census data also indicated that more than half of the immigrants to Canada who landed in the five years preceding the 2016 census had a graduate degree (Statistics Canada, 2017). However, despite their highly skilled status, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada found that these new immigrants often face difficulties in finding a job, with lack of Canadian work experience being the most cited reason, followed by lack of labour market contacts, lack of recognition of foreign experience, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, and language inadequacies (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Foreign qualifications of immigrants are often not recognized for reasons such as perceived lower quality of foreign qualifications compared to Canadian qualifications and non-suitability of certain foreign qualifications to the Canadian market (Alboim et al., 2005). Immigrants from certain countries

with a different education system, for instance, an education system with a three-year bachelor's degree as opposed to the traditional four-year bachelor's degree of many North American HEIs, may find their three-year degrees are not recognized by some North American HEIs (World Education Services, 2019). In such a situation, immigrants with master's degrees may find their degree being evaluated as equivalent to a four-year bachelor's degree, thereby devaluing an immigrant's educational capital. The absence of a fair credential assessment has negative consequences both for immigrants, who may feel frustrated, and for Canada, which may lose out on attracting skilled immigrants. Further, requalification of immigrants results in additional costs that need to be borne by immigrants and taxpayers (Canada Parliament, 2009). To overcome the above-mentioned labour market challenges, some immigrants with foreign qualifications enrol in HEIs in Canada, hoping to increase the value of their previously acquired human capital and thereby improve their employability (Anisef et al., 2009). Past studies have indicated an increase in the number of immigrants enrolled in higher education in Canada (Adamuti-Trache, 2010; Sinacore & Lerner, 2013); however, more recent data on immigrants in higher education remains unavailable. Further, the needs of the immigrant student group have seldom formed part of institutional policy (Adamuti-Trache, 2010; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

Residency Status and Associated Benefits

Immigrant students are permanent residents of Canada and, apart from being ineligible to vote until they become citizens, they enjoy the same rights as Canadian citizens, such as access to health care and government assistance (Government of Canada, 2019). As permanent residents, they pay domestic tuition fees and are eligible to apply for government-sponsored financial assistance such as the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) (Ontario, 2020). Thus, it may be assumed that as permanent residents, immigrant students most likely identify as legitimate members of Canadian society who are on their way to becoming citizens of Canada.

Older Age and Family Responsibilities

Out of the approximately 300,000 people that immigrated to Canada between July 2019 to June 2020, 23,070 were in the 20- to 24-year-old age group; 63,717 were in the 25- to 29-year-old age group; and 54,665 were in the 30- to 34-year-old age group (Varrella, 2021). Further still, a large proportion of immigrants who arrive in Canada come as members of a family (Phan et al., 2015). Many studies have indicated that the principal immigrant applicant isnormally the one who invests in skill upgrading while the dependent spouse is either engaged in low-level employment or managing the family (Beach & Worswick, 1993; Duleep & Sanders, 1993). Thus, immigrant students with families perform dual roles and are obligated to discharge their responsibilities as students and as family members. This scenario can add to the stress of an immigrant student.

Motivation and Purpose

Immigrants generally decide to migrate to Canada anticipating a better life and thus expect to have successful careers and social lives once here (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013). The main goals of immigrants are to successfully settle in their new country by improving their economic status, becoming active participants in their new community, and achieving overall well-being (Safdar et al., 2003). Thus, it can be inferred that immigrant students aim to make the most of their Canadian educational experience to acquire the knowledge and qualifications that can help them gain

meaningful employment in the Canadian labour market, making them engaged and productive members of society.

Socioeconomic Identity

Where an immigrant chooses to study to a large extent depends on their socioeconomic identity. Socioeconomic status refers to the social position of a person or group based on their education, occupation, and income (APA, n.d.). Lutz (2007) argued that socioeconomic status has a significant impact on dropouts amongst immigrant school students. Socioeconomic status for immigrants has an added layer of complexity. Some immigrants have a high level of education (Statistics Canada, 2015) and may also be financially affluent in their home countries, thus signifying a high socioeconomic status. However, upon immigration, while certain socioeconomic measures remain the same, e.g., the education level, there may be a significant change in an immigrant's income level in the new country. Furthermore, in Canada, foreign education credentials are often devalued (Guo & Andersson, 2005) and thus could also be considered as a low socioeconomic measure further complicating an immigrant's socioeconomic status.

The financial commitment of obtaining a higher education qualification further acts as a barrier, particularly for individuals with low socioeconomic status (Shankar et al., 2020). Immigrant students with considerable financial resources have greater access to pursue expensive programs such as a business degree, afford childcare while they study, and pay for books. This is not the case for immigrant students with low financial resources. However, it is important to note that immigrants under the economic class are required to show proof of funds to be eligible to enter Canada (Government of Canada, 2024). The minimum amount an immigrant need is $14,690 (Government of Canada, 2024), which signifies that immigrants under the economic class do not generally have low economic status.

Challenges Faced by Immigrant Students

There are several academic and non-academic barriers that immigrant students need to overcome to have a positive educational experience. It is also important to note that Canada has a diverse immigrant group in terms of country of origin, socioeconomic status, and immigration background (refugee or economic class) (Volante et al., 2017). Thus, the immigrant student group is heterogeneous, and challenges faced by some immigrant students may not necessarily affect others.

Learning Challenges

Immigrant students, like international students, may have come from a very different educational system and thus may be accustomed to a different pedagogical style and academic environment (Akanwa, 2015). In a study by Kang and Metcalfe (2019) on students participating in reciprocal exchange programs between Korean and Canadian universities, it was observed that Korean students shied away from asking simple questions in class to avoid being judged by fellow classmates as well as to avoid challenging a faculty member's authority. Immigrant students in Canada coming from similar pedagogical environments as Korea might also sit in silence rather than challenge a professor's authority. Immigrant students who use the same learning strategies they used in their home country, such as reproduction (i.e., rote learning), are often surprised when they are marked low by their Canadian professors (Akanwa, 2015). Adjustingto a new style of

learning and teaching is thus a challenge for many immigrant students when they first enrol in higher education in Canada.

Social Challenges

The university or college community in Canada can often resemble the larger Canadian society in terms of diversity of the student body, thus making HEIs a suitable practice ground for social integration.

Culture. Immigrants face issues acclimatizing to the norms prevalent in Canada, such as socio-cultural practices, communication styles, and soft skill expectations of the Canadian labour market (Lai et al., 2017). These issues can demotivate immigrants and affect their integration in their new environment, which in turn can result in underutilization of immigrant skills (Bauder, 2003; Cheng et al., 2013). Immigrant students also go through a process of cultural transitioning while they are trying to settle in the country in which they are pursuing their education (Sinacore et al., 2011). These students face adjustment challenges in their new academic environment, and their unfamiliarity with the established norms and expectations of academia in Canada can affect their experiences. For example, like immigrants entering the Canadian labour market with technical skills but lacking soft skills (Sakamoto et al., 2010), immigrant students may possess the required technical knowledge to be part of academia, but they may be unfamiliar with the norms for interacting with faculty. Successful transition occurs when immigrant students can enjoy psychological well-being and successfully manage social activities in the new culture (Thomson & Esses, 2016; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). However, many immigrant students struggle to adapt primarily due to a lack of awareness about the prevalent culture in Canadian HEIs.

Language. Immigrant students not proficient in the dominant languages of Canada may have trouble assimilating teaching content, submitting written assignments, and communicating with faculty (Lum & Grabke, 2012). While several immigrant students surveyed as part of a study conducted by Lum and Grabke (2012) indicated that they had some form of English language training in the past, the effectiveness of such training in communicating confidently in an academic and social context could not be ascertained. In academic settings, tests designed with native English speakers in mind can be challenging for immigrant students (Rowland & Davis, 2014). Postsecondary immigrant students who are unable to cope with the academic standards of higher education on account of language limitations often become discouraged and drop out (Gitlin et al., 2003), which can have a detrimental impact on their careers. Language proficiency is also an important factor in determining immigrant earnings, with higher earnings being attributed to greater proficiency (Chiswick & Miller, 2003), making language fluency a significant challenge for immigrants and immigrant students.

Social Integration. One of the main challenges facing new immigrants to Canada is a loss in the number and type of social networks in comparison to the networks in their home countries (Guruge et al., 2019; Simich et al., 2005). Social support, especially from people within the same ethnic group, can help an immigrant settle in the new country (Guruge et al., 2019). Immigrant students may struggle to settle and integrate into Canada's HEIs. In the absence of any formalized support, they lack opportunities to network with their ethnic community and with Canadian students, which could further result in social isolation.

Disabilities. Depending on the culture from which they come, some immigrants are wary of disclosing disabilities as they feel it may affect their settlement/citizenship process (Pegg, 2004).

There is a lack of awareness about mental health and intellectual disability amongst various ethnic immigrant communities in Canada (Pegg, 2004), perhaps due to the fact that in an immigrant's home country, such disabilities tend to not be publicly discussed. Research indicates that immigrant students may not be comfortable voluntarily disclosing their disabilities and as a result fail to register with accessibility services (Marcil et al., 2015). Immigrant students with disabilities also may not be aware of the existence of an accessibility office, let alone what that office does, and thus may end up struggling without realizing that help is available.

Economic Challenges

Career. Immigrants looking to restart their career in Canada may face challenges, including discrimination, culture shock, isolation, and sudden loss of social status (Sinacore et al., 2011). It is at this stage that many immigrants return to some form of higher education to address these issues; however, they may find career service personnel in HEIs are not trained to handle profiles of older students with work experience (Sinacore et al., 2011). Career service centers are also not equipped with advisors and mentors who can provide academic advisement as well as a robust understanding of Canadian labour markets to their immigrant students (Sinacore et al., 2011). In such a situation, career service centers are unable to add value to an immigrant student's professional development. This can result in adverse economic and financial consequences for immigrant students if they cannot find a job after having invested in acquiring a Canadian qualification.

These challenges are experienced by most immigrant students and help in determining their needs. Having laid out the key characteristics and challenges of immigrant students, the next section presents the data and analysis of immigrant student needs in higher education.

Data and Analysis

To understand the needs of immigrant students, I conducted a qualitative research design study that allowed for extensive exploration of participants' experiences and needs (Creswell, 2012). This study focused on recent immigrants, defined as immigrants who arrived in Canada one to five years before enrolling in higher education. Participant criteria also included mature (24 years or older) immigrants who arrived in Canada under the economic class and thereafter enrolled as graduate students. Participants were recruited from universities in Ontario, Canada through a combination of advertisements in newsletters, and personal and professional networks. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants. Data was collected through virtual participant interviews, and each participant was interviewed twice, resulting in sixteen interviews among eight participants. Participants were asked open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview protocol to describe and explain their experiences and needs in their own words. Participants were from different parts of Asia, with some having lived in countries other than their home country before they arrived in Canada. Four participants identified as male and four as female, with an age range of 24 to 55. There was a combination of master's and doctoral students

Data analysis included a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to code data from the transcripts of participant interviews. For inductive analysis, data was coded based on participants' responses, whereas for deductive analysis, relevant higher education scholarship was used to determine underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). NVivo was used for the initial coding of the data, after which a thematic map was created to identify main themes and subthemes.

Member checks and researcher's reflexivity were employed to ensure data validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Findings

Immigrant students' needs were found to be an outcome of their characteristics as immigrants, the challenges they encountered on account of their international background, and the opportunities they had access to owing to their status as domestic students. These three factors determined why they decided to enrol in higher education and what their expectations were during their education and upon completion. Despite the existence of these students on campuses, it was found that there were no specific support services available for immigrant students, although they had access to resources available to domestic students. A key finding from the participant interviews was that available supports were not nearly enough to meet the needs of these students. In this section, I highlight three types of needs that immigrant students have from their HEIs based on their goals and experiences. I categorize them as: the need for prestige for immigrant students, the need for transition support into the HEI and Canada, and needs while pursuing higher education.

Need for Prestige

This theme provides important context that helps us understand who these immigrant students are and alludes to the kind of support they need. The findings of this study revealed that as new immigrants, they had a strong desire to achieve a comfortable standard of living for themselves and their families. Thus, they were driven by a need to succeed and took measures such as obtaining a Canadian credential to help them achieve success in their careers. Interestingly, success did not mean simply attaining a Canadian credential, institutional prestige and personal prestige were equally important to them. While institutional prestige was associated with the prestige a particular HEI elicited, personal prestige was linked to their high self-efficacy (i.e., belief in their abilities). Institutional prestige was important as they believed it would give them the best chance to achieve career success in Canada. As explained by one participant, "I chose to stay back in Ontario and pursue an education that would give me probably a similar status of what I had back in my home country. … being the best university in Canada that was my first choice." This participant indicates that pursuing education at a premier institution was important to meet their goals. Another participant further elaborates that studying at a prestigious institution was linked to her self-efficacy:

> One of the reasons that I chose [this university] was because a friend of mine said to me that, "Oh my god, you're really … going above and beyond. Because you have a [permanent residence], you could just join a college or something for one year and get a related kind of certification and just find the job." But I'm not sure, but this is part of my personal character that I love, you know, going in the best way.

Personal prestige for 'going in the best way' was also accompanied by a great passion for learning for these immigrant students. Canadian labour market norms had enticed them to enrol in education; however, the thrill of gaining knowledge through education was equally alluring. A participant explains, "the thing that motivates me the most is knowledge ... I have a passion for learning." He also acknowledged that the hidden curriculum related to his degree was an important factor to achieve success. For instance, he took steps to demonstrate his ability as an academic, such as publishing in high-impact factor journals and working for relevant research centers on

campus. He was clear that grades alone would not be sufficient to help him meet his goal of becoming an instructor; he needed to gain the right attention in the right circles. Many of the immigrant student participants hoped to use the education system and participate in the activities that were essential but not mandatory to meet their post-graduation goals. Such strategizing by immigrant students is also indicative of their high self-efficacy, which can be attributed to their work experience and existing qualifications. Most of them had excelled academically in their previous degrees, thereby giving them confidence to aim high as students. Thus, already having gone through graduate-level education, they had clear expectations for themselves, were resilient, and set high standards for themselves as students.

For immigrant students, thriving in Canada was the goal, and they hoped their education in a renowned institution could help them secure meaningful employment. Simultaneously, their belief in their abilities meant that it was important for them to aim high and not settle for anything less, no matter the effort involved. The need for institutional and personal prestige suggests that what they need from their institution is a support system that can help them capitalize on their previous careers. This finding has important social justice implications, as immigrants are often expected to fit the norm prevalent in the labour market, which fails to recognize all their previous experiences and knowledge.

Need for Transition Support

This theme reflects the struggles immigrant students face during transition and highlights the value of timely support to help them transition successfully. The immigrant student journey in Canada comprises two key transitions: transition into HEIs and transition in Canada. All participants reported struggling with each of these transitions and shared how HEIs could help.

Transitioning into a HEI is a crucial time for any student and unfortunately one of the most difficult times for immigrant students. As explained by a participant, unlike international students who have an entire office reaching out to them even before they arrive on campus, immigrant students were still attempting to understand the stakeholders in the system. It is not that they did not have access to information (though at times access was an issue), but without the context to understand what to prioritize or pay attention to, they often missed opportunities, such as funding application deadlines.

Transitioning to Canada came with its own challenges; interestingly, participants felt that these two transitions were not mutually exclusive and often found their experience in higher education helpful in adjusting to life outside campus. As explained by one participant:

> So, I was very actively participating in both the department and [the university] … because I'm not only studying for this degree but I'm an immigrant. I want to have better language proficiency and know the process of doing things here so that's why I'm devoting more time and even doing more work than is required from the degree … I think it's helpful for me to adapt into the Canadian society and have connection with the community.

The above statement indicates how immigrant students can use their education to settle in Canada. Their institution could be a place for them to gain community and skill. However, as described by a participant, this high level of engagement also meant more effort by the immigrant student, which took away from their family and personal time. A participant, for instance, admitted, "I am one of [those] immigrants who are very hard on herself." However, while all the participants had high expectations for themselves and felt that the onus was on them to excel, for those immigrants who were the sole breadwinners, education had to occur around their family life and not vice-versa. As explained by one participant:

> My top priority is not my education … it is obviously my family. So, I have to run a family, so the top need is financial … in case, God forbid, there is a situation where I have to choose one thing … PhD is my passion, but I will immediately stop my passion, and then I will be diverting myself to my economic needs.

Pursuing an education as an older student with family responsibilities was hard for all participants, and they indicated the need to be supported by their HEIs during these transitions. Support services provided by HEIs yielded benefits in their transition into their higher education institution and Canada. It is important to note that transition support for immigrants needs to extend to their families as well, considering the life stage of many immigrant students.

Needs while Pursuing Higher Education

Participants reported facing several challenges while pursuing their education, which included a lack of awareness about the functioning of the education system, inadequate support, and instances of discrimination. As newcomers, they lacked awareness about the academic system, which resulted in immigrant students ignoring what they considered unimportant. For instance, a participant dropped a course because she did not read her program requirements and syllabus. In her experience, curriculum existed but reading it in detail was not expected from students. Another participant also admitted that he did not have many comments to share in class as he barely did his readings; he realized midway through his first term that his professor was not going to deliver a lecture in the traditional sense and to learn meant that he needed to engage with the content (e.g., readings) that was assigned before class.

Immigrant students also found the grading system used to be very confusing, with some faculty using grades and some using marks; this seemed very course-specific to them. Many of these students were used to a more standardized grading model and expected to know where they stood once allotted a grade or mark; however, in the Canadian system, they often felt lost when trying to ascertain their performance. For two participants who were high performers in their previous degrees, not knowing which category their performance fell into was stressful and frustrating.

Unfamiliarity with academic culture also had a negative effect when it came to group work. Non-immigrant group members could end up demoralizing immigrant participants who did not know the expected standards. For instance, a participant, who was distraught with her group, shared, “whatever I write they rewrite it or like change everything.” While the other students in her group were following academic protocol used in Canada, they did not realize that their actions without any explanation were humiliating to their peer and had a detrimental effect on her confidence. Through the above instances, it can also be deduced that several participants felt that the onus was on the students to navigate the system and seek answers. A participant explained, “I found out different things by asking different people by myself. It took me a very long time…ask A, A said, ‘Okay this problem you need to find B, C, D,’ and you ask 10 people and resolve the question.” The problem with the approach is that it is time-consuming and for an immigrant student who is already on a tight schedule, it can discourage them from seeking clarification and exploring opportunities if the process to receive answers is tedious.

Immigrant students were aware that their needs and challenges did not completely resemble those faced by domestic or international students. Their challenges were often similar to those faced by international students, but the intensity of their needs differentiated them from the

international student group. For instance, immigrant students were doing their part to overcome employment barriers and gain Canadian credentials recognized in the labour market while simultaneously dealing with family responsibilities and settlement (Adamuti-Trache, 2010), a situation that most international students do not face. Further, as adults with experience, they already knew the field and job they wanted to have post-education, and they wished to resume their career, not start from scratch like many younger international students. In addition, their need to settle in Canada, which included buying a house and saving for children's education, meant that they had more financial responsibilities compared to international students. Thus, while services offered by campus centers for international students could help meet some of the immigrant students' needs, the services did not address several of their requirements. For instance, many immigrant student participants wished to have access to social networks comprising other students in their position; however, international student centers could not provide such access. These centers often catered to helping international students with information necessary to immigrate to Canada, information not required for existing immigrants.

Lack of awareness and inadequate support made it hard for immigrant students to navigate the system but could be rectified with time; however, experiences with discrimination had a much more lasting impact. A participant who faced an instance of discrimination during a class group discussion was visibly upset and disappointed when narrating her experience. She emphasized that the other student, a white woman, "clearly targeted us for being non-white, and she clearly targeted us for my [our] ethnicity." The student in question came across as rude and uncompromising, and further pulled out of their group project, while threating them, "that she knows all the policies which can work in favour of her and against us." The participant further added that, "although she was not very direct towards me, like she was in a way, but with the other girl who covers her head, it was very ugly with her." For our participant this was, "a perfect example of white superiority. She thinks that if she's white, she's supreme. And this is what she reflected through her actions and words." This experience of a participant brings the focus on systemic forms of oppression, particularly targeted at racialized or religious groups that many of this study's participants identified with.

To counter these challenges faced by immigrant students, HEIs need to create community or dedicate staff to support them as well as create programming relevant to these students. Similarly, when it comes to managing acts of discrimination or microaggressions, there is a need to sensitize the wider community about the presence and characteristics of immigrant students so that their experience and skills are given due recognition and not undermined.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I examine the different needs that immigrant students have from their educational institutions. A key finding is that although immigrant students have access to services offered to domestic students (Adamuti-Trache, 2010), their unique needs are not being met by their HEIs. Their domestic status accords them several benefits, mainly lower tuition fees and access to more funding opportunities; however, their unfamiliarity with the education system and its failure to reach out to them limits the effectiveness of these supports. In contrast, international students pay higher tuition fees but have access to dedicated services normally offered within their departments and/or by international student offices (Wang, 2007). An analysis of immigrant student needs reveals the necessity for a dedicated support system to help these students in their student journey and beyond.

While more customized support offered by HEIs will certainly help immigrant students, it is not enough to counter unequal systems that have historically worked against immigrants. This holds even more true for racialized immigrants who are required to navigate work and education systems influenced by colonial legacies (Karki et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2011). As Asians, many of the participants had shared stories of discrimination driven by race, which made some of them hesitant to include their experiences in this study. A participant shared a painful experience of racism related to their HEI, where the participant admitted that people questioned the credibility of their work simply because they were not white and not from here. This instance was unfortunately not a one-off, and it calls for the need for structures to support these students and also to counter the bigger issues of racism and discrimination within academia. As an immigrant, this participant was hesitant to seek help, as with their family responsibilities and education, they did not have much time to focus on their overall wellness. There was also the fear of repercussions and people not understanding their situation, which they felt would harm them more than help. Many participants reported feeling this way but did not know other immigrants who could validate their feelings and experiences as there was no immigrant student community.

A support system is necessary as what immigrant students are lacking is the existence of cohesive structures in HEIs that work to advocate for and support them. HEIs are likely to support these students by including terms like 'newcomers' to their existing programming; however, often such programs are extensions of international student programming that are not designed to fit the needs of immigrant students. Further, as emphasized by Ahmed (2007), it is important to be cognizant of the "gaps between words and deed" (p. 590), suggesting that modifying language is insufficient if it's not backed up by the work that needs to be done. In this situation, the intent to be inclusive is simply not enough, but instead risks being performative. For instance, their need for prestige indicates the level of success they wish to achieve; it is not merely for them to pick up from where they left off in their home countries but instead, they wish to grow. Based on the participant interviews, no such service provided by HEIs offered this kind of support. These students were often advised by staff or faculty either from the perspective of domestic (i.e., traditional age students raised in Canada) or international students. It is certainly no easy task for staff and faculty to advise immigrant students based on their unique immigrant identity without embracing realities of the labour market and sociocultural norms, hence this study argues for the need for an institution-wide support system that can assist immigrant students and the staff who are supposed to help them. They need the support of their institutions to help them capitalize on their existing professional experiences, which suggests that institutional support cannot be standalone, such as helping these students through career services. Instead, what is needed is for HEI to use their wider institutional reach to advocate for them with entities outside the institution. HEIs can use their platforms to influence relevant policies. Hiratsuka's (2019) study on the functions of international student offices is helpful in presenting a case for an institution-wide dedicated immigrant student support system. He found that these offices perform three functions, offering services to international students, interdepartmental coordination, and external entities coordination to assist and advocate for international students. A similar setup would be useful to meet the needs of immigrant students.

A support system is also useful when dealing with heterogeneity, as systems can help provide comprehensive programming to meet diverse needs. Immigrant students are far from a homogeneous group and hence have different needs. For example, participants from East Asia reported more issues with language as opposed to participants from South Asia, who had all their

education in English. Similarly, some participants had access to more economic and social capital compared to others; participants who were sole breadwinners had very different needs from those who had spousal support. Such diversity in needs requires an approach with well-formed policies and plans. In the absence of such an approach, immigrant students have equality but not equity from their HEIs. Existing supports lack the nuance or the reach to be effective in changing unfair structures and practices; at most, they are a band-aid solution attempting to fix an immediate problem but not the reason for its occurrence. The bigger issue with this quick-fix approach is that it undermines the immigrant student's capability and experience, raising issues of societal inequality.

In conclusion, the findings discussed in this chapter found a mismatch between immigrant student needs and the support provided by HEIs. These findings demonstrate the need for greater discussion about how HEIs can move from an equality to equity approach to better support and empower immigrant students. Findings indicate the need for HEIs to create equitable practices and systems that cater to the needs of this particular group, such as advocating for these students at all levels, including industry, society, and government; establishing an immigrant student community; and encouraging faculty and staff to critically examine how they identify and engage with these students. Such efforts by HEIs can help these students avoid being underutilized and undervalued and instead enable them to have a socially just experience and contribute to Canada based on the skills and knowledge they possess and attain.

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