Overcoming Barriers Facing Adult Immigrant Students That Prevent Them from Completing Post-Secondary Education

by

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to explore immigrant students’ needs regarding institutional support services and programs in order to overcome difficulties that prevented them from completing their higher education at Vancouver Island University (VIU). By investigating immigrant students’ needs by gender and educational level, new services have been recommended to suit the different characteristics of immigrant students at VIU.

The object of this study was also to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success instead of struggling in a new educational system. The reasons for the author of the present study investigating the support needed by immigrant students can be explained through both professional and personal perspectives.

The main instrument of this present study was a survey designed to reveal immigrant students’ experiences and needs that they sought out after entering the Western post-secondary educational system. From the finding of this study, the stakeholders could re-evaluate the adult immigrants’ needs and provide them an equal opportunity to succeed from the post-secondary educational system.

Keywords: Immigrant students, Post-secondary, Survey methods, Support services
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Chapter 1: Problem to be Investigated

Introduction

According to the May 2016 edition of *The Canadian Magazine of Immigration*, one in five of the Canadian population is an immigrant to Canada. Tannock (2011) identified three streams of immigrants: economic (e.g., self-employed), family (e.g., family sponsorship), and humanitarian (e.g., refugee). Most recently, through Canada’s resettlement programs, 33,723 Syrian refugees have been settled by the Canadian government with both public and private sponsors between November 4, 2015 and October 30, 2016 (Government of Canada, 2016).

The Canadian immigration program selects highly educated professionals, but the immigrants usually have to accept less-skilled jobs in which they are often overqualified and underpaid in order to survive in the host country and to support their family (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Beiser, Puente-Duran, and Hou (2015) explained “… almost one third of immigrant families present in Canada for ten years or less lives in deep poverty” (p. 35). In fact, Shankar et al. (2013) have reported that fifty-two percent of skilled economic immigrants with university degrees are living in low income conditions. Frequently, the foreign-trained immigrant professionals are “…treated with suspicion and as inferior” in the community (Guo, 2009, p. 38). Ferrer and Riddell identified that “…non-recognition of foreign credentials and the discounting of foreign work experience” are barriers to immigrant assimilation in the workforce (as cited in Adamuti-Trache, 2011, p. 62). As a result, immigrants feel compelled to attend university in order to obtain Canadian credentials, to establish their position, and to prove that they are capable in their field, although they were considered highly educated professionals in their own countries.

Kanno and Varghese (2010) indicated that immigrant students are often frustrated by institutional policies which require immigrants to prove their proficiency in English when there
is no guarantee that native speakers have sufficient literacy to attend higher level education. Immigrant students feel the extra time and tuition that they have to pay for ESL courses before being accepted into the post-secondary is unfair (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Because of the stigma “English language required” which is attached to the immigrant students’ admission requirements, the students showed resentment and “…often ended up resisting the course, the curriculum, and the teachers” (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 319).

Kanno and Varghese (2010) stated that adult immigrant students tend to make decisions on whether to study at either a community college or a four-year university based on tuition, academic demands, and program selection processes. In fact, Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, and Suarez-Orozco (2011) have pointed out that universities have fewer practical courses, and are less able to accommodate immigrant students who are working or need to support a family financially. While immigrant students face resettlement stresses such as language proficiency, isolation, finances, and discrimination, they are also encountering challenges of completing their further training and higher education due to limited support. By obtaining a Canadian credential, immigrant students not only gain an advanced opportunity to improve their life qualities, but also contribute to their professional skills and knowledge which benefits the communities as a whole.

This study explored the types of institutional support services that are required by immigrant students, so they can complete their post-secondary education successfully at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is not only to find out the barriers that immigrant students are facing, but also to gain an insight into their unique needs while attending post-secondary education. Adult immigrant students tend to drop out of school due to the responsibilities of taking care of their family or their low language proficiency, and join the labor force instead of
continuing with their post-secondary studies. Anisef, Sweet, Adamuti-Trache, and Walters (2010) explained that many immigrant families in Canada face high costs of childcare, which affects their abilities to participate in post-secondary education. Frequently, being a part of a visible minority, immigrants’ traditional culture, values, beliefs and knowledge are undervalued, unrecognized, and misunderstood by the dominant groups at the educational institution (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012, p. 71).

When immigrant students have less connection with their own ethnic group and lack of interaction with the new culture, they are more likely to experience discrimination and rejection from others. It will gradually become difficult for them to adapt to the changes and will lead them to become isolated, and the feeling of being excluded within the school system. Shankar et al. (2013) found that experiencing unequal treatment in higher education can increase acculturative stress and decrease academic self-confidence for the immigrant students (p. 3911). When immigrant students perceive a sense of ethnic discrimination from their peers, advisors, and professors, they become less interested in school and experience decreased academic motivation for higher education (Coutinho & Koinis-Mitchell, 2014, p. 523). Correspondingly, Sinacore and Lerner (2013) found that if immigrant university students encounter discrimination in higher education systems, it can influence their academic achievement negatively.

By gaining an insight into the unique needs of immigrant students while attending post-secondary education, the present study could help to inform stakeholders about the concept of globalization and equality in order to help alleviate discrimination and prejudice in society. Educational institutions and communities could work together to enable the support services and programs that are critical to assist immigrant students to achieve their goals and to succeed in their new homeland.
Several assumptions have been made in the present study such as (1) immigrants who are interested in taking higher education in Canada have completed their university or college in their own country; (2) immigrants already have certain professional skills that are needed by the workforce such as those in pharmacy, nursing, information technology, and education; (3) instructors and support staff have the skills and knowledge to support immigrant students; (4) the institution has a certain budget and resources for supporting immigrant students; (5) immigrants will seek help rather than being ‘found’ by the institution; and (6) both administrators and support staff are culturally sensitive without stereotyping and favoritism.

**Justification of the Study**

The reasons for the author of the present study investigating the support needed by immigrant students can be explained through both professional and personal perspectives. From a professional perspective, the author of the present study is working at the Faculty of International Education as an administrative assistant and has seen and witnessed many skilled and intelligent immigrants who struggle with family, schooling, financial, and employment issues. While international students receive emotional and academic support from the Faculty of International Education department, immigrant students are sent away as they are under the category of domestic student. Due to their low English proficiency, they usually rely on their friends or relatives to translate and to guide them through the Western educational system and procedures in order to register in courses.

The author of the present study is an immigrant who has experienced many hardships in terms of academic performance, limited social interaction, employment distress, and cultural discrimination. Since the author of the present study was unfamiliar with the English language, Western cultural expectations and educational systems, she encountered many complexities that affected her lifestyle and health. She not only had to deal with academic issues such as
understanding academic lectures, joining group discussion, and meeting all the professors’
expectations, but also had to overcome social interaction issues such as attending social events,
following conversations, and conveying messages to others. These were daily problems that she
had to face with limited family support.

From the gender perspective, Sadeghi (2008) confirmed that immigrant women are
struggling between “…their educational and vocational aspirations and culturally scripted roles
and obligations” (p. 218). Immigrant women not only face institutional discrimination but also
encounter family culture and language issues in higher education. Anisef et al. (2010) reported
“immigrant women are less likely to enroll in post-secondary education and…the issue of access
for women [is] complicated by social and cultural biases” (para. 6). In the post-secondary
education system, gender may affect women’s earning potential and career status since women
are often discouraged from studying trades, science and technology programs that offer better
employment and higher paying jobs (New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women
[NBACSW], 2007, p. 10).

Immigrant students often feel powerless, inferior, and embarrassed, and do not have the
courage to ask questions or to complain because immigrant students lack “…a dominant body to
raise consciousness about their experiences” (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 3919). Furthermore, it is
their culture to remain silent to maintain harmony and commonality in the group (Shankar et al.,
2013). However, most immigrant students are determined and motivated to attend post-
secondary education because they are eager to improve their career and financial situation, to
increase their social status, to provide a better life quality for their family, and to become a role
model for their children (Costigan, Hua, & Su, 2010; Shankar et al., 2013; Sinacore & Lerner,
2013).
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research question has guided the present study: What do Vancouver Island University (VIU) adult immigrant students report as the ‘support services’ that they need to be successful as examined by gender and educational level?

The four hypotheses for this present study are presented below. First, most immigrant students are unaware of the possible financial support opportunities and are unfamiliar with the process of applying for scholarships within the institution (H1); therefore, they would benefit from mentoring and tutoring from both graduates and support staff. Second, the needs among ESL, ABE, trade, and academic immigrant students will be similar (H2). Third, a safe welcoming environment and a supportive social network from their own ethnic groups are available to immigrant students, so that they can graduate from VIU (H3). Fourth, additional types of services and programs that are needed by immigrant students will be identified such as immigrant consulting services and occupational ESL part-time programs (H4).

Definition of Terms

The four key terms for this research paper are ‘immigrant students’, ‘barriers’, ‘support services’, and ‘completing’. The operational definitions for these four key terms are given below. The term ‘immigrant students’ in this present study refers to adult immigrants who were born outside of Canada and might have lived or studied in Canada before becoming permanent residents or Canadian citizens. Also, ‘immigrant students’ refer to individuals who have come from a different ethnic group and have lived in a foreign country when the surveys were conducted. The term ‘immigrant students’ include three categories of immigrants in the present study: refugees, economic immigrants (skilled workers and business people), and family class (dependents). However, the term ‘immigrant students’ excludes second or third generation immigrants. In this present study, ‘immigrant students’ are students who are currently taking, or
have taken, internal (institution) or external (outside of institution) English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and intend to enter trade, undergraduate, and/or graduate programs in VIU.

The term ‘barrier’ is defined as something that makes it difficult for immigrant students to achieve certain tasks. For example, communicating with others, fulfilling their emotional or physical needs, participating in social events, understanding academic assignments, discovering resources and benefits, or completing official documents due to their lack of English language ability, is repeatedly challenging among immigrant students’ lives. The term ‘support services’ is defined as services that are provided by professors, advisors, counsellors, support staff, and administrators in order to reduce immigrant students’ stress and to increase an opportunity for continuing their courses at VIU.

Finally, in this study, the term ‘completing’ is defined as all the processes that immigrant students go through such as the process of application, testing by ABE or ESL departments, meeting the requirements for admission to specific academic programs (including recognition of credentials), and graduating from post-secondary education.

**Brief Overview of Study**

The present study was conducted to explore immigrant students’ needs regarding institutional support services and programs to overcome difficulties that prevented them from completing their higher education at VIU. The participants were taking either the ESL, ABE, trade, or academic programs before January 2018. The author of present study conducted a survey which asked questions about the demographics of participants, desired support services/programs, factors of motivation, and strategies that were used by immigrant students to manage their challenges in a higher education environment. From the findings of this study, stakeholders could re-evaluate adult immigrants’ needs and provide them equal opportunities to
succeed from the post-secondary educational system. By completing and obtaining Canadian credentials, immigrants are able to use their professional knowledge and skills to contribute to the local and global economy and increase public well-being.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The primary objective of the literature review section is to recognize the various challenges that have significantly impacted and postponed refugees and immigrant students at post-secondary education in their host country. It also intended to explore what factors that have been indicated through various studies, would contribute to the academic success of immigrants, refugees, and new Canadians in the post-secondary education (PSE) system.

There are many studies related to children and youth barriers, and the types of support that are needed in order to help them to integrate into a new culture more successfully. However, there are limited studies about providing services or programs that would support adult immigrant students in post-secondary education in Canada. Both Sinacore and Lerner (2013) and Söhn (2016) indicated that although education is highly valued by the immigrant students, very few studies have been done on the subject of adult immigrants in post-secondary education.

This literature review has been categorized into four main themes: social and cultural adaptation, discrimination and racism, employment, and education challenges which mainly interfere with the ability of adult immigrants to integrate efficiently into the host country.

Social and Cultural Adaptation

Canada welcomes diverse immigrant groups, and the challenges of “…integrating its diverse population” is increasing, especially in terms of financial and human resources (Volante, Klinger, Bilgili, & Siegel, 2017, p. 333). In the period between November 2015 and January 2017, more than 40,000 Syrian refugees were relocated within Canada (see http://www.cic.gc.ca/English/ refugees/welcome/). However, as Kilbride and D’Arcangelo stated “…immigrant post-secondary students have specific academic, cultural, and social needs that go unmet” (as cited in Sinacore & Lerner, 2013, p. 70). Factors such as “socioeconomic
status (SES), language proficiency, social support, parental expectations, and self-efficacy” have
been identified as possible disruptions to immigrant and refugees’ educational achievement
(Sinacore & Lerner, 2013, p. 69). Some researchers have suggested that “a range of
individual/family, policy, and sociocultural and demographic contexts influence immigrant
student achievement” (Volante et al., 2017, p. 335).

Nawyn, Gjokaj, Agbényiga, and Grace (2012) indicated that immigrants often feel like
strangers and outsiders when attending activities at school or communities when they are unable
to participate in the conversations with others due to their language abilities. In the end, they
feel disregarded, devalued, disrespected, ignored, and isolated while attending the events with
the native English speakers due to their low conversational English skills. Similarly, Adamuti-
Trache (2012) found that immigrants who have limited social networks frequently reduce their
chances to interact with the local community and other ethnic groups. More seriously, adult
immigrants who have insufficient language abilities could also face severe social isolation and
“create intergenerational tensions in their families” (Nawyn et al., 2012, p. 258). Therefore, as
Nawyn et al. (2012) discovered, immigrants who build strong social networks and relationships
with others would improve their sense of security, inclusiveness, and significance in the
community. However, the connections between “…language skills and feelings of belonging or
exclusions” (Nawyn et al., 2012, p. 257) are not well studied by the immigration researchers.
Bagnail (2015) also stated that there is limited inquiry and research about adult immigrants’
sense of belonging and identity, and more studies have been done on international students.

Frequently, international students receive support from both their family back home
financially and from international department advisors, but immigrant students receive limited
academic and social support services. Unfortunately, these services are delivered from domestic
student advisors who are unlikely to speak the immigrant students’ first language. Therefore,
immigrant students usually rely on their relatives or friends who can speak the same languages to assist them to resolve their problems. Makwarimba et al. (2013) revealed that refugees rely on their extended family as the main source for social support in Canada. According to Teranishi et al., previous research seldom identified the discrepancy among international students and immigrant students at post-secondary institutions (as cited in Sinacore & Lerner, 2013). Arthur and Flynn (2011) revealed that immigrant students faced similar challenges as international students, but research revealed that international students receive more attention than immigrant students in post-secondary settings (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013).

While most international students tend to associate with other international peers, mature adult immigrants/refugees often feel alone and isolated. One mature immigrant student was asked to provide English 12 or equivalent English proficiency before applying dental hygiene diploma. After being unable to prove her English proficiency, she was enrolled in an ESL class with fifteen international students, and expressed her feelings of awkwardness, exclusiveness, and uncomfortableness among young international students (K. Kim, personal communication, December 1, 2017). Most immigrants and refugees do not know where to meet other ethnic immigrant students and make connections with them on the campus. Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter and Gallarin (2016) cited two studies undertaken in the mid-2000s by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco and Rodriguez et al., who found that “peer support was a better predictor of academic and psychological well-being than family support” (p. 382) especially for students in higher education settings. Makwarimba et al. (2013) explained that assisting immigrants to access cultural services and providing social support not only diminishes refugees’ isolation and loneliness but also helps them to integrate into the new society. Similarly, the researchers indicated that feelings of loneliness can be alleviated through peer support (Juang et al., 2016). Mendenhall, Bartlett and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017) revealed that peer support groups would allow
the immigrants to meet others who could speak same language to benefit them socially and academically.

Sinacore and Lerner (2013) reported that immigrant students seek additional support such as “…language, cultural adaptation, legal status issues, social support and guidance on basic living in Canada” (p.78), and without having this social support, they might experience loneliness and depression. As a result, the educational transitioning process has become more challenging for immigrant students who lack social networks in the higher educational environment. Sinacore and Lerner (2013) discovered that those immigrants who have social support and maintain a close relationship with their ethnic community tend to pursue post-secondary education. As Söhn (2016) also indicated, “the interaction with native teachers and students can be an important part of the everyday incorporation process” (p. 194). Building connections with peers, staff, instructors, and administrators might create opportunities for employment and provide a sense of inclusiveness for the immigrants and refugee students. He, Bettez, and Levin (2017) detailed that community resources would help refugees to achieve their educational goals and highlighted that ‘it takes a village’ to provide education (p. 972) for the immigrants and refugees.

Researchers have also suggested that the implementation of educational policies for diverse sociocultural contexts has an impact on the immigrant’s educational learning outcome (Volante et al., 2017). As Nakhaie (2017) found, by helping immigrants and refugees to connect with co-ethnics, the opportunities for them to become involved in community engagement, to access government services, to extend social networks and to increase coping skills increased. In 1984, Giddens used the expression ‘vehicles of power’ to describe the effect of social networks that provide immigrants to access resources, services, and job opportunity information (as cited in Nakhaie, 2017).
Brooker and Lawrence (2012) pointed out that, besides a general lack of time and energy, encountering cultural conflict and isolation from other ethnic groups ranked highest in the educational challenges that faced immigrants. According to Brooker and Lawrence (2012), the immediate obstacles of learning and “…everyday experiences seemed to loom larger than the broader acculturation issues” (P. 82). Brooker and Lawrence (2012) indicated that immigrants who experienced difficulties in fitting in a new culture were directly related to their educational experiences. Most immigrant students encounter cultural challenges regarding finding both housing and an individual identity between heritage and host cultures. Sinacore and Lerner (2013) cited a study by Calderwood et al. who said that “immigrant post-secondary students may experience conflicts between the values of their native culture and the host country, as well as with the educational institution, or the discipline in which they study” (p. 70). Therefore, helping students to expand their bicultural identities would assist them to manage their educational and personal challenges positively and effectively (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012, p. 84-85). Nawyn et al. (2012) suggested that one strategy for immigrants to integrate into their new community would be to access linguistic resources and increase social networks that would provide economic opportunities at the same time. Brooker and Lawrence (2012) explained that when immigrant students are able to access resources from both their traditional and host culture, they would feel supported academically and emotionally. Indeed, Adamuti-Trache (2012) reported that there is no doubt that “…most immigrants have to overcome language, cultural, and social barriers when entering new workplaces and communities” (p. 107).

However, immigrant students often feel powerless, inferior, and embarrassed, and do not have the courage to ask questions or to complain because immigrant students lack “…a dominant body to raise consciousness about their experiences” (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 3919). And, it is their culture to remain silent to maintain harmony and commonality in the group (Shankar et al.,
2013). In order to provide a culturally and socially-friendly environment, the author of present study wants to understand how often the immigrant students access the VIU services such as counselling, advising, the gym, and the cafeterias. And, how helpful these services are for supporting them emotionally or socially. Also, the researcher is interested in finding out what strategies they used to solve problems, and who they ask for help and where they seek help if the services were unavailable on campus. By finding out their strengths and social connections, immigrant students can be given the opportunity to develop a sense of community within an academic institution. It would reduce the feeling of loneliness and exclusiveness that might improve their chances of succeeding in their academic career.

**Discrimination and Racism**

Kannon and Varghese (2010) identified that ESL immigrant students often suppressed themselves from competing with native speakers or were held back from obtaining opportunities and resources because of their identity and abilities in English. Sadeghi (2008) revealed that Iranian females struggled to balance advanced education, family responsibilities, institutional racism, cultural conflict and language barriers which “limit access to health and social services” (Nakhaie, 2017, p. 4) in Canada. Most Iranian women sought social and economic equality, and looked for autonomy and a voice within their families, ethnic groups and host society (Sadeghi, 2008). However, most well-educated females have been forced to take low-paying jobs that require minimal qualifications. Anisef et al. (2010) discovered that female immigrants not only needed to deal with educational systemic biases such as gender-specific fields but also had to adjust their own cultural perspectives to a new post-secondary structure.

As immigrant students are self-conscious of their own status, they do not see themselves as a full member of the university community in the host country, and they gradually remove themselves from the community (Kannon & Varghese, 2010). In reality, it is very common for
people to negatively judge other ethnic groups that differ from themselves especially with regards to visible minority groups in society. Many studies (e.g., Beiser et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2010) have described that ethnic minority groups are not only struggling with language and integration difficulties but also dealing with the feelings of loneliness and prejudice in the new country (Makwarimba et al., 2013). However, Stebleton, Soria, Huesman, and Torres (2014) suggested that immigrant students need to proactively engage with peers and faculty to meet the cultural expectations, and to learn the educational systems.

Frequently, administrators, professors or support staff are the first contact for newcomers. Most people tend to assume that faculty, peers, and practitioners are sufficiently culturally sensitive to deliver high quality services to immigrants without stereotyping or prejudice. However, many Canadian educational institutions employ the same academic advisors to assist students regardless of the students’ different ethnic backgrounds. In fact, immigrant students can experience discrimination and racism from “…their white teachers, peers, administrators and counselors” who should be supportive (Shakar et al., 2013, p. 3918). Nawyn et al. (2012) found that some refugees feel anxious about their English communication skills and “…felt neglected and disrespected as they could not express themselves to staff…” (p. 267). In addition, Morrice (2013) has discovered that mature immigrant students who come from minority groups often encounter “…discrimination from both inside and outside of the higher educational setting” (p. 654). Shankar et al. (2013) described that immigrants and refugees who are afraid of expressing their own opinions or feel embarrassed and powerless tend to remain silent and experience prejudice, racism, social isolation, and discrimination in the host country (He, Bettez, & Levin, 2017; Nakhaie, 2017). Since most immigrants and refugees in higher education are mature students with family responsibilities, they avoid being labelled as ‘trouble makers’ and tend to accept the situations in their classes instead of questioning or complaining. Some immigrants
believe that if they create issues, they could be deported (Shakar et al., 2013). Due to the lack of language skills, social networks, and support from their own ethnic community, the new immigrants not only face racism and discrimination (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013; Schroeter & James, 2015) and problems in cultural transitioning (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013), but also encounter complications in accessing social services and integration, underemployment, and financial difficulties (Nakhaie, 2017).

Thijs and Verkuyten concluded that college students who experience ethnic discrimination may have their academic, emotional and physical health adversely affected (as cited in Juang et al., 2016). Lenette (2016) cited a study by Earnest, Joyce, De Mori, and Silvagni who indicated that a lack of staff awareness and university support concerning refugee students’ experiences would negatively affect the students’ abilities to complete higher education successfully. In fact, Barnhardt, Phillip, Young, and Sheets (2017) stressed that educational institutions need to encourage departments and administrators to create an inclusive and unbiased learning environment instead of expecting diverse immigrant students to adapt, to engage, and to change their personal attitudes or characteristics spontaneously. Barnhardt et al. (2017) also believed that when staff and administrators show professional abilities and considerate attitudes, it would provide effective and positive outcomes for minority immigrant students academically at higher education. The researchers recommended campus staff to provide resources professionally and to broaden procedural support accordingly in order to “…create a welcoming and supportive campus climate” (Barnhardt et al., 2017, p. 2) for immigrant students.

Unfortunately, racism and discrimination still exist in both educational settings and the community. Juang et al. (2016) explained that is very common for ethnic minorities who are post-secondary students in the U.S. to experience racial discrimination. Their study showed immigrants who have experienced discrimination tend to have poorer physical, emotional, and
social adjustment which are related to limited peer support and adaptation to the new environment (Juang et al., 2016, p. 380-382). Juang et al. (2016) concluded that immigrant students who experienced racism tend to have lower self-esteem, social connectedness, social competence, and sense of consistency. He et al. (2017) recommended that creating a respectful learning atmosphere and appreciating the cultural and linguistic difference would support immigrants in the educational settings.

As school is usually the first place for immigrant students to learn about the culture of the host country, to meet other ethnic groups, and to learn the local language, it is critical for the institution to create a safe, respectful and non-judgmental learning environment. As Volante et al. (2017) have mentioned, school holds a significant role to support transition and integration for immigrant groups in Canada (p. 332). Thus, it is crucial to create a gathering place for immigrant students to seek support from each other academically and psychologically. As Stebleton et al. (2014) mentioned, providing a safe physical space can function “… as a form of symbolism and means of honoring tradition” (p. 200) for the immigrant students.

When immigrant students have less connection with their own ethnic group and lack of interaction with the new culture, they are more likely to experience discrimination and rejection from others. It will gradually become difficult for them to adapt to the changes and will lead them to become isolated, and the feeling of being excluded within the school system. To alleviate this, institutions should give immigrants the tools and the opportunity to develop their own ‘community’ within the institutional community until they gain sufficient self-confidence to become more independent. This research seeks to find out what those tools and opportunities are. In order to value and to welcome the minority ethnic groups within the community, the study also intended to discover new services would support different ethnic individuals to feel equaled, respected and safe in a new learning environment.
Employment Challenges

Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) investigated skilled adult immigrants who continuously face underemployment, are underutilized, and have unrecognized foreign credentials in the Canadian labour market. Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, Sweet, and Walters (2013) cited a study by Sweetman and McBride who identified that immigrants “…come to Canada with foreign credentials in hand and find that their qualifications do not ensure full-time employment in their fields of study” (p. 140). Many immigrants, who came from east and south Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, have encountered non-recognition of foreign education credentials and devalued foreign work experiences by the Canadian employers (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). In order to overcome the various barriers, completing post-secondary education is the most efficient pathway for adult immigrants to obtain employment opportunities, and to ensure their financial stability in their new country (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013; Sinacore & Lerner 2013; Tecle, Ha, & Hunter 2016). For example, immigrants to Germany would rather obtain ‘native’ education that would be recognized by the employers than become unemployed or receive unacceptable low paid work (Söhn, 2016).

Adamuti-Trache et al. (2013) stated the immigrants’ decision on whether to attend post-secondary education (PSE) or work-related training is influenced by financial constraints, weak language abilities, culture-related gender expectations, unfamiliarity with educational culture, and family obligations. In addition, since the immigrants were selected through Canada’s point system which favours professionally qualified applicants, more males would work in professionally desirable fields such as engineers, doctors, or IT programmers; so the male population in an academic setting is significantly higher than females (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013). Shankar et al. (2013) stated that completing post-secondary education is the minimum requirement for a stable and secure employment for Canadians; however, only 66% of Canadians
have completed their advanced education (p. 3911). They concluded that the barriers for completing university are due to lack of financial means, proximity, and parental education level. Several studies have found that immigrants are likely to be valued as ‘cultural capital’ once they obtain qualification, certificates and competencies in their host country (as cited in Söhn, 2016).

Anisef, Sweet, Adamuti-Trache, and Walters (2010) found that personal ‘economics’ is the most vital reason for immigrant students to participate in the Canadian post-secondary education. And by attending post-secondary education, immigrants have more opportunities to extend their diverse networks and increase chances for employment. According to the study of Anisef et al. (2010), immigrants who have enhanced language skills are more likely to be successful in finding work and in advancing their professions. Similarly, studies showed that one of most effective strategies for increasing employment integration and enhancing immigrants’ position in the workforce is to complete Canadian education and training (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). However, since “the Canadian labour market is not welcoming for immigrants” especially highly educated workers, they are generally underemployed with professional levels of education, but in low salary employments (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, p. 63). Moreover, educational researchers have indicated that adult immigrants in Germany are frequently unemployed or work in less prestigious jobs due to the educational institution ignoring “…intercultural openness and sensitivity in teaching and learning style” (Söhn, 2016, p. 195) of diverse immigrant students.

Premji, Shakya, Spasevski, Merolli, and Athar (2014) reported that Canadian female immigrants who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds tend to work at low wages and low-skilled jobs although they have higher education qualifications. Brooker and Lawrence (2012) discovered that since Canada does not have sufficient systems to recognize foreign credentials and foreign working experiences, immigrant women are constantly forced to work in
the fields that are not related to their professions. Furthermore, Tecle, Ha, and Hunter (2016) stated that adult immigrants are forced to accept trade or low pay service employments since their knowledge and expertise remain ‘invisible’ to the host community. Premji et al. (2014) indicated that in Canada immigrant women’s physical and psychological states were affected by these undesirable labour force experiences. Similarly, He, Bettez, and Levin (2017) stated that Liberian male immigrants strive to find a job based on “…their education and qualification which [subsequently] affects their sense of identity” (p. 960) and Liberian women who feel distressed are expected to be the breadwinners of their family which goes against their traditions once in the United States. Conference Board of Canada (2004, p. 17) reports: “both government and employers are failing to make the most of immigrants’ skills, expertise and entrepreneurial qualities” (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013, p. 140).

Beiser, Puente-Duran, and Hou (2015) explained “… almost one third of immigrant families present in Canada for ten years or less lives in deep poverty” (p. 35). In fact, Shankar et al. (2013) have reported that fifty-two percent of skilled economic immigrants with university degrees are living in low income conditions. In this climate of employers looking for skilled employees, it is apparent that institutions need to do more in terms of support and services for highly-qualified immigrants to speed up the transition into the Canadian workforce. This research paper will seek to fill in some of the gaps in current research and recommend methods to expand current services. A list of suggested new services was provided in the study, so the appropriate services might be identified for assisting immigrants into the labor market.

**Education Challenges**

In the mid-1980s, Bourdieu defined privileged, white, middle-class culture as “cultural capital” and as being the ‘standard’ in education; however, Yosso described community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by
Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression’ (as cited in He et al., 2017, p. 963). Both Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) and Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2011) said that most immigrants are unfamiliar with their host country’s educational systems and cultural expectations. Therefore, immigrants are likely to have limited knowledge of knowing or accessing government or community resources as their priorities are solving the challenges of resettlement such as housing, childcare and employment in a new society to support their dependents (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). Kanno and Varghese (2010) also identified linguistic challenges, structural constraints, limited financial resources and self-censorship as factors that can block first generation immigrants from pursuing higher education.

Shankar et al. (2013) indicated that visible minority students who have low income backgrounds faced difficulties trying to attend post-secondary education. Bevelander and Pendakur (2014) detailed that refugee claimants (RCs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) are not qualified for government financial assistance, so they do not have rights to access free language training, housing and settlement services. Therefore, RCs and PSRs have experienced more difficulties than the government-assisted refugees (GARs) who gain provincial financial support (Nakhaie, 2017). Attending university is challenging for first generation immigrant students in the host country while taking care of families, adjusting culture expectations, building social networks, and accessing government services with limited language abilities and information in the new community. Many first-generation immigrant students feel discouraged when the Western education system required them to select academic courses and to manage the university credits transfer from their original university to the host country without having clear directions from the staff. They not only need to manage with the unfamiliar registration process but also to adjust to a new rating system while learning a new language in a larger class size.
OVERCOMING BARRIERS FACING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

(Sinacore & Lerner, 2013). He et al. (2017) stated that adult and children of immigrants from marginalized cultural and linguistic backgrounds experience limited educational opportunities.

Frequently, adult immigrants and refugees choose to participate in the post-secondary education in the host country instead of joining the workforce due to the non-recognition of their occupations or devaluation of their foreign academic credentials (Adamuti-Trache, 2012; Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013; Söhn, 2016; Tecle et al., 2016). Due to the different cultural backgrounds and linguistics, the interactions among immigrant students, peers, and instructors are complex. Milner stated that instructors and educational institutions tend to associate the immigrant students’ low academic achievement to socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic difficulties (as cited in He et al., 2017). Most immigrants came from an educational system focused on memorization and repetition learning style instead of critical and analytical thinking process which is predominant in Western education. Therefore, immigrants struggle with academic learning at the post-secondary education level (Sadeghi, 2008, p. 222-223). Sinacore and Lerner (2013) indicated career services and mentoring systems could assist immigrants with learning about the Western educational systems and structures. At the same time, they recognized that new immigrants rely on immigrant peers and relatives, which may “result in students being misinformed and not integrating into the university environment” (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013, p.81). He, Bettez, and Levin (2017) suggested that showing respect and appreciation to the ethnic groups who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds would encourage and promote multilingualism and diversity for immigrant students and the community.

Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) found both individual and situational factors, which are education-related and employment-related, were the greatest elements for influencing adult immigrants’ decision to enroll in a Canadian post-secondary education. For most of the adult immigrants, completing higher education and gaining foreign credentials represents achievement.
Likewise, the government of Germany values education as an important element of lifelong learning policy goals and emphasizes “…lifelong learning is decisive for the prospects of the individual, the success of industry and the future of society” (Söhn, 2016, p. 194).

In 1991, Bourdieu described that “the power of language consists not only of the ability to communicate but also the ability to advocate for oneself through verbal interaction” (as cited in Nawyn et al., 2012, p. 269). According to Anisef et al. (2010), Brooker and Lawrence (2012), and Mendenhall, Bartlett, and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017), the biggest challenges for immigrants and refugees is English; although, they usually meet the requirements for entry by submitting IELTS or TOEFL scores. The Canadian government provides some language training for immigrants, the support programs only focus on newcomers without considering immigrants who have lived in the society for some years and still encounter language obstacles (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). Volante et al. (2017) explained that education is not an instrument but is the foundation of success and that education should be treated as “an essential part of cultural development” (p. 332) instead of seeing it as a marker of economic growth. On the other hand, most adult immigrants and refugees who participate in either academic or English as a Second Language at post-secondary institutions aim for upgrading their credentials in order to prove their professional skills and abilities for employment in the host country.

Mendenhall, Bartlett and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017) have identified several factors that contribute to immigrant students’ academic success. First of all, many refugees pointed out that “…the importance of feeling supported by and sensing a close connection with various educators” (p.7) is crucial for helping them to overcome the challenges of academic learning. When the instructors act as mentors, they could build positive relationships with the students through caring, encouragement, and assurance emotionally and academically. The authors also emphasized that “language does not exist apart from the context of life and the world, and
language is more readily remembered when it has meaning and when it is in context” (Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017, p. 9). They also believed that language and thoughts are connected, so the teachers could allow students to convey their ideas through both their native language and English in order to communicate and to solve problems with peers. Finally, encouraging teachers to create “…a curriculum that is responsive to students’ needs and interests” (Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017, p. 18) would support immigrant students’ language and culture learning. Through a group project, students are learning to work collaboratively and to practice their critical thinking to find solutions for their problems instead of memorization.

Because of the stigma “English language required” which is attached to the immigrant students’ admission requirements, the students showed resentment and “…often ended up resisting the course, the curriculum, and the teachers” (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 319). Immigrant students feel the extra time and tuition that they have to pay for ESL courses before being accepted into the post-secondary is unfair (Kanno & Varghese, 2010).

Ideally, institutions need to be more welcoming to immigrant students and help them see that learning English is not a barrier, but a stepping stone to their future career goals. This research will explore ways by which learning English and upgrading their credentials are seen not only as a way to get a better job, but also as a way of increasing their chances of advancement. Since most adult immigrants are highly educated professionals, the author of present study wants to understand what kind of learning environment would encourage them to continue their studying at post-secondary education, so they would feel supported and welcomed by the staff and professors on campus.

Conclusion
In 2010, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reported that it is crucial to recruit experienced employees who have intercultural and foreign languages capabilities in order to interact with partners and to enhance economic growth internationally (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). According to Statistics Canada 2016 data there are more than 200,000 new immigrants every year, and the support and services needed are different among economic immigrants, family unification immigrants, and refugees (Nakhaie, 2017). Sinacore and Lerner (2013) discovered that “…very few services existed at the university that were designed to help students navigate challenges” (p. 81). On the other hand, He et al. (2017) believed if immigrants have resilient personalities and receive compassion and support from the community, they would be able to overcome educational challenges by themselves.

According to Nakhaie (2017), the results showed that government-assisted and sponsored refugees required more assistance than the economic immigrants in the community and educational settings. The most significant services that would be of advantage to immigrants and refugees are “(1) government services and language skills (2) information about Canadian life and access to community services (3) education and work in Canada, and (4) social and professional networks and community involvement” (Nakhaie, 2017, p. 1). The study also indicated that ethnic and community members are the main sources for helping refugees’ employment; and their relatives are essential for building their social networks in which they would experience less discrimination and more inclusiveness (Nakhaie, 2017).

As previously mentioned, there are limited studies about providing services or programs that would support adult immigrant students in post-secondary education in Canada. This research paper will partially fill the gap of available studies and provide valuable information for institutional policymakers seeking to expand their current level of services to provide a new, more inclusive and flexible student support system.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was not only to find out the obstacles that adult immigrant students are facing, but also to gain an insight into their unique needs in terms of support services and programs while attending post-secondary education. This study has been conducted to explore immigrant students’ needs at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

The objective of this study was also to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success instead of struggling in a new educational system. It should also be remembered that on top of these educational struggles, many female immigrants have additional obstacles from family responsibilities and cultural expectations (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013; Sadeghi, 2008). By investigating immigrant students’ needs by gender and educational level, new services will be recommended to suit the different characteristics of immigrant students at VIU. In examining education level, the purpose was to analyze if immigrant students who did not complete their higher education back home require different types of support services from immigrant students who have completed their degree/diploma from back home. In this study, the author used a survey that included quantitative and qualitative items in an effort to collect information about immigrant students’ needs for achieving their goals at VIU.

Sample

The population for this study consisted of immigrant students who were currently (2017-2018 academic year) or finished studying Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), Trades, Academic or Master programs at VIU. Both current and graduated VIU adult immigrant students were invited to participate in the educational survey. All of the possible participants were first generation immigrants who have permanent resident or refugee
status, or have become Canadian citizens. International students who held study permits, visitor visas, or were in the process of applying for permanent resident status were not included in this study. The participants completed the survey individually or with the researcher assistant at a neutral environment in VIU Nanaimo campus.

The researcher intended to visit 10-15 ESL/ABE classes and hoped to recruit 25 current VIU immigrant students and 25 VIU graduates from the community. The researcher visited 7 ESL classes but was not invited to present the survey project to the ABE students. Out of an estimated target of 50 students, there were a total of 34 participants who responded which gives a response rate of 68%. Of those 34 participants, there were 25 females (73%), 8 males (24%) and one agender student (3%). Agender refers to a person who was unwilling to identify themselves as a particular gender. Therefore, the unidentified student was only included in the analysis of education but excluded from the gender analysis. Overall, nineteen VIU graduated immigrant students (56%) and fifteen continuing immigrant students (44%) participated in the survey. No student attended the guided survey or submitted the paper survey to the locked mailbox; instead, all students used the online version of the survey.

**Instruments Used**

The main instrument of this present study was a survey designed to reveal immigrant students’ experiences and needs that they sought out after entering the Western post-secondary educational system (see Appendix A). This survey aimed to compare what support services are needed by different gender and education groups. A question about educational level achieved was included to see if this level was a factor affecting the needs for various support services and programs.
In this study, three versions of survey were administered: (1) a paper-based questionnaire, (2) a web-based questionnaire, and (3) an English language guided-survey. As it was difficult for the author to anticipate each individual’s English language ability, the vocabulary used for the survey questionnaire was designed to be equivalent to Academic Preparation level 3 to 4 at VIU. The survey research questions were reviewed and approved by the English Language Centre (ELC) Curriculum Coordinator in order to maximize effective and accurate responses from the participants.

The reason for offering a paper-pencil survey was to provide opportunity for adult immigrant students who have experienced different educational systems and would prefer to use a more traditional method to convey their messages. They could quickly skim the questions, and then make a decision to participate in the survey or not.

A web-based survey was offered to VIU graduates, or current students who preferred to use computer or personal devices to complete the survey. The online survey was also sent to Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS) immigrant settlement workers in order to recruit VIU graduates who have visited and requested various services and trainings from CVIMS staff.

The last version, a guided-survey, was designed to eliminate potential discrimination and to provide an equal opportunity for lower-level English immigrant students to have their voices heard. Both paper-based and web-based surveys were self-administered by the respondents; and the English language guided-survey was filled out by respondents with guidance and language support from the research assistant. The purpose of the guided-survey was to accommodate immigrant students who have either reading or writing difficulty.

The survey was designed to take 10-15 minutes to complete depending on the participants’ English language skills. There were a total of 16 questions in the survey which
were categorized into 3 sections. In the first and second sections of survey, the participants used a 5-point Likert scale to circle the appropriate letter or a number beside a description except for the gender question, or to circle ‘X’ for a statement that was not related to them. In the third section, participants were asked to describe their experiences of using VIU services and to evaluate a list of suggested services that would benefit immigrant students in the future.

Section one of the survey consisted of seven questions with regards to the immigrant student’s demographic information which consisted of their citizenship status, current status at VIU, educational level from back home, education experiences in Western culture, and gender. Some researchers have suggested that “a range of individual/family, policy, and sociocultural and demographic contexts influence immigrant student achievement” (Volante et al., 2017, p. 335).

In order to provide helpful services for VIU immigrant students, the researcher wanted to understand if immigrant students who were unfamiliar with Western culture and education system required more support than immigrant students who have studied in the Canadian education system. As Kilbride and D’Arcangelo stated, “…immigrant post-secondary students have specific academic, cultural, and social needs that go unmet” (as cited in Sinacore & Lerner, 2013, p.70). Factors such as “socioeconomic status (SES), language proficiency, social support, parental expectations, and self-efficacy” have been identified as possible disruptions to immigrant and refugees’ educational achievement (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013, p. 69). By knowing their personal backgrounds, it provided concrete information for the researcher to identify and to analyze different needs among different genders and educational level of first generation adult immigrant students at VIU.

Section two of the survey contained five 5-point Likert scale questions related to immigrant students’ experiences with VIU services. The potential participants were requested to
rate the level of difficulty in completing the registration process. Most immigrant students from Asian and south Asian would be familiar with different educational system and registration process than Canadian education system. Therefore, new immigrants often got lost when they try to register academic courses and to make a right decision to enroll in the right programs which affect their future careers. Therefore, the author of present study wanted to understand what the most challenging processes that immigrant students encountered when they tried to enroll in a Western higher educational system.

The participants were also asked to rank the frequency of their visits per semester within these services and how helpful these services were. These questions were designed not only to obtain the quality rating of VIU services but also to provide awareness for the immigrant students of these services on campus. A list of potential services that might support immigrant students emotionally and academically at VIU was also presented. The last question of section two investigated elements that would encourage immigrant students to continue their higher education and to become more successful. The participants were asked to circle 1=very unhelpful, 2=unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4=helpful, 5=very helpful. The participants were also invited to add extra comments in a space provided to suggest services that would benefit immigrant students. The list of suggested support services was designed according to the author’s professional working experience with diverse ethnic immigrant students at VIU and recommendations identified in various articles in the literature review. The data collected would point to the types of services that are helpful and supportive for immigrant student populations; and would provide a strategy for the institution to maintain or to increase student retention rate in the future.

Section three of the survey consisted of four open-ended questions intended to discover the unique strategies that immigrant students used to resolve issues when services were not
available to assist them on campus. Due to the lack of language skills, social networks, and support from their own ethnic community, the new immigrants not only face racism and discrimination (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013; Schroeter & James, 2015) and problems in cultural transitioning (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013), but also encounter complications in accessing social services and integration, underemployment, and financial difficulties (Nakhaie, 2017). Therefore, by providing an opportunity for immigrant students to indicate and report specific resources and services that are needed in the survey, their voices are heard, and their concerns are recognized.

In the study, the participants were asked to provide their experiences of using VIU services and to respond to potential new support services that would be helpful and might encourage them to continue their studying at VIU. As immigrant students are self-conscious with their own status, they do not see themselves as a full member of the university community in the host country, and they gradually remove themselves from the community (Kannon & Varghese, 2010). As a result, the participants were also invited to add their own ideas and suggestions for new services.

**Procedures Followed**

Prior to beginning the present study, the final research proposal was submitted to the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board for approval. The following procedures for this research were used. First, after the researcher had received approval from the REB, the researcher emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix B) to the Executive Director of the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society. The recruitment letter indicated the purpose of the study, participant criteria, total number of questions, the expected time to complete the survey, and the contact information of the researcher. The letter also stated that participation in the survey was voluntary and the results were confidential, and that they could discontinue the survey at any time. Upon the approval from the ED of CVIMS, an electronic poster (Appendix
C) was emailed to Nanaimo immigrant settlement coordinator and settlement workers who would email the poster to the members of CVIMS. The survey link and QR code were provided in the electronic poster and the recruitment letter.

Secondly, the researcher wrote letters to the ESL Learning Centre (ELC) coordinator and Adult Basic Education (ABE) department for permission to place the bookmarks (Appendix D) and posters in their area. The posters for this study were also posted in various ESL classrooms and in student services buildings such as Student Union and cafeterias at the VIU Nanaimo campus. In addition, the researcher requested the ELC language coaches for assistance for immigrant students who may have difficulty understanding the survey prompts and answering the questions in English.

Thirdly, the researcher asked ESL and ABE instructors for permission to present the research project during their class time. A recruitment speech script (Appendix E) was sent to instructors before the researcher visited their classes to deliver the recruitment speech. Students were encouraged to pick up a bookmark to participate in the online survey or to pick up a copy of the consent form (Appendix F) and survey (Appendix A) from the Learning Centre. Students were directed to return the completed survey to the locked box at Bldg. 255. Students were encouraged to seek language support from their coaches or Learning Centre teachers if they were unable to understand the questions.

Next, the information sessions about the research project were advertised and posted via the International Weekly Events and through VIU Digest (Appendix G). At the scheduled information sessions, two native speakers and three academic immigrants attended the session. The researcher recited a concise summary of the purpose of the survey and went through the consent letter. Participants were encouraged to ask questions if they needed more explanation about the statements on the survey. The researcher explained to the participants that there were a
total of 16 questions in three sections and it required ten to fifteen minutes to complete the survey; whereas, the guided-survey would take approximately 20-30 minutes for the research assistant to guide the participants to complete the survey. However, they were welcomed to take as much time as needed to complete the survey. Copies of the paper-based survey and consent forms with an addressed envelope were also available during the information sessions. The potential participants were directed to return the completed survey to the locked box at Bldg. 255. The bookmarks with both QR code and survey URL were also available for pick up at the info session.

Finally, a drop-in guided-survey session was held at the end of Fall semester of 2017. The specific time and location were announced during the classroom visit and posted in mid-November. Potential participants who were interested in guided–survey could attend the scheduled drop-in survey session in a computer lab. The research assistant was available to provide support for the participants during the scheduled time and Google translation could be used to assist these new immigrant students. However, none of refugees, permanent residents, or new Canadians attended the drop-in guided-survey on December 1st, 2017. At the end of this study, all confidential statistics were stored in a locked cabinet in the Faculty of Education's Graduate Chair's office.

**Validity**

The purpose of this study was to discover the obstacles that adult immigrant students have been facing, and to gain an insight into their unique needs regarding support services and programs at VIU. The survey was structured to discover the adult immigrant students’ needs with regards to aspects of gender and educational level that they completed in their original country. The vocabularies and sentence structures were reviewed and approved by the ELC Curriculum Coordinator in order to provide a clear and straightforward survey for the potential
participants. To validate the survey, the draft survey was pretested at ELC department with international students taking Academic Preparation level 3 to 5. The researcher had offered an English language guided-survey session in which the researcher assistant was available to assist participants to complete the paper based or web-based survey.

Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, Sweet, and Walters (2013) stated the immigrants’ decision on whether to attend post-secondary education (PSE) or work-related training is influenced by financial constraints, weak language abilities, culture-related gender expectations, unfamiliarity with educational culture, and family obligations. By asking immigrant students to identify their desire for new services and to rank their experiences with VIU services, the author would be able to discover students’ satisfaction towards current services and determine their needs for new support programs or services which could be offered by the administrators in the future. Also, by offering three types of survey (i.e., online, paper-based, and guided-survey), allowed the author of present study to recruit and to include different language levels of diverse immigrants on campus.

Statistical Techniques

As there are not many studies on Canadian immigrant students’ needs at the post-secondary education level, the author of the present study created a survey that sought to identify a variety of helpful services that are available at VIU for first generation adult immigrant students.

The survey was designed and created by using Google Forms. A survey link was created and provided to the potential participants (see Appendix A). The survey was analyzed in two stages: (1) as a whole, to see if there were any common needs for services; and (2) in groups by gender and educational level to indicate the specific needs for these groups. And the online responses were recorded using Google Forms and the researcher exported the summary of
responses from the Google form to a password-protected folder of the researcher. Results were shown through a variety of bar graphs and charts. Qualitative data that was obtained through short-answer questions was categorized into themes which were coded and entered into Excel spreadsheet. Graphics were also used to present the strategies and recommended services that immigrant students used and requested to manage their challenges. Some of the participants’ comments and opinions were directly quoted in this study.
Chapter 4: Research Findings and Results

Introduction

The present study was conducted to explore immigrant students’ needs regarding institutional support services and programs in order to overcome difficulties that prevent these students from completing their higher education at VIU. The term ‘immigrant students’ includes three categories of immigrants in the present study: refugees, economic immigrants (skilled workers and business people), and family class (dependents). International students who held study permits, visitor visas, or were in the process of applying for permanent resident status were not included in this study.

The object of this study was also to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success instead of struggling in a new educational system. As there was a high response rate (68%) in this study, it indicates the desire and enthusiasm of immigrant students to contribute to the future directions of their post-secondary education.

The findings of the present study could help to inform stakeholders to re-evaluate adult immigrants’ needs and provide them with an equal opportunity to succeed within the post-secondary educational system.

The main instrument of this present study was a survey designed to reveal immigrant students’ experiences and needs that they sought out after entering the Western post-secondary educational system (see Appendix A). This survey was used to identify and to compare what support services are needed by different gender and education groups. The filter function of Microsoft Excel allowed the data to be analyzed by gender and educational level. A question about educational level achieved was included to see if this level was a factor affecting the needs for various support services and programs. There were 16 questions in the survey which were
categorized into 3 sections. Four open-ended questions were provided in the last section for students to indicate their opinions and suggestions related to their educational needs at VIU.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

**Demographic information.** There were a total of 34 participants in this survey which comprised 25 females (73%), 8 males (24%) and one agender student (3%). ‘Agender’ refers to a person who was unwilling to identify themselves as either gender. Therefore, this student was excluded from the analysis of gender. The data was collected between October 25 and December 31, 2017. No student attended the guided survey or submitted the paper survey to the locked mailbox; instead, all students completed the online version of the survey. All 34 participants gave their consent and suggestions via the online survey in Google Form.

![Figure 1. Percentage of male and female participants (n=34).](image)

In order to distinguish the different needs for support between new Canadians and permanent residents/refugees in higher education setting, participants were asked to identify their status in Canada (Figure 2). In this study, immigrant students included refugees, Canadian
permanent residents, or new Canadians. Temporary residents such as international students were not included in this study. Among the thirty-three immigrant students, twenty-seven participants (82%) consisting of 21 females and 6 males identified themselves as either permanent residents (PR) or refugees. The other six participants (18%), 4 females and 2 males, had Canadian citizenship.

![Figure 2. VIU immigrant students' status in Canada.](image)

Participants were asked if they were VIU students. Twenty-nine participants (88%) indicated that they were VIU students, and four immigrant students (22%) responded that they were not VIU students (See Figure 3). However, these four non-VIU students revealed personal experiences of using VIU services and studying programs such as ESL or trade programs at VIU. As the voices and comments of immigrants are valuable, these four participants were included in the study even though they claimed they were non-VIU students in the survey.
In Question 3 of the demographic section, participants were asked if they were VIU graduate students (See Figure 4). The term of “graduate” is defined as students who have successfully completed certificates, diploma/degree or master programs at a higher education setting. Overall, eighteen respondents were VIU graduate immigrant students (55%) who were working in the community and fifteen were current immigrant students (45%).

In terms of gender, twelve female students had completed and graduated from ESL, trade, diploma/degree, or master programs; and thirteen female students were continuing students in the Fall 2017 semester at VIU. Six males had completed their certificates, diploma/degree, or Master programs, and two males were continuing students during the Fall 2017 semester at VIU.
Participants were asked if they had lived or studied in Canada before becoming a Canadian permanent resident. In order to provide helpful services for VIU immigrant students, the author of present study wanted to understand if immigrant students who were unfamiliar with Western culture and education system required more support than immigrant students who have studied in the Canadian education system.

In Question 4 of the demographic section, eleven females (33%) and two males (6%) said they had lived and studied in Canada as international students before obtaining a status of permanent residents or Canadian citizenship. Fourteen females (42%) and six males (18%) did not have previous Canadian education experiences when they arrived in Canada as permanent residents/refugees. Overall, as shown in Figure 5, thirteen participants (39%) have lived and studied in the Western educational system as temporary residents before changing their status to permanent residents or Canadian citizens. Twenty immigrant students (61%) had never previously lived and studied before in Canada.
In Question 5 of the demographic section, participants were asked to answer if they had completed a degree or gone to college in their original country. The purpose was to analyze if immigrant students who did not complete their higher education back home require different types of support services from immigrant students who have completed their degree/diploma from back home.

As shown in Figure 6, twenty-one female immigrant students (84%) had received a degree in their own country and four females (16%) did not take a degree. Six male immigrant students (75%) had completed their higher education and two males (25%) had not received a degree from their own original country. Overall, twenty-seven students (82%) had already received a degree or diploma from their original country before studying at VIU. Six students (18%) emigrated from their county to Canada without a degree.
Participants were asked to indicate programs that they had studied or were taking at VIU. The researcher was interested in discovering what most immigrants studied at VIU to join the workforce after upgrading their credentials in Canada. Most immigrant students studied 4-year business-related programs, followed by job-related trade programs.

Among the twenty-five female students, nine students were enrolled in 4-year programs, four students took certificate courses, three students studied 2-year diplomas, three students upgraded their English language skills, three were in Masters’ programs, two were ABE students, and one studied in an online program at VIU.

There were a total of eight male participants in the study. Three out of eight male students studied Masters’ programs, two students enrolled in 2-years diploma, and two students studied 4-years academic program. There was only one male studying a certificate program.

From the results of the survey, immigrant students who enrolled in the academic programs seemed to have higher language abilities and felt more comfortable to express their
comments and share their experiences in the study. There were only two ABE and three ESL students that participated in this study. When participants were asked “What program are (were) you studying at VIU?”, eight students who selected more than one programs in the survey had attended ESL, ABE, or both before enrolling their degree at VIU.

![Programs studied by VIU immigrant students.](image)

**Figure 7.** Programs studied by VIU immigrant students.

**Student experiences with VIU services analyzed by gender.** In section 2 of the survey, immigrant students were invited to express their experiences with VIU services through 5-point Likert scale questions. In the first question, participants were requested to rate the level of difficulty in completing the process of registering. The participants were asked to circle 1=not easy at all, 2=not easy, 3=fair, 4=easy, 5=very easy. The numbers were added and averaged for each service from the 33 responses. The average of responses was calculated where 1 was a low response and 5 was a high response. The results are shown in Figure 8.
Figure 8. Participant responses to 5-point Likert scale questions related to the level of difficulty in completing VIU registration process.

Overall, students indicated that completing admission applications, registering in academic courses, and communicating with staff had levels of difficulty between ‘fair’ and ‘easy’ with scores of 3.24, 3.32, and 3.24, respectively. However, there was no average score which was closer to the ‘easy’ score of 4 which suggests that all students need to double check that they have filled in the appropriate information correctly. Most students found balancing courses and work schedules was the most complicated; and all participants felt it was not easy to apply for financial aid, student loans, or scholarships at VIU.

In terms of gender, males reported that the level of difficulty in completing the VIU registration was ‘fair’ in all categories except when applying for financial aid, student loans and
OVERCOMING BARRIERS FACING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

scholarships (2.75). This suggests that male students feel that the registration process at VIU is relatively straightforward. Males felt most at ‘ease’ registering for academic courses (3.20) which could indicate males are generally comfortable on an online environment.

Females reported greater difficulty than males in most stages of the registration process with the lowest score recorded in the ability to balance their course and work schedules at 2.36. It is likely that many females looked at this question as the ability to balance their course schedules with the demands on the rest of their life (i.e., including family life) rather than just their work life. Applying for financial aid, student loans, or scholarships at VIU was the next lowest category at 2.64. Interestingly, females reported a slightly higher comfort level with understanding the Western education system than males at 3.08 compared to 3.00.

In Question 2 of section 2 of the survey, participants were asked to indicate the frequency of their visits per semester to various services at VIU campus. The question was designed not only to obtain the quality rating of VIU services, but also to gauge the awareness of these services on campus.

Figure 9 shows the average frequency per semester that immigrant students reached out to VIU Faculty and staff for support academically, socially, and emotionally. In order to calculate the average of the result, people who have never visited services scored zero, 1-2 times scored one, 3-4 times scored two, 5-6 times scored three, 7 and more times scored four.
Generally, there was a low level of usage of VIU services among immigrant students. Disability services and CEL were the least used by all the immigrant students with an average of 0.32 and 0.35, respectively. These scores suggest that most students never visit these services. It should also be noted that this could be because they either do not need the service or do not know of its existence. According to the results, the Upper/Lower Cafeterias were the most popular places for most immigrant students as they responded that they visited cafeterias over 4 times per semester at the average of 2.29. The Gym and the Academic Writing Centre are also
popular areas that immigrant students visited with an average of 1.41 and 1.12 times per semester. These results imply that immigrant students have a sufficient comfort level within these services to maintain their connections with their same ethnic groups for support or intend to extend their interactions with local students in a safe environment.

The frequency of visiting VIU cafeteria among both genders was similar at the average of 2.25 and 2.36. However, males appeared to manage their free time well between academic classes and liked to spend time in the VIU gym alone or with friends (2.38). It suggests that males tend to release their stress by exercising alone or with others, and thereby maintaining a healthy wellbeing physically and emotionally. Surprisingly, males had a higher rate (1.25) of visiting the VIU Counselling service compared to females (0.52). However, in many cultures, males are more cautious of disclosure or are more concerned about their privacy issues, so they prefer to receive support from professionals instead of family members or friends. In Figure 9, it shows male students used Academic Writing Centre on the average of 1.75 and it is almost double the average of females (0.96). This shows a level of comfort with the academic support system.

In term of females, the survey results indicated the average of visiting counselling services (0.52), advising (0.8), and academic writing (0.96) was low compared to males. It suggests that female immigrant students might have extensive social connections and tend to trust their own friends who can speak their own languages for support instead of talking with professionals.

In Question 2 of section 3 of the survey, participants were invited to evaluate how helpful these services were in meeting their needs from their personal experiences. The participants were asked to circle 1=very unhelpful, 2=unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4=helpful, 5=very helpful. The satisfaction of immigrant students with various VIU services is displayed in Table 1. The
participants circled ‘X’ for a statement that was not related to them. When students have never visited these specific services, it could indicate that the services were either not required by participants or the immigrant students were unaware of those certain services at VIU. In Table 1, the averages are calculated without students who selected “X”.

Table 1

*Immigrant Student Responses to Likert Scale Questions Evaluating Service Satisfaction by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average of VIU Service Satisfaction by Gender</th>
<th>All (avg.)</th>
<th>Female (n)</th>
<th>Female (avg.)</th>
<th>Male (n)</th>
<th>Male (avg.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advising Centre (n=30)</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Career Preparation (n=25)</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Service (n=25)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Service (n=18)</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Help-Desk (n=24)</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Writing Centre (n=24)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Centre for Experiential Learning (CEL) (n=17)</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Health and Wellness Centre (n=21)</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Gymnasium (n=29)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Upper and Lower Cafeteria (n=28)</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n values vary since participants could choose x (not related to them)

Overall, students expressed a satisfaction level close to ‘neutral’ (3.00) for most services except VIU Cafeteria, the Gym, and the Academic Writing Centre which had average scores closer to ‘helpful’ (4.00). This result correlated to the frequency of visits previously discussed. However, it could also suggest that current VIU services were perceived as not entirely meeting
immigrant students’ needs academically or emotionally. And, it implies that students might experience discomfort, uneasiness, or uncertainty at the thought of visiting these services.

In Table 1, males reported that they were satisfied with the services that they received from the VIU Gymnasium (4.29). It suggests that they feel relaxed in this non-academic environment. The Academic Writing Centre and the Advising Centre both had scores closer to ‘helpful with scores of 3.80 and 3.57, respectively. All other services scored averages in the neutral range.

Female immigrant students reported all services they received as “neutral” except CEL; although the average of frequency of visiting VIU services is under 1 visit as previously discussed (see Figure 9). They expressed a higher satisfaction level when visiting the Upper and Lower Cafeterias with an average of 3.8 which had an average closer to ‘helpful’ (4.00) than going to the gym with an average of 3.59. It suggests that they prefer to spend time with friends/classmates at the cafeteria, so they can share their stories or support each other emotionally in a calming setting.

**Future support services analyzed by gender.** Question 4 of section 2 was designed to explore the different types of support services that might benefit future immigrant students socially, emotionally and academically at VIU. Participants mostly evaluated the potential new services (Figure 10) positively and ranked them between (potentially) helpful and (potentially) very helpful.
Both females and males indicated similar needs for support services. However, male immigrant students showed higher enthusiasm than females for most of new services especially taking job related language programs and evenings/weekends ESL programs, joining intercultural exchange club, and having employment/internship services at VIU. Overall, the peer support and translation services on campus were less needed by the immigrant students compared to other services. This could suggest that immigrant students are satisfied to rely on their friends/classmates or community members for these services.
Surprisingly, males reported higher scores in wanting new support services in the areas of translation (4.25), immigrant intercultural exchange program (4.50), and new Canadian support group (4.38) compared to females with the averages of 3.92, 3.92, and 3.88 for the same new services (see Figure 10). It suggests that males might have difficulty finding people who can speak the same language, and lack of guidance and support from peers academically and socially on campus. On the other hand, females seem to receive language and culture support from their ethnic groups; and they are looking for “a physical space for socializing with other immigrant students” and “Canadian employment internship and job-related language program” with an average of 4.08.

In Question 5 of section 2, participants were given an opportunity to indicate the factors that would encourage them or might support them to continue their studies at VIU. The participants were asked to circle 1=very unhelpful, 2=unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4=helpful, 5=very helpful (see Figure 11). One of the goals of this study was to point to the types of services which could be helpful and supportive for immigrant student populations; and would provide a strategy for the institution to maintain or to increase student retention rate in the future. The participants were also invited to suggest services that would benefit immigrant students; however, no suggestions were received.

The survey results show that male immigrant students were looking for (1) a friendly and welcoming learning environment, (2) an equal opportunity and treatment from professors/staff, (3) an extra English language support, and (4) the feeling of inclusion and valued.

From the female immigrant students’ perspectives, they valued four support ‘services’ that support them equally to continue education at VIU. These were (1) a friendly and
welcoming learning environment, (2) an equal opportunity and treatment from professors/staff, (3) encouragement from people around them, and (4) the availability of financial support.

The common requests from both female and male immigrant students to continue their studies at higher education were (1) a friendly and welcoming learning environment, and (2) an equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Male (n=8)</th>
<th>Female (n=25)</th>
<th>All (n=33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from the same ethnic groups and peers</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and welcoming learning environment</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from people around you</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra English Language support (e.g. reading, writing skills)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of inclusion and valued</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of financial support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11.* Average helpfulness of factors for motivating immigrant students to study at VIU evaluated by gender.

**Student experiences with VIU services analyzed by education.** A total of 34 responses were collected between October and December 2017 through an online survey. The survey data was also examined by educational level in order to see if there are different needs between students who have completed a degree (n=28) and students who have not completed
degree studies from back home (n=6). The purpose is to understand if immigrants’ education level from back home plays an important role in seeking different support at the host country.

Participants were asked to indicate the frequency of reaching out to different services on campus. In order to calculate the average of the result, people who have never visited services scored zero, 1-2 times scored one, 3-4 times scored two, 5-6 times scored three, 7 and more times scored four.

From the results in Figure 12, most participants, whether they had received a degree from their original country or not, only visited the VIU services 1-2 times per-semester. The average of visiting the Academic Writing Centre and Counselling Services was slightly higher for students without degree from back home. Generally, the frequency of visiting VIU services was similar within these two groups; therefore, their educational level coming into VIU is not a factor in reaching out to VIU Faculty and staff for support.
Figure 12. Frequency of visiting VIU services per semester with regards to educational level from home.

Feedback on VIU services was also analyzed by students’ education entering VIU. Students who had never visited the specific services at VIU were given the choice of circling the statement “X=not related to you” in section 2 Question 3. The total number of students who had visited and evaluated the services is shown in Table 2. This table also shows the average response for each group of students.
Table 2

Immigrant Student Responses to Likert Scale Questions Evaluating Service Satisfaction by Education Level from Original Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with VIU services</th>
<th>Completed degree from original country (avg.)</th>
<th>Completed degree from original country (n)</th>
<th>Do not have degree from original country (avg.)</th>
<th>Do not have degree from original country (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advising Centre (n=31)</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Career Preparation (n=26)</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Service (n=26)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Service (n=19)</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Help-Desk (n=25)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Writing Centre (n=25)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Centre for Experiential Learning (CEL) (n=18)</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Health and Wellness Centre (n=22)</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Gymnasium (n=30)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIU Upper and Lower Cafeteria (n=29)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n values vary since participants could choose x (not related to them)

From the survey results, 15 students with a completed degree and 4 students without degrees had reached out for the services of disability; although, students’ satisfaction with disability department was “neutral”. Results suggest that immigrant students had been proactively seeking help and support in particular areas that might fit their needs at a new learning environment. Regardless, it indicates most immigrant students are familiar with the academic support services such as the Academic Writing Centre and IT help-desk (n=25), Academic and Career Preparation and Counselling (n=26) and the Advising Centre (n=31).
Overall, the satisfaction levels among students who had a completed degree and who do not complete degree from their country were relatively close for most services that they have received on campus (see Table 2). Most students from both groups selected “neutral” for the services they received at VIU campus except CEL and Counselling with an average of 2.93 and 2.83 which were “unhelpful”.

Students with a completed degree from home visited Advising Centre, the Gym, and Cafeteria, and their responses for these services were between “neutral” to potentially “helpful” with an average of 3.48 and 3.72. Students who had a completed degree in their home country were feeling generally more supported by the counsellors (3.30) compared to students without a degree from their original country (2.83). This could indicate that immigrant students who previously had higher education experiences may be open to try new strategies for their issues after talking with counsellors. On the other hand, immigrant students without previous higher education experiences from back home might expect to receive direct solutions and clear guidance from the counsellors and advisors from the disability services as they might not have the necessary resources to manage their problems.

In Question 4 of section 2, participants were invited to give their reaction for new support services and programs for new immigrant students at VIU. Their responses are shown in Figure 13. The students who had a completed degree suggested that most services would be helpful, especially job-related language program, new Canadian employment/internship, and advising services. However, the help-desk, peer support group, and translation services received the lowest level of support. Students without a completed degree from their home country believed all new services were helpful but having a physical space for socializing was slightly less important.
Figure 13. Average perceived helpfulness of new support services and programs for VIU immigrant students with regards to educational level from home.

The author of present study was expecting that the needs for new services/programs would be similar among 34 immigrant students who were taking ABE, ESL, trades, and academic programs at VIU. Since there were very few ESL and ABE students who participated the survey (Figure 7), it was difficult to analyze and compare immigrant students’ needs within various programs at VIU.

Most students desired to have a job-related language program, evenings/weekends ESL program, employment advising service, and a physical space to socialize and exchange cultures with other immigrants. One student from each of the 2 years and 4 years program replied “very unhelpful” to advising, translation, job-related language, and evenings/weekends ESL programs.
In Question 5 of section 2, participants were given an opportunity to indicate the other services that would encourage them or might support them to continue their studies at VIU. The participants were asked to circle 1=very unhelpful, 2=unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4=helpful, 5=very helpful (see Figure 14). The participants were also invited to suggest services that would benefit immigrant students; however, no additional suggestions were recorded.

![Figure 14](image-url)

*Figure 14. Average helpfulness of additional services that could motivate immigrant students to study at VIU with regards to educational level from home (n=34).*

Overall, regardless of educational level, the participants were very receptive to the new services suggested in the survey with average scores between 3.83 and 4.50. A score of 4 represents that this service was seen as potentially ‘helpful’, and a score of 5 was potentially ‘very helpful’.
The top three most important services that might motivate immigrant students with degrees from their original country were (1) equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff, (2) a friendly and welcoming learning environment, and (3) extra English Language support and encouragement from people around them.

Immigrant students without previous higher education experiences from their home country believed the (1) availability of financial support, (2) extra English Language support and encouragement from people around them, and (3) feeling of inclusion and being valued in a friendly and welcoming leaning environment would support them to continue their study effectively.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Both Sinacore and Lerner (2013) and Söhn (2016) indicated that although education is highly valued by the immigrant students, very few studies have been done on the subject of adult immigrants in post-secondary education. Bagnaill (2015) also stated that there is limited inquiry and research about adult immigrants’ sense of belonging and identity, and more studies have been done on international students. Therefore, section three of the survey consisted of four open-ended questions intended to discover the unique strategies that immigrant students use to resolve issues when services are not available to assist them on campus.

The participants were asked to provide their experiences of using VIU services and to have an opportunity to add their own ideas for new services without the limitation of Likert scale questions. The author of present study organized and categorized the keywords from all responses and combined them into themes. Some students expressed their unhappiness and dissatisfaction with staff or professors when responding to the open-ended questions on the survey while students with higher language abilities indicated more than one solution or strategy for managing their challenges.
According to some scholars, immigrant students can experience discrimination and racism from “…their white teachers, peers, administrators and counselors” who should be supportive (Shakar et al., 2013, p. 3918). From Questions 1 to 3 in section 3, students were asked how to manage the language barriers when they have difficulty explaining a problem to staff, when there are no suitable services to meet their needs, or if the staff were unable to solve their problems. The responses of most students indicated the presence of a cultural network either within VIU or outside VIU. Eleven female students and two male students reported that they asked friends/classmates for help, as their comments included:

“Ask other Canadian friends”
“Sought help from other students and experienced peer”
“Friend or relative who is able to speak and understand English”
“I was looking for a friend who has better English skill to help me”

Seven students asked for support from community members, for example:

“I can ask a social worker at our community.”
“I was looking for such services outside VIU.”
“I looked for a professional consultant”.
“An organization from my home country”.

At the other extreme, eight students wrote “not applicable” since they have no problems communicating with others:

“N/A I spoke fluent English”
“Does not apply as there was none”.

While other students demonstrated a certain degree of determination:

“I was OK, but I prefer to have someone available who speaks my language (...) in VIU”
“I had some difficulty to explain my problems but I explained slowly and clearly as I could not find any person who spoke the same language”

Perhaps, the most troubling response was:

“Nobody ever helped me with my employment issues. I had to go elsewhere.

Figure 15 illustrates what strategies participants used to solve their problems if there are no services available at VIU to fit their needs. The responses were similar to section 3 Question 1. Eight female students and one male asked friends/classmates for support; and two females asked family members for help, but none of the males used this strategy. Eight students searched the internet, six students asked their professors or staff, and six students looked for support from community workers. There were five females who did not respond to this question, and two females did not seek support from either the staff or their social networks.
Figure 15. Strategies used to solve problems when VIU services unavailable.

From the results, it demonstrated that most immigrant students have a supportive social network from their own ethnic groups and the community provides a safe welcoming environment for immigrants to achieve their goals.

Also, participants expressed their frustration and comments when they did not receive equal treatment from the VIU staff or professors. Some of the comments indicate that language and Canadian cultural knowledge are major obstacles to students:
“...students feel [the staff] is strict ... especially for those students who are from overseas and have language barriers.”

“I [used a] trusted community member who has the language proficiency, and Canadian cultural knowledge and experience to help explain, instruct, or give me guidelines on how to deal with situation.”

Only one student identified the teaching staff as problematic, but it is difficult to know whether language was the core problem or another issue.

“I felt hopeless and I did not know where to go.”

The last open-ended question invited all participants to provide their suggestions for any types of services that would help new immigrant students to continue their studies at VIU. They expressed their concerns and requested VIU to improve services to fit the needs of immigrant students especially for communication and cultural issues. Comments below are quoted from the participants’ personal experiences through the open-ended questions.

“We need someone to advocate for us because we come here with 1000 problems. If there is no support and professors act unfairly, we are overwhelmed and we feel hopeless.”

“Have translation service and advisor who can understand my request.”

“Adapted information written in simplified English.”

“I would suggest a course to know North American culture, something similar to ‘ask the questions to get your answer’ movement.”

Services recommended by VIU immigrant students are shown in Figure 16. Some students suggested more than one support services or programs. The top choice for both female and male students is to have language and intercultural support followed by “an immigrant helpdesk”, “an immigrant consultant”, and “financial aid” services. Eight participants did not provide any suggestions, but it could be due to their high language abilities and independence
since they have never encountered any unresolved issues. Or, they do not know what types of services would meet their needs since they are unfamiliar with the program content in the Western culture. Mentorship is another service recommended by seven students.

![Bar chart showing requested support services by VIU immigrant students.](chart.png)

**Figure 16.** Requested support services by VIU immigrant students.

Since there were insufficient responses that could be divided by educational level, analyzing responses within this category was not possible. However, as the results in Figure 12 show, educational level is not a factor in reaching out to VIU Faculty and staff for support, the results already described would still be applicable.

**Summary**

The data collected through both quantitative and qualitative surveys showed the demographics of participants, desired support services/programs, factors of motivation, and strategies that were used by immigrant students to manage their challenges in a higher education
environment. Through the findings, valuable feedback from current and graduated VIU students was discovered. The results provided important tools for the VIU administrators to consider and to implement a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for the diverse ethnic groups on campus. A discussion of the findings from this data is presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Research Overview

The purpose of this study was to discover the barriers that adult immigrant students face, and to gain insights into their unique needs regarding support services and programs at VIU. The survey was structured to discover the adult immigrant students’ needs with regards to aspects of gender and educational level that they completed in their original country. The research question was: What do Vancouver Island University (VIU) adult immigrant students report as the ‘support services’ that they need to be successful as examined by gender and educational level?

A survey (Appendix A) was designed and delivered via three methods: (1) an online survey, (2) a paper-based survey, and (3) a guided survey. All 34 participants provided their responses through the online survey. Unfortunately, no students attended the guided survey which was designed specifically to encourage both new refugees and new permanent residents to have their voices heard at VIU. There were three sections in the survey that were categorized into (1) demographics; (2) 5-point Likert scale questions for finding students’ needs for services; and (3) open-ended questions that gave students an opportunity to share their experiences and to provide suggestions for planning supportive services and programs at VIU. Immigrant students’ needs were then analyzed by both gender and educational level. Closed-ended survey responses were averaged and displayed in bar charts and tables or described in written form. Open-ended responses were categorized and coded for themes that are displayed in graphics or directly quoted in this study.

Among these 34 participants, there were 25 females (74%), 8 males (24%) and one agender student (2%). The low participation rate among male immigrant students could indicate that they came to Canada with professional skills and sufficient English language abilities, so
they showed less interest in participating in the survey. Another possible reason could be that immigrant males have to balance supporting their young family, improving communication skills in a new country, and enhancing their qualifications for employment, so lacked the time to participate.

Sponsored refugees who are under pressure of completing their training within a government-mandated one-year time limit may lack of time and energy to read the complicated consent letter or to understand the questions in the survey after finishing part-time work, taking care of their young family, or studying. The willingness in this group to participate was lower than expected especially if interpreters were not available.

From a gender perspective, Sadeghi (2008) claimed that immigrant women are struggling between “…their educational and vocational aspirations and culturally scripted roles and obligations” (p. 218). Anisef et al. (2010) reported “immigrant women are less likely to enroll in post-secondary education. However, this survey had a higher response rate from female respondents (73%) who were enrolled in higher education system than males. It may indicate the female immigrants came to Canada as dependents with parents, or they are the main primary caregivers to their children. They may feel the need for learning English to communicate with their children, to attend school activities, to understand laws/policies, or to volunteer in community events in order to support their elder parents or young children in a Western society.

As Anisef et al. (2010) discovered, female immigrants not only needed to deal with educational systemic biases such as gender-specific fields but also to adjust their own cultural perspectives to a new post-secondary structure. This study showed that females tend to continue their studying in Trades or 4 year business related academic programs (see Figure 7). Although, females are still expected to take care of their young family members, the results suggest they
have arranged their schedules wisely and are eager to improve their knowledge and skills despite facing a variety of barriers and challenges in their daily life.

Despite the lower than expected response rate from males and a higher response rate from the females, the participants reflect the variety of programs available to students at VIU, so the results are representative of the issues that many immigrant students face.

Discussion of Findings

The survey project was inspired by witnessing many Canadian newcomers who are struggling to adjust to different lifestyles, upgrade their credentials, and find professionally-related employment in their new community. Many studies (e.g., Beiser et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2010) have described that ethnic minority groups are not only struggling with language and integration difficulties, but also dealing with feelings of loneliness and prejudice in their new country (Makwarimba et al., 2013). A combination of these difficulties could result in students delaying their career goals by being reluctant to enroll or to continue their studies in higher education or more seriously dropping out school. Sinacore and Lerner (2013) discovered that “…very few services existed at the university that were designed to help students navigate challenges” (p. 81). Therefore, the discovery of the desires of adult immigrant students in this study will provide a means for the administrators and program directors to acknowledge and to plan a respectful, equal, and welcoming learning environment to support the diverse ethnic populations.

The results of this study will be discussed in terms of the four hypotheses that were put forward in this study, and with regards to two problem areas identified in the literature review in chapter 2, namely educational support and employment support.
Hypothesis 1 (H1) stated that most immigrant students are unaware of the possible financial support opportunities and are unfamiliar with the process of applying for scholarships within the institution. As shown in Figure 8, most participants felt it was not easy to apply for financial aid, student loans, or scholarships at VIU (AVG = 2.68). This is most likely due to the terms and vocabulary that are used on the application forms which are both not easy to interpret and unfamiliar. Hos (2016) described how “the lack of English proficiency makes it difficult for immigrant and refugee families to navigate the education system” (p. 480). From the survey, there is partial support for H1, but no barriers were identified that were specific to women.

In Figure 5, thirteen participants (39%) said they had lived and studied in the Western educational system as temporary residents before changing their status to permanent residents or Canadian citizens. They are likely young adult immigrant students and are likely to receive financial support from their family, so they may have experienced less stress or challenges than the mature students. On the other hand, twenty immigrant students (61%) had never previously lived and studied before in Canada. They may have limited knowledge about accessing resources and are unfamiliar with the Western educational systems and cultural expectations. They are more likely to have immigrated to Canada with young children or elder parents, so they would require more support socially, financially, and academically from the institution and community. This reinforces findings by Shankar et al. (2013), He, Bettez, and Levin (2017) and Nakhaie (2017). He et al. (2017) detailed that community resources would help refugees to achieve their educational goals and highlighted that ‘it takes a village’ to provide education (p. 972) for the immigrants and refugees.

Hypothesis H2 stated that the needs among ESL, ABE, trade, and academic immigrant students will be similar. As there were very few new current ESL and ABE students who participated the survey (Figure 7) and thirteen participants (39%) have lived and studied in the
Western educational system as temporary residents before changing their status to permanent residents or Canadian citizens (Figure 5), it was difficult to conduct analysis to address hypothesis H2.

Hypothesis H3 stated that a safe welcoming environment and a supportive social network from their own ethnic groups are available to immigrant students, so that they can graduate from VIU. From the open-ended questions in section 3, participants were asked what strategies they used to solve their problems when there are no services available at VIU to fit their needs. The results (Figure 15) demonstrated that most immigrant students have a supportive social network from their own ethnic groups and the community provides a safe welcoming environment for immigrants to achieve their goal which supports H3.

In Questions 1 and 2 of section 3, students were asked how they manage the language barriers and what strategies they used to solve their problems when there are no services available at VIU to fit their needs. Thirteen students (40%) reported that they asked friends or classmates for help when they encountered language barriers. The result is consistent with several studies. Juang et al. (2016) cited two studies undertaken in the mid-2000s by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco and Rodriguez et al., who found that “peer support was a better predictor of academic and psychological well-being than family support” (p. 382) especially for students in higher education settings.

From this study, it shows that most immigrants rely on their own friends and relatives to support them to become familiar with the new community. Since VIU does not provide translation services, students have been proactively looking for support from their own social circle or from the local immigrant settlement workers who provide the connections between the same ethnic groups. The author of present study has dealt with both immigrant and international
students for over 10 years at VIU International Educational department. From the author’s working experience with all ESL students and themes in the open-ended questions, most new ESL immigrant students are accompanied by a friend/relative when registering in ESL or ABE programs. They feel uncomfortable communicating with staff who may not understand their request and their language, or they have limited understanding of English. This is consistent to the findings of Nawyn et al. (2012) who found that some refugees felt anxious about their English communication skills and “… felt neglected … [if] they could not express themselves to staff…” (p. 267). These students trust their friends who understand their culture and speak the same language for support. Sinacore and Lerner (2013) discovered that immigrants who have social support and maintain a close relationship with their ethnic community tend to pursue post-secondary education. In 1984, Giddens used the expression ‘vehicles of power’ to describe the effect of social networks that provide immigrants access to resources, services, and job opportunity information (as cited in Nakhaie, 2017).

Figure 9 shows the usage of VIU services were generally very low since the average is either zero or around one, except for the Upper and Lower Cafeterias or the Gym. This could reflect that immigrant students do not feel that they need these services because they have their own supportive networks, but it could also mean that they do not know what these services offer. It is likely that the communication of these services, most likely through the VIU website, is at a level of English which makes it unclear to many immigrant students, so they just ignore these services.

The Cafeterias and the Gym provide a physical space for students to socialize, to relax and to support each other emotionally. From the results, it suggests that students are gathering in a common space to share life experiences with the same ethnic groups and to support each other academically, emotionally, or socially. This corresponds to research by Stebleton, Soria,
Huesman, and Torres (2014) who mentioned that providing a safe physical space can function “… as a form of symbolism and means of honoring tradition” (p. 200) for the immigrant students. In fact, when students were asked what additional services they desired, the results show an average of 4.06 (between helpful and very helpful) for having a physical space to socialize with others on campus (Figure 10).

Male students visited the Gym over 4 times per semester, but females only visited 1-2 times per semester which suggests that female students lack time for their own wellbeing. This could be because they have the responsibility of taking care of their young families after classes or complete school work between class times. However, it might also be attributed to a feeling of self-consciousness in a gym setting. For many women, there is a concern of being judged on what they are wearing and whether they fit in. This negative feeling tends to go across cultures; whereas, wearing shorts and a T-shirt for men is acceptable in virtually all cultures.

From the findings of the survey, males tend to seek help from professionals instead of friends/classmates which is the opposite of the female immigrant students. As there are power differences between students and counsellors/advisors, it may be threatening and intimidating for female students from some cultures. In addition, it could be due to their language barriers or the cultural attitudes for certain populations. For instance, Asian cultures tend to judge a person who visits a counsellor or disability service as ‘mentally challenged’; and the individual might lose self-esteem or worry about being rejected or isolated by the same ethnic group members in a new country. This is consistent with the findings of Sinacore and Lerner (2013) who cited a study by Calderwood et al. in which “immigrant post-secondary students may experience conflicts between the values of their native culture and the host country” (p. 70). Therefore, most immigrant students may be unwilling to visit counsellors for help due the negative reaction of their own community.
The final hypotheses (H4) stated that additional types of services and programs needed by immigrant students will be identified such as immigrant consulting services and occupational ESL part-time programs. In this study, males indicated the needs for peer support, translation program, and intercultural support from their same ethnic group, so they can extend their social interactions and expand their social network on campus (see Figure 10). As male immigrants seem to have limited social connections with others, it could be an additional reason why there were fewer males who participated in this survey – they were not informed about it by their peers.

By comparing the suggested new services in Question 4 of section 2 with the themes from the open-ended questions, mentorship is an additional type of service that was discovered through the study (see Figure 16). The survey suggested that immigrant students seek support, guidance and connections within their ethnic group while attending higher education to achieve their goals. Mendenhall, Bartlett and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017) revealed that peer support groups would allow the immigrants to meet others who could speak the same language to benefit them socially and academically.

Most students identified the most potentially helpful new support services at VIU as:

(a) a job-related language program and new Canadian employment and internship service (AVG = 4.18);
(b) a new immigrant advising service (AVG = 4.14);
(c) a physical space to socialize and exchange cultures with other immigrant students (AVG = 4.11); and
(d) evenings/weekends ESL programs, employment advising service and intercultural exchange club (AVG = 4.0) (see Figure 13).
This indicates that the reason immigrant students enroll in higher education is mainly for employment purposes and for improving their quality of life in Canada. As Tecle, Ha, and Hunter (2016) stated, many adult immigrants are forced to accept trade or low pay service employments since their knowledge and expertise remain ‘invisible’ to the host community. Therefore, it is encouraging to see immigrant students trying to improve themselves.

**Educational supports.** According to the Fall 2017 statistics, the English Language Centre at VIU had a total of 27 immigrant students who were studying ESL programs. However, there were only three ESL students (10%) who participated and expressed their concerns in this study (Figure 7). The low participation rate of ESL Immigrant may be due to their concerns with privacy, no energy after both school and part-time work, or no confidence with their own beliefs and language abilities. Kannon and Varghese (2010) identified that ESL immigrant students often held back from obtaining opportunities and resources because of their identity and abilities in English.

The challenge from the low participation from students with limited language abilities is that the needs of these individuals will continuously be unmet. Also, it is difficult to plan and implement an effective support service or to create a supportive learning environment for these individuals. When institutional policymakers are unaware of the needs of minority groups, immigrant students may face further unexpected barriers and continue to feel excluded from the community during their studies at higher education. Although Adamuti-Trache (2012) reported that there is no doubt that “…most immigrants … overcome language, cultural, and social barriers when entering new workplaces and communities” (p. 107), staff, professors, administrators also have to interact and to recognize cultural difference in order to support these diverse ethnic groups on campus. Indeed, Coutinho and Koinis-Mitchell (2014) indicated that when immigrant students perceive a sense of ethnic discrimination from their peers, advisors,
and professors, they become less interested in school and experience decreased academic motivation for higher education.

Surprisingly, many academic services were seldom used: students either never visited or only used most of the VIU services 1-2 times per semester (Figure 9). Twenty-seven participants (82%) had never used CEL which helps students within co-operative education and internship programs find work experience within their fields of study. However, as most immigrant students took business or trade-related courses, they may not have had direct need for the service of CEL. This suggests that students could be unaware of these services. However, when participants were asked about satisfaction with all VIU services, the average response was “neutral” although they seldom visited VIU services. This indicates immigrant students have a low level of comfort and satisfaction to revisit or to look for help from staff/professors after 1-2 visits. Responses may also reflect that some immigrants believe that if they create issues, there will be dire consequences (Shakar et al., 2013), so answering ‘neutral’ is a way of avoiding conflict.

In Figure 14, the results show that adult immigrant students who have completed higher education in their original country responded that receiving equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff (AVG = 4.36) would motivate them to continue studying at VIU more than the group without degree (AVG = 3.83). And the students who did not complete their degree from their original country denoted that feeling included and valued (AVG = 4.17) would encourage them to pursue their higher education in higher education more strongly than the group who had a completed degree (AVG = 3.96). As students were originally educated in different educational systems, most immigrant students encountered a variety of challenges, including different expectations from professors, different communication styles (either direct or
indirect), English word usages, expression of gestures/tones, social interaction skills, or thinking processes in Western universities.

One of the goals of this study was to identify the types of services and programs that may accommodate and support immigrant student populations effectively; and at the same time to provide a potential strategy for the institution to maintain or to increase student retention rates in the future. Figure 11 shows the feedback from immigrant students for new support services; a number of common themes for motivating students to continue their study at VIU were identified (see Figure 16).

Both female and male adult immigrant students proposed two services that would play significant roles in motivating and encouraging them to remain studying at VIU:

(1) a friendly and welcoming learning environment; and

(2) an equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff

The results reveal and suggest that most VIU immigrant students were not feeling welcomed or comfortable on the campus. When students feel excluded, unwelcomed, devalued, or ignored, they may lose self-esteem and motivation to complete their programs. As Shankar et al. (2013) found, experiencing unequal treatment in higher education can increase acculturative stress and decrease academic self-confidence for the immigrant students (p. 3911). In fact, as school is the first place for immigrant students to learn the local culture, it is essential to provide an equal and respectful learning atmosphere for the diverse ethnic groups. Barnhardt, Phillip, Young, and Sheets (2017) stressed that educational institutions need to encourage departments and administrators to create an inclusive and unbiased learning environment instead of expecting diverse immigrant students to adapt, to engage, and to change their personal attitudes or characteristics spontaneously.
Employment supports. In order to explore the different types of support services that might benefit immigrant students socially, emotionally and academically at VIU, participants were encouraged to select suggested services and to write down their recommendations in the open-ended section. Most participants evaluated the potential new services positively (Figure 10). The average of responses for males was generally higher than female students. Male immigrants indicated that all nine suggested new services would be between potentially ‘helpful’ (AVG = 4.0) and potentially ‘very helpful’ (AVG = 5.0), especially job-related language programs (AVG = 4.75), evenings/weekends ESL programs (AVG = 4.63), and an intercultural exchange club and new Canadian employment/internship services (AVG = 4.5) at VIU.

On the other hand, female students indicated five out of nine new suggested services that were helpful (4.0) for their needs. Results suggest that male immigrant students are primarily the financial supporters in most cultures, and they require more professionally-related language training to work in fields that they were trained in previously in their original country. From a 2013 study by Amanuti-Trache (2013), it was discovered that highly educated workers are generally under-employed or have low salary employment since “the Canadian labour market is not welcoming for immigrants” (p. 63). Similar findings were reported by Adamuti-Trache et al. (2013) who cited a study by Sweetman and McBride in which immigrants who “…come to Canada with foreign credentials in hand … [and] find that their qualifications do not ensure full-time employment in their fields of study” (p. 140). From the findings of this study, twenty-seven students (82%) have already received a degree or diploma from their original country before studying at VIU (Figure 6). Since many Canadian employers and government do not recognize foreign credentials and overseas working experience, both female and males need job-related language programs and employment/internship services from the higher education institution to become more successful.
Currently, many skilled immigrants are working in fields that are not related to their professions and are forced to work in the low paying service employments. For instance, the researcher has met physiotherapists, lawyers, or doctors from overseas who struggle to find a professional related job since their expertise and oversea credentials are unrecognized by the Canadian employers. They are working as cashiers, secretaries, home support workers, night cleaning staff, or nurses to survive in a new society. In fact, Shankar et al. (2013) have reported that fifty-two percent of skilled economic immigrants with university degrees are living in low income conditions.

In Figure 8, both female and male students claim that balancing course and work schedules are not easy. This result also suggests that immigrant students are looking for education-related and employment-related courses during the evening/weekends, but most higher educational institutions have few practical courses and somewhat inflexible training schedules for students who are working or need to support a family financially. In fact, Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, and Suarez-Orozco (2011) have pointed out that universities have fewer practical courses and are less able to accommodate immigrant students who are working or need to support a family financially.

The author of present study has processed many cases in which ESL students have had to withdraw from classes due to the conflict between class times and taking care of their young children or obtaining an employment opportunity. Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, Sweet, and Walters (2013) stated the immigrants’ decision on whether to attend post-secondary education (PSE) or work-related training is often influenced by financial constraints and family obligations.

The results of this study imply that adult immigrant students require language and intercultural support (Figure 16) to extend their social network and to feel included in the
Western higher education environment. The findings have also pointed to the direction of requiring more interactions, communication, and collaboration among students, staff, and professors on campus, so they can connect to each other and build positive relationships in the long term, so students would feel more supported and comfortable within the same community. As Söhn (2016) also indicated, “the interaction with native teachers and students can be an important part of the everyday incorporation process” (p. 194). Lenette (2016) stated that immigrants value higher education as the key to re-establish their dignity, safety and ambition to ensure well-being and socioeconomic integration and inclusion within their new community (p. 1311). Since schools are the main settings for immigrants to learn about new culture and to interact with local people, it is important for an institution to adjust its policies, to create curricula, to provide services that would support diverse learners academically or linguistically. After that, immigrant students would be able to upgrade their credentials and to contribute their knowledge and skills to benefit the society.

Limitations

In the study, some helpful and desirable support services and programs have been indicated by most of the current and graduated VIU academic students. One weakness of this study is that most current ESL students have limited communication and reading skills, so they were hesitant in participating in this study. In addition, a few potential female participants, especially refugees, may have required language assistance or permission from their partners who were concerned about their personal safety, so their voices were not heard. Culturally, males are expected to manage their own issues and to protect their family members. Therefore, they might not expect others or institutions to offer services that did not exist in the host country. Or, it can be due to their dignity, self-respect, or confidence in which they would become more resilient and independent in order to survive in new society. They focus on surviving and work
through the challenges themselves instead of creating problems which might affect their status. As a result, the male immigrant students who especially have young family members may have been reluctant to participate in the survey.

As a result, their specific challenges and needs are still unrevealed from this study. Also, since this study was only conducted through survey, the author of present study was unable to clarify the comments from participants or to have deeper understanding of each individual’s frustrations regarding their cultural values and believes.

There were five limitations and threats to validity identified by the author of this present study. First, when the participants submitted online survey, it was difficult to verify if the answers to the questions were from their own experiences or from their relative’s point of view. Some participants likely received assistance from friends or relatives to understand the questions and to express their needs. Second, the researcher was unable to confirm if the online survey responses were from VIU graduates or current students since the meaning of “graduates” can be interpreted as graduated from ESL/ABE program but they are continuously taking job-related or master program during the survey by immigrant students.

Third, the volunteer participants were most likely to have a better understanding in English language and to have more outgoing personalities than the non-participant new immigrant students. They could also be more self-reliant, independent, and resourceful with VIU registration systems than the new adult immigrant students who might feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the new educational environment. So, the data might not reflect new adult immigrant students. For adult immigrant students, who grew-up in certain cultural backgrounds, collaboration is more important than expressing their individual needs and opinions. In the end, their voices might not be acknowledged in the survey. The fourth limitation in this study was that the researcher might misjudge or misunderstand the words that participants used in the
survey. Since English vocabulary contains many different meanings in different concepts for new English learners, the author of the present study might interpret the information differently than the participant intended. The fifth limitation in this study was that the researcher was unable to determine if the participants’ reading comprehensive skills were strong enough to fully comprehend the questions that were asked in the survey.

**Recommendations**

As immigrants consist of three streams: economic (e.g., self-employed), family (e.g., family sponsorship), and humanitarian (e.g., refugee), their challenges and needs for support are different from each other. In this study, the focus is on finding appropriate support services for the first generation of adult immigrant students at a higher education setting, so they can have a sense of belonging and become more successful in their new country. From the findings of this study, it appears that immigrant students’ educational levels from their original country are not a factor for requesting different support services in the host country.

Even though the immigrant students received support from friends/classmates or community members, Sinacore and Lerner (2013) found that “new immigrants rely on immigrant peers and relatives, which may “result in students being misinformed and not integrating into the university environment” (p. 81). Barnhardt et al. (2017) believed that when staff and administrators show professional abilities and considerate attitudes, it would provide effective and positive outcomes for minority immigrant students academically at higher education. The researchers recommended campus staff to provide resources professionally and to broaden procedural support accordingly to “…create a welcoming and supportive campus climate” (Barnhardt et al., 2017, p. 2) for immigrant students.
To provide reliable resources and create a sense of inclusiveness, to ensure immigrant students’ confidentiality, and to reduce misinterpretations, the author of present study recommends that VIU administrators employ a culturally sensitive Intercultural Affairs Coordinator to advocate for immigrant students’ academic and emotional well-being on campus. The VIU Intercultural Affairs Coordinator would coordinate the new support services identified by the survey participants:

1. a job related language program;
2. new Canadian employment and internship services;
3. new Canadian help-desk; and
4. an advising service.

To assist immigrant students to apply their skills and knowledge after upgrading their credentials, a non-judgmental and culturally sensitive Intercultural Affairs Coordinator could offer interview workshops, provide practical community services resources, and create networks for them to meet potential ethnic employers. It would also be helpful to produce a directory of community resources in different language versions with pictures and icons online or hardcopies, so students could quickly integrate with the local community.

Although most Canadians treat refugees and immigrants respectfully, prejudgments can still exist in people’s facial expressions and attitudes unintentionally. In this study, it was revealed that most adult immigrant students desire to learn knowledge in a friendly and welcoming environment and would like equal opportunity and treatment from staff/professors. For instance, when teachers are welcoming and participate in the students’ cultural events, it would make the students feel valued and respected. Encouraging peer support and sharing life experiences with others would create a sense of belonging to the immigrant students as well. By
encouraging students to participate in school activities or volunteer on campus, they could build a bridge to connect with local people and community.

Also, immigrant students are looking for mentorship services and programs that are job-related language courses during evenings and weekends, so they can upgrade their credentials and support their family financially at the same time. Providing social connection services is the most important factor that has been mentioned by most ESL instructors at Vancouver Island University (VIU). They believe that new immigrant students need to be proactive and willing to join different social clubs and community events to learn the new culture and to integrate with diverse immigrants who could share and support each other (S. Kimoto, personal communication, November 02, 2017; W. Moore, personal communication, November 02, 2017). As most immigrant students are highly educated from their original countries, the institution could create a Technical Language Skill Based program that combines the expertise of technical fields such as IT, mathematical, or scientific tasks and English language learning.

It is suggested that a future study include different age groups, ethnic groups, and types of immigrants to identify their specific needs among different generations and cultural backgrounds. Since every individual holds their own cultural beliefs and values, it is helpful to acknowledge their unique perspectives and needs for providing effective immigrant services on campus. Moreover, since the Canadian immigration program selects highly educated professionals, it would be helpful to further research types of programs and courses that are needed by these diverse ethnic groups, so they can apply their professional knowledge and skills that they gained from back home to benefit both their own ethnic members and the local community in the host country. In addition, a future study on “educational equality at higher educational classrooms” is recommended since there are many studies on children and youth but only limited research on adult immigrant students in the post-secondary classroom.
Conclusion

The British Columbia Ministry of Education announced free tuition for Canadian immigrants to study ESL courses in the province effective September of 2017. Ironically, it has become an issue for many institutions since they are unable to generate revenue by accepting immigrant students. Therefore, many new immigrant students are on the waiting list which would unquestionably affect the sponsored refugees who are under pressure to complete their training within the one-year time limit. Furthermore, some colleges have canceled ESL programs since they lack the government funding to hire ESL instructors for the immigrant students.

An additional problem arises when immigrants change their status from permanent residents to Canadian citizens: they are not qualified to receive certain services or take ESL courses at local community centres such as Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS). They are sent to VIU to study higher level English courses, but the seats are limited. They are trapped between the educational policies and government support system. This situation has increased their anxiety and insecurity since they are not guaranteed to enroll in the ESL programs at VIU. The notion of receiving an equal educational opportunity and respect has become a question mark for the immigrant students. Jackie Foster, one of the ESL instructors at VIU, said that “it is our social responsibility to reduce the gap in receiving education for the immigrant students” (J. Foster, personal communication, November 5, 2017).

Immigrants and refugees should have equal rights to access the resources without facing discrimination, judgment, and unfairness due to the lack of government funding and budget cuts. Without having the opportunities to study ESL at VIU or CVIMS and to receive the necessary support services, it has created more barriers for immigrant students to complete their higher education, to join the workforce, and to integrate with Canadian society successfully. Through
the findings in this study, the author of present study hopes the stakeholders would consider developing new programs and establish effective support services that contain the concept of globalization and equality to help alleviate discrimination and prejudice in society. Educational institutions and communities could work together to enable the support services and programs that are critical to assist immigrant students to achieve their goals and to succeed in their new homeland.
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APPENDIX A
SURVEY

“Overcoming Barriers that Prevent Immigrant Students from Completing Post-Secondary Education”

Have your voices heard about your NEEDS
Ctrl + Click to follow the link below
https://goo.gl/forms/Etz2KTDHjffQ1JeF2

What Types of Services Do VIU Refugee and Permanent Resident Students Need to be Successful?

Please circle the letter that applies to you for the following questions.

Section One: Demographic (7 questions)

1. Are (were) you a permanent resident or refugee?
   a) Yes    b) No

2. Are (were) you a student at VIU?
   a) Yes    b) No

3. Are you a VIU graduate student?
   a) Yes    b) No

4. Did you live and study in Canada before becoming a Canadian permanent resident or Canadian citizen?
   a) Yes    b) No

5. Did you complete a degree or college in your original country?
   a) Yes    b) No

6. What is your gender?
   __________
7. What program are (were) you studying at VIU?
   a) 2 year diploma (e.g., IT, Social Services, Dental Hygiene, Tourism, PDDB)
   b) 4 year Bachelor program (e.g., BBA, B.Ed.)
   c) Adult Basic Education (ABE)
   d) Certificate (e.g., Trades and Applied Technology programs, Health Care, Dental Assistant, Event Management, Support Worker)
   e) English As a Second Language (ESL)
   f) Master degree
   g) Online/distance courses

Section Two: The Needs for Services (5 questions)

1. Please rank how easy the process was when registering at VIU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = not easy at all, 2 = not easy, 3 = fair, 4 = easy</th>
<th>Circle a Number per statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A To complete VIU application for Admission</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B To register for academic courses</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C To apply for financial aid, student loan, or scholarship</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D To balance course schedules and work schedules</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E To communicate with VIU staff about your needs</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F To understand the Western educational system</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How often did you visit the services below every semester?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = never, 2 = one – two times, 3 = three – four times, 4 = five – six times, 5 = seven times and more</th>
<th>Circle a Number per statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Advising Centre (located at Bldg. 200)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Career and Academic Preparation Service (Located at Bldg. 205)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. How helpful were the VIU services provided below in meeting your needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1= very unhelpful, 2= unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4= helpful, 5= very helpful, X= not related to you</th>
<th>Circle a Number per statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Advising Centre (located at Bldg. 200)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Career and Academic Preparation Service (Located at Bldg. 205)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Counselling Service (Located at Bldg. 200)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Disability Service (Located at Bldg. 200)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>IT help-desk (Located at Bldg. 305)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Academic Writing Centre (Located at Bldg. 305)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>The Centre for Experiential Learning (CEL) (Located at Bldg. 310)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>VIU Health and Wellness Centre (Located at Bldg. 200)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VIU Gymnasium (Located at Bldg. 190)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>VIU Upper and Lower Cafeteria (Located at Bldg. 300 and Bldg. 185)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How helpful do you think the following NEW services would be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1= very unhelpful, 2= unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4= helpful, 5= very helpful</th>
<th>Circle a Number per statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Advising service for new immigrant students</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A physical space for socializing with other immigrant students</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>New Canadian Help-Desk</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>New Canadian peer support group</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>New Canadian employment &amp; internship service</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Immigrant Intercultural Exchange Club</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Translation service</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evenings / weekends ESL Program</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Job-Related Language Program</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How would the services below encourage you to continue your studies at VIU?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1= very unhelpful, 2= unhelpful, 3=neutral, 4= helpful, 5= very helpful</th>
<th>Circle a Number per statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Availability of financial support</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Ability to work part-time and study at the same time</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Feeling of inclusion and valued</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Extra English Language support (e.g. reading, writing skills)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Encouragement from people around you</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Equal opportunity and treatment from professors and staff</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Friendly and welcoming learning environment</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Support from the same ethnic groups and peers</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other services:
Section Three: Open-Ended Questions (4 questions) Please use the back of the paper if needed

1. If you had difficulty explaining a problem to VIU staff, how did you find a person (who spoke your language) to help you?

2. How did you solve problems if there were no services that fit your needs at VIU?

3. Who did you ask for help when a VIU staff member was unable to provide the services that you needed?

4. Please suggest any type of services that would help new immigrant students to continue their studies at VIU.

Thank you so much for your valuable time and opinions that you provided in this survey.

Please DO NOT indicate your name. This survey is completely voluntary and nameless.

When you submit this survey, I have your consent to participate in this educational research and your information may be included in this study’s results. Please be advised that information stored outside of Canada may be accessed by the US Department of Homeland security through the Patriot Act.

If you are interested in participating guided survey and requesting more information about the process, please contact me. If you have any concerns about your involvement in this study, please contact VIU Research Ethics Board.

Please place the completed survey in the addressed envelope provided and drop it off in the locked box in Bldg. 255. The survey is available until Friday, December 29, 2017.
APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Rebecca Lin, Researcher
Master of Education
Vancouver Island University
Rebecca.lin@viu.ca

My name is Rebecca Lin and I am presently an Administrative Assistant to the Associate Dean in the International Education Department at Vancouver Island University (VIU). I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Education in Educational Leadership (MEDL) program at VIU. My research, entitled “Overcoming Barriers that Prevent Immigrant Students from Completing Post-Secondary Education”, focuses on discovering the needs of Canadian immigrant students in terms of institutional support services, in order to assist them to be successful at VIU.

If you are an immigrant, who either is attending or have attended VIU, you are invited to participate in this study. There are 16 questions in the survey, and it should only take 10 -15 minutes to complete. If you are interested, you can complete an online survey by clicking the link below or scanning the Quick Response (QR) code indicated on the top of this letter. https://goo.gl/forms/Etz2KTDHjffQlJeF2. Your participation is completely voluntary and nameless, and you may stop the survey at any time without giving any reason and explanation.

If you would like to have your voices heard, paper-based survey forms and consent letters are also available at Bldg. 255 Room 175. Please read the enclosed consent letter and return the completed survey in the provided addressed envelope and drop it off in the locked box in Building 255 at VIU. I recognize that you might face mental distress due to the difficulty in understanding the questions or using English words to express your opinions effectively. You might also feel frustrated due to the limited English vocabulary. You can visit ELC Language coaches or Learning Centre teachers at Bldg. 255 Room 175 for emotional and language support.
if you need it. A special drop-in guided survey will be available on Friday, December 1st, 2017, 9:30-11:00 am if you prefer to have assistance from a research assistant to complete the survey. The researcher recognizes that when the participants attend the drop-in guided survey or ask for help from ELC Learning Centre and researcher assistant, they can be identified as participants. The research assistant who assists during the drop-in guided survey will not disclose who completed the survey.

All completed surveys are confidential, and can be only accessed by my research supervisor and myself. Although I work in the Associate Dean’s office, I have no power over what supports you receive, your admissions or your grades. Since your participation is anonymous, I will not know that you participated. The support that you have received or will receive from VIU will not be affected by either your participation or your responses. If you are completing the online survey, please be advised that information stored outside of Canada may be accessed by the US Department of Homeland security through the Patriot Act.

This research will be shared in the form of a presentation and thesis as part of the requirements for a MEDL degree. The findings from this study will be shared with Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, VIU colleagues, and professors. If you require more information about this research, please contact me.
APPENDIX C
Masters of Education in Leadership – Survey Info Session
Wednesday, October 25, 2017
12:30 pm – 1:30 at Bldg. 355 Rm 211 (refreshments provided)

Are you an immigrant Student?

What Support Services Do You Need to be Successful at VIU?

Have Your Voice Heard...

Immigrant students include refugees, permanent residents, and new Canadians.

The purpose of this research project is to focus on discovering the needs of Canadian immigrant students in order to assist them to become more successful at VIU.

The object of this study is also to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success.

Scan the Quick Response (QR)
Code above or follow the link below
https://goo.gl/forms/Etz2KTDHjfQlJe

Drop-in guided survey for ESL student
Dec. 1st, 9:30- 11:00 am @ Bldg. 255

Researcher: Rebecca Lin
VIU immigrant students are invited to participate the Educational Survey by taking a picture of QR code below

What Support Services Do You Need to be Successful?

Immigrant students include refugees, permanent residents, and new Canadians.

Have your Voices Heard

by accessing QR code or the link below
https://goo.gl/forms/Etz2KTDHjjfQlJeF2

Drop-in guided survey for ESL students
Dec. 1st, 9:30 - 11:00 am @ Bldg. 255

The purpose of this research project focuses on discovering the needs of Canadian immigrant students in order to assist them to become more successful at VIU.

The object of this study is also to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success.

Masters of Education in Leadership

Rebecca Lin
Tel: (250) 740-6318
APPENDIX E
SCRIPT FOR RECRUITMENT SPEECH

“Overcoming Barriers that Prevent Immigrant Students from Completing Post-Secondary Education”

Rebecca Lin, Researcher
Master of Education
Vancouver Island University
Rebecca.lin@viu.ca

Dr. Rachel Moll, Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
(250) 754-3245 Local 2161
Email: Rachel.Moll@viu.ca

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to present my research project during your busy schedules. My name is Rebecca Lin, and I am currently working at the English Language Centre (ELC) as an Administrative Assistant. As a front line support staff, I provide program information and the registration process for both international and domestic students regularly. As I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Education at VIU, I have had an opportunity to explore and to design a research project that would allow me to learn what support services are needed in order to help current and future immigrant students.

During my working experiences with immigrant students, I noticed that they often rely on their friends or relatives to help them to understand various programs and the registration process due to their language barriers. As an immigrant myself, I am interested in discovering the needs of new Canadian immigrant students that include permanent residents and refugees in order to assist them to feel included and supported academically and emotionally. So they could become more successful at VIU.

The purpose of this study is to provide a chance for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to recognize their needs for success instead of struggling in a new educational system. Immigrant students are invited to join me to find out what kind of services that would best help you and might benefit your relatives or friends in the future. It is very important to learn from your experiences in order to develop VIU support services.

I recognize that potential participants might face mental distress due to the difficulty in understanding the questions or using English words to express their opinions effectively. They might also feel frustrated due to their limited English vocabulary. Your participation is
completely voluntary and nameless, and you may stop the survey at any time without giving any reason and explanation. The support that you have received from VIU will not be affected by either your participation or your responses. If you feel uncomfortable to answer an open-ended question(s), you can skip these questions.

However, please be advised that information stored outside of Canada may be accessed by the US Department of Homeland security through the Patriot Act.

If you are interested in providing your valuable suggestions and ideas, please pick up an educational survey bookmark for accessing the online survey link and the Quick Response (QR) code at the Learning Centre (Bldg. 255 Room 175). There are 16 questions in three sections, and it would only take 10-15 minutes. The paper copies of the survey and consent forms are also available at the Learning Centre.

If you need help to understand the questions, please visit the ELC Language coaches or Learning Centre teachers for support. Please keep the blue consent form and return the completed survey paper in the addressed envelope and drop it in the locked box at Bldg. 255.

A drop-in guided–survey session will be scheduled on Friday, December 1st, 2017 which is the last of day of the FALL semester. The research assistant, Ami Robinson, will be available to assist and support you during the guided-survey. The specific location and time will be posted outside of the ELC Learning Centre in mid-November for your convenience. Please be aware that your participation will not remain anonymous if you attend the drop-in guided survey since the research assistant will see and assist the participants at the lab. However, the research assistant will not disclose to the researcher who attended the drop-in survey.

Since the survey is anonymous and your responses cannot be identified, you will be unable to withdraw from the study after submitting the survey. By submitting the online survey or the paper-copy survey in the addressed envelope, you are giving consent for the information collected to be included in the research project. If you have any concerns about your involvement in this study, please contact VIU Research Ethics Board. You are also welcome to contact me at (250) 740-6318 if you have any questions about this research.

Your ideas and comments on supporting immigrant students are much appreciated. Please encourage current and graduated immigrant students to have their voices heard. Your suggestions can make a big difference for the future immigrant students at VIU. Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to receive your comments and ideas to improve support services for VIU immigrant students.
APPENDIX F

LETTER OF CONSENT

“Overcoming Barriers that Prevent Immigrant Students from Completing Post-Secondary Education”

Rebecca Lin, Researcher  
Master of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
Rebecca.lin@viu.ca

Dr. Rachel Moll, Supervisor  
Faculty of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
(250) 754-3245 Local 2161  
Email: Rachel.Moll@viu.ca

My name is Rebecca Lin and I am presently working as an administrative assistant at English Learning Centre (ELC) at Vancouver Island University (VIU). While working at the Faculty of International Education as a front support staff, I have seen and witnessed many skilled and intelligent immigrants who struggle with family, schooling, financial, and employment issues. As I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Education at VIU, I have had an opportunity to explore and to design a research project that would allow me to learn what support services are needed in order to help current and future immigrant students.

It is very important to learn from your experiences in order to develop VIU support services. Your provided information would potentially assist immigrants in becoming more successful during their studying.

To participate and share your ideas in this study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous survey about your experience using VIU services. There are 16 questions in three sections, and it should only take 10-15 minutes. You are invited to have your voices heard by completing either a paper-based or online survey or by attending the drop-in guided survey. You can pick up paper-based survey and consent forms at Bldg. 255 Room 175 and ask for language support from the Learning Centre instructors at the same location if needed. Please return the completed survey in the provided addressed envelope and drop it off in the locked box in Building 255 at VIU. You can also complete an online survey by scanning the QR code on the top of this letter or by following the link below https://goo.gl/forms/Etz2KTDHjffQ1JeF2. The survey is
available until Friday, December 29, 2017. Please be advised that information stored outside of Canada may be accessed by the US Department of Homeland security through the Patriot Act.

I recognize that you might face mental distress due to the difficulty in understanding the questions or using English words to express your opinions effectively. You might also feel frustrated due to the limited English vocabulary. You can visit the ELC Language coaches or the Learning Centre teachers for emotional and language support if you need it. A special drop-in guided survey will be available on Friday, December 1st, 2017 if you prefer. The researcher recognizes that when the participants attend the drop-in guided survey or ask for help from ELC Learning Centre and researcher assistant, they can be identified as participants to the research assistant and to other participants. However, the research assistant will not disclose to the researcher who attended the drop-in survey.

The survey data, which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, can only be accessed by my research supervisor and myself. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All data will be deleted and shredded three years after completion of the research (April 2021).

The results of this study will be presented at the MEDL conference in the spring of 2018. This thesis paper may also be published online at the VIU and Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS), and VIU Student Affairs.

Your participation is completely voluntary and nameless, and you may stop the survey at any time without giving any reason and explanation. Although I work in the Associate Dean’s office I have no power over what supports you receive, your admissions or your grades. Since your participation is anonymous I will not know that you participated. The support that you have received or will receive from VIU will not be affected by either your participation or your responses. If you do not feel comfortable to answer an open-ended question(s), you can skip these questions.

By completing the online survey or submitting the hard-copy survey in the addressed envelope, you are giving consent for the information collected to be included in the research project. Since the survey is anonymous and your responses cannot be identified, you will be unable to withdraw from the study after submitting the survey.

If you are interested in participating guided survey and requesting more information about the process, please contact me at (250) 740-6318. If you have any concerns about your involvement in this study, please contact VIU Research Ethics Board.
APPENDIX G
INFO SESSION TEXT FOR VIU DIGEST & WEEKLY EVENTS

Permanent residents, refugees, and new Canadians are invited to participate in the Masters of Education in Leadership Survey Info Session on Wednesday, October 25, 2017. 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm at Bldg. 355 Rm 211 (refreshments provided)

What Support Services Do You Need to be Successful at VIU?

Have your Voices Heard

The purpose of this research project: to discover the needs of Canadian immigrant students in order to assist them to become more successful at VIU.

The object of this study: to provide an opportunity for immigrant students to have their voices heard and to acknowledge their needs for success.

MEDL Researcher: Rebecca Lin