



*language acquisition is non-linear. In other words, it is a bumpy process that can be variable and represented by adaptation valleys and hills. Universities and other service providers involved in international education are advised to be actively engaged in helping international students transition throughout the international student's migration trajectory.*

## International Students' Educational Integration

Under the influence of globalization the continuous increase of international student mobility influences the socio-cultural and economic structures of the educational sector in hosting countries. A recent study predicted that top student providing countries would raise their investments in education products and services by nearly 50%, from \$4.4 trillion in 2012 to \$6.2 trillion by 2017 (Ortiz, Li, & Fang, 2015). According to an economic assessment commissioned by Global Affairs Canada in 2014, the total economic impact of international students coming and studying in Canada is projected to account for \$12 billion to Canada's GDP and creation of 152,700 jobs (Kunin, 2012). Besides the enormous economic benefits, the increasing transnational mobility of international students also enhances cultural diversity and the internationalization of curriculum within the educational sector of host countries (Findlay et al., 2012). Furthermore, the successful integration of international students reflects the commitment these receiving nations are making to enhance quality education and teaching expertise, and has become part of the global branding strategy used by higher education institutions to promote their services overseas. Despite these positive facets of international education, scholars across disciplines have argued that international students have issues adapting to culture in their host countries and this cultural transition does not proceed in a linear manner, it is especially bumpy for many international students with Asian origins (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014). This report examines the experience of international student groups in the LEAF program at the Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada; this study considers international students at different stages of their academic journey.

## Sample and Methodology

### Population

This project focused on a group of Chinese international students who either received language training in a pre-degree language program or pursued their undergraduate degree at Laurier. In order to identify the major integration challenges and contextual demands facing Chinese international students during different educational contexts, the sample was divided into three focus groups with between 5 and 10 students in each:

- a) current language (pre-degree) students attending Laurier English & Academic Foundation (LEAF),
- b) LEAF graduates now studying in Laurier undergraduate programs (pathway-entry), and
- c) current Laurier undergraduates admitted directly from Chinese high school (direct-entry).

Similar to many higher education institutions in North America, Wilfrid Laurier University admits students both domestically and internationally. International applicants are generally admitted through two different processes, direct-entry or pathway-entry. Students who demonstrate high academic performance on both their high school transcripts

and English proficiency exams are admitted through a direct-entry process similar to domestic admission. Successful undergraduate candidates need to satisfy one of the several internationally accredited language efficiency exams.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, students who meet all of the admission requirements, with the exception of the language component, are offered a conditional offer, which means that students will be officially admitted to university upon completion of an English language training program. In Laurier, students can fulfill such English requirement by attending LEAF. Features of the LEAF curriculum include essay writing, listening to lectures, reading academic texts, and learning university vocabulary; therefore, the core courses include listening and speaking, reading and vocabulary, writing and research, critical thinking, global engagement, and grammar.

## Methodology: Research Ethics Board (REB) # 5026

The survey and interview were conducted at the beginning of September 2016. All participants were provided with a consent form that was available in both English and Chinese to ensure they were aware of the research procedure and purpose.

**1. Likert-Scale survey:** The goal of this research was to assess Chinese students' socio-cultural adaptation and linguistic acquisition in Canadian educational environments. Quantitative analysis was achieved using a Likert Scale survey instrument composed of *fifteen* questions (see Appendix), where students provided their answers by choosing numeric values; this allowed the data to be quantified for descriptive analysis. The first five survey questions asked students about their general English skills; the next five inquired about students' social supports and connectedness in Canadian society; and the last five assessed students' daily transition experiences.

**2. Semi-structured interview:** The open-ended questions asked during the semi-structured one-on-one interviews were designed with the same focus as the survey, but encouraged students to reflect deeply and extensively on their experiences. Some students exemplified their adaptation using memorable events, which further solidified the contextual analysis. Throughout the interviews, students were invited to comment on anything they considered relevant to their cross-cultural adaptation and education experience in general.

## Results

**1. Survey results:** While histograms and data tables were generated for all fifteen survey questions, four revealed significant contrasts on students' self-reported language efficiency, cross-cultural social skills, and adaptation outcomes between the three sample groups (see Appendix for example). Current LEAF students seemed to be exceedingly satisfied with their English and social skills; they dominated the top rating for all four selected histograms. Unlike current LEAF and direct-entry students, LEAF graduates (pathway-entry), who had the longest residence time in Canada and the

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<sup>3</sup> According to the international admission website, Laurier recognizes the following: TOEFL requires a minimum overall score of 83 for the internet-based testing with minimum score of 20 in each component, and a minimum overall score of 560 on paper-based testing; IELTS requires an academic score of 6.5 or higher; MELAB requires 85 or higher; CAEL requires 70 with each band 60 or higher; CAE requires a minimum overall of 176.

advantage of completed language trainings, were absent from the top rating of all histograms; their ratings were frequently distributed on the lower and middle ranges.

**2. Interview results:** According to the interview narratives LEAF students tended to describe their experience as an “exotic vacation” and demonstrated more curiosity and positive attitudes than peers currently completing university degree programs. In comparison, both pathway-entry and direct-entry students commented largely on academic challenges and obstacles to socializing with Canadians. As compared to their previous study in LEAF, pathway-entry students explained a dramatic rise in their academic workload and the frequency of situations where they felt ‘forced’ to interact with Canadians, for example, through group assignments. While ‘social integration’ was not reported as a concern for LEAF students, interaction with Canadians was mentioned as very limited by this group. This was not surprising given that all LEAF classes were comprised of only Chinese students. This study hypothesizes that such a highly homogenous demographic within language programs may be detrimental to Chinese students’ long-term, social integration within Canada.

## Discussion

The counterintuitive satisfaction and confidence reported by LEAF students and the apparent decline in the sense of confidence and competency reported by LEAF graduates suggests that the transition from language program to university cannot be mapped as a linear trajectory. In other words, the advantage of having completed a language training program before enrolling in a degree program does not guarantee students will report a higher sense of cultural adaptation and linguistic confidence. It is hypothesized that the changing educational context is a key cause for this adaptation inconsistency.

**1. Linguistic and Academic demand:** In language programs, the curriculum is mainly composed of various aspects of linguistic training, but in university, English becomes the tool to acquire higher levels of knowledge and to complete assignments that require higher academic and socio-cultural competencies; this consequently compounds the academic challenges students face.

**2. Socio-cultural demand:** The rise in social demands that group work with Canadians places on Chinese students also pushes Chinese students to the edge of their comfort zone. As mentioned earlier, the highly homogenous Chinese population within the LEAF program is considered problematic as it potentially fosters a social bubble that prevents Chinese students from integrating more fully into the numerically dominant Canadian student population. Once students continue their studies within degree programs, this social bubble is greatly stretched and Chinese students are ‘forced’ into a different learning environment and required to complete group assignments with Canadians. In some cases, Canadian students were also reported to be less supportive of their international student peers, creating complex socio-cultural interactional environments that challenge international students linguistically and interpersonally.

**Suggestions:** Because of these contextual demands, the transition between pre-degree language and university programs can be characterized by what can be characterized as ‘adaptation troughs’ that influence students’ educational satisfaction and long-term success. Universities and other service providers are crucial to the success of international students, and are advised to constantly seek proactive strategies to facilitate students’ transition not only at the start of their international education but throughout it. This includes the design and implementation of pre-degree language programs, greater support strategies for international students, as well as the development of greater

cross-cultural internationalized competencies for the wider Canadian student population. Meanwhile, given the increasing popularity of international education, it is recommended that future investigation focuses on the changing contextual demands before and after international students' transition into the university context.

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## Resources

- Bertram, D. M., Poulakis, M., Elsasser, B. S., & Kumar, E. (2014). Social support and acculturation in chinese international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 42(2), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2014.00048.x>
- Findlay, A. M., King, R., Smith, F. M., Geddes, A., & Skeldon, R. (2012). World class? An investigation of globalisation, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), 118–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00454.x>
- Kunin, R. (2012). Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – 2016 Update, 100, 8–11.
- Ortiz, A., Li, C., & Fang, Y. (2015). International Student Mobility Trends 2015 : An Economic Perspective, 1–10.

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## Appendix

### Survey:

Research Ethics Board (REB) #5026

Please read through and sign the consent information before preceding to this questionnaire. In order to protect your identity information, this questionnaire will be anonymous; therefore, do not leave your personal and sensitive information. 请在完成此问卷前仔细阅读知情同意书。

Age 年龄: \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality 国籍: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender 性别: \_\_\_\_\_

Time spent in Canada prior to this questionnaire 在做这份问卷调查之前在加拿大停留的时间:

\_\_\_\_\_

# IMRC Policy Points



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Select the best option that describes your education level 请选择你现在的身份:

- LEAF student ; LEAF在读学生
- Undergraduate student from LEAF ; LEAF 毕业本科生
- Undergraduate student ; 本科生

Please answer the following fifteen questions by checking off the most appropriate option. Options are based on the Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Two example are given below.

请核对最合适的选择去回答下面的15个问题。选项基于利开特式量表，从强烈反对到强烈认同。下面给出两个例子。

Example (1): Do you think first-year international students should spend more time studying than domestic students? 你认为第一年的留学生与加拿大当地学生相比应花费更多时间来学习

a). Strongly Disagree b). Disagree c). Neutral d). Agree e). Strongly Agree

a). 非常不同意 b). 不同意 c). 中立 d). 同意 e). 非常同意

Example (2): Apple pie is my favorite dessert. 苹果派是我最爱的甜品。

a). Strongly Disagree b). Disagree c). Neutral d). Agree e). Strongly Agree

1. My general English skills (including speaking, listening, writing and reading) are excellent. 我的综合英文水平(包括听说读写)是很优秀的。

a).  b).  c).  d).  e).

2. I have no problems understanding lectures in English. 我能无压力的理解全英式授课。

a).  b).  c).  d).  e).

3. I am comfortable explaining my concerns in English to the LEAF administrators. 我能很自然的和LEAF的管理人员讲解我的担忧。

a).  b).  c).  d).  e).

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4. Even though I speak English every day, I prefer to think in Chinese. 即使我每天都说英语，我更喜欢用中文去思考。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
5. When I receive emails in English, I'm able to extract the key information. 当我收到英文写的邮件时，我能够摘取出关键信息。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
6. Since I arrived in Canada, I often hang out with friends from the same country and cultural background as my own. 自从我到了加拿大，我常常和来自中国的朋友打交道。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
7. I tend to make the first step to initiate conversation with Canadians and international students from other countries. 我倾向于迈出与加拿大人和来自不同国家的留学生开始交谈的第一步。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
8. I have many opportunities to socialize with Canadians. 我有很多能与加拿大人来往的机会。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
9. I want to meet more Canadians than people from the same cultural background as me. 相比中国学生，我更倾向于结实加拿大人。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
10. I believe that participating in cultural related workshops will help me develop better socio-cultural skills and will improve my study abroad experience. 我相信参加与文化相关的培训课程能够帮助我提高社交文化能力。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).
11. My English skills have a major impact on my academic performance. 我的英文水平对我的学业成绩有重大影响。
- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).

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12. I had high academic achievement in my home country, but I am at a clear disadvantage in achieving the same level of academic performance in Canada. 我在国内时学习成绩很好，但是当我在加拿大想要拥有相同级别的学术表现时，与加拿大人相比，我发现自己处在明显劣势。

- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).

13. My overall experience in Canada is impeded due to the lack of social connectedness and social support. 由于缺乏社交能力，我在加拿大的综合生活水平受到阻碍。

- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).

14. Every time I am able to carry out a long and meaningful conversation with a Canadian, I feel I have accomplished something. 每当我能与加拿大人展开一段漫长而有意义的对话时，我有很大的成就感。

- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).

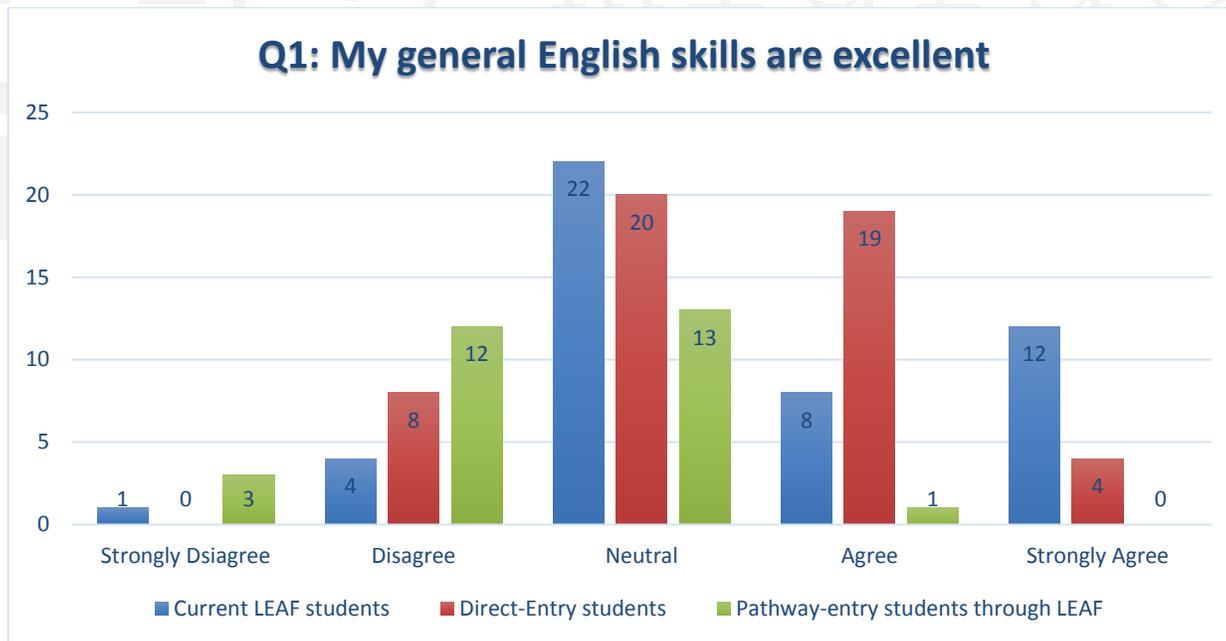
15. I often feel stressed and anxious when I have to speak English. 每当我必须说英语时，我感到有压迫感。

- a).       b).       c).       d).       e).

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**Graph 1: Self-evaluation of English skills**



**Table 1: Self-reported levels of satisfaction with English as a Second Language**

Likert Scale	Current LEAF Students		Directly Admitted Undergrads		LEAF Graduates in Undergrads	
	Students	in %	Students	in %	Students	in %
1	1	2%	0	0%	3	10%
2	4	9%	8	16%	12	42%
3	22	47%	20	39%	13	45%
4	8	17%	19	37%	1	3%
5	12	25%	4	8%	0	0%