

RESEARCH REPORT

Canadian Education Abroad: Exploring the Strengths and Weaknesses of Two Distinct Models

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A growing number of schools around the world are using different models of Canadian education. There is a dearth in research that examines how each model operates and how their policies, processes, and programming are implemented in foreign contexts. This mixed method thesis study explored the strengths and weaknesses of two distinct models of Canadian education implemented abroad: educational franchise schools and provincially affiliated schools (PA).

Educational franchise schools contract experienced Canadian educators to train local teachers to implement Canadian curriculum and pedagogy in their country of origin. Canadian Educational Services Latin America Inc., otherwise known as Maple Bear (MB), is the educational franchise presented in this study. There were 28 participants from 10 different MB schools. MB stakeholder groups consisted of franchise administrators, teacher-trainers, curriculum writers, school owners, academic coordinators, and classroom teachers. PA schools require provincially certified teachers and administrators to provide an education for local students using Canadian curriculum. There were 48 participants from 12 different PA schools. PA stakeholder groups were government liaison officers, school principals, and teachers.

Quantitative data were gathered through an online survey consisting of 15 Likert-scale questions. Qualitative data were collected through 5 open-ended survey questions and one-to-one interviews. A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each distinct model was organized into 11 themes: systems and structures; staff profile; recruitment and retention; community perspective; school climate; cultural and professional preparation; professional development; curriculum, resources, and materials; methodology; English language learning; and student as a learner.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The strengths and weaknesses of each model were examined critically, in order to develop conclusions and recommendations that were universally applicable in any form Canadian education used abroad. In this research, conclusions and recommendations were organized into four topics: "The Power of the System," "Recruiting and Retaining Teachers," "Peering Through a Cultural Lens," and "Creating a Culture of Professional Development and Collaboration."

The Power of the System

MB and PA schools are smaller parts of larger systems. These systems are important. "The Power of the System" refers to the processes of coordination, collaboration, and quality assurance that occur within systems of education and their interactions with external private institutions and public government agencies. The following recommendations promote the value of developing strong systems that are formative, collaborative, and sustainable:

- The Canadian federal government should research the potential costs/benefits of organizational/financial support of offshore Canadian schools.
- Provincial departments of education should increase transparency and collaboration regarding the policies, programming, successes, challenges, and plans of PA offshore schools.

- Canadian offshore schools should develop collaborative relationships with other Canadian schools in their international settings.
- Canadian offshore schools should provide scholarships or financial accommodations for the tuition of lower income families.
- Canadian offshore schools should administer multiple forms of assessment (reading scores, student work, observational assessments, EAL tracking, etc.) to collect, measure, and track school data.
- Canadian offshore schools should develop a system for assessing and tracking language development.
- Canadian offshore schools should use school data to inform school planning and staffing, and to establish clear priorities. For school planning to be effective, all school stakeholders must engage in the development process. An attention to school priorities will encourage continuity and explicit focus for teacher-training and professional development.
- Canadian offshore schools should establish professional development, programming, and assessment/tracking strategies that integrate the unique needs of English language learners with high-quality pedagogy.
- Policy-makers should identify the specific reasons that families enrol children in offshore schools. This information should be included when schools develop their school plans.
- Canadian offshore schools should track the success of their graduates in Canadian post-secondary institutions. This data should be included when schools develop their school plans.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

This research found that Canadian offshore schools perpetually deal with the challenge of “Recruiting and Retaining Teachers.” Many factors contribute to this issue that are unique to each school, context, and model of Canadian education. The following recommendations identify successful recruitment and retention practices implemented in individual contexts, while providing additional approaches for addressing the challenges that are universal among Canadian schools abroad:

- Canadian offshore schools should consider monetary incentives for long-term service.
- In contexts where local non-native English speakers are hired to teach in Canadian offshore schools, the practice of hiring individuals first as teacher assistants, then grooming them to become teachers, is effective and should be applied wherever possible.
- Canadian offshore schools should invest in support staff at the discretion of the school principal or academic coordinator. These decisions should be informed by school data and consider the cultural ideologies of the local context. For example, students attending offshore schools in South Korea were reported to have high levels of anxiety and therefore would benefit from the support of school counsellors. Clinical support from local individuals such as psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech/language pathologists would also be beneficial in some of these contexts.
- Canadian offshore schools should invest in English as additional language specialists to support, and in some cases supplement, the classroom teacher.
- Canadian offshore schools would benefit from developing associations with individual Canadian post-secondary institutions.
- Canadian universities should offer courses tailored to preparing teachers for the unique experiences of international teaching.

- PA schools should provide a thorough cultural orientation to prospective teachers, in order to prepare them for living in foreign contexts. This programming should be developed and administered by individuals who have first-hand experience living and working in these specific contexts.
- Canadian offshore schools should provide extra support to foreign (Canadian) staff as they initially move and acclimatize to these new cultural contexts. A local individual who is fluent in English and has a deep understanding of school policies, the local culture, and the nuances of living in these contexts should facilitate this support.

Peering Through a Cultural Lens

The topic “Peering Through a Cultural Lens” explored the impact of culture on Canadian schools operating abroad. Each country values education for a different reason. In many Asian countries, for example, the purpose of education is to rank and sort students for post-secondary education. Similarly, schools in Brazil aim to prepare students for the Vestibular, a public university entrance exam. Canadians tend to value education as a way to prepare students for life, which includes academic, social, emotional, and physical domains. The following recommendations consider a variety of issues in offshore Canadian education that become evident when examined through a cultural lens:

- Federal/provincial governments should provide financial support and leadership in purchasing and distributing educational resources for Canadian offshore schools.
- Canadian offshore schools should ensure that schools are supplied with up-to-date resources that support teachers’ instruction and students’ learning. Each Canadian offshore school must invest in an inventory of resources that meet the specific needs of its teachers and learners. Resources should include literature on best practices for instruction, intervention programming, standardized assessment tools, high-quality levelled literature, and sensory tools.
- Curriculum should be written and revised by writers who are experienced and educated in curriculum design and development, and are culturally familiar with the local context.
- Because the staff profile of most Canadian offshore schools consists primarily of young inexperienced teachers, curricula should be written or revised to be more prescriptive and detailed.
- Curriculum should incorporate formative assessment strategies. Furthermore, teachers should undergo specialized training in how to incorporate these strategies.
- Curriculum should incorporate strategies tailored to the unique needs of ELLs.
- Canadian offshore curricula must clearly differentiate between content and outcomes. Teachers should be offered some flexibility in adapting content to meet the specific needs of their students. The process of adapting curriculum should be supported and overseen by school leaders.
- Offshore Canadian curriculum should include content and outcomes that are tailored by local/foreign school leaders, in order to attend to the culture of the local learners.
- Canadian offshore teachers should consider the culture of their local students when planning and delivering instruction, and assessing student learning.
- Canadian offshore schools should explore ways to support parents in fostering English language- and literacy-rich home environments.
- Students who will be graduating from Canadian offshore schools should engage in learning opportunities that explicitly teach them about living and going to school in Canada.

Creating a Culture of Professional Development and Collaboration

The development of a school culture that is focused on continuous professional collaboration and improvement was found to be critical to the perceived success of offshore Canadian schools. This research explored a variety of processes/practices used by PA and MB schools that either benefited or hindered the development of a positive school culture. The following recommendations draw from both models of offshore Canadian education, in order to outline approaches that offshore Canadian schools can use in “Creating a Culture of Professional Development and Collaboration”:

- Canadian offshore schools should promote and finance internal and external professional development opportunities for teachers.
- School principals/academic coordinators should be pedagogical leaders in the school. When managerial demands overwhelm the principal’s ability to be an effective pedagogical leader, a second position should be created to fulfill this role.
- Canadian offshore school principals/academic coordinators must engage in professional development specifically tailored for their particular roles as managers and pedagogical leaders.
- Provincial departments of education should develop online networking resources that provide offshore teachers access to professional learning, sharing, and collaboration opportunities.
- Canadian offshore teachers should be provided with regularly scheduled opportunities for professional collaboration.
- Canadian offshore school principals/academic coordinators should engage in regular and ongoing professional collaboration with others in their role.

About the Author

Derek Marvin defended his M.Ed. thesis in curriculum and instruction in March 2017. After 10 years of service as a teacher and resource teacher, Derek is currently the vice-principal of Dawson Trail School in Seine River School Division.