Promoting Canadian Student Outbound Mobility: Analysis of Internationalization Policies

Shuai Yu, University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract: This study examines how internationalization policies of Canadian higher education support student outbound mobility. Applying the Global Higher Education Matrix (Jones, 2008) and the four approaches to internationalization (Knight, 1997; Zha, 2003), I collected and analyzed the international strategies implemented at the national, provincial, and institutional levels. The findings demonstrate that the current international strategies and policies support outbound student mobility from four aspects: providing financial assistance, increasing the availability and benefits of international learning opportunities, building capacities, and forming or reinforcing partnerships and collaboration. Examining international education strategies contributes to understanding the current context of Canadian student outbound mobility. Furthermore, it helps policymakers and stakeholders (institutions, administrative staff, Canadian students, and faculty members) to understand the deficiencies of the current strategies and to inform the future development of international education policies and internationalization strategies regarding outbound student mobility.

Keywords: international student mobility, outbound student mobility, Canadian higher education, policy analysis

Introduction

Internationalization plays an increasingly important role at institutional, national, provincial, and international levels (Yang, 2014). A commonly accepted definition of internationalization of higher education is "the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching/learning, research and services functions of a university or college" (Knight, 1994, p. 3). de Wit (2015) updated this definition by adding the goal of internationalization:

> the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (p. 24)

Beyond these broader definitions and goals, internationalization also has specific implications when viewed through different lenses. From a social/cultural perspective, internationalization is viewed as a way to develop citizenship, improve intercultural understanding, and promote national cultural identity and language (Knight & de Wit, 1997). From political and economic viewpoints, internationalization also plays a role in enhancing national security and peace understanding, developing skilled human resources for economic growth and competitiveness (Knight, 2004; Knight & de Wit, 1997; Zha, 2003). International students are key to trade relations and can bring direct economic benefits to institutions or governments (Knight, 2004; Knight & de Wit, 1997).

International student mobility, as an essential component of internationalization, has transformed the higher education landscape over the last few decades. (Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE), 2016; Knight, 2012). For instance, the priorities of Canadian higher education's international activities shifted in the last decade from increasing inbound to promoting outbound mobility (Global Affairs Canada, 2012, 2014). This shift emphasizes the significant benefits that international student mobility brings to students, post-secondary institutions, communities, society, and the economy (CBIE, 2016; Global Affairs Canada, 2017; Knight, 2012). However, despite high student interest in studying abroad and the commitments and investments from governments and institutions, the number of Canadian students engaging in learning abroad experiences has remained consistently low (CBIE, 2016, 2017), with approximately 11% of Canadian undergraduate students undertaking an international learning experience by 2017 during their academic years — fewer than their counterparts from the United States (16%), Australia (19%), and France (33%) (Center for International Policy Studies, 2017). This low participation rate presents a challenge for Canada, highlighting the need for Canadian government agencies and educational institutions to actively promote outbound student mobility. Such efforts should focus on informing students and families about the opportunities and benefits of studying abroad, addressing the barriers to international education, and supporting those interested in engaging in these international learning experiences.

In Canada, the ten provinces and three territories have their own education structures, holding exclusive jurisdiction over areas such as administration, delivery, and assessment of education (Department of Justice Canada, 2013; Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Most provincial governments and higher education institutions in Canada have

implemented international education strategies and developed policies on internationalization. Given this varied backdrop, it is crucial to analyze the policies and strategies at different levels to address the barriers and engage Canadian students in learning abroad experiences. This study, therefore, aims to examine how student outbound mobility is manifested in the internationalization policies at the national, provincial, and institutional levels.

Benefits of Canadian Student Outbound Mobility

Knight and Madden (2010) suggest that the benefits of international academic mobility can be viewed from individual, institutional, and national perspectives. At the individual level, Canadian students may develop intercultural awareness, competencies, and a deep understanding of global issues (Trower & Lehmann, 2017). Similarly, students can gain knowledge of cultural, economic and political diversity and establish international networks when studying abroad (Government of Saskatchewan (G of S), 2021). Education abroad experiences can also influence students' career paths, academic choices, and contribute to their overall employability in an increasingly global society and competitive labour market (CBIE, 2016; Global Affairs Canada, 2020; Government of Alberta (G of A), 2020; G of S, 2021). Notably, such experiences provide those from less-advantaged backgrounds with more opportunities to succeed in new and high-growth industries (Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017).

At the institutional level, Canadian universities benefit from academic and research partnerships fostered through academic mobility, which offer international comparative perspectives (Knight & Madden, 2010) and strengthen the institutions' global research networks (Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017). On a provincial level, study abroad programs contribute to local economies, tourism, trade relations, and foster entrepreneurship and innovation, helping provinces to build and strengthen diplomatic ties and expand provincial international influence (Global Affairs Canada, 2020; G of A, 2020; G of S, 2021).

At the national level, the mobility of Canadian students promotes global knowledge sharing and supports Canada's science and technology strategies (Knight & Madden, 2010). Increased international education experiences among Canadians help to "expand diplomatic reach in new markets" (G of A, 2020, p. 18) and "advance Canadian interests and values in global affairs" (Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017, p. 32). Finally, internationally experienced individuals contribute to an "increasingly diverse and multicultural society" and the "globalized labor market of this major trading nation," which can directly benefit Canada's economy (McRae et al., 2017, p. 9).

Barriers for Canadian students to Study Abroad

Similar to their benefits, the barriers faced by Canadian students studying abroad can be viewed from both individual and institutional perspectives. Studying abroad can present many challenges for Canadian students, especially first-time travelers (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Key barriers reported by Canadian students include health and safety concerns, financial barriers (lack of funding or financial support), academic challenges (inflexible curricula, lack of institutional support, faculty commitment, and credit recognition), language/culture barrier (lack of necessary language skills, unfamiliar with the culture, loneliness), lack of knowledge about international learning opportunities, and time (delayed graduation) (AUCC, 2014; CBIE, 2016; Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017; G of A, 2020; Global Affairs Canada, 2020; Knight & Madden, 2010; Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011).

Institutions also face challenges in facilitating study abroad programs, including accreditation, resources, and credit transfer, and quality assurance (McRae et al., 2017). Students from specific programs (e.g., engineering programs) with accreditation requirements sometimes find it difficult to receive course credits from foreign institutions, thus limiting the curricular activities they pursue outside of Canada. Additionally, the resources, such as regulations or policies to effectively track and deliver quality international programs, are inadequate at the institutional level (McRae et al., 2017). Also, the credit recognition system is to some extent deficient, which leads to a lack of alignment between the course offerings at foreign institutions and the credit recognition criteria of Canadian home institutions, creating a mismatch with Canadian programs of study (CBIE, 2016; Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017; McRae et al., 2017).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I combined the Global Higher Education Matrix (Jones, 2008) and the Four Approaches to the Internationalization of Higher Education (Knight, 1997; Zha, 2003) as a conceptual framework to examine the international education strategies implemented at the national, provincial, and institutional levels. The Four Approaches to the Internationalization of Higher Education, including activity, competency, ethos, and process, was utilized as a tool to categorize and analyze the policies (Knight, 1997; Zha, 2003).

Global Higher Education Matrix

Based on Marginson and Rhoade (2002)'s Glonacal Agency Heuristic, Jones (2008) developed a Global Higher Education Matrix model to analyze the globalization and internationalization of higher education from inter-relationships across local, national, and global dimensions. In the original Glonacal Agency Heuristic model, the term "Glonacal" represents three levels of authority: global, national, and local; "Agency" refers to both organizations and the agencies of human action operating at these three levels (Marginson & Rhoade, 2002). Recognizing that the multiple dimensions mentioned in the Glonacal Agency Heuristic could also be considered as different levels of authority within the higher education system, Jones (2008) proposed Global Higher Education Matrix as a tool to explore "how each level of authority is oriented towards these multiple dimensions" (Jones, 2008, p.464). Compared to Glonacal Agency Heuristic, this matrix put more emphasis on the reciprocity and dynamic interactions of the multi-level (federal, provincial, institutional and faculty) policies and initiatives (Jones, 2008). In this study, Global Higher Education Matrix serves as an efficient and useful framework for studying internationalization policies and international education strategies of the Canadian higher education system at different levels.

Four Approaches to Internationalization of Higher Education

The concept of internationalization can be explained through four approaches: competency, activity, ethos, and process (Knight, 1997; Zha, 2003). Knight (2004) described these approaches as various methods that countries or institutions use to address the implementation and conceptualization of internationalization.

The activity approach promotes specific activities or programs that foster internationalization, such as curriculum, student or faculty exchange, technical and financial support, and international students (Zha, 2003). It also involves integrating international education into the curriculum and activities that promote intercultural dimensions, including accommodating international students and facilitating curriculum and student/faculty exchanges (Knight, 1997).

The competency approach focuses on the development of students and faculty members' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values (Zha, 2003). This approach mainly focuses on improving teaching and research quality, and on aligning program capabilities with international standards. The "ethos approach" aims to "create a culture or climate that values and supports international or intercultural perspectives and initiatives" (Zha, 2003, p.251). It emphasizes the importance of a supportive institutional environment in integrating the international dimension with the mission and goals of higher education institutions (Zha, 2003). Finally, the "process approach" aims to integrate "an international or intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service in higher education institutions by combining a wide range of activities, policies, and procedures" (Zha, 2003, p.251). The emphasis of this approach is on program and organizational aspects, such as policies and procedures.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the four approaches are used to understand the priorities of outbound student mobility by examining the current international strategies and policies implemented at the national, provincial, and institutional levels.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework. Adapted from Jones (2008), Knight (1997), and Zha, (2003).
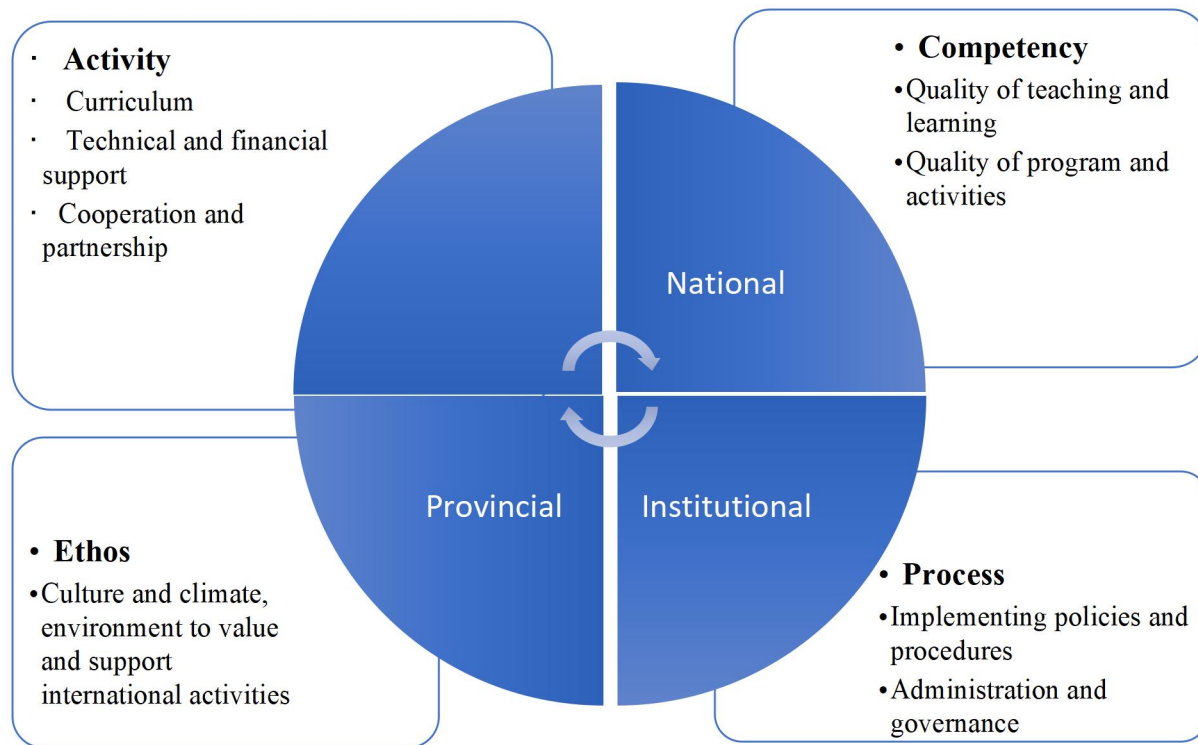
Methodology

Following the qualitative research design, I employed document analysis to collect data. Documents are "an umbrella term to refer to a range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study," which usually "represents some form of communication that is meaningful to participants and/or the setting" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). In addition, documents provide essential background information and historical context for specific issues or cross-cultural research (Bowen, 2009; Merriam, 1988). In the present study, analyzing documents enabled a deeper understanding of the state of outbound student mobility in Canadian higher education.

This study follows Creswell (2012) guideline for collecting documents. International policies were a main data source. To clarify, according to Pal (2005), a policy refers to "a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems" (p. 2), typically involving problem definition, statements of goals, and instruments. For the purpose of this study, internationalization policies are viewed as plans, international strategies, blueprints formulated and implemented by governments (national and provincial) and institutions to address the challenges and facilitate the development of outbound student mobility.

Therefore, I searched "internationalization policies" and "international education strategies" implemented by national and provincial governments and institutions. Additionally, my goal was not to explore the historical development of the policies but how student outbound mobility was reflected in current policies; thus, I only selected the most recent documents issued in the past five years (2016-2021).

The policies were collected from the websites of Global Affairs Canada at the national level. At the provincial level, the policies were collected from the websites of the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Alberta. Finally, at the institutional level, the documents were collected from the websites of the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and the University of Alberta (U of A) (see Table 1).

Table 1

International Strategic Plans

Authority of Issuing	Issuing Date	Name of Document
Global Affairs Canada	2020	Building on Success: International Education Strategy 2019-2024
Government of Saskatchewan	2021	International Education Strategy
University of Saskatchewan	May, 2018	"Connecting with the World" The international blueprint for action 2025– A vision for a globally significant university
Government of Alberta	Feb, 2020	Alberta's International Education Strategy
University of Alberta	April 18, 2019	International Strategic Plan

Notes. This table outlines the International Education Strategies from the national, provincial, and institutional levels.

There were three reasons that I selected these two provinces and universities. First, both institutions have established cooperative ties and partnerships with foreign universities and international organizations. The two universities encourage students to study abroad by participating in exchange, collaborative, and degree programs and encourage scholars and faculty to engage in international activities and research. Secondly, both institutions have implemented policies, strategies, and plans related to internationalization during the past two decades. Finally, my personal academic experiences at both institutions have significantly shaped my research interests and assumptions. As an international student at the U of S and U of A, I gained firsthand insight into the impact of internationalization on higher education governance and organization. These experiences led to my doctoral research focus on Canadian exchange students' learning experiences in China and sparked my curiosity about the reasons behind the limited number of Canadian students studying abroad, particularly in developing countries. This personal background informs my interest in exploring how Canadian governments and institutions promote outbound student mobility through policies and international strategies.

The present research utilizes qualitative content analysis, which is a process of systematically identifying and organizing information into categories that address the central questions of the research (Berg, 2004; Bowen, 2009). The analytic procedure of content analysis includes four steps. First, I read through the documents and skimmed for information or content relevant to the policy documents. After the initial reading, I identified specific codes within the policies. Thirdly, I identified themes related to the priorities for promoting outbound mobility. Lastly, I examined and interpreted these themes drawing on the chosen framework and the research purpose (Berg, 2004; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

Findings

Guided by the conceptual framework and employing the document analysis method, the examination of policies and strategic documents from national and provincial governments, as well as higher education institutions, demonstrates four priorities aimed at promoting and supporting Canadian student outbound mobility, including providing financial assistance, improving availability and promoting accessibility of international learning opportunities, building and enhancing the institutional capacity, and establishing external partnerships and internal cooperation.

Financial Assistance

Providing financial assistance for Canadian students to study abroad is demonstrated in the national, provincial, and institutional international strategies. For example, the Government of Canada initiated a five-year pilot project, offering $5000 to $10000 annually to support up to 11,000 undergraduate students to study or work abroad (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). At the provincial level, the Alberta government suggests offering Alberta post-secondary students funding to pursue studies abroad (G of A, 2020). At the institutional level, U of A (2019) addresses "enhancing the availability of financial support on all forms of international learning" (p. 6). U of S (2018) also

emphasizes addressing students' financial barriers in degree-credit study abroad and ensuring financial support for equitable student participation in international learning experiences (U of S, 2018).

Availability and Accessibility of International Learning Opportunities

Ensuring the availability and accessibility of international learning opportunities is another main strategy mentioned by the internationalization policies. At the national, provincial, and institutional levels, the strategic plans and political documents recommend raising awareness among Canadian students and parents of study abroad opportunities. The national government advocates promoting *International Experience Canada* (IEC) to raise their awareness (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). IEC is a federal initiative that enables Canadians youth (age 18-35) to work and travel in any of over 30 partner countries. To increase the participants of Canadian students in education and work abroad programs, the international strategy implemented by the Saskatchewan government focuses on fostering new international partnerships (G of S, 2021). Alberta's *International Education Strategy* provides detailed recommendations, including reducing barriers to student and institutional participation, making searching for the opportunities easier, developing a mechanism for institutions to promote the available programs, building affordable and accessible programs that support curricular needs, and supporting collaboration between higher education institutions (G of A, 2020). Further, the Government of Alberta's strategy (2020) suggests communicating the value, availability, and importance of international learning to stakeholders, including students, parents, industry, and employers. Moreover, developing an alumni network of Albertans who studied abroad and increasing the impact of new and existing programs can also promote global learning.

Both universities propose actions to improve student participation. The *International Blueprint for Action 2025* (U of S, 2018) emphasizes leveraging existing partnerships and developing new partnerships to increase the flexibility of programs and fit within degree requirements. Moreover, it highlights that U of S should provide opportunities for students to share their study abroad experiences, enhancing the marketing of the benefits of education abroad opportunities (U of S, 2018). The U of A (2019) recommends diversifying the programs, such as "joint or dual degree programs, research collaborations, summer schools or internships abroad" and "for-credit international learning experiences" (p. 6). Additionally, *the International Strategic Plan* mentions that the university should recognize students' achievements in global learning by issuing certificates, such as Certificates in International Learning (CIL), Sustainability and Global Citizenship, etc. (U of A, 2019). More importantly, the national strategy and the U of S blueprint both highlight the need to develop international mobility opportunities for indigenous students as the underrepresented students (e.g., low-income students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities) are the least likely to pursue study abroad opportunities but most likely to gain valued skills and competencies from those opportunities (Global Affairs Canada, 2020; U of S, 2018).

Building Capacity

In addition to improving availability and accessibility, it is essential for the universities to build their capacities to support student outbound mobility. Improving infrastructure and support systems is important to provide information and resources for students interested in studying abroad. First is streamlining and improving the transfer credit recognition of learning abroad programs by creating pre-approved pathways as part of exchange agreements (U of S, 2018) and encouraging institutions to share credential assessment results (G of A, 2020; U of A, 2019). Secondly, the Government of Alberta (2020) proposes that the government should develop an "online toolkit" of resources for institutions to develop and administrate their study programs. Furthermore, the institutions should provide workshops and resources for post-secondary staff to develop the skills and knowledge needed for managing their own study abroad programs and share their best practices on supporting international learning (G of A, 2020). Also, international education programs should consider and support curricular needs. In addition, standard data collection should be encouraged to track the trends in outbound student mobility (G of A, 2020). Lastly, the University of Saskatchewan (2018) suggests that the institution should identify and remove the barriers related to program distribution, provide adequate administrative support resources, and develop strategies to retain students during the post-application period.

External Partnerships and Internal Collaboration

To promote outbound student mobility, Canadian national, provincial governments, and institutions should establish external partnerships with prioritized potential international markets and encourage internal collaboration between institutions, governments, organizations and other stakeholders. Most Canadian students who studied abroad chose the traditional destinations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and some European countries (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Therefore, the federal government should identify and target regions that have the potential for international education and encourage students to pursue study opportunities in those countries, specifically Asia and Latin America, in order to foster specialized knowledge and economic ties and grow cultural and business ties with these regions to the Canadian workforce (Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC), 2019). Both provincial governments (G of S and G of A) advocate developing partnerships and aligning study-abroad programs with prioritized international markets; the Government of Alberta (2020) further suggests that Alberta's international education grant programs for study abroad opportunities should "align with target markets and objectives for economic growth" (p. 24). In terms of establishing, growing, and consolidating priority partnerships, the University of Alberta (2019) proposes that a framework should be developed to identify and support institutional priority partners. Also, it is essential to track the ongoing partnerships to evaluate progress, benefits, and strategic alignment. The University of Saskatchewan (2018) suggests establishing a *Global Ambassador Program* to enhance collaboration by supporting the students to travel to global institutions.

Regarding internal collaboration, the provincial governments and institutions all propose different forms of collaborative relationships, including between institutions, governments, industry partners, government ministries and agencies, etc. The federal government should play a leadership role in international education while collaborating with other stakeholders, including K-12 schools, colleges, institutes, universities, language schools, not-for-profit organizations and private companies (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Additionally, the federal government will provide support and guidance to post-secondary institutions who access funding through the five-year pilot project (support up to 11,000 Canadian college and university undergraduate students to study or work abroad) and develop strategies to ensure the safety of Canadian students studying in other countries.

The Government of Alberta (2020) suggests supporting collaboration between institutions so that those with significant experience in education abroad can help those with less experience. Besides, collaborations between government, learning institutions, and industry partners (international co-op and internship) would increase the number of Alberta engaging in international learning opportunities and decrease the cost of developing and administering programs (G of A, 2020). It is also important to align and incorporate global education goals into the work of Alberta's international office and trade missions. The Government of Saskatchewan (2021) recommends collaboration between post-secondary institutions, federal governments, and other ministries and agencies, such as Education, Immigration and Career Training, Trade and Export Development. The University of Alberta (2019) advises clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in designing and implementing the international institutional agenda and facilitating institutional collaboration.

Discussion

By reviewing the existing literature and current international strategies, this study provides insights into the the current context of Canadian student outbound mobility. Exploring the benefits and challenges of student outbound mobility helps policymakers and stakeholders (institutions, administrative staff, Canadian students, and faculty members) to understand the deficiencies in current strategies and inform future practices to enhance student outbound mobility.

First, all the analyzed policies stress the importance of providing financial assistance. Nevertheless, the adequacy and international competitiveness of this funding remain unclear. The allocation of financial support differs, especially considering the diverse study destinations chosen by students. To address this, the amount and allocation of scholarships and grants should be tailored to meet the needs of specific student groups to ensure equitable participation (U of S, 2018). Particularly, underrepresented student groups (e.g., low-income students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities) are less likely to pursue international education opportunities, yet they stand to gain valued skills (Global Affairs Canada, 2020; U of S, 2018). Trower and Lehmann (2017) indicate that study exchanges give less-privileged Canadian students opportunities to engage in international experiences,

which tend to have more substantial positive effects on students from low socio-economic backgrounds. In 2020, a comprehensive funding program was developed by Universities Canada to provide funding to Canadian post-secondary students. The objectives of this program are three-fold: 50% of student funding is targeted at underrepresented student groups to address inequality and representation in outbound student mobility; 40% of funding is to prioritize activities in non-traditional studying abroad countries, and 10% is to support innovative approaches and reduce barriers to outbound student mobility. Given these developments, future studies and surveys in HEIs are recommended to explore the specific financial support needs of students interested in studying abroad. This will enable the provision of targeted support and assistance, thereby facilitating a more inclusive and effective approach to outbound student mobility.

Secondly, the findings demonstrate that increasing the availability and promoting the benefits of international learning opportunities are essential to encourage Canadian students to study abroad, which is closely connected to the institutional capacity to provide support and services. Lacking knowledge about international learning opportunities and concerns about delayed graduation are barriers that prevent students from studying abroad (G of A, 2020; Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011). Therefore, policies at the three levels all suggest raising the awareness of international education opportunities by increasing the variety of programs (especially programs that fit within degree requirements), making searching for the opportunities easier, developing a mechanism for institutions to promote the available programs, and promoting the value and benefits of studying abroad. Brown et al. (2016) suggest that students should be informed of the study abroad opportunities early in their academic programs, including detailed information about the programs, funding, language, and other supports. The faculty members should play a significant role in spreading the information and facilitating these activities. Moreover, the findings recommend several ways to inform the stakeholders of the value and benefits of studying abroad, such as inviting alumni who studied abroad to share their experiences and recognizing students' achievements in international learning by issuing certificates, personal enrichment, and career prospects enhancement (CBIE, 2017). As Curtis and Ledgerwood (2018) state, educators should promote study abroad benefits by directly linking international education experiences to their future employability. The G of S strategy (2021) also supports this statement by recommending collaboration between post-secondary institutions, governments, and Immigration and Career Training agencies. Although the two institutions make an effort to improve the availability and promote the benefits of international learning opportunities, it is unclear whether the practices resulted in low or high participation in studying abroad. Thus, more surveys or studies at the institutional level should be conducted to track the trend of outbound student mobility, which resonates with the G of A international strategy that in-time data collection should be encouraged to track the trends and numbers in outbound student mobility (G of A, 2020).

However, the above activities could not be achieved without proper institutional support. Hence, ensuring the institutional capacities is crucial as Canadian students' intent to study abroad is associated with their "perceived social and institutional support and academic hassles at the host and home institution" (Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011, p. 495). Furthermore, the common challenges faced by institutions and individuals are lack of institutional support, accreditation, resources, and credit transfer and recognition, which limits the curricular activities students can undertake outside of Canada (CBIE, 2016; Centre for International Policy Studies, 2017; McRae et al., 2017). Therefore, the policies at the provincial and institutional levels both emphasize strengthening the credit transfer and accreditation systems, such as creating pre-approved pathways of the program agreements and encouraging institutions to share credential assessment results. In addition, regarding the institutional support practices, the international education strategies implemented by the federal and Alberta governments provided several recommendations, such as developing an "online toolkit" of resources for institutions to develop and administrate their study abroad programs, providing workshops and resources for post-secondary staff to develop the skills and knowledge, and strengthening collaborations between institutions so that those with significant experience in education abroad to help those with less experience, and federal government providing support and guidance to post-secondary institutions. Most importantly, students viewed the lack of institutional support as a barrier to studying abroad, so it is crucial to understand the support they need that is lacking.

Regarding external partnership and internal collaboration, the findings suggest that it is essential to encourage students to pursue study opportunities in less traditional study-abroad countries in order to foster specialized knowledge and economic ties and grow cultural and business ties with these regions to the Canadian workforce (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Therefore, for students who are interested in less traditional countries, specific support and services should be provided regarding their needs (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). In addition, students

who pursue study opportunities in less traditional countries are more likely to face language and culture barriers, including lacking necessary language skills and being unfamiliar with the culture (AUCC, 2014; CBIE, 2016; Global Affairs Canada, 2020; Knight & Madden, 2010). Hence, language training and workshops for introducing the culture should be provided to prepare students to study in those countries.

Finally, academic values and quality should be considered to ensure students can benefit from their abroad experiences to promote outbound mobility (AUCC, 2014; McRae et al., 2017). Although both universities highlight the necessity of improving the learning outcomes of education abroad experiences (U of A, 2019; U of S, 2018), detailed and targeted strategies are missing. For example, institutions should include international learning outcomes in their academic plans (G of A, 2020), track the ongoing partnerships for program progress, benefits, and strategic alignment (U of A, 2019); and support faculty and staff development to help students succeed when they study abroad and implement assessment tools to measure students' international learning outcomes, and their satisfaction with participation in international learning experiences (U of S, 2018).

Understanding Canadian students' rationales for studying abroad and their experiences is also crucial to improving the quality assurance systems because it will inform administrators and educators of their needs (McCarthy et al., 2012). Since the number of Canadian students studying abroad is relatively small, only a few studies are available on their rationales and motivations for studying abroad. McCarthy et al. (2012) surveyed 87 Canadian students at a small private college in New York and found that the unavailability of desired programs in Canada and the qualification recognition are critical factors that affect students' decisions to study in the US. Trower and Lehmann (2017) interviewed 17 Canadian students about to undertake exchange programs (UK, US, Australia, and Europe) from a Southwestern Ontario university. They concluded that students decided to study abroad for personal growth and escape temporarily from the frustrations and pressure of being an undergraduate student. More importantly, credit recognition is essential when choosing their study destination (Trower & Lehmann, 2017). Additionally, Knight and Madden (2010) proposed that Canadian doctoral students' primary rationales and motivations to engage in short-term abroad experiences are enhancing career opportunities, gaining life experiences, and attending conferences and workshops for their research work. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research exploring Canadian students' experiences in other countries.

Theoretically, this study confirms that the combination of the Global Higher Education Matrix and four approaches to internationalization is an effective framework for analyzing international education strategies regarding the priorities of outbound student mobility. All four approaches are reflected in the findings. For example, "activity" is reflected in providing financial support and establishing partnerships and collaboration; "ethos" and "process" are represented in promoting the availability and accessibility of studying abroad opportunities and capacity building; "competency" is demonstrated in ensuring the quality of the study abroad programs and tracking the learning outcomes.

Due to the decentralized education structure in Canada and the autonomy of Canadian higher education institutions (CBIE, 2012), the policies at the institutional levels are more detailed and comprehensive. However, there is no obvious coherence or alignment between policies initiated by the national and provincial governments and institutions. As a result, there is no comprehensive system to track and measure outbound mobility, resulting in a lack of reliable annual participation statistics, which affects the planning to track and deliver quality international programs, and hinders the ability to accurately compare participation rates at the international level (CBIE, 2016; McRae et al., 2017). Accordingly, streamlined data gathering and decision support tools should be established; centralized, methodologically sound longitudinal studies should also be designed to track and evaluate the full impact of international education (McRae et al., 2017; U of S, 2018).

Conclusion

This study applied the Global Higher Education Matrix (Jones, 2008) and the four approaches to internationalization (Knight, 1997; Zha, 2003) to examine how internationalization policies and international education strategies at the national, provincial, and institutional levels support outbound student mobility. The findings reveal four priorities for promoting outbound student mobility: financial assistance, promoting the availability and benefits of international learning opportunities, building capacities, and establishing or strengthening partnerships and collaboration.

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Based on the findings and discussion, recommendations are provided accordingly. The institutions and relevant organizations should conduct studies or surveys to explore the needs of Canadian students interested in studying abroad, especially underrepresented students, regarding potential studying destinations, rationales for studying abroad, financial assistance, and the barriers that prevent them from studying abroad. First, since Canadian HEIs have autonomy in developing strategies and administration, the institutions should strengthen collaborations with the federal government to develop detailed funding plans or strategies for outbound student mobility. Second, a comprehensive system should be established at the institutional level to track the trend of outbound student mobility and learning outcomes. For example, surveys or interviews can be conducted with students who studied abroad, so that detailed strategies or preparation workshops can be developed to improve the learning outcomes of education abroad experiences and the quality of the programs.

This study has several limitations. First, this study only collects policies from two provinces and two Canadian universities so that future research can analyze policies from other Canadian provinces and universities. Second, it remains unknown how these policies and strategies benefit students. Moreover, students' needs will likely differ if they study in traditional and less traditional countries. Surveys can be conducted to explore the challenges or barriers that prevent potential students who are interested in studying abroad, especially underrepresented students. Interviews can also be used to understand Canadian students' experiences in other countries.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shuai Yu is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. During the past four years, she worked as a graduate research assistant on several projects, such as policy reform on China's World-Class Universities, curriculum evaluation for high schools in Alberta, underrepresented students' experiences in engineering programs, and assessment of engineering graduate attributes. Her research focuses on the internationalization of Chinese and Canadian higher education, international student mobility, comparative education, curriculum development, and policy analysis.