

Post-Student Cap Analysis in Ontario, Canada: Faculty's Perspectives a Vital Component in Understanding the Impact of International Student Caps

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Abstract

This survey study, uniquely employing Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model, investigated faculty attitudes and challenges due to the federal government's decision regarding international student caps in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). The study used a structured questionnaire to investigate faculty perceptions of financial, professional, and personal impacts. The study aimed to capture faculty perceptions of international caps and the potential for job losses in higher education. The survey was restricted to faculty members affiliated with higher education institutions, particularly PPPs. Based on statistical correlations and data analysis from 165 participants, the author provided comprehensive findings and recommendations for understanding the issue from faculty members' viewpoints. The author suggested ways to support faculty and ensure academic excellence in higher education as part of the recommendations. In terms of demographics, 96 percent of the respondents were minorities, and 78.4 percent strongly agreed that the decision adversely impacted their financial and emotional well-being. Data analysis revealed a strong correlation between psychological health and faculty career impact. The study recommended revisiting the situation in a fresh light and considering other stakeholders who are often overlooked to avoid future economic and social hardships. According to the author, faculty in higher education should receive support and guidance as well as incentives and compensation, such as a waiver of the Ontario Teaching Certificate.

Keywords: higher education, Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model, International Student Cap, public-private partnerships, psychological health & part-time faculty

1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) enables personal development and promotes economic, technological, and social change. HE equips students with the skills necessary to navigate the ever-changing labor markets by fostering knowledge exchange, research, and innovation. Over the past decade, higher education has undergone drastic changes in enrolment, student mobility, faculty diversity, research dynamics, and technology. Approximately 254 million students sought HE worldwide, an increase of more than double the last 20 years. Over 6.4 million students study abroad and are international students. International students flock to Canada for many reasons, including its excellent study destination. A global reputation for academic excellence precedes the nation's ranking as one of the world's leading nations for quality of life. Furthermore, Canada offers cheaper study options, simpler application processes, and more opportunities for permanent residency after graduation than most Anglophone countries. Based on the Canadian Bureau for International Education's survey of international students conducted in 2021, 95 percent said they were satisfied with their experience studying in Canada.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of international students receiving study permits to pursue education in Canada. In Canada, international students are integral to the social, cultural, and economic fabric. However, the Canadian government has expressed concern that many institutions have significantly increased their international student intake, decreasing the quality of their education and not providing the necessary support (Government of Canada, 2024, January 24). In January 2024, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Marc Miller announced that the Canadian government would cap international student permit applications to ensure stability. As a result of this cap, 360,000 study permits will be approved, a decrease of 35% from 2023 (Government of Canada, 2024, January 24). International students who enroll in a program at

a publicly-funded college delivered through a private partner will not be eligible for a post-graduate work permit as of May 15, 2024 (Ontario Newsroom, n.d.). There are currently layoffs and program closures as a result of the decision, as well as financial risks related to the cap.

2. Background

During the 1980s and 1990s, Neoliberalism emerged in higher education and in countries such as Canada and the United States. In recent years, government-funded community colleges have formed partnerships with for-profit colleges. The subsidiary campuses operate under a licensing agreement with the publicly funded college, where private institution purchases the name, branding, curriculum, and credentials (Sharma & Sanford, 2021). Neither the private campus instructors nor the PPP are OPSEU or Ontario college faculty members. Unlike Ontario college faculty, private campus instructors earn substantially less and are not protected by unions.

As of 2019, the Ontario government has implemented the Modernizing Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Act (MSTAA). This act allows public colleges to offer standalone certificate and diploma programs in skilled trades without requiring students to complete full apprenticeships; this prepares them for employment. Since these programs are shorter and less expensive than traditional apprenticeships, they are more accessible to a broader audience, especially international students. By implementing this policy, the Ontario government aimed to improve and streamline the province's apprenticeship program to address labor shortages. To maintain Ontario's competitiveness, public colleges in Ontario and across the country entered into private partnership agreements to offer programs leading to Ontario college credentials.

A change in government plans appears to have occurred. Its efforts are now positioned to support the labor market needs of graduates of public post-secondary programs in Ontario. The decision protects the integrity of the post-secondary education system by limiting the number of students and international students who can obtain a Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) to only public colleges and universities. The government presented the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, which, if passed, would enhance students' experiences by implementing additional measures to support mental health, create safe and inclusive campuses, and ensure transparent fees, benefiting all students, including international students. A work permit can be obtained after graduation for international students who have graduated from an eligible designated learning institution (DLI). Under the joint provincial-federal International Student Program, Ontario approves DLIs (Ontario Newsroom, n.d.).

The International Student Cap, published on January 22/2024, was designed to reverse the MSTAA and adversely affect the newly established sector. It will also be challenging to fill the labor shortages envisioned by the government. Colleges that work closely with public colleges and contribute significantly to the economy will bear the consequences of the decision. Due to the low intake of international students, the current financial climate has been severely affected. Faculty positions have already been eliminated due to mass terminations. Noticeably, Ontario's unemployment rate increased to 7.0% in June from 6.7% in May (Labour et al., June 2024, n.d.). The rate has increased significantly since falling to a record low in April 2023 (5.1%) (The Daily — Employment Insurance, June 2024, 2024). In addition, on a year-over-year basis, the number of regular EI beneficiaries was up by 45,000 (+10.4%) in June 2024 (International students have provided the sector with the revenue needed to operate the institutions as tuition payments. Revenues from the industry are expected to decline, and businesses established to contribute to the economy are expected to close.

The January 24 decision has adversely affected higher education faculty, particularly those involved in public-private partnerships (PPPs). This decision has profoundly affected employment conditions, institutional security, and employment security. Considering the implications of this decision on faculty members' roles, rights, and well-being on both professional and personal levels was necessary. As part of the study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected using a mixed-methods survey approach to assess the impact of the January 2024 decision on higher education based on Johada's Latent Deprivation Model (LDM). This survey study aims to help policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders reflect on strategies for ensuring academic excellence in higher education. It also supports faculty members.

3. Relevance

The decision needs to be more relevant and reflect labor shortages in the province. It also does not reflect international students' positive impact on the province's economy and culture. There is a strong likelihood that this decision will adversely affect faculty members and educators who heavily depend on this sector for financial support. Financial hardship may cause them to not pay for housing, healthcare, and daycare expenses. Stress and feelings of isolation from their family and community will result. There have been adverse reactions to this unexpected and drastic change. In a statement to Global News, Isaac Garcia-Sitton, the Executive Director of

International Student Enrollment, Education, and Inclusion at Toronto Metropolitan University, stated that the cap is bad news for universities since it may result in layoffs, program closures, and fewer services for students due to the financial risks associated with this cap (Rana, 2024).

A significant concern is the potential impact of the policy change on part-time faculty members in higher education, a group often overlooked. In general, part-time faculty members are characterized by a lack of security, seniority, or the opportunity to apply for full-time positions. It is anticipated that part-time faculty in higher education will experience poverty and marginalization due to economic instability and policy changes, as in higher education in Ontario.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) (2018) reports that part-time faculty outnumber full-time faculty three to one in higher education. Moreover, Ontario colleges and universities rely on these multiple short-term contracts to meet their financial obligations, a sign of a just-in-time mentality.

Shaker (2018) says job precarity is not an isolated issue but a widespread problem that affects a substantial portion of Ontario's citizens. The cap on international students will adversely affect PPPs, private institutions, and faculty, especially true for those who have settled in Ontario with their families and face financial, emotional, and social hardships. Also, these educators are not permitted to work in primary or secondary schools due to the Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) requirement. OCTs are professional designations awarded by the Ontario College of Teachers to qualified, registered members in good standing. They wish to teach in public schools in Ontario. Additionally, this policy will increase unemployment rates, especially for visible minorities. Nationally, the unemployment rate for visible minorities (6.3%) is higher than the overall unemployment rate (4.9%).

4. Theoretical Framework

Adapted from Marie Jahoda's latent deprivation model LDM (1980), which suggests that unemployed people have impaired mental health. A latent function model for employment and unemployment was developed by Jahoda in the 1980s, mainly based on the analysis and interpretation of unemployment research in the 1930s (Jahoda & Rush, 1980; Jahoda, 1982). Marie Jahoda's latent deprivation model suggests that unemployed people have worse mental health than employed people. Because of this, they lack the manifest function of employment (earning money), but they also lack the latent functions of employment: time structure, social contact, collective purpose (meaning, feeling helpful to others), status, and activity. Jahoda says unemployment has two main consequences for individuals: it reduces income and raises poverty risk while excluding them from the material and social contexts provided by their workplace. He argued that unemployment in the 1930s represented "physical deprivation," while unemployment in the 1980s represented "relative deprivation," but that its psychological impact was comparable between the two periods (Jahoda, 1982, p. 38).

Because basic human needs are no longer met, she believes that being terminated or "excluded" from employment causes emotional distress and poor mental health. It is imperative to have "structured rather than empty time, purposeful activity rather than feeling useless, a defined place in society other than being an outcast, and the ability to participate in society instead of feeling excluded" (Jahoda, 1986, p. 10). They are mirrored in her "categories of experience" or "latent" functions of employment, which are positive characteristics. Social psychologists and psychologists welcome Jahoda's approach as offering a sound theoretical explanation for the negative psychological consequences of job loss and unemployment. Jahoda says the study of unemployment's psychosocial effects is not an end in itself but an opportunity to develop a broader understanding of the psychological meaning of work (Jahoda, 1986, p. 10). In organizational psychology textbooks, her approach has been incorporated into chapters on motivation at work (Wacker, 2012).

Jahoda's model helped me identify a psychological negative effect between faculty who expressed emotional distress and poor mental health. They also lost hope of finding a replacement due to the high unemployment rate and contractual faculty situation in higher education.

Using this model, I explored the implications of the minister's decision on the faculty. According to the accumulated data and responses, the lack of financial support and concerns for their dependents' well-being contributed to faculty mental stress.

5. Methodology

This study aimed to examine the attitudes and challenges faced by all members working in higher education following the federal decision regarding international caps. The author used a structured questionnaire to explore faculty perceptions about the financial, professional, and personal impacts. These questions were designed to capture faculty perceptions and reactions to international caps and possible job losses in higher education. Survey participants were exclusively faculty who work in higher education and are currently employed in the

sector based on a review of the latest news related to the decision. I have administered the survey via LinkedIn to reach a professional audience, with related groups also utilized to target the intended participants. A descriptive-correlational design was used to understand and determine faculty perception in Ontario's higher education sector after the introduction of the international student cap and after its implementation. A descriptive-correlational design was chosen for the purpose of getting faculty perceptions and understanding relationships between variables. It is popular in fields such as psychology, education, and health care.

Data were collected through a meticulously designed structured survey, consisting of closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The closed-ended questions aimed to measure the variables such as mental distress, effectiveness of the policy, dissatisfaction, while the open-ended question provided participants with an opportunity to elaborate their experience and insights. The data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative and statistical methods, including descriptive statistics and correlations, to show the relationship between different variables. The study also controlled demographic factors like years of experience and institutional type to reflect the influence of post-student cap rather than any other external factor.

6. Findings

The survey, which received 332 views, with 165 participants and a 69% completion rate, yielded some unexpected results. Notably, 69.7% of the participants were visible minorities, and 16.2% identified as persons with disabilities. This diverse composition of the survey respondents helps us understand how recent decisions affect different groups. In terms of experience, a significant 37.8 percent have been in higher education for over ten years, demonstrating a substantial portion of respondents have long-term experience in the field. This underscores the need for respecting their expertise. Additionally, 51.4 percent are full-timers, and 81 percent work in public or private institutions.

When respondents were asked about the impact of the decision, a staggering 78.4 percent strongly agreed that the decision had a negative effect on them. A significant 92.7 percent determined the impact was financial, and 97.6 percent were major household income contributors. This highlights the urgent need to address the significant economic burden imposed on faculty members, many of whom are responsible for the financial well-being of their families. This information should invoke a sense of urgency in the audience.

Furthermore, 87.8 percent reported that the decision would affect their careers, raising concerns about long-term job security and professional development within the sector. When asked about pivoting to having another career or considering alternative job paths, 58.1 percent of respondents expressed uncertainty about their next steps and lacked clear direction, highlighting the unstable job market. Also, 83.7 percent of respondents believe there are no viable employment opportunities in Ontario, highlighting the scarcity of opportunity, particularly in Higher education. Also, 53.7 percent of respondents reported not having medical insurance.

Finally, the data indicated a strong positive correlation of 0.6999 between the decision's impact on faculty career and psychological well-being. This confirmed that as the decision adversely affected their jobs, it also had a significant detrimental effect on their mental health and well-being. This underscores the need for comprehensive support systems to help educators cope with their challenges, making the audience feel the importance of their role in providing support.

The findings provided a snapshot of the current situation affecting faculty in higher education in terms of financial, career uncertainty, and psychological distress. The high percentages confirming that respondents are experiencing negative impacts call for urgent attention from policymakers and institutions to address the academic workforce.

7. Recommendation

Employers should implement Data-Driven Workforce planning in HE. Institutions need to understand their workforce needs and develop strategies for attracting, retaining, and developing faculty. To ensure that employers have the right people in the relevant roles at the right time, they can leverage two critical processes: workforce planning and succession planning.

In recent years, mentoring has become increasingly popular, especially for minorities seeking career guidance (Higher ED, 2017). Professionals and faculty must also build networks within their workplace and beyond. Mentoring can have different types: A peer mentor is a professional who shares their experiences with a mentee in a similar situation. Using Group or Team Mentoring, an individual mentor meets with several experienced advisors (selected by the mentee or, more typically, the employer) who have a common need or similar goal. Online mentoring eliminates geographical distance limitations by providing access to mentors online. Reverse mentoring occurs when a junior mentors a senior colleague. The purpose of this is to keep the more senior

colleagues informed about the latest methods or technological advancements.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the policy change be revised and its outcomes closely observed since it already affects the sector, precisely as identified and concluded by the primary study. For policy changes to improve, it is imperative to understand the logic behind their failure or negative impact. To guide prospective solutions, policymakers and legislators should be cautious when assessing risk, not overestimating the costs and risks associated with delivery. This is particularly true since the cap intervenes and affects finances and multiple stakeholders, ranging from faculty to private institutions. Also, policymakers should assess and observe the impact of these changes, particularly on a vast new sector that is expected to suffer due to such a policy. It adheres to the revised student cap policy and changes it.

8. Conclusion

Several significant stakeholders, such as the private sector and faculty in higher education, were excluded from the decision-making process. The reasons for reversing the initial MSTAA decision are unjustified and lack transparency, with no clear explanation for the moratorium decision or the intended value of this action. This decision has far-reaching negative consequences, particularly for faculty experiencing detrimental impacts on their social, economic, and psychological well-being. Visible minorities within this group are vulnerable and are unlikely to receive adequate attention despite being citizens and taxpayers.

With Ontario's unemployment rates on the rise, the urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. Over 2,000 faculty members are currently grappling with anxiety and uncertainty, unsure of how to navigate the current circumstances. It is imperative that we review the consequences of the decision to avert the looming threat of mass terminations.

The mental health of our educators is not just a responsibility, but a paramount one that the government must prioritize. A comprehensive mental health plan is not just a suggestion, but an imperative to prevent, protect, and promote mental health. We must create an environment that actively supports the well-being of our educators. To address faculty concerns and minimize negative impacts on the sector, we need to conduct in-depth studies and further investigations.

To mitigate these adverse effects, it is essential to develop and implement a comprehensive health plan that promotes mental health. This plan should aim at preventing harm, protecting those impacted, and fostering an environment that encourages adaptability and change. However, this is not enough. We need to conduct further research, investigation, and in-depth analysis, with special attention to faculty members, to ensure that our measures are effective and targeted. Without these steps, the consequences of this decision will continue to ripple through the academic community and lead to long-term damage.

The current crisis can be solved by integrating faculty members into the school system, which also suffers from a shortage of instructors (Bradshaw, 2024). The Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) requirement prevents these educators from working in primary or secondary schools. This solution not only addresses the shortage of teachers in Ontario, but also opens up new job opportunities. By allowing faculty in higher education to pursue the Ontario teaching certificate, we could enhance education and leverage the strengths of both sectors.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Obtained.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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