

Employers perspectives about hiring students from international pathways

NANCY JOHNSTON

ANDREA SATOR¹

NATALIA GAJDAMASCHKO

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

NORAH MCRAE

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada

KARIMA RAMJI

University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada

EARL ANDERSON

British Columbia Institute of Technology, Burnaby, Canada

CRISTINA EFTENARU

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

LARRY ILES

Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, Canada

SHADAB SHAH

Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada

This study explored Canadian employers' perspectives around the hiring of students who come from international pathways (SFIP) using Q Methodology. The research question was: "What are employer perceptions and practices regarding the hiring of students who come to Canadian (B.C.) post-secondary institutions via international educational pathways?" Four distinct worldviews emerged regarding employers' perspectives around the hiring SFIP: 1) Candidates' qualifications are key and diversity is a real asset, 2) International pathway students are difficult and just not a good workplace fit, 3) Candidates are hired based on who is deemed most likely to succeed in our organization, and 4) While philosophically committed to diversity, our hiring commitment remains with Canadians. All employers noted that English language and cultural competencies were critical requirements influencing their hiring decisions. This raises important implications for practitioners and institutions where SFIPs study and suggests that additional English language and intercultural supports are needed.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, students from international pathways, employers perspectives, Q Methodology

Over the past decade there has been steady growth in the number of students coming to study at Canadian educational institutions from international pathways including international visa students, immigrants, new Canadians, refugees and Canadians that completed their K-12 education abroad but returned to Canada for their post-secondary education (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018, as cited in Kuo, 2018). In this study we refer to this collective group as SFIP (Students from International Pathways). The majority of these students indicate a longer-term desire to immigrate to Canada (Esses et al., 2018) and seek domestic work experience in order to do so.

Significant numbers of these students seek Canadian work-integrated learning experiences through educational programs such as co-operative education (co-op). Research and practice in these programs have revealed that many SFIP struggle significantly in order to obtain such experiences. Co-op practitioners also report that preparation of these students is more complex and time consuming, and

¹ Corresponding author: Andrea Sator, ajsator@sfu.ca

SFIP's job search success is still often lower than their domestic counterparts. Unfortunately, according to a 2017 CD Howe report, this disparity persists after graduation and "there remains a large gap in wages and employment between immigrants and non-immigrant workers" (Li, 2017, p.1).

Little detail is known about employers' perspectives regarding the hiring of these students making it challenging to prepare them well for the Canadian workplace and/or assist employers in welcoming and effectively integrating these students into their workplaces. Because of this, the Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning British Columbia/Yukon's research committee, designed a study to learn more about employers' perceptions regarding this group of students.

A review of the literature indicated that overall there is an appreciation of SFIP and concurrently that there are associated challenges with respect to hiring SFIP. The rhetoric of globalization and respect for diversity (Desai-Trilokekar et al., 2016) calls for a better understanding of employer's hiring practices and their perspectives regarding international talent. Friesen (2011) suggested most employers associated SFIPs with a strong work ethic, open-mindedness, and a sense of responsibility. Arthur and Flynn (2011) noted that international students were more attractive to employers because they not only bring valuable knowledge of the work practices of their home country, but also have acquired valuable local expertise as a result of studying in Canada. International students were appreciated for their multiple perspectives and resilience (Desai-Trilokekar et al., 2016). Their willingness to invest time and money to travel abroad for higher education was lauded. Furthermore, SFIP's agility and versatility drew praise from recruiters. Canadian immigration policies and practices have also reflected a strategy to ensure talent for Canadian workplaces through facilitating immigration for eligible graduates who have "proficiency with English and/or French, their Canadian education credentials, and their Canadian work experience" (Esses et al., 2018, p.2).

With respect to challenges, Desai-Trilokekar et al. (2016) cited that SFIP's work location preferences (metro/non-metro), their ability to commute to remote locations, and sub-optimal soft skills as problematic for employers. Some researchers also suggested that employers were concerned about SFIP's deficiencies in spoken English/French, writing skills, cultural assimilation ability, and lack of employability competencies (Desai-Trilokekar et al., 2016; Drolet et al., 2014). Adey (2007) also noted SFIPs' inability to form professional networks and lack of social capital. Employers viewed hiring international talent as a costly and time-consuming process (Adey, 2007; Grant, 2009; Sorensen, 2013; Watt et al., 2008). The Conference Board of Canada reported that employers shied away from hiring international talent due to a lack of Canadian work experience, discrepancies in recognizing foreign work experience, language barriers, and differences in workplace cultures (Kukushkin & Watt, 2009).

Much more needs to be learned about employers' beliefs and actions related to hiring people who come from international pathways (Drolet et al.2014; Rivera, 2011, 2015). While the literature reviewed did provide insight into employers' perspectives globally, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of Canadian employers' beliefs about hiring, particularly as the numbers of SFIP that study at Canadian post-secondary institutions continues to rise (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2016). SFIP often seek work experiences through co-op programs, a work-integrated learning model that provides a structured method for integrating academic learning with learning experiences in the workplace (McRae, 2013; Sattler et al., 2011). Yet, despite the best intentions of SFIP and academic institutions, these students find it challenging to attain Canadian work experiences. For academic institutions to better facilitate the transition of SFIP to work experiences, there is a need to understand the thinking and hiring practices that impact this group of students (Gribble, 2014).

This study explored Canadian employers' understandings, beliefs, and perspectives regarding the hiring of co-op students who come from international pathways. The research question guiding the study was: "What are employer perceptions and practices regarding the hiring of students who come to B.C. post-secondary institutions via international educational pathways?" The goal of the research was to better understand co-operative education programs' employers' perspectives to ensure more supportive transitions of SFIP to the workplace. The study was conducted by the Research Committee of the Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (ACE-WIL) for British Columbia and Yukon. The research team consisted of representatives from four British Columbia (B.C.) institutions, namely: British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Simon Fraser University (SFU), Thompson Rivers University (TRU), and University of Victoria (UVic).

METHODOLOGY

The researchers selected Q Methodology (Stephenson, 1953) as the research approach that best supports the investigation of the complex perspectives and beliefs sought of this study's participants. This mixed methods research approach provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity through seeking a person's viewpoint, opinion, belief, and/or attitude on an issue, and assists in obtaining "understandings concerning the interpretative subjectivity of participants that is not possible through traditional positivistic research methodology" (Madoc-Jones & Gajdamaschko, 2006, p. 65). The methodology brings "coherence to research questions that have many, potentially complex and socially contested answers" (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 75). "In Q, researchers do not suggest or impose meaning as a priori, but rather let the participants determine what is meaningful, valuable, and significant from their perspectives" (Ward, 2009, p. 76).

Q Methodology is carried out in three stages. Valenta and Wigger (1997) describe the stages as:

- 1) The development of a set of concourse statements and ultimately the research tool, the Q-Set.
- 2) Participant rank-ordering of the Q-Set on a continuum of preference, called the Q-Sort.
- 3) Analysis and interpretation of the operant factors by the researchers, the Q-Factor Analysis.

Each step is discussed in more detail in the upcoming sections.

STUDY QUESTIONS (THE Q-SET)

The core aspect of Q Methodology is the creation of the concourse statements, which represent the array of ideas, attitudes, feelings, values and perceptions about the research topic. The researchers conducted an extensive environmental scan that generated as many concourse statements as possible related to employers' perspectives and practices regarding hiring students from international pathways. This included a broad array of statements that reflect what is being said and thought about the subject (Valenta & Wigger, 1997). These statements were drawn from broad sources including: business people, students, research publications, public perspectives in the media, chambers of commerce other labour market position papers and reports, government reports such as the B.C. Jobs Plan, national workforce related materials, practice and policy (e.g., Express Entry). To devise the concourse, the research collaborators designed multiple opinion statements, which were then reduced to the Q-Set (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005), those statements that participants were presented and required to respond to. The Q-Set for this study was comprised of 38 statements that served as the research tool during the Q-Sort (Brown, 1993). The Q-Set was tested at a provincial conference and refined in several subsequent pilot studies in order to remove ambiguity and ensure its completeness (Anderson et al., 2016).

STUDY PARTICIPANTS (THE P-SET)

The participants in the study were employers from British Columbia, who partner with co-operative education programs across multiple institutions and represent various sized industries and organizations that hire co-op students. Q Methodology, in contrast to other research methods purposefully (vs. randomly) selects the study participants (the P-Set) to ensure that certain perspectives are included in the research (Brown & Ungs, 1970). Twenty-nine study participants comprised this data set and were identified by: the industry/business type and size; the number of SFIP they hire per year; their role in the organization; and, the institution that recruited them for this study. The P-Set represented biotechnology, equipment manufacturing, government, engineering, manufacturing, telecommunications, education, social services, finance, tourism, gaming, law, church organizations, non-governmental organizations, and health organizations. The organization size was also noted: small (<25 employees), medium (25-100 employees), and large (>100 employees). The participants' roles in the organizations included: human resources personnel, supervisors, directors, senior managers, managers, recruiters, assistant deputy managers, chief executive officers, consultants, and research directors. Ethical approval was obtained for this study at the primary institution and through harmonized agreements with all participating institutions. Participation was voluntary, guided by institutional ethical regulations, and the participants gave informed consent before taking part in the study. Participants could withdraw without consequence at any time.

STUDY EXERCISE (THE Q-SORT)

In the Q-Sort, participants shared their perspectives through personal reactions to the Q-Set (Chen et al., 2015). Using their individual preferences, judgements, and feelings, the participants rank-ordered the 38 concourse statements in the Q-Set based on the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement relative to the other statements. It is important to underscore that participants were not rating agreement or disagreement with the individual statements themselves, rather the methodology focuses on participants ranking each statement relative to the other statements. This differs significantly from traditional research wherein participants either agree or disagree with views generated by the researcher. The ranking scale ranged from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree). Importantly, Q Methodology also forces the Q-Sort into the shape of a quasi-normal distribution (Valenta & Wigger, 1997) limiting the number of statements that can be placed in each ordinal on the scale. The quasi-normal distribution allows for fewer sorts able to be ranked at the ends of the scale than in the center of the sort, such that each end represented the strongest views and the center of the scale represented more neutral views. Because of the limitations of the number of statements allowed to be sorted into each ordinal, participants had to deeply consider (and often re-consider) each statement. This required that they think beyond their initial reactions and also consider each new statement relative to previous ones (e.g. "I strongly disagree with eight statement but can only sort five into the "strongly" disagree ordinal so which ones and why?). It is this iterative process of ranking and re-ranking statements, especially about which they felt similarly, that elicits a deeper meaning in the responses of the P-Set. It requires more profound thinking and rationalization, and this brings the subjective meaning to the Q-Set (Smith, 2001) that ultimately reveals distinct worldviews (Brouwer, 1991).

Q-FACTOR ANALYSIS

The focus of Q Methodology is to elicit strong personal and subjective responses to the research question. This study is not about discovering how many people support a particular viewpoint, but

rather about determining what distinct viewpoints people hold about the research topic. In Q Methodology, participant responses are first analyzed using correlation and by-participant factor analysis, which is a “grouping of expressed opinion profiles based on the similarities and differences in which the statements are arranged by each participant” (Valenta & Wigger, 1997, p. 503).

PQ Method (Atkinson, 1992) is the statistical software used to interpret the raw Q-Sort data and derive clusters of thinking, or Factors (also known as “worldviews”). The “statistical analysis is not performed by variable, trait, or statement, but rather by person. People correlate to others with similar opinions based on their Q-Sorts” (Valenta & Wigger, 1997, p. 503). The resulting groupings or clusters represent segments of subjectivity that emerge from the ways the participants judged the Q-statements and how they sorted statements relative to each other. The researchers then analyze and interpret each Factor’s defining statements, shared statements and differing statements to uncover the P-Set’s distinctive views on the research question. In the team research environment that characterized this study, each researcher conducted their analysis of the Q-Factors that emerged individually then met as a group to compare, contrast and collectively inform the final qualitative analysis.

FINDINGS

The statistically relevant factors that resulted from this analysis represent particular perspectives regarding the hiring of SFIP. They signify the clusters of subjective thinking that exist and represent distinct worldviews (Brown, 1993). Table 1 shows the correlation between the factor scores and demonstrates that four distinct factors emerged from the data. The connection to each factor depends on the strength of the correlation to it (e.g., values closer to 1 are more strongly correlated).

TABLE 1: Correlations between factor scores.

	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
Factor One	1.0000	0.0108	0.0470	0.5922
Factor Two	0.0108	1.0000	0.1993	-0.0257
Factor Three	0.0470	0.1993	1.0000	0.2486
Factor Four	0.5922	-0.0257	0.2486	1.0000

While the factor analysis determines the number of statistically distinct views that exist, it is up to the researchers to interpret, understand, and describe each factor in ways that reflect participant’s worldviews regarding the research question. To assist this interpretation, the researchers examined all the statements in a factor, first giving attention to those statements that were most highly agreed upon (+4) and most disagreed upon (-4). The researchers then looked at statistically significant statements of consensus and distinction across the factors, as well as those that fell in the neutral zone, as provided in the output from PQ Method. First individually, then collectively, the researchers ascribed meaning to the factors that emerged resulting in four distinct employer worldviews regarding hiring students from international pathways.

The four worldviews identified by the researchers were labeled as follows:

Factor/Worldview One: Qualifications are Key and Diversity is a Real Asset

Factor/Worldview Two: International Pathway Students are Difficult and Just Not a Good Fit

Factor /Worldview Three: Hire Those Most Likely to Succeed, Eh?

Factor/Worldview Four: Philosophically Committed to Diversity, Behaviorally Committed to Canadians.

Each of these factors/worldviews is described below in greater detail using exemplars of their defining discourse statements (shown in quotations) in order to provide a fuller description of that findings.

Factor One: Qualifications are Key and Diversity is a Real Asset

This worldview reflects a perspective that SFIP are very hard working and perhaps more productive than domestic students as they are perceived as being “the top students in their home countries.” The belief is that SFIP are well prepared for dynamic workplaces and are eager and want to stay in Canada. The perspective shared by this group is a preference to hire SFIP to meet their organizational diversity goals. They recognize that language barriers can create a problem in the workplace and are clear when hiring, that students require strong written English skills for professional communication.

The defining statements for this worldview are that “relevant work experience and credentials” and “schools with good reputations for their workplaces” are more important than citizenship or nationality. Additionally, people that share this worldview believe “fluency in more than one language” is an asset, and “different cultural backgrounds enhance the workplace,” and students from international pathways “bring new knowledge to the workplace.” Participants with this worldview did not see SFIP as taking jobs away from domestic students (in fact they perceived B.C. students as being privileged) or requiring special accommodations. This worldview also seriously disbelieves that “an applicant’s name can indicate how they will fit into the workplace” and does not feel that SFIP “do not naturally fit into the workplace” re-enforcing the notion that these students are very strong and competent candidates.

Factor Two: International Pathway Students are Difficult and Just Not a Good Fit

Employers sharing the Factor Two worldview would like to hire SFIP for “the knowledge they could bring to the workplace.” Yet, these employers find that hiring of SFIP is “very challenging” and for that reason prefer to give domestic students positions over similarly qualified students from international pathways. When making hiring decisions, nationality is not stated as a driving factor, rather they report that they hire from schools with good reputations for their workplace and prefer that relevant work experience and credentials drive their hiring decisions. That said, these employers do consider that reference checks outside of Canada are challenging and suggest that they also “negatively impact the hiring process.”

While study participants holding this worldview express a desire to hire people who want to stay in Canada and build their careers, and acknowledge that SFIP are eager to please because they want to stay in Canada, their commitment to hiring SFIP is marred by other perspectives they hold. The primary focus of the employers that comprise this factor is on the difficulties of international pathway students “fitting into their organizations.” They believe that SFIP have difficulty transitioning to their workplaces because of language and cultural differences and that overcoming and /or accommodating these challenges requires “substantial resources” from the employers. These employers also believe that SFIP may “have religious and/or cultural needs that may be demanding for their organization,” and that SFIP may “react unpredictably to pressure” and thus are more challenging to manage. This worldview sees SFIP as: 1) not understanding Canadian workplace norms; 2) coming from privilege and having a sense of entitlement; 3) not being open to adjusting their attitudes and behaviors

accordingly; and, 4) being resistant to understanding and accepting feedback. Further, respondents sharing this worldview most highly ranked the notion that the resistance to “fitting in” is particularly noteworthy in male students from “some cultural backgrounds that have trouble respecting women in authority.”

This worldview was the only one that believed that international pathway students take jobs away from their Canadian counterparts, yet interestingly supported the notion that hiring from different cultural backgrounds can “enhance the workplace.” This group feels strongly that they may be more willing to hire SFIP if they feel “affinity towards their nationality in terms of understanding what the student may need to succeed.” They do not perceive immigration requirements nor a lack of relevant Canadian work experience as a reason not to hire SFIP and did not approve of profiling by applicant name. Employers comprising this worldview also recognized that SFIP can help meet organizational diversity goals, and denied having a preference to hiring Canadian vs SFIP students.

Factor Three: Hire Those Most Likely to Succeed, Eh?

Unlike the above worldviews, Factor Three employers believe that an applicant’s name (which may be a signpost of nationality) is a good indicator of whether or not they will fit into their workplaces. They also view SFIP as “unpredictable in how they handle pressure and as more challenging to manage.” While these employers feel that hiring SFIP can “help meet the diversity goals of their organization” and that “hiring from different cultural backgrounds enhances the workplace,” they also feel that SFIP have difficulty transitioning to the workplace because of cultural differences; are not well prepared for the dynamic and diverse workplaces; and, require a lot of resources. This worldview reiterates the importance of hiring people with strong written English skills for professional communication. While they recognize that SFIP are “eager and ready to please because they want to stay in Canada,” the process of checking references outside of Canada was seen as a further barrier. They also felt that male SFIP may “have trouble respecting women in positions of authority” and “have trouble with integrating feedback from Canadian employers.” Finally, this worldview believes that SFIP are not cost effective and take jobs away from Canadian students.

Factor Four: Philosophically Committed to Diversity, Behaviorally Committed to Canadians

This worldview espouses a commitment to hiring primarily based on “relevant work experience and credentials” regardless of where the students come from, yet also strongly feel that when making hiring decisions they prefer “relevant local work experience.” These employers prefer to offer “opportunities to B.C. (Canadian) students to give them an advantage.” Interestingly, equally highly ranked in this perspective are the statements “I don’t worry about the nationality” and “employees with different cultural backgrounds enhance our workplace” and “fluency in more than one language is an asset” suggesting a respect for the potential value of SFIP that is clearly tempered by a strong bias to hire Canadian students. Employers loading in this factor very much disagree that SFIP “struggle with accepting feedback and adjusting culturally” or that it is a “challenge to conduct reference checks outside of Canada.” In other words, they are not prepared to identify problems with hiring SFIP per se, but nevertheless report a preference for hiring Canadian students.

DISCUSSION

When analyzing and describing the findings, the researchers compared how the statements in each factor related to each other, how they clustered similarly and differently across the factors, and how the statements that were most agreed with (+4) and most disagreed with (-4), differed across the factors.

In Factor One, the focus is overwhelmingly on the added value that SFIP bring to the workplace, a viewpoint corroborated by Desai-Trilokekar et al., (2016), Friesen (2011) and Arthur and Flynn (2011). If experience, education, and English fluency were relatively equal, one could surmise that employers sharing this worldview would hire an international pathway student over a Canadian student given their eagerness and potential for enriching workplace diversity. This worldview very much supports the value of students from international pathways and the majority of the co-op employers that participated in this study “loaded” into this factor. This is not surprising given that most co-op employers are seeking the best talent they can access, regardless of nationality, and are used to significant diversity in the students they hire. As well there is likely already significant diversity in their own organizations, as the research was conducted in B.C., an immigrant rich province. This was the most supportive of the four worldviews determined in this study regarding the hiring of students from international pathways. As a result, this factor was entitled “Qualifications are Key and Diversity is a Real Asset.”

In contrast to the first factor, the perspectives represented in Factor Two are not in support of hiring SFIP. The Factor Two worldview is that SFIP are generally poorly prepared, difficult to manage, and resource-intensive to accommodate and support. While there was some support given to select philosophical statements regarding the value of SFIP, there was equal or greater support for statements that did not support the hiring of SFIP. Furthermore, the proponents of this worldview denied any value that SFIP might bring to assisting the development of the local labour market, and in fact believe that they could hurt the hiring market for local Canadian students. It is indisputable that the challenges identified by employers loading in this factor are largely intercultural in nature. The focus in this worldview is about the cultural transition challenges more than language challenges, with employers in this factor being the only ones that were *not* in agreement with the statement that “strong written English skills” are needed in their workplace, but strongly supported the notion that SFIP simply “do not fit into their organizations.” Studies do support this employer view that SFIPs are often ill-prepared and resource intensive, often in part due to the challenges resulting from intercultural tensions and misunderstandings (Desai-Trilokekar et al., 2016; Kukushkin & Watt, 2009). For these reasons we titled the Factor Two worldview “International Pathway Students are Difficult and Just Not a Good Fit.”

The differences between the last two worldviews that emerged from the factor analysis are more nuanced, and lean more towards those expressed in Factor Two (anti SFIP) than Factor One (pro SFIP), but for different reasons. In Factor Three, the perspectives reflect many of those expressed in Factor Two yet they also strongly support “hiring students who are most likely to succeed.” The caveat here is that they also believe that SFIP’s lack of English language proficiency, and to a lesser degree intercultural fluency, make them decidedly “less likely to succeed.” While they state support for hiring the best candidate, delving more deeply into the other defining statements for this factor allowed researchers to determine that this meant hiring a Canadian student. This worldview could be seen as the most patriotic perspective as demonstrated in the participants’ direct and indirect support of statements about hiring Canadian students over SFIP. Employers that loaded into this factor indicated a clear bias for hiring Canadian students and justify this by pointing out the many problems related to hiring students from international pathways. They strongly agreed that SFIP have difficulties with English language (Kukushkin & Watt, 2009), find cultural transitions challenging, and struggle with feedback (especially some males with respect to females in authority). All this is exacerbated by the fact that conducting the relevant international reference checks was also seen as challenging for employers. This worldview does not highly support SFIP’s abilities to bring new knowledge to the

workplace though they do support the notion that fluency in more than one language can be an asset to the workplace. The overall perspective of Factor Three is that that SFIP are not well prepared for the Canadian workplace and are not cost effective for their organizations, the two likely being related.

Interestingly, unlike the Factor Two view that Canadian students do in fact have jobs taken away from them by international pathway students, employers loading into Factor Three did not agree that this was the case. This may be because they view international pathway students as largely unprepared to succeed and therefore likely to be passed over by employers in favour of more “work ready” Canadians anyway. This is an example of two different worldviews ranking a particular statement completely differently, for very different reasons (as determined by how they ranked other related statements), but with similar results – in this case a bias against hiring SFIP.

Factors Two and Three both neutrally rank the notion that where a qualification is earned has an impact on their hiring decisions. This is in stark contrast to Factors One and Factor Four, wherein both of those worldviews place a very high value on “relevant work experience and credential regardless of whether they come from Canada or elsewhere.” This illustrates a fundamental difference in hiring perspectives and practices. Factors One and Four views focus on workplace qualifications while Factors Two and Three are much more about workplace cultural fit. Factors Two and Three share many perspectives regarding transitional challenges for SFIP and their preference for hiring Canadian but differ with respect to their views on other statements. Employers loading in Factor Three do not believe that international pathway students are at all “prepared for their dynamic and diverse workplace” while those in Factor Two are much more supportive of the notion that they are. As previously referenced, this likely relates to why the two factors also differ with respect to their views on SFIP taking jobs away from Canadian students.

Another area of significant deviation between Factors Two and Three relates to their views about preferring to hire students with “relevant B.C. (Canadian) work experience.” The Factor Two worldview does not believe in this practice while Factor Three employers do. Again, the notion that the Factor Three worldview is very pro-Canadian or patriotic is evident here and while the Factor Two worldview is no more favorable toward hiring SFIP, it differs as to why that is. For Factor Two, the issue is all about cultural fit, and this would not be, in their minds, negated simply by having had some Canadian student work experience. These employers believe that there are significant cultural differences for SFIP entering the Canadian workforce and these differences are challenging to overcome, even given feedback and direction.

Both Factor Two and Factor Three worldviews perceive SFIP are “eager and ready to please” employees which would appear to contradict their overriding negative views regarding their qualifications and fit. However, the motivation attributed to this “eagerness and readiness to please” is “because they want to stay in Canada,” so more self-serving than for the betterment of the work or workplace. Finally, Factor Two and Factor Three views are clear about the challenges of hiring students from international pathways, in spite of indicating relatively high agreement with the statement that “hiring employees with different cultural backgrounds enhances our workplace.” While this finding may benefit from additional analysis, it may be acknowledging support for higher principles around the value of workplace diversity, but this view is held simultaneously with even stronger beliefs regarding the challenges of realizing and supporting that diversity. As a result of all these perspectives, the Factor Three worldview was entitled “Hire Those Most Likely to Succeed, Eh?”, with the “Eh” signifying a common Canadian expression (used to ask for confirmation or repetition or to express inquiry) and an overall bias toward hiring Canadians.

In Factor Four, what appears evident is a tension between what is stated in terms of respecting and valuing diversity and what is practiced in terms of hiring Canadian students over SFIP. Also, highly ranked along with these apparently contradictory perspectives, is a cluster of statements that may provide some rationale for the practice of hiring Canadian students versus the value of the diversity of language and culture that SFIP can bring. These statements defined the factor and included strong support for the notion that “language barriers create problems in the workplace” and that there is a critical need for “strong written English skills” in the workplace. This provides strong rationale for the preference of hiring Canadian. Students (based on qualifications vs. any other potential bias) and assumes that all Canadians would have greater English language competencies. Employers loading in this worldview also believe that “it is difficult to effectively assess foreign education and credentials” and that as employers, they want to invest most in “people committed to staying and building their careers in Canada, implying (wrongly according to 2018 Canadian Bureau for International Education data), that SFIP return home once their schooling is completed. Again, this may provide rationale for the Canadian hiring bias. This collection of seemingly contradictory statements along with statements that refer to challenges in hiring SFIP reflect a worldview that philosophically acknowledges the potential value of SFIP and the belief that one should focus on experience and credentials regardless of where they are earned, but in practice, preferentially favours hiring students from Canada. It may be that employers loading in this factor want to state what they know to be politically correct views regarding the hiring of students from international pathways, but feel a strong need to qualify why their actual hiring practices might waiver from those views. Because of the stated beliefs regarding the potential value of SFIPs but equally strong commitment to statements regarding the related challenges and their preference for domestic students, this Factor’s worldview was entitled “Philosophically Committed to Diversity, Behaviorally Committed to Canadians.”

IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study present implications for employers, practitioners and institutions, students, and governments. It is interesting, to note that although the employer worldviews were distinct, several statements did rank highly in all four factors, and these indicated the critical need for SFIP to have English language competency, both written and oral and some degree of intercultural fluency. It must be noted, however, that while employers understandably need employees who speak English well, these may be offset by the benefits to hiring individuals that bring cultural diversity to the workplace. These benefits include expanding an employers’ client base, increasing the organization’s competitiveness, and the ability to work with diverse teams (British Council, 2013). Despite these benefits, many employers still express reluctance to hire students from diverse backgrounds as they demonstrate an inability, often due to a lack of intercultural experience, to leverage the benefits that they could bring to their workplaces (McRae, 2013). Consequently, resources and supports for employers could help them better understand and integrate the contributions that SFIP make in their workplaces (Gribble & McRae, 2017).

This study raises interesting implications for practitioners and institutions where SFIP are studying. Additional English language support (both business and idiomatic) is clearly needed and practitioners working with these students could benefit from learning more about, and sharing with employers, information regarding the processes for gaining work permits, seeking international references, permanent residency trends, and developing intercultural competencies among employees. While practitioners might tap into their highly motivated international student groups on campus, institutions could also consider collaborating with other institutions for a more regional approach.

SFIP also need to develop some agency around their own engagement with work integrated learning programs and employers (Gribble & McRae, 2017). These students would also benefit from intercultural competency development training to better understand their strengths and develop their intercultural capabilities (McRae & Ramji, 2011, 2017; McRae et al., 2016), as likely could many institutional practitioners and employers. Finally, SFIP students often demonstrate their interest and commitment to a future in Canada by engaging in their communities – both on and off campus, and this could be better highlighted in their cover letters, resumes and interviews.

Governments, both provincial and federal, have an interest in promoting Canada as a destination for SFIP students. SFIP provide important revenue for the education sector and hold the promise for an educated immigration pipeline into Canada's labour force. For these strategies to be successful, additional resources to educational institutions would enable them to provide sufficient English language and intercultural awareness offerings. Incentivizing the hiring of SFIP students would go a long way to overcoming employer reluctance. Facilitating transitions into the labour force through expedited visa processes and opening-up opportunities within the federal public service would also enhance employment prospects for these students and could better facilitate hiring processes for employers.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted with employers from various sectors operating in British Columbia Canada, and with students from multiple post-secondary institutions. As such it may not represent the diverse employment perspectives shared by all Canadian employers, nor was it intended to do so. Rather it was designed to reveal distinct opinions or points of view that might be held by some of those employing students from international pathways by using a methodology that required participants think deeply about a sensitive topic in a way that allowed for complex, underlying perspectives to emerge. While the outcomes of the research are limited to the time, place and particular research participants, we believe the emergence of four distinct worldviews, three of which are less than favourable regarding the hiring of SFIP, indicates that there is more work in to be done to assist students from international pathways in reaching their employment goals.

CONCLUSION

Four distinct worldviews emerged from this study regarding employers' perspectives of hiring students from international pathways. Three of these were less supportive of hiring SFIP, though the majority of employers that participated in this study loaded into the first, most favourable worldview. The findings provide some understandings about the limited scholarship about employers' hiring practices reviewed in the introduction section of this paper at the time of this study (Drolet et al., 2014; Rivera, 2011, 2015). While a couple of the worldviews are diametrically opposed (Factor One: Pro SFIP vs. Factor Two: Anti SFIP) the others are a little more nuanced, differing on whether language or culture was the biggest challenge with respect to hiring and fitting SFIP into their organizations. All four worldviews noted English language competency as a critical requirement in their hiring decisions. The Factor Two perspective was also very concerned about the difficulty of the cultural transitions while Factor Three cited both language and culture as barriers for hiring SFIP. Factors Three and Four also had strong patriotic leanings, clearly favoring hiring Canadian students, but for differing reasons.

Further analysis on the demographics data might help to deepen the understandings and underpinnings of these perspectives. Q Methodology allows for follow-up discussions with

participants to more deeply explore the factor interpretation and the relationship with the demographics (e.g.; employer size, type, industry sector, etc.).

This study opened conversations with employers and gleaned insights and understandings about the ongoing global discussions and debates related to hiring practices and their implications. It also revealed that different worldviews exist even within this small group of employers, and while they may vary in their rationale, three of the four perspectives supported the hiring of Canadian students over SFIP. As a result of this research, the participating post-secondary institutions can better understand the perceived barriers and supports required regarding the hiring of students from international pathways and adjust their preparatory work with both students and employers accordingly. It is worth noting that as a result of early findings from this study, the Association for Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (ACE-WIL) professional development committee has already designed a resource to help support employers in hiring SFIP. This study is particularly important given that research published since its completion indicates that employer preferences and concerns relating to SFIPs remain similar to those identified at the time of this study (Mackaway, 2018; Education New Zealand, 2019; Berquist et al., 2019).

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