



An investigation of the career paths of internationally trained early childhood educators transitioning into early learning programs

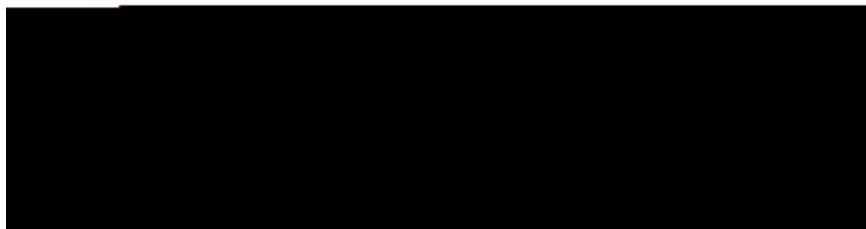
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Background

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is a

The following report begins with a review of relevant research in immigrant workers' employment patterns in Canada, and the barriers immigrants face when seeking secure employment. This is followed by an overview of the study, the methodology, and the findings.

Literature Review

Immigrants comprise approximately 20% of Canada's entire population with more than half coming from Asian countries and the Middle East; most of which reside in Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). Many newcomers arrive in Canada equipped with the necessary skills, experiences and educational background to enter the Canadian labour market within their respective fields of expertise (Gurcham & Li, 1998). However, once immigrants arrive in Canada, they face several barriers both personally and professionally as they establish themselves in a new country.

When applying for employment, some of the barriers immigrants face include the assumed need for Canadian experience, English-language skill mastery, and the lack of recognition for their foreign credentials (Kustee, Thompson & Xue, 2007). As a result, newcomers are forced into positions unrelated to their field, may engage in further schooling or leave the country to find better opportunities elsewhere (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Immigrants who do find employment often work for lower wages, experience a lack of job security, are only offered contract or supply positions and receive no benefits (Basran & Zong, 1998). In the teaching profession, many internationally educated immigrants meet teaching requirements but their lack of Canadian experience and international education limit their ability to secure teaching positions (Phillion, 2003). Similarly, according to Kolowale (2009), a total of 1,992 internationally educated nurses applied to register with the Ontario College of Nurses but only 6% were able to complete the registration process within a year of application suggesting significant barriers for nurses who had been trained outside Canada.

This study on internationally trained early childhood educators was carried out at a time when the ECE sector is experiencing a number of changes and challenges. The early childhood sector

Methods

The current study included twenty-five participants (n=25). All participants were female and their age ranged from 38-45 years of age. The majority of participants immigrated from different parts of India. Some of the participants were from China, and some from both Western and Eastern Europe. All the participants had either a combination of diploma and/or degree completion from outside Canada and a letter of equivalency from the AECEO, indicating the successful completion of the program before 2009.

Four key questions were addressed during the interviews with participants:

- a. Experience in the ECE Bridging Program. What new knowledge did you gain? Describe any challenges you experienced and what improvements would you recommend?
- b. Experience applying for jobbedICana1pe 50or jobpbtoletion ofe

difficult. The majority of ECE Bridging graduates were employed in part time, precarious employment despite the combination of ECE equivalency from Ontario and additional post secondary education from outside Canada (See Figure 2).

suggested more opportunities for experience in centers and greater English-language support during and after the Bridging Program.

Conclusion:

Two main objectives of this study were to document the employment patterns of internationally trained early childhood educators who have completed the ECE Bridging Program and to analyze the differential in employability of internationally trained early childhood educators that have an undergraduate degree from outside Canada to investigate if their advanced post-secondary training was recognized by employers.

All the students entering the Bridging Program have completed some form of post secondary studies outside Canada. In fact, some of them have completed undergraduate degrees and a few have completed graduate degrees. Many of the participants either worked as full-time teachers or held higher positions in the education sector in their home countries. Research evidence points to the value of early childhood degree training, yet many of these students were unable to receive recognition for their educational credentials.

According to Bellm & Whitebrook (2006) teachers with four-year degrees in early childhood education rated higher in positive interaction with children than those without these credentials, and were less detached, less authoritarian and less punitive. Children who had teachers with a bachelor's or associate's in early childhood education demonstrated stronger receptive vocabularies than those with teachers holding only a high school diploma. Retaining the greatest number of teachers with bachelor's degrees or more was the strongest predictor of whether a center maintained a high level of quality over time. Despite the higher level of education that internationally trained educators hold, many of these educational qualifications are not sought after by early childhood employers in Ontario. Although the current Day Nurseries Act only requires a minimum of an ECE diploma, the early childhood profession may benefit from the additional knowledge and expertise advanced education brings.

Despite the desire to have well trained early childhood educators lead early years programs, there is some resistance by early childhood education employers to recognize international credentials that may not fit a traditional standard of what is considered appropriate educational standards in Canada. As much as the early childhood community touts the value of diversity, equity and inclusion, we have much work to do when responding to internationally trained early childhood educators. Further consideration should be given to employers' knowledge of foreign credentials and the value that this training could add to the labour market. Employers may have the misconception that the quality of instruction outside of Canada is lower and preference is given to individuals educated domestically (Sawchuk, 2009).

Similar to early childhood, educational and entry requirements established for professions such as nursing, engineering, teaching, and law, need to be revisited where greater acknowledgement is given to foreign qualifications and credentials (Gurcham & Li, 1998; Sawchuk, 2009). The procedure used to evaluate foreign credentials by partnering organizations is incomplete and inadequate and could be more streamlined in early childhood education.

Many of the participants found the Bridging Program useful and recommended more emphasis on Canadian legislation and context, richer experiences in placements, with reduced workload

and more training with English skills (accents were stated as a barrier). Bridging courses and programs need to be tailored to fit the needs of internationally trained educators and financial support for newcomers needs to be taken into consideration.

Almost all participants stated that they have not reached their employment goals they had envisioned for themselves. Many participants wanted to work for a school board and stated that they would do further schooling despite their former credentials. Immigrants tend to have limited access to employer sponsored training despite higher levels of education (Sawchuk, 2009). However, in the early childhood profession, post secondary institutions and professional organizations could potentially fill this void.

The participants noted that they needed more employment experience and language support. Training programs that assist immigrants to upgrade their skills are often not enough and do not assist in gaining employment experience in Canada (Khan, 2007). These barriers and difficulties increase if immigrants are a visible minority (Esses, Dietz, Bennett-Abuayyash & Joshi, 2007).

Esses, Dietz, Bennett-Abuayyash & Joshi (2007) suggest that in order for Canada to be an inclusive society, it must investigate subtle prejudices and discriminatory practices when hiring immigrants. Guo (2007) argues that recognizing all knowledge and experience can contribute to this inclusive framework.

However, based on the findings in this study, racism and discrimination is sadly more overt in early childhood and needs to be addressed more openly. Many of the practices employed with immigrant workers are often violations to human rights legislation (Gurcham & Li, 1998) and this may be somewhat more apparent in the early childhood community. The requirement for Canadian experience is a barrier to hiring qualified professionals (Esses, Dietz, Bennett-Abuayyash & Joshi, 2007). It is possible to eliminate that requirement as organizations such as Family Services of Toronto have done recently. Providing immigrants with more opportunities to become involved in internships and placements can enable them to gain the Canadian work experience that employers' desire (Guo, 2007). However, unpaid work experiences also add a financial burden for new immigrants.

Although Ontario schools and early childhood programs claim to be making an attempt to hire more diverse educators, this study reveals that there is a lack of acceptance and discrimination. Immigrant teachers have suggested more professional development for school staff with respect to racism, cultural awareness and sensitivity would be helpful (Esses, Dietz, Bennett-Abuayyash & Joshi, 2007).

trouble the assumption of diversity, equity and inclusion in early childhood and forces the field to critically examine existing practices to ensure they are free of discrimination. Working with children and families requires a complex understanding of human rights. Both the early childhood and education professions need to understand and value the skills, experiences and expertise internationally trained educators bring to the education system and consider the opportunities to support diverse learners in Ontario through the integration of diverse educators in the workplace.

Summary of Recommendations from the ECE Bridging Program participants:

1. More in-depth courses in topics such as ECE in the Canadian context; legislation and longer field placements.
2. Greater English language skill support.
3. Travel considerations (having courses available in many parts of the city or online)
4. Adapting the course work to reduce the workload.
5. Networking opportunities and job search training.
6. Provide professional development for early childhood employers on issues of

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