

ABSTRACT

The globalization of education presents numerous advantages to Canada's political, economic, and sociocultural structure. In order for Canada to reap such benefits, international students must successfully transition to the Canadian environment. However, international students typically report facing greater adversity compared to domestic students. Identifying what variables can facilitate international students' adjustment would therefore not only be of benefit to international students' well-being, but also to all parties involved, from university and governmental-related student recruitment and retention efforts to the development and implementation of educational and immigration policies. Given that international students differ with regard to their willingness to acculturate to Canada, the present study investigated acculturation motivation as one such factor. A comparative thematic analysis between the experience of international students with low acculturation motivation and that of international students with high acculturation motivation was conducted. Results indicate that international students with low and high acculturation motivation are having inherently different experiences abroad, thus supporting support the heterogeneity of the international student experience.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization of Education

- Canadian universities accepted over 100,000 international students in 2012, a 60% increase since 2004 (CIC, 2013).
- The number of full-time international students is aimed to be doubled to more than 450,000 by 2022 (DFAIT, 2012).
- Current recruitment factors are poor predictors of international student adjustment (e.g., GPA, TOEFL scores; Chavoshi et al., 2012)
- Then what DOES predict adjustment? How can we reach the recruitment objective?

Acculturation Motivation (AM)

- Definition:** Willingness to learn about the host culture, to develop friendships with host members, and to explore the host country's social and cultural environment (Chirkov et al., 2007)
- International students are a particular type of migrant group
 - Sojourners:** Migrants who voluntarily leave their home country on a **time-limited** basis and whose primary objective is **non-residency related**.
 - If international students are sojourners, then what role does AM play in their cross-cultural transition?

Research goal

- Explore and compare the narratives between students with Low and High AM

METHOD

Participants

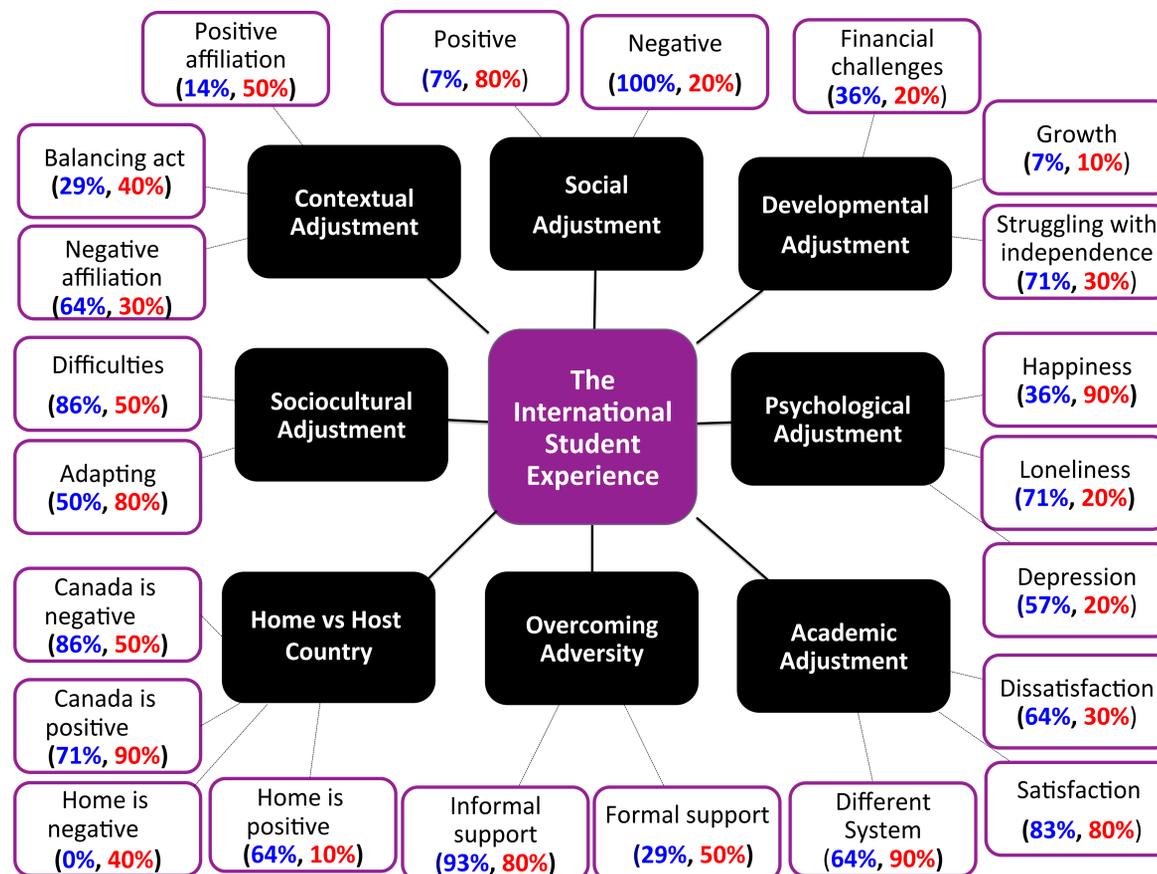
- 70 international students (from over 60 countries) attending York University, in Toronto.
 - High AM**: + 1 SD on Acculturation Motivation Scale
 - Low AM**: - 1 SD on Acculturation Motivation Scale

Acculturation Motivation Scale (AMS; Chirkov et al., 2007)

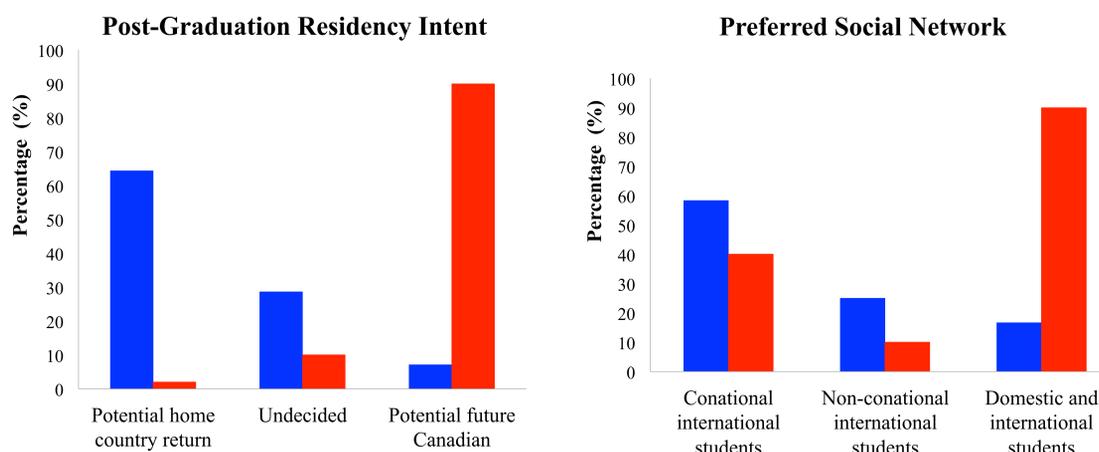
- 15-item scale: "The statements below describe possible thoughts and feelings of international students about Canada and Canadian people", 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)
- Example items: "I am interested in learning more about Canada"; "I try to avoid interactions with Canadians unless it is absolutely necessary."

RESULTS

Comparative Thematic Network of the "International Student Experience" between Low AM and High AM (% of sample endorsed)



Low AM and High AM Future Residency Intent and Preferred Social Networks (% of sample endorsed)



SELECTED REFERENCES

- Chirkov, V. I., Safdar, S., de Guzman, J., & Playford, K. (2008). Further examining the role motivation to study abroad plays in the adaptation of international students in Canada. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(5).
- Chirkov, V., Vansteenkiste, M., Tao, R., & Lynch, M. (2007). The role of self-determined motivation and goals for study abroad in the adaptation of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2013, February 26). Re: News Release — Canada welcomes record number of international students in 2012.
- Smith, R.A., & Khawaja, N.G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 699-713

DISCUSSION

Acculturation motivation matters!

- International students with **Low AM** appear to endorse more negative outcomes across social, developmental, psychological, academic, sociocultural, and contextual adjustment domains. In contrast, international students with **High AM** appear to endorse more positive outcomes across the same domains.
- When faced with adversity, **High AM** appear to endorse greater use of formal support (e.g., university resources), compared to **Low AM**. This may be due to **High AM** reporting greater institutional affiliation.
- Given that **Low** and **High AM** appear to endorse opposite perceptions of both home and host countries, the role of home and host country perceptions on AM should be further explored.
- High AM** are more likely to pursue future residency than **Low AM** – important for student retention!
- Low AM** students reported socializing more with other international students, whereas **High AM** students reported socializing with **BOTH** Canadian and international students.

Future Directions

- Quantitative analyses should also explore AM as a **predictor** of international student adjustment. (in progress)
- If additional support for AM is found, then AM should be considered as a possible criterion for international student recruitment and retention.

Take Home Message

The international student experience is **not homogeneous**. International students with differing levels of acculturation motivation appear to be having qualitatively different experiences abroad. AM also appears to be associated with future residency intent. As such, AM should not only be considered as a potential predictor of international student adjustment, but also as a potential predictor of future Canadian residency and citizenship.