

An Examination of Discrimination Faced by Immigrant Indian International Students in Canada

Discipline: Sociology

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Abstract

Student migration into Canada has increased substantially over the past few years. Despite many people migrating to Canada, discrimination experienced by international students often remains poorly documented and examined. This article examined these conditions from an academic and experience-based view in the form of a case study analysis, based on secondary data. Analysis of these conditions over the past 7 years revealed significant changes, and concerning conditions in the Canadian settings, where international students' experience of discrimination in various forms is on the highest side of the scale, despite universities, national and state governments having various regulations in place. Despite some positive developments, discrimination remains at large, among international students, both in university settings and social settings. Discussions followed current academic evidence and practical evidence identified in this context, and recommendations were drawn from this evidence.

Keywords: Immigration, Migrant students, Discrimination, Canada

1. Introduction

There has been a constant flow of international students and student migration to Canada over the past few years. Between 2019 and 2023, study permits allocated by Canada increased from 6,37,780 to 10,40,985 (TOI Education, 2025). Despite constant changes happening to immigration policies, student immigration has seen a continuous rise in Canada (TOI Education, 2025). As of 2024 statistics, Canada hosted more than one million international students in 2023. This has also triggered new changes in terms of protecting students from labour exploitation (Isai, 2024), indicating how immigrant students, especially are exploited in foreign countries. Despite popular claims, at least one-third of the people living in Canada have experienced discrimination in one form or

the other (Government of Canada, 2024). This article looks at these events from the lens of international students, in the form of a narrative literature review of these issues.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the discrimination faced by international students in Canada
- To critically discuss current regulations and policies aimed at curbing discrimination in Canada
- To make recommendations on how to reduce racial and other forms of discrimination experienced by international students in Canada.

2.1. Significance of the Study

As student migration is on the rise in many Western countries, including Canada, the USA, and most of Europe, understanding the issues faced by international students in these regions is essential. Canada being a major destination for migrant students from countries like India, assessing these situations reporting them, and articulating current academic debates surrounding these conditions is important in bringing attention and awareness among academic communities, as well as aspiring students. This can help in further educating students and even shedding light in the right direction for new policy development to limit and prevent discrimination of students in racial or any other forms.

3. Materials and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research design followed here is a secondary data study, following a descriptive research design.

3.2. Data Collection

The data collection strategy employed collecting published academic articles from various journals and secondary data collected from online sources, related to the research problem. Articles were selected based on their primary focus on immigrant students, and discrimination conditions they experience, within the context of Canada.

3.3. Study Area

The study area focused specifically on Canada, immigrant students, and discrimination of various forms.

3.4. Tools and Techniques

The study followed a qualitative methodology. Hence, the method of analysis used was a case study analysis, by discussing current academic debate under various themes, coupled with real evidence collected from secondary sources, like News Articles, and Government publications.

4. Results

4.1. Concept of Discrimination and its Effects on Migrant Students

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals in the same situation, same society, or same settings based on one or more characteristics that differentiate them from the rest (Fibbi, Midtbøen& Simon, 2021). While this simplistic view often encompasses the underlying factor, the concept of discrimination is multifaceted, mainly because it is a matter of comparison, and it is also a matter of favourable and unfavourable treatment of different groups of people (Fibbi, Midtbøen& Simon, 2021). Another key factor associated with discrimination in this case is the concept of intersectionality, which is the view that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, ability, age etc. create complex social inequalities (Fibbi, Midtbøen& Simon, 2021). Some of the consequences associated with students' experiences of discrimination include but are not limited to issues with developing relationships, poor behaviour, poor academic performance, limited development of academic competence, and overall lower life satisfaction, not to mention the heightened risks of substance abuse among those experiencing such events (Metzner et al. 2022).

4.2. Discrimination in Canada

Current data relating to students' experiences in Canada in general shows a significant level of discrimination experienced by people from racial and ethnic minorities (see Figure 1). Even though students expressing individual experiences have remained somewhat low, there is a general understanding of such type of discrimination among students at large, and most students have also agreed this is a factor they come across (Angus Reid Institute, 2021).

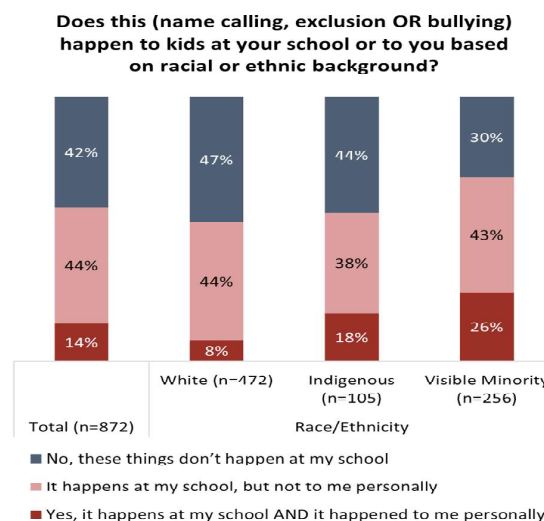


Figure 1 - Students experiencing discrimination in Canadian settings (Source: Angus Reid Institute, 2021)

Likewise, a study conducted by Saunders, Guan, Macpherson, Lu & Guttmann (2020) also found that discrimination, including physical assaults faced by immigrants in Canada, did not reduce, depending on the time they spend in the country. As per 2019 polls conducted on a similar issue, Canadians suggested racism is not a major problem needing considerable attention (Abedi, 2019), while statistics indicate otherwise. Students have experienced a strong level of psychological distress after immigrating to Canada (Firat & Noels, 2021). Many of these issues have been associated with cultural distancing and cultural differences. Major issues identified in this case Monoculturalism, which is a major approach to cultural thinking where people identify with a single culture, and it may cause conflict among others, especially when people are not ready to understand and identify other cultures or their existence (Firat & Noels, 2021). In comparison, hybrid cultural thinking shows a blend of multiple cultures and identities, thereby developing a sense of compatibility between two or more such cultural identities (Firat & Noels, 2021).

Current data clearly shows international students experiencing discrimination at schools/universities and workplaces, especially in hiring processes, and even experiencing biased decisions and engagement at work (Le & Sarwar, 2024). According to the observations made by Le & Sarwar (2024), part of these issues was due to the differences in languages, and the barriers they presented, in addition to the cultural differences that affected how well employees, employers, or colleagues were able to work together. These were identified to be a major issue faced by international/migrant students because they often gain very limited time to adapt to foreign settings and are often exposed to these discriminations at an early stage.

While investigating the presence of diversity, inclusion and equality concerns and practices in Canadian universities, Tavares (2024) found that international students still feel excluded from the larger socio-cultural landscape present in universities, especially in social groups. This has been observed as a common condition, despite the commitments and tactics implemented by universities in tackling equality, diversity and inclusion (Tavares, 2024). At the same time, however, international students with limited foreign experiences are more likely to experience social and personal challenges in Canadian universities, in addition to language-related challenges, found Worae & Edgerton (2023).

4.3. Current Policies and Regulations to Prevent Discrimination in Canada

Several issues were identified concerning ensuring racial diversity and inclusion in Canadian educational settings.

Lack of Data

Allegations are also made by migrant student researchers and scholars, as well as researchers experiencing discrimination (Menezes, Henry & Agarwal, 2022). According to Menezes et al. (2022), these issues are prevalent in Canada largely due to the lack of action from concerned parties, and due to the lack of precise data in this area. A 2017 article published on the same claimed Universities have very little insight into their racial diversity and more specifically, the actions and policies in this area (McDonald & Ward, 2017). While these conditions are slowly changing, especially since more Canadian universities and educational institutions now have espoused commitment to ensuring racial diversity, inclusion, and more importantly support, there is still a strong gap between rhetoric and the actual practice, argue Cukier, Adamu & Elmi (2021).

Regulations

While most of the universities have dedicated policies and regulations aimed at curbing discrimination of different types (Hussain, 2023), migrant students do not necessarily come across such issues in their schools/universities alone. From a legal and regulatory point of view, Canada has strong regulations in place, which are collectively called the Race and Equality Rights in Canada and has taken a more collective and community-based approach (Service Canada, 2024). Various regulations, such as the Anti-Racism Act, of 2017 (Law Document English View, 2014) also address these issues at a legal level. However, claims made by various parties question the effectiveness of such policies, citing extensive accounts of racial discrimination events reported by individuals (International Service for Human Rights, 2024). Thus, this comes down to a matter of action and inaction, and enforcement of existing policies and regulations, both at the university and legal/regulatory levels.

5. Discussions

Several themes were identified in the paper.

5.1. Presence of Discrimination in Canada

First, experiences of racial discrimination or other forms of discrimination have not declined in Canada, whether it is in the case of students or the public. Even though the public in the country seems to have disagreements related to how friendly the country is, and believing racism is not a major issue they are facing, current statistics and academic evidence are pointing towards a much bigger problem. Considering how experiences of racial or other forms of discrimination affect students and their overall learning, development, and well-being, especially their student performance and life satisfaction, as pointed out by Metzner et al. (2022), strong ramifications can be expected from

such events. More importantly, the study found that discrimination does not stop at psychological effects, but it often extends towards physical abuse, such as assaults (Saunders et al. 2020). In such instances, the consequences can be severe. The presence and role of cultural distance, language-based differences, and even colour-based discrimination or racial and ethnic profiling is also evident in Canada, and a prevalent issue faced by international students. In other words, biased treatment, feeling left out in groups and clubs, poor treatment from others, etc. are some of the common issues identified here.

5.2. Policies and Practices

Looking at the second objective of the ongoing policies and regulations, both universities and state/national governments have established strong regulations and policies to remove these issues and the occurrence of such events. However, regardless of these practices, students in universities continue to experience these issues. On the one hand, universities' understanding of racial and other forms of diversity conditions has increased. While they are taking steps to ensure better management of diversity, equality and inclusion (Cukier et al. 2021). While data remains a major issue, which could prevent universities from implementing necessary actions (Menezes et al. 2022), current gaps are more prevalent in how international or migrant students are exposed to discrimination largely in wider social settings other than universities. Despite practices aimed at limiting discrimination of various forms, including racial and ethnic, frequent occurrences of such events are still reported (International Service for Human Rights, 2024). Hence, it shows further improvements are needed in these areas.

5.3. Recommendations

Collective action is needed to improve the current situation. Despite discrimination being a major issue, the public tends to believe it is not a frequent issue and does not consider this as a major problem that needs tackling. Hence, various forms of awareness-building campaigns and education are necessary to change this social thinking. Governments and universities should take action to address these concerns.

Proactive engagement from students is essential in reducing the chances of discrimination, which may also need some form of cross-cultural training to reduce the influence of monoculturalism among students, especially among those who have not witnessed or experienced another culture. Therefore, cross-cultural training should become part of the curriculum in universities.

6. Conclusion

The article examined the issue of discrimination, as a major problem faced by international students or migrant students in Canada. As a major international educational

destination, Canada is attracting millions of students every year. However, current conditions reported by academic articles and other sources claim that concerns about discrimination have not improved in the country. Students continue to experience such issues, despite universities and national/state governments promoting various policies and regulations. Consequences of such discrimination and related experiences were also identified in the context of Canada. Considering current numbers and statistics within this context, the article identified significant improvements are needed in this direction, as more improvements are needed to reduce the number of such discrimination events or even limit the chances of international students experiencing discrimination issues in the wider society, outside of their educational institutions, such as the local communities, or their workplaces.

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