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Nontransferability of the skills and qualifications among the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada

Carla Lucia Ibanzo
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Carla L. Ibanzo

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Nontransferability of Skills and Qualifications Among the Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto

Canada

by

Carla L. Ibanzo

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

About 35% of the Canadian labor market is made up of highly skilled immigrants, yet they have the highest unemployment rates. This study filled a gap in knowledge related to reasons Caribbean credentials are not more widely recognized and accepted in Canada and why their skills and qualifications are nontransferable. The purpose of this qualitative research was to identify the barriers to the successful integration of Caribbean immigrants into the Canadian job market and to obtain strategies to remove them. The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was Rawls Social Justice theory. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with 15 participants. Data were analyzed using both manual coding and qualitative analysis software. The results of the study revealed that the barriers to the recognition of Caribbean credentials include (a) lack of awareness of Caribbean universities by employers, (b) lack of Canadian work experience, (c) perception of the quality of the degree, (d) racism and discrimination, and (e) lack of requirements of regulated professions. The strategies identified include raising the profile of Caribbean universities, developing a memorandum of understanding between the two regions at the government level, and the publishing of nondiscriminatory credential evaluation standards, among others. The findings of this study could have implications for positive social change by providing Canadian Immigration officials with guidance on removing barriers to employment for Caribbean immigrants in Canada through suggested modified or enacted immigration and employment policies.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my mother Beulah Ibanzo, and my father Pasqual Ibanzo, both of whom have passed on but who I know would have been extremely proud of me. This is for you.

To my brother Ricardo Ibanzo who spurred me on. He gave me endless insights, encouragement, and support when I needed it the most. I thank you!

To my grandparents Harold & Carmen Lucille Kelman and Mrs Leanora Morrison.

To my dear aunt, Mrs Sheila Clark, my second mother, I thank you. And to Dr Ibanzo (Aunt Bloss) who gave me valuable tips and advice based on her own dissertation journey.

Thank you all!

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I truly know that I was able to accomplish this feat because God helped me every step of the way. So, I give Him all the honor, thanks, and the praise.

Looking back, I can say that I did not seek this research, this research found me. The experience that I went through (although I didn't understand it at the time), the experience of my brother, relatives, and friends, birthed the original idea for this study. Further, the experience of my family members and extended Caribbean family helped me to conceptualize and focus the direction of the study.

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“Never give up on a dream just because of the length of time that it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.” Earl Nightingale

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this study, I explored the nontransferability of the skills and qualifications of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada. Caribbean immigrants face a dilemma in Canada. Immigrants make up approximately 30% of the labor market yet have the highest unemployment rates and earn 35% less than Canadian-born nationals (Statistics Canada, 2018). These immigrants were accepted into Canada because of their skills and qualifications and prerequisite work experience (Li, 2002). Thus, their struggles call into question the efficacy and justification of Canada's skilled migrant visa program (Little, 2003).

Research into why a program that recruits overseas talent yet produces such low market outcomes and the subsequent immigration policy implications has been recommended (Bouchard, 2006). Canada's skilled visa program awards applicants points based on age, educational achievements, experience, language, and adaptability factors such as a family member living in Canada. The visa is awarded if the applicant secures enough points to qualify. More importantly, qualified applicants are deemed to have skills that are in demand in Canada.

In this study, I sought to ascertain the barriers to the successful integration of Caribbean immigrants in the job markets and industries they are qualified for in Canada. In seeking to understand the barriers to positive employment outcomes, it is prudent to first understand the perspective and stories of the immigrants and other stakeholders. Developing such an understanding could be used to improve the employability of the

Caribbean diaspora in Canada. This improvement could result in positive social change that may impact the lives of current and future immigrants. In this chapter, I give a brief overview of the current labor trends in Canada and the background, rationale, and significance of the study. I also present the study's research questions, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

Background

Caribbean immigrants continue to struggle to obtain meaningful employment in Toronto, Canada (Grable, 2009). According to Li (2003) immigrants are faring worse than immigrants who migrated decades before. Reasons given for the low employment outcomes are lack of credential recognition, lack of Canadian experience, lack of knowledge of Canadian labor laws, lack of language skills, and discrimination (Weiner, 2007). Thus, for my study, I explored the concept of credential recognition in the context of Caribbean immigrants' search for employment in Canada. At present, Caribbean credentials are not recognized and are undervalued or nontransferable. These harsh realities affect hopeful immigrants coming to Canada intending to work, provide for their families, and improve their standard of living. The situation implies that these in-demand skills desired by the government are unwelcomed to the industry gatekeepers.

People migrate because they desire better for themselves and their families; they migrate to work. Migration also grants people opportunities they would not have otherwise been able to obtain (Brown & Reginald, 2008). Many immigrants perceive migration as the pathway to achieving upward and social mobility. Further, the Caribbean people have a rich history of migration, which is part of their culture and identity. Canada

remains one country with a high Caribbean presence. Canada is a popular choice among Caribbean people because of its skilled migrant visa program and geographical advantages (Thomas-Hope, 2002).

This study will fill a gap in knowledge related to reasons Caribbean credentials are not more widely recognized and accepted in Canada and why their skills and qualifications are nontransferable. Breen (2016) suggested that further studies be conducted to ascertain how to improve the educational and hiring processes so that immigrants and refugees can successfully integrate into society. In my study, I explore how the educational and hiring practices in Canada could be more equitable so that Caribbean immigrants can obtain meaningful employment and successfully integrate.

Problem Statement

Canada is underpopulated and needs 340,000 immigrants per year to sustain its labor force, drive its economy, and prevent a fiscal and economic collapse (Canada's Immigration Plan, 2020). In 2016, 21,140 Caribbean immigrants settled in Toronto (Census Highlights, 2016). Twenty-four percent of Caribbean women and 34% of Caribbean men have a bachelor's degree level education or higher (Edmondson, 2016). Immigrants are available, qualified, and experienced, yet have the highest unemployment rates (Toronto, Region Immigration and Employment Council, 2017). Lancee and Boi (2017) suggested that the nontransferability of skills and qualifications of immigrants affects their job prospects and wage potential, and the place of education matters when seeking employment. Several factors contribute to the nontransferability of skills and

degrees, including the perception of the quality of the degree and subjective hiring practices (Lancee & Boi, 2017; Abdullah & Chaudhry, 2017; Bennett & Laub, 2019).

Currently, it is not known how a set of established systems and processes to standardize the credentials of Caribbean immigrants, thereby making them transferable, could improve their employability. Literature reviewed for this study identified international migration, equity, and social justice themes as the foundation for the focus of other researchers' studies (Breen, 2016; Moskal & North, 2017; Rubali, 2016). None of the literature reviewed examined how to minimize the disparity, subjectivity, and inconsistency in determining educational competencies in similar career fields from the perspectives of those responsible for establishing and recognizing academic credentials, standards, and accreditation. My study fills this gap by contributing to the body of knowledge to address this problem by providing data that could affect existing policies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the barriers to the recognition of Caribbean degrees as providing the equivalent competencies for similar professions and industries in Toronto, Canada. There is a current need to increase understanding of this phenomena as immigrants make up 47% of the employable labor force in Canada (Toronto, Region Immigration and Employment Council, 2017). Establishing a process to standardize Caribbean degrees will help in improving the perception of degree quality and degree recognition. Such improvements could lead to improved job prospects and aid in reducing the unemployment rates of immigrants.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of the Caribbean diaspora and other stakeholders regarding the barriers to or facilitators of improving the recognition and transferability of Caribbean credentials in Toronto, Canada?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical base for this study was Schneider and Ingram's (1991) social constructivist theory and Rawls' (1971) social justice and equity theory. The tenets of social justice and equity theory are based on equal rights, social inequality, and fairness and indicate that there should be equity in the distribution of goods and services in society. I selected this theory because of its alignment to my problem statement and its focus on justice citizenship.

Through my study, I sought to address the inequity in the education and employment processes of immigrants in Canada. My aim was to ascertain the barriers to recognition and to seek out strategies to remove these barriers, which could give immigrants a fair chance to compete for jobs. Social justice and equity theory is used extensively in studies relating to politics, education, immigration, and welfare (Sabatier, 2018). The main question the theory is used to ask is, why is there an unlevelled playing field as it relates to the distribution of goods and services? (Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

I also selected the social constructivist theory because it is used to explore how people assign meaning to objects, words, and things based on their worldview or perception. The quality or subjectivity surrounding Caribbean degrees is based on perception and the cultural lens through which people view and understand their world.

Perception is fluid and can be changed through research, data, and established standards. This aligns with my research question in which I sought to ascertain from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders how the credentials of Caribbean degrees can be standardized and/or recognized. This phenomenon was explored within the context of educational standards and perception. Concepts investigated include accreditation, equity, fairness, and equal opportunity, which will give insights into the degree recognition challenge.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a generic qualitative study (GQS) and a case study. Generic designs are suited for studies conducted to understand the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. I selected a generic qualitative inquiry to investigate the subjective opinions, beliefs, or reflections of the participants' experiences of things in their outer world. This type of study is useful when the research problem and question require a qualitative or mixed methodology. No single design (ethnographic, phenomenological, case study or grounded theory) aligned with the focus of the study.

I sought to understand the experiences, perspectives, and worldview of a group of people with varying cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. Gathering data from this eclectic group was necessary to develop a better understanding and clarity to the barriers to the recognition of Caribbean degrees through the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The audience for my study is policy makers, educators, employment bureaus, accrediting bodies, educational institutions, qualification assessment centers, immigration specialists, and immigrants.

Before conducting the study, I obtained permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting the study. Confidentiality of participants was upheld by using pseudonyms and numbers instead of names. Fifteen participants were purposively selected and were drawn from the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada, and employees who worked in organizations that provide services to the immigrant population or worked in the accreditation industry. Caribbean immigrants would need to be living legally in Canada for at least a year and have obtained either permanent residence status, valid work permits, or Canadian citizenship. Participants were recruited via LinkedIn and snowball sampling.

An interview guide I developed was used during the interviews. I conducted interview practice with family members and friends to help hone my interviewing and listening skills. Interviews lasted between 20 and 90 mins and were electronically recorded via Zoom and stored on a secure USB drive. The role of researcher as an instrument was reflected upon and kept in check so as not to lead or influence participants' responses. Self-reflexivity was necessary to ensure transparency and objectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Notes taken during the interviews were stored at my home in a drawer that I alone had access to.

Data were analyzed using the theming method of analysis. Emerging themes and patterns related to the research questions were coded and analyzed by me. Atlas.ti software was used to assist with coding. Researchers must understand their role and remain aware of how their life experience and culture shape their interpretation of

information received. Data saturation was determined and acknowledged when the analysis of new data yielded no new knowledge or information. This was reached with the 12th participant.

Definition of Key Terms

In this study, the following words and definitions were adapted from various literature and are repeatedly used throughout the research. For ease of reference and the purpose of clarity, they are reiterated below.

Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE): A regional exam taken by students who have completed at least 5 years of secondary education. The exam is designed to provide certification of the academic, vocational, and technical achievement of students in the Caribbean who want to pursue further education. Three or more subject passes in this exam will help students matriculate into local universities.

Caribbean diaspora: A term used to categorize people who were born in the Caribbean but live and work overseas. Previously, the term referred to Caribbean immigrants living and working in the United Kingdom and North America, but now has expanded to include other regions, such as Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Caribbean Examination Council (CXC): The premier provider of globally competitive curriculum development services, examinations, certification, and educational services in the Caribbean. This examination board was created and regulated to conduct examinations. Caribbean high school students are awarded certificates and diplomas based on their examination results.

Common Entrance Examination (CEE): The education exam in Britain and the British Caribbean taken by public school children between the ages of 9 and 11 years. This highly competitive exam determines which high school a student will attend. Placements are based on the results of the exams. This exam was replaced by the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) in 1999.

General Certificate of Education (GCE): A subject-specific academic qualification that awarding bodies in the United Kingdom and the commonwealth territories confer on students. Students sit these external exams at the end of fifth form (Grade 11) and upper sixth form (Grade 13) in secondary high schools in the Caribbean and other territories in the commonwealth.

Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT): This local exam is taken by Grade 6 students in elementary school for placement in high schools in Jamaica. The exam is usually taken in March and the results are given in June of the same year.

Nontransferability of credentials: The condition or practice of not granting or enabling immigrants to carry forward or benefit from merits, value, or worth of credentials conferred by a university in the Caribbean.

Northern Caribbean University: A private liberal-arts institution established in 1907. Three main campuses are in Kingston, Mandeville, and Montego Bay, with a subcampus in Runaway Bay. The institution offers a number of preprofessional, professional, and vocational programs. Students from over 35 countries attend this school, and average yearly enrollment is over 5,000 students.

Polarities of democracy (POD): A theory that seeks to guide healthy, sustainable, and just social change efforts by maximizing and minimizing the positive and negative factors in society (Benet, 2006, 2013). POD came out of critical theory and builds on emancipation, freedom, and eliminating dominion/control by any one group. POD expounds the need to examine both sides of the opposing spectrum to reach a consensus/solution.

Toronto Region Immigration and Employment Council (TRIEC): A resource center in Canada that seeks to support immigrants with testing, exams, and training, among others, so they can find employment in the greater Toronto area (GTA). The center also helps immigrants to expand their professional network and understand the labor market. In addition to supporting immigrants, the center also supports organizations by helping them to become more inclusive.

Secondary high school in the Caribbean: These high schools in the Caribbean include Grades 7–13 (in the United States) or first form to sixth form (in the Caribbean). Grades 12 and 13 are upper-level forms that prepare students for entry into universities both locally and internationally.

Social justice: Refers to the balance between individuals and society related to rights, opportunities, wealth, and other resources. Social justice is measured by comparing how well these resources are evenly distributed through the means of wealth distribution differences from personal liberties to fair opportunities.

Skilled visa program: Skilled individuals in 347 eligible occupations who meet the minimum entry requirements may be eligible for a skilled worker program visa.

Applicants are ranked based on their age, education, work experience, language ability, and adaptability factors. If they secure enough points, individuals can apply for and obtain the skilled migrant visa that enables them to live and work legally in Canada.

University Council of Jamaica (UCJ): The national external quality assurance agency for higher education whose mandate is to assure the quality of higher education in Jamaica. This agency accredits degrees and specialized programs by establishing standards and evaluating programs against these standards.

University of Technology (UTECH): Another public institution of higher education in Jamaica, formerly known as College of Science and Technology (CAST). The institution was established in 1958 and has a student population of over 12,000. It offers courses across eight colleges and faculties, college of business and management, health sciences, education and liberal arts, engineering and computing, law, science, and sport, built environment and medicine, oral health, and veterinary science.

University of the West Indies (UWI): A public university established to serve the educational needs of 17 countries in the Caribbean. The main mandate of this premier university is to provide world-class education to Caribbean students and to help unlock the potential for economic growth in the Caribbean, West Indies. The university has four main campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and Antigua and Barbuda; the main campus is in Mona, Jamaica.

Worldwide Evaluation Services (WES): The leading credential evaluation services in Canada is a nonprofit social enterprise that provides credential evaluations for international students, immigrants, and refugees who intend to live, work, or study in

Canada. Their evaluations are accepted by employers, academic institutions, and regulators worldwide.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study are addressed in the four schools of thought as outlined below:

- **Ontology:** Researchers must understand how they, as individuals and social beings, interpret things and how things work in society (Scotland, 2012). Several logical constants adequately represent social systems (Hofweber, 2021). My research stands firmly in relativism. Reality is subjective and based on the lens from which researchers view and understand the world. Reality, therefore, is how individuals perceive the social world, which is shaped by traditions, personal experience, background, culture, etc. (Business Research Methodology, n.d.). This reality will vary depending on which side of the lens used to view the world. Thus, qualitative researchers assume consensus rather than truth, as truth is relative (Pring, 2000). I sought to understand the worldviews, perceptions, and stories of the population under study. I assumed these realities would be subjective. Further, I viewed, sifted, and understood the information being given based on the filter through which participants experience and interpret their world and realities. In essence, humans are social beings, operating within a social contract in a social world.
- **Epistemology:** The epistemological assumptions deal with nature and forms of knowledge. The forms of knowledge extolled are traditionalist and subjective,

which are derived from social constructivism (Scotland, 2012). Humans are all born with rights that are indisputable. Based on access or lack of access to these rights, individuals are able/unable to carve out the life they wish through goal setting, education, and labor. However, there exists an unequal distribution of natural resources, opportunities, and rights and as a result there is much injustice in society (Rawls, 1971). The epistemological assumptions can be further explained by acknowledging the credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and confirmability of the study. Beliefs can be justified within the realm of the above assumptions (Scotland, 2012)

- **Axiology:** The value that is placed on right, good, beauty and harmony. I assumed the common will of people is to do good unto others. People are not all selfish and will work toward a common good. Individuals and groups will advocate and support worthy efforts that are altruistic in nature (Business Research Methodology, n.d.). In research, this assumption operates under the umbrella of positive social change. Researchers assume that studies will result in positive action to improve the lives of individuals, groups, and communities and by extension the wider society (Business Research Methodology, n.d.) Thus, researchers continually ask whether research is meaningful and how it will benefit society.
- **Methodology:** The methodological assumption refers to the plan or strategy employed to collect and analyze data (Sandford, 2012). This study was inductive, emerging and bounded by context, and aligned with the nature of qualitative

designs (Pring, 2000). Qualitative designs are used to understand, explore, interpret, and investigate, among others, the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, the study was iterative and emerging. The further a researcher progresses in a study, the more they find new insights and information that refines and reshapes a study. Thus, research is not static and is constantly evolving (Pring, 2000).

Researchers must be willing to change focus, RQs, and data collection methods if the information received calls for it. In other words, researchers must let the study develop organically and not try to lead the study in the direction they desire.

Researchers must understand a study is not value free or free from social and political contexts. Social reality is not static and changes the more aware people become (Pring, 2000).

Scope and Delimitations

In research, to make a study more manageable and doable, researchers narrow the focus of a study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Researchers do this by identifying and reporting the scope and delimitations applicable to the study. In other words, researchers state the extent to which the work will be explored and within what specified parameters (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Some of the delimitations of my study were its sample population and size, focus, and duration. Many challenges affect the immigrant community; however, for this research, only the nontransferability factor of their credentials was explored. In the same vein, only Caribbean immigrants living in Canada and employees of organizations serving the immigrant population or accrediting entities were included. While the

phenomenon being studied affects other immigrant groups, no other immigrant groups were included in the study.

The geographical location was also another delimitation (What is the meaning, 2020). The sample included immigrants and employees living in the GTA and Jamaica. Caribbean immigrants living outside the GTA were not included in the sample. Participants were 13 Caribbean immigrants over 18 years of age and 2 employees. The timeframe expected to conduct the study was within 1 year.

Another delimitation of the study was the research design. Based on the complexities of the phenomenon being explored, the study would have been better served using a mixed-methods approach. Quantifying data would have added strength to the findings and helped with the contextual boundaries and lack of generalizability identified with qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003). Policymakers seek findings that can be generalized and applied across situations, time, and context (Pring, 2000). I was bounded by time and finances. A mixed-methods approach was also not recommended by the faculty. However, per Richie and Lewis (2003) and Cohen et al. (2007), good research is that which provides rich evidence and offers credible and justifiable narratives, can be of benefit to another, and can be replicated. This can be true of both qualitative and quantitative studies.

Limitations

Potential barriers included securing participants from several different countries and coordinating interview dates and times that were convenient for all. Both the participants and I were geographically dispersed. Other limitations included the biased

and subjective views of the researcher and participants. In addition, due to the nature of the study, it may be challenging to recruit participants from the organizations serving the immigrant community in Canada.

In examining the role of researcher, I was aware that my study could be biased due to personal experience and my involvement and kinship to the Caribbean community. I limited this bias and reined in my emotions by consulting with other researchers and peers to gain different viewpoints and to challenge my thinking. This self-awareness also helped to keep my biases in check. I also kept a journal to record my thoughts, biases, and motivation. Acknowledging and declaring these biases will improve transparency and promote objectivity of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation of data using multiple methods of data collection was done to improve validity of the findings.

Significance

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in exploring how the credentials of Caribbean immigrants can be standardized and recognized. This study was unique because it addressed an under researched area regarding standardization of degrees obtained in developing countries. The results of this study will aid multiple stakeholders—Caribbean immigrants, accreditation agencies, immigration centers, and employment agencies in Toronto, Canada—by seeking to remove the disparity and subjectivity in the educational and employment systems and processes.

The study results could have practical implications for policies and programs relating to education, credentials, migration, and international employment. Findings from the study will be disseminated to Caribbean universities and accrediting agencies

and may provoke discussions to change existing policies and programs to standardize Caribbean degrees. In addition, I intend to publish the findings in the Caribbean weekly and other newspapers to increase awareness and stimulate further public discourse on the topic. An executive summary of the findings will also be sent to the Toronto, Region Immigration and Employment Council (TRIEC). According to TRIEC, their mission is to “ensure that the Toronto area benefits from the untapped potential of immigrants.” The findings from this study can provide suggestions on how to improve the employment prospects of Caribbean immigrants. In so doing, their organizational goal of tapping into the underutilized talent pool of Caribbean immigrants can be achieved.

Education is considered a social equalizer and an honorable pathway to social mobility (Moskal & North, 2017). Removing the barriers to recognition of Caribbean degrees will help to bring about positive social change by improving the job prospects and wage potential of immigrants. This can be done through the establishment of a standardization process/system that could result in improved employability and an overall improvement in the well-being and quality of life of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada. This would benefit current and future generations of Caribbean immigrants.

Summary

Caribbean immigrants migrate to Canada to improve their economic conditions and provide for their families. The migration process has become easier for immigrants due to the Skilled Visa Migrant Program. Nonetheless, this immigrant group experiences low job prospects, high unemployment/underemployment, and discriminatory hiring practices. Despite being qualified and experienced, the nontransferability of their

credentials is perceived as a challenge. In this study, I sought to explore the barriers to their employment and to understand the logic and justification of a system/process that invites qualified immigrants into their country to fill in-demand occupations yet produces such low employment outcomes. I also sought to obtain strategies that could be used to improve employability, which could result in positive social change for this immigrant population. In the next chapter, I review relevant literature and present an analysis of Canada's labor market, current trends, challenges facing immigrants, the educational system in the Caribbean and Canada, and policy implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature on immigrants in Toronto, Canada—specifically, immigrants from the Caribbean who are living legally in Canada and are employed or underemployed. This review of the literature highlights current trends in the Canadian labor market and the barriers for this population in gaining employment in their field of study, the differences in the educational system of the two territories, the challenges Caribbean immigrants face, and the strategies employed to combat these challenges. These issues bring essential policy implications to the forefront and suggest how amendments to existing policies could help this community. I use the tenets of the social justice and equity theory to support the argument for fairness in recruiting and hiring practices.

Over the last 5 years, much discourse has centered around the merits of the skilled migrant visa program within the Caribbean community. As highlighted by the Toronto Region Immigration and Employment Council (2017), immigrants are qualified and experienced yet have the highest unemployment rates and earn 33% less than Canadian-born nationals. Even with the existing programs and policies, some of which are geared toward inclusion, fairness, and integration, immigrants struggle to obtain meaningful employment (Reitz et al., 2012). As a result, this population's integration into society takes a long time.

Immigrants migrate because they seek better wages and jobs, not to experience unemployment or underemployment. Some immigrants feel that the skilled migrant

program is misleading. As a Caribbean national, I have been privy to some of the concerns and critiques of the skilled migrant visa program, which led to this research focus.

In this study, I sought to ascertain the key impediments to the acceptance and nontransferability of Caribbean credentials, whether these impediments are based on cultural and educational factors, and what industries and professions are most affected. The research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of the Caribbean diaspora and other stakeholders regarding the barriers to or facilitators of improving the recognition and transferability of Caribbean credentials in Toronto, Canada?

While other immigrant groups are impacted by this phenomenon, for the purpose of this study, only Caribbean nationals from the English-speaking Caribbean were included. This phenomenon is not limited to Canada, but for this study, Canada was the country of focus, specifically the GTA. My research aims were to ascertain the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the quality of Caribbean credentials and to use the findings to help formulate new policies or improve existing policies/programs relating to immigration and credentials assessment.

Literature Search Strategy

My research is concerned with fairness and equity within the context of employment opportunities and hiring practices for skilled Caribbean immigrants. Thus, the main keywords used in my search were *immigrants in Canada*, *challenges facing immigrants in Canada*, *Canada's labor market*, and the *employment/unemployment rates of immigrants*. In comparing the educational systems of the two regions, I expanded my

keywords to include the *educational system in Canada and Jamaica, accreditation practices, and assessing and evaluating foreign credentials in Canada*. With regard to my theoretical framework, I used keywords such as *social justice and equity, equity in education, international immigration, and immigration policies*. I also used Rawls's book *A Theory of Justice* as a literature source. The four main databases I used for my searches were Walden University's library website, academia.com, researchgate.net, and ERIC. I also used Google Scholar as an alternative database.

Theoretical Foundation

Social Justice and Equity

According to Rawls (1971, 1999), social justice is the basic structure of society and facilitates how institutions in society distribute essential rights, duties, influence, and advantages. These institutions define an individual's rights and abilities and influence their prospects. Other theorists, such as Rousseau, Kant, and Hobbs, share similar ideologies related to social contracts and social justice (Laskar, 2013). The social structure present in society gives individuals different positions and expectations that are determined by a political system, social and economic circumstances, and institutions that favor certain locations over others (Rawls, 1971). In this context, justice is explained as the means of a proper balance between competing claims with a set of related principles. The principles of justice dictate the rights and duties in assigning the division of social advantages and/or benefits (Rawls, 1971).

Hobbs opined that the social contract theory came about as people in society sought to respect each other and live-in peace and harmony (Laskar, 2013). People felt

that to live in harmony, they should surrender their rights and liberties to preserve peace, life, and property. In return, the authority would guarantee life, property, and liberty. Hobbs believed that people pursued only that which was in their best interest (Laskar, 2013). Locke differed from Hobbs in that Locke believed that every individual's organic condition has rights given by nature, and individuals are responsible to conduct their lives as they see fit. In this society, people are equal and free to pursue their own interests (Jensen, 2018). Locke believed that the purpose of government was to uphold and protect the natural rights of humans. Locke argued for a state of liberty, not a license to life, liberty, and property.

Rousseau shared the same ideology as Rawls and advocated for people's sovereignty—their freedom and liberty (Laskar, 2013). Rousseau also believed that the state and law should be the product of the will of the people, and if government did not conform to the will of the people, it should be removed. Both Locke and Rousseau shared the view that the state of nature is a state of perfect freedom and that the state exists to preserve the natural rights of the citizens (Laskar, 2013). If government failed in this regard, citizens had the right to rebel. The role of government was to secure the rights and property of its people. Locke made the distinction that a civil society was not the same as government.

Rawls's theory of social justice is in direct contrast to Nozick's entitlement theory of justice. Nozick argued that government should not be involved in the distribution of wealth and should mainly be providers of law and order (Meadowcroft, 2011). Nozick argued that people should be allowed to work and acquire the wealth or rewards of their

labor. Novick argued for a minimalist state that did nothing to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor; Nozick indicated that, by doing so, the government would be violating the liberties of the rich, thus withholding justice from them (Meadowcroft, 2011). Novick's theory supported individualism over a welfare state.

Further, Novick felt strongly that any theory of justice would bring some amount of entitlement and a distribution system that would infringe upon or interfere with people's lives and ultimately violate their rights (Meadowcroft, 2011). Novick argued that people have rights, and these rights should act as side constraints that would prevent them from violating the rights of others.

Kant believed that human rights operate within parameters allowed/given by the state (Jensen, 2018). Kant also believed that society can only function if the laws are given and enhanced by the state. These laws are necessary for the state to function effectively (Jensen, 2018). Thus, everyone would have the same rights and be able to act independently, so that laws could be applied and evaluated equally. If people were unable to act independently, then no rights would be necessary. Jensen (2018) reiterated the point that in exercising one's rights undermines the rights of others, and it is not good enough to act on our own moral leanings. A system is needed that guides people to take each other into account. Kant's philosophy outlines the framework as to what justice is and how it is recognized. The meaning of justice will however change according to time and circumstance (Jensen, 2018).

In Rawls's (1971) theory, the basis of the social justice theory is justice as fairness. Social justice is the basic structure of a society. These principles govern the

assignment of duties and rights in these institutions and determine the distribution of social life's benefits and burdens. Novick rejected this ideology and argued that if one has natural talents and abilities for which they are rewarded and entitled based on whatever income flows from it, then people are thus entitled to the unequal holdings that flow from their natural assets/talents (Meadowcroft, 2011). Novick believed that justice and the distribution of wealth could be managed by three principles: justice in acquisition, justice in transfer, and justice by correction if the first two principles of acquisition and transfer are violated.

The theories of Rosseau and Kant provide support to Rawls' theory of justice. Rawls's two principles of justice state that everyone should have equal rights to the basic liberties for themselves and others. Rawls believed that social and economic inequalities should be managed so that everyone can benefit from its advantages and be eligible for positions and offices that are open to everyone (Rawls, 1971). Based on this explanation, injustice can be determined as inequalities that are not to the benefit of all. This interpretation, though vague, outlines the basic premise behind justice and fairness. With democratic equality, the difference principle is satisfied, it is impossible to make one man better off without disadvantaging another. Thus, justice needs to be consistent with efficiency and fairness (Rawls, 1971, 1999).

The democratic interpretation is achieved by combining the fair price of equality of opportunity with the difference principle. This principle eliminates the indeterminates from which the social and economic structures are to be judged (Rawls, 1971). The social order should not seek to establish and secure the more attractive prospects to those better

off unless it is also to the advantage of those lesser off. In essence, the distribution should make both persons better off (Rawls, 1999).

Rawls's work focused on liberty and the acquisition, transfer, and distribution of material goods, income, and wealth. Rawls's theory can be specifically applied to education, welfare, migration, and healthcare, with important policy ramifications (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Rawls (1971) asked the question "If people had a choice, what basic moral character would free, equal and rational people vote to accept for regulating their society?" (p. 121) and argued that people are capable of having a sense of good, and a sense of justice. People operate under a veil of ignorance and do not know anything specific about their society or themselves (Rawls, 1971). The basic principle is that this ignorance allows no one to bargain for justice principles that would favor their condition. Rawls thus argues that in the first principle each person would have an equal right to a total system of basic liberties. In the second principle, social and economic inequalities are arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under full equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971). In Rawls's view, there should be an equal playing field as it relates to the distribution of goods and services in society.

The basic principles referred to in the liberty principle include the right to vote and be eligible for public office, freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, the right to gain personal property and freedom from arrest. Rawls assumed that the government should handle the problem of unequal worth of liberties due to wealth difference. Rawls's view of distributive justice is opposed by

Novick's theory of anarchy state and utopia (ASU) as it relates to wealth and income.

Novick argued that entitlement must play a part in any theory of justice and any interference on a continuous basis will affect an individual's natural rights (Meadowcroft, 2011).

Nonetheless, both Rawls and Novick agree that the concepts that govern the use of ethics need to be improved (Meadowcroft, 2011), and they reject utilitarianism as it does not take into account the differences that exist among individuals. Rawls noted that there was a difference between the welfare of society and the welfare of the individual. A moral theory to reduce the welfare of one to benefit another is flawed. Moral integrity and autonomy should lead to rights as side constraints (Meadowcroft, 2011). Rawls (1971, 1999) opined that with the opportunity principle, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged to open positions to all under equality of opportunity. All should have a fair chance of obtaining them. Those with the same level of talent or skill have the same prospects of success regardless of their place in the social system. For example, a right to an education should not be frustrated by a lack of income.

Rawls's opportunity principle can apply to the fairness or lack thereof in expanding the job opportunity pool so that it can be more inclusive. However, making it more inclusive is not enough; it also has to be more fair. To elaborate, discriminatory practices and procedures such as requiring Canadian experience and rejecting resumes based solely on someone's name are not only blatant discrimination but also exclusive. The perception that non-Canadian degrees equal lower quality of degree compared to a degree earned in the host country helps to perpetuate the stigma of less than or not good

enough. Non-Canadian qualifications are perpetuated by the very term used to categorize foreign credentials.

In my view, I reject Novick's entitlement distribution theory. Novick argued that the distribution of wealth and income meant taking away from the wealthy to give to the poor, which would infringe upon the rights of the wealthy. This is not my understanding of Rawls's social justice theory. Rawls advocated for fairness in the distribution of wealth and opportunity. For example, if this theory were applied to the Canadian job market, immigrants do not want jobs to be withheld from Canadians so they can be given to them. Immigrants would like an equal opportunity to be able to compete for these jobs through call backs, interviews, selection, and eventual hire. Immigrants want to be able to compete and secure professional and well-paying jobs. Immigrants are not even granted call backs nor even make it to the interview stage (Drouspoulous, 2011). Immigrants' applications are screened and rejected based on their names, country of education, and lack of Canadian experience (Drouspoulous, 2011).

Per Rawls (1971), the difference principle and the distribution of goods could operate from the political-economic system. The least well off should obtain the maximum amount possible under maximization of the minimum. Educational and other resources could be allocated to improve long-term expectations of the least favored. This concept can be applied to any of the social systems and has been used extensively in immigration, welfare, and education sectors. Rawls (1971) felt that the basic needs must be met before liberty, fair equality and difference principle come into play.

Literature Review

Brief History on Migration in the Caribbean

Migration is not new to the Caribbean experience. As far back as the 1930s, Caribbean men went to work on the Panama Canal (Thomas-Hope, 2002). In the 1950s and 1960s, skilled teachers and nurses from the English-speaking Caribbean islands migrated to the United Kingdom, seeking a better way of life for themselves and their families. In the 1970s and 1980s, this trend intensified with a mass exodus of migrants migrating to the United States and Canada (Thomas-Hope, 2002). The United States continues to be the preferred destination of choice for the English-speaking Caribbean nationals due to its proximity to the islands and strong economy. Canada is the second destination of choice, with the United Kingdom following closely behind (Thomas-Hope, 2002). Migration to the United Kingdom and the United States occurred through active ongoing recruitment for local nurses and teachers to fill the demand in these countries (Brown & Reginald, 2008).

Historically, people migrated as they sought to improve their living standards and access opportunities that they would not have had access to in their home countries (Brown & Reginald, 2008). In the 1970s, the petroleum market boom saw Caribbean nationals migrating to other Caribbean islands such as Aruba, Trinidad, and Tobago and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Working Papers on Migration, 2017). The development of the tourism industry also witnessed migration to the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas. Migration is not only in the form of interregional but also intra and extra regional with about 10% of migration taking place. Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, Dominican Republic are

the main countries that send workers to other Caribbean islands (Lesser, Fernandez-Alfaro, Courie, Btruni, 2006).

Many families though separated, still enjoy close familial ties. Families are not bound to one destination and usually spend their time living between two countries. It's not unusual for Caribbean people especially children of migrants, to have dual citizenships (Thomas-Hope, 2002). The large Caribbean diaspora overseas provide valuable resources in terms of remittances, acquired knowledge and language skills. Diaspora communities promote social, political, and cultural influence in their country of origin (Lesser et al, 2006).

Over the last two decades, Canada has become one of the easier countries to migrate to because of language compatibility and its federal skilled visa program. Many persons from the English-speaking Caribbean islands have applied for and have been successful in obtaining entry into Canada via this program. However, there are many challenges facing new immigrants upon arrival into the country. For this research, the challenge that will be focused on is the nontransferability of skills and qualifications which limits the pace at which immigrants are able to gain employment and successfully integrate into society.

Canada's Labor Market

Canada's immigration selection system is one that attempts to support the country's economic development and growth. However, many of the outcomes are less than expected (Sweetman, 2013). For example, the slow pace of integration of immigrant families into the wider society. According to Stanford (2000), policy discourse has

emerged due to increased poverty levels and a decline in market outcomes. More policy reforms are being touted. Some of the discussed policy issues include more government reforms relating to nationhood, humanitarian concerns, and social inclusion (Stanford, 2000).

Russell and O'Neil (2019) report that in 2016-2017, the Canadian job market saw a slight increase in the employment rates, but the unemployment rates remained the same. 80%–85% of jobs are in the nonregulated professions. For example, retail, manufacturing, and trade jobs (Toronto Trading Board, 2006). Earnings growth did not accelerate in harmony with the rate of inflation. Canada's labor force is approximately 19.6 million and is about 65% of the total population. 21% of the labor force is under 55. 14% is between 15-24 (Sweetman, 2012).

A quarter of the labor force are immigrants, and they have the highest unemployment rate (Statistics Canada, 2018). Healthcare and social services are the highest employment industries with 2.14 million, this is followed closely by retail trade at 2.11 million. Statistics Canada (2018) report that employment increased in several provinces. Namely, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Prince Edward Island. Employment however declined in Newfoundland and Labrador. British Columbia has the highest employment rate in the country (Statistics Canada, 2018).

It's estimated that by 2040, 25% of Canadians will be 65 years and over (Thornton, Russell and O'Neil, 2019). This projection reveals the need for more immigrants. Canada's population is 37.6 million. Its growth rate is mainly driven by immigration, which stands at 1.4% (Sweetman, 2012). Immigrants are necessary to

achieve economic growth, fund the tax-payer pensions and health care systems, and keep the country's GDP stable and balanced (Sweetman 2012). Canada accepts about 300,000 immigrants per year. By 2021, this figure is expected to increase to 350,000. Canada's immigration report (2018) suggests that reducing immigration would increase healthcare costs. Further, the labor force would be out of balance (Thornton, Russel & O'Neil, 2019). The underutilization of the skills of Canadian immigrants cost the economy 2-3 billion dollars annually, and is the most disappointing reality facing immigrants (Watt & Bloom, 2001; Li, 2004)

It is projected that by 2040, 13.4% of the currently employed will retire, and only 11.8% are expected to join the workplace (Thornton, Russel & O'Neil, 2019). Without migration, GDP would drop for the next two decades to 1.1% (Thornton, Russel & O'Neil, 2019). With a steady immigration, GDP would rise to 1.7-2.0%. Immigration is therefore needed and has positive impacts on the health of the economy. The effects of immigration are higher however when immigrants are better integrated (Thornton, Russel & O'Neil, 2019). Canada has taken immigration for granted and could lose immigrants as they could simply decide to go to other countries. Skilled workers and entrepreneurs are highly mobile internationally (Aydemir & Robinson, 2006). Canada, especially Toronto, needs to do more to integrate its newcomers into the labor force. According to Wayland (2006) the difficulties facing newcomers is a Canadian problem not an immigrant problem.

Canada's Federal Skilled Migrant Program

At the beginning of the 21st century, rich developed nations saw the opportunity to grow and expand their economies. They saw the advantages of recruiting bright and talented people from overseas (Tannock, 2019). In so doing, they saw the potential to increase their global competitiveness and maximize their high skilled knowledge jobs. Governments felt under pressure to open up their borders to highly skilled immigrants. In addition, low birth rates, globalization, and an aging population added to the demand for immigrants among developed nations (Skeldon, 2002).

Buzdugan (2009) purports that skilled immigration is a cheap solution to increase Canada's economic growth because it does not bear the cost of educating these skilled workers. In addition, skilled workers are preferred to family class immigrants and refugees due to their high human capital (Abu Laban & Gabnel, 2002). Canada is one of several countries that have capitalized on this opportunity. Over the last 30 years, Canada has made it easier for qualified professionals to obtain permanent residence and work permits by way of the skilled migrant visa program (Sweetman, 2012). Other commonwealth countries such as New Zealand and Australia also have a similar type of skilled visa program.

Under the Federal Skilled Worker program workers in 347 eligible occupations who meet the minimum entry requirements may be eligible for a skilled worker program visa. Applicants are ranked based on their age, education, work experience, language ability, and adaptability factors, such as family members living in Canada. If they secure enough points, they can apply for the skilled migrant visa (Sweetman, 2012). Most of the

immigrants to Canada settle in the GTA. As of 2016, approximately 2.7 million immigrants reside in the Toronto Metropolitan area (Sweetman, 2002). These individuals make up 70.2 percent of Ontario's population and 35.9% of Canada's immigrant population. In 2016, new Caribbean immigrants living in Toronto stood at 21,140.

Many qualified Caribbean nationals have gained entry into Canada and eventual citizenship by way of the federal skilled worker program. The Caribbean people are a qualified talent pool, with many individuals holding a Bachelors's degree or higher qualification. Over 200 occupations or professions in the occupations in demand list rely on overseas talent to fill these positions. And many Caribbean professionals came to Canada hoping to fill these positions. However, based on my understanding of the literature, the very skills and credentials that qualified them for entry into the country are not accepted for employment. In other words, these skills, and qualifications though valuable, are nontransferable.

Challenges Facing Canadian Immigrants

Immigrants in Canada often struggle to find employment and the data regarding immigrants is often opposing. This is largely because some researchers use data for both self-employed and full-time employed individuals while others analyze earnings for full-time employees only (Skeldon, 2002). While this may be true, immigrants' employment rates compared to similar-aged Canadians are twice as high, and immigrants' average wage is 35% less than Canadians (Skeldon, 2002). Immigrants are more likely to obtain employment in small and medium-size companies (Alboim & McIssac, 2007). The

democratic struggle for fair treatment in society and the economy is continuously expressed by frustrated immigrants and new citizens of the country (Sawchuk, 2008).

While this scenario of immigrant unemployment applies to other countries, it is somewhat unique to Canada as it supposedly accepts immigrants with superior level education, skills, experience, and industry demand (Tannock, 2009). Moreover, most of the immigrants coming to Canada have at least an undergraduate degree. This is 60% of the immigrant population compared to the 20% of Canadian-born nationals (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Canada has the highest per-capita immigration in the world. Policymakers are concerned with the low level of immigrant integration. This low level of integrating suggests that immigrants are not assimilating into the host country as well as they could be (Sweetman, 2012). Immigrants are not doing well economically compared to their predecessors, even though they are better educated (Li, 2003). Caribbean immigrants experience higher unemployment rates and lower incomes due to devaluation of credentials or lack of recognition (Weiner, 2007; Li, 2003; Pendakur, 2001). Devaluing or not recognizing their credential raise the question that maybe transfer and/or existing bridge programs, social assistance, child tax benefits, and income tax revenues, are not very effective. Why is Canada's skilled visa program not as successful as it could be? The reasons vary per province and population.

According to Weiner (2007) the four main barriers to labor market integration are lack of recognition of foreign credentials, lack of communication skills specific to the workplace, employer's insistence on Canadian experience, and discrimination. These

reasons were also posited by Bouchard (2006) who wrote that Canadian employers feel that immigrants are not knowledgeable of Canadian culture, labor market, the norms of the Canadian workplace and lack other needed skills. Bouchard (2006) continues that information should be provided on equivalencies between foreign credentials and Canadian skills, labor market information and challenges immigrants are likely to encounter upon arrival. Moreover, that they begin preparing for the Canadian labor market before they arrive. Many immigrants are oblivious of the credential challenge awaiting them (Bouchard, 2006, Li, 2003).

High skilled professionals end up working in factories and retail stores in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and are not accounted for as being unemployed but are underemployed. Immigrants come to the country with human capital that they want to utilize, benefit from, and not waste (Reitz, 2006). In fact, 70% of the net labor growth was attributed to immigration and this figure is even higher in Toronto (Weiner, 2007). How can we achieve justice as it relates to credential recognition is a research area that has received significant political, economic, policy and research attention in Canada (Sawchuk, 2008). Credential assessments, regulations to ensure fair access to professional licensing, bridge programs and settlement services have been adopted. The Ontario Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act (2006) have mandated transparency in assessing immigrant credentials (Office of Fairness Commission (2011).

The TRIEC helps new immigrants to integrate into the labor market. Its mission is to remove the barriers immigrants face upon entry into the labor market. They provide such programs as the training and loans program for short-term training, credential

assessment and examination fees (TRIEC, n.d.). The TRIEC also offers support to employers as it relates to training for employers to remove biases from their recruiting process and offers support for staff and community agencies to better interact with their employers (TRIEC, n.d.). However, are these actions/policies effective?

Polarities of Democracy

The POD is a theory which seeks to guide healthy, sustainable, and just social change efforts by maximizing and minimizing the positive and negatives factors (Benet, 2006, 2013). The ten elements that constitute this theory are further categorized as five (5) polarity pairs. They are freedom and authority, justice and due process, participation and representation, diversity and equality, human rights, and communal obligations (Benet, 2012, 2013).

According to Benet (2013) the POD came about as an answer to guide the efforts and goals of positive social change as there was no clear or agreed definition of democracy. For democracy to work, there needs to be some unifying system or process that will bridge the differences that exist. Some of the challenges facing the society and its citizens are climate change, poverty, unemployment, joblessness, and political unrest. POD came out of critical theory and builds upon emancipation, freedom, and eliminating dominion/control by any one group. POD extends on the premise that the sets of opposites operate interdependently and in dealing with a solution, we have to examine both sides of the opposing spectrum.

Johnson (1996 as cited in Benet, 2013) asserts that there is a tension in all polarities related to how and when to shift the pole. By applying POD, we can understand

the forces and the complexities that support each opposing pole and work towards a solution that benefit each opposing group. When POD is not appropriately managed, there will be a push and pull ad infinitum, with one side gaining and the other losing. Benet (2006, 2012) opines that the 10 elements of the POD model have to be managed effectively to achieve the full benefits. For the polarities to be optimized, there has to be a clear understanding of their elements (Johnson, 1996 as cited in Benet, 2013). The crusaders and the tradition bearers can maximize the benefits of both poles and be democratic participants. If managed successfully, POD can be applied at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels, and we can measure the effectiveness of the social change effort both qualitatively and quantitatively (Benet, 2012, 2013).

The POD is another excellent theory in assessing the phenomenon of this study. When there are multiple stakeholders, different interests and motivation regarding immigration policies will exist. Some of these stakeholders include immigration officials, professors, employment agency personnel, immigrants, policy lobbyists, job applicants, among others. Managing these different interests and understanding the motivation behind these goals/intentions by applying the concepts of POD can help to balance the negative and positive outcomes. Immigration and education policies cover a wide range of industries and focus. Careful negotiation and meaningful dialogue can result in significant and sustainable policies that can bring about positive social change.

Racism and Discrimination in Canada

Many arguments have been put forth to explain the difficulties encountered by immigrants in Canada. Especially, the skilled worker visa holders. These immigrants

obtained entry into Canada because of the points-based system which award points to applicants based on their age, skills, education, language ability etc. (Reitz, Curtis & Elrick, 2012). Canada's immigration point system can be made more fair by an integration program that could benefit immigrants. Race based disparity and class reproduction have emerged in a new maelstrom of foreign credentials and experience and the social injustice that is implied which may be indirectly perpetuated (Reitz, Curtis & Elrick, 2012). Immigrants struggle to find employment and the most common reason is that employers do not value foreign credentials. In addition, foreign work experience is not seen as being useful. Language and cultural differences were also cited (Drospoulous, 2011). These factors may not matter much however for lower-level menial jobs.

Declining labor market outcomes of new labor entrants across the board means that both immigrants and natives labor entrant's earnings have decreased (Reitz, 1998, Aydemir and Skuterund, 2004). According to Little (2003) there is lower economic return for foreign degrees compared to domestic earned credentials. Also, the native worker and the immigrants do the same work but are paid differently (Bonacich, 1979). McDale (1988) was one of the first proponents for an objective mechanism to assess foreign credentials. DeSilva (1992) argues that there is no way to ascertain if the under devaluation of foreign credentials is due to prejudice, ignorance or perhaps both. The under devaluation of foreign credentials was experienced by mostly women and minorities (Pendakun, 2000; Li 2001).

In a study seeking to understand the wage gap, a Blinder-Daxac Type Decomposition Methodology was used (Ayedimer and Skutereed, 2004; Frenette and

Morisette, 2003; and Green and Worseick, 2004). This approach searched and analyzed the similarities between immigrants and Canadian born nationals as it relates to age, qualification, and experience. The difference between an immigrant's earned and expected wage and foreign background was analyzed to determine which of these factors have the most significant explanatory power. The foreign experience was seen to be the factor with the lower returns.

In a study done by Drospoulous (2011), thousands of applications using mock resumes were sent out in response to job postings across Toronto, Canada. These jobs spanned service occupations and a wide range of industries around GTA. English, Chinese, and Pakistani names were used to determine call back rates. The study revealed that Canadian born applicants with English names were more likely to receive a callback even for those holding foreign degrees. 16% received callback with English sounding names, Canadian education, and experience. Only 5% with resumes with foreign-sounding names, education and experience received a callback (Drospoulous, 2011). This suggests that immigrants do not even make it to the interview stage of the application process. Another conclusion is that employers seem to favor Canadian experience over Canadian qualifications when interviewing foreign applicants and are more interested in interviewing these applicants (Drospoulous, 2011).

Interestingly, having a degree from an Ivy league foreign institution or acquiring additional schooling in Canada does not improve the likelihood of a callback. This is the same for both high-ranking and low-ranking Canadian institutions. Foreigners with a higher-ranked Canadian qualification, however, were 40% more likely to receive a

callback. Thus, education plays a minor role only if the applicant has less than 4-6 years of experience (Drosoulous, 2011). Otherwise, having Canadian experience is vital to securing jobs.

The third conclusion is that there is substantial discrimination related to the ethnicity associated with the applicant's name. Callback significantly declined by 40% (Drosoulous, 2011). If this is so, then employers need to understand that these are discriminatory practices. Many employers argue that discrimination is unintentional (Drosoulous, 2011).

Declining labor market outcomes of new labor entrants across the board means that both immigrants and natives labor entrant's earnings have decreased (Reitz, 1998, Aydemir and Skuterund, 2004). According to Little (2003) there is lower economic return for foreign degrees compared to domestic earned credentials. According to Buzdugan (2009) the value attributed to education depends on the level of education acquired and place of education. Racial and economic discrimination is becoming evident due to the widening gap between immigrants, minorities, and whites (Buzdugan, 2009). In addition, social and structural barriers such as obtaining the required Canadian licenses and certification of their profession prevent the immigrants from working in their area of training. These institutions were seen as acting as gatekeepers (Ngo and Este, 2006).

In summarizing the results of the above study, the main takeaways are that for immigrants, Canadian experience seems to be more favored than credentials. Further, there are little economic benefits to be earned from foreign degrees. This position can be altered however if Canadian qualifications are obtained. For the new immigrants entering

the country there is not much of an alternative but to struggle to find any legal job that will provide for them and their families. Then, devise a plan to obtain some sort of Canadian credentials sometime in the near future. While this looks like a good plan on paper, the fact of the matter is that these jobs do not provide sufficient income to take care of their families. Many immigrants end up subsidizing their income with welfare assistance from the government.

Certification and Licensing

The quality of credentials or education earned is often verified and confirmed through licensing and accreditation. In Jamaica, the UCJ is the primary institution that accredits courses and programs at the tertiary level (University Council, 2020). In Canada, evaluation, and assessment institutions like WES and ECA are highly respected institutions that evaluate foreign credentials. According to WES website, its goal is to help international students and professionals achieve their goals in the United States and Canada. And they evaluate and advocate for the recognition of international educational qualifications. Their evaluations are recognized by businesses, government institutions and over 2500 educational institutions worldwide (WES, 2020).

The UCJ is the premier external quality assurance agency for higher education in Jamaica. It registers and assures the quality of local programs and institutions as well as foreign programs being offered in Jamaica. It also acts as the information center for local, regional, and international education institutions and qualifications (University Council, 2020). The UCJ's main mission is to be the center of excellence, enabling national, regional, and international development through higher education quality assurance. Its

mission is to facilitate and oversee the development and maintenance of a robust higher education quality assurance system. Its policy objective is to commit to safeguarding quality and standards in the provision of higher education and training institutions (University Council, 2020).

With the expansion and growth of the international labor market, it begs the question, “Should local institutions be focusing on regional accreditation or regional and international accreditation?” In other words, how can our tertiary educational institutions equip our students with transferrable skills and credentials so that they can compete successfully on the international job market? It seems that the UCJ’s primary focus is on assuring local and regional quality markers for the general public.

Accreditation is of particular importance for professionals in the health, medical, educational, and technological industries (Sweetman, 2012). Especially for healthcare workers and workers in the education industry. Many doctors, nurses, etc., find that they have to complete bridging programs those local institutions require to bring them up to acceptable destination standards (Sklair, 2001). In studies conducted by Moskel and North (2017) and Breen (2016), it was revealed that the place of education was a strong determinant in whether an applicant was denied or accepted for a job in the international job market.

Aligning Caribbean Credentials With the Canadian System

Quality has been a critical issue in educational policies and the focus of higher education (Ramirez & Berger, 2013). Caribbean society is one that places a high value on education. This is evidenced in the number of immigrants holding tertiary education. The

education system is based on the British education model, and it is a three-level system of education. They are kindergarten to elementary school, secondary education and post-secondary or tertiary education. Our elementary education starts from Grades one to six. Students sit an external exam in Grades 5 and 6 and are awarded placement in high schools or secondary schools if successful.

The secondary schools in the Caribbean are from first to the fifth form. In the fifth form, students sit the Caribbean Examinations Council or the General Certificate of Education Cambridge examination from the United Kingdom or O' Levels as it is called. Successful passes in five or more subjects grant you advanced placement into sixth form, a 2 year program for university preparation. The first year is called lower sixth, and the second year is called the upper sixth. In the second year, students sit the A' Levels or General Certificate of Education examinations from the United Kingdom or the CAPE. Successful passes of two or more of these subjects will grant them entry or matriculation into our local university or university overseas.

Entry into tertiary institutions is very competitive (DaLisle, 2012). Students gain entry based on the required matriculation designated per program. Generally speaking, students are required to have five passes at the Ordinary Level Examination and two or more passes at the Cambridge Advanced Level Examination or the Caribbean Advance Placement Examinations (CAPE). Most colleges in the Caribbean offer diploma and Bachelor's degree programs and specialized training courses and certification. Our universities offer undergraduate and graduate programs. The Bachelor's degree program is usually a three or four-year program (University Council, 2020). The Master's degree

is usually a two-year program, and successful completion of same can grant you entry into the Ph.D. program. The Ph.D. program can take anywhere between 3-7 years to complete.

The Caribbean system of tests and placements have had its share of critics. They argue that upward mobility is denied to many, and they are only a few that can earn these spots in the universities (DaLisle, 2012). Also, the tuition is often outside of the means of many prospective students, and parents/students have to seek loans to pursue tertiary education. De Lisle (2012) called these systems gatekeepers that determine entry and or denial into the pathway of social gain and upward mobility. Thus, even in the Caribbean system, the issue of access and equity in education is challenged. Roberts (2003) argues that higher education is not a path that is made available to everyone but should be.

Canada's Education System

Canada is said to have one of the highest education systems in the world. In 2015, 66% of the population have obtained post-secondary education. It doesn't have a federal department system of education (Government of Canada, 2017). Instead, it's led by the provincial and territorial governments (Garea, 2014; Morgan, 2017, Lessrad & Brassard, 2004). The education system is funded mainly by property taxes 58.4%, local brand 25%, other grants 14.6%, and the federal government 2% (The Education System in Canada, 2020). Their Ministry of Education leads each province, and the ministers serve on the council of CMEC and provide leadership at the local and international levels (The Education System in Canada, 2020).

Canada's decentralized education system is based on three-level system – pre-primary and primary, secondary, and post-secondary. In the primary education goes from grades 1 to 8. In comparing this to the system in the Caribbean, it is different as ours go from grades 1 to 6. Pre-elementary program students are introduced to the alphabet, pre-reading, mathematical skills, music art, and play (Waddington, 2018). These schools are geared toward preparing students for primary education.

Primary education is compulsory and runs from grades 1-6. Then there is an intermediate education called junior high school consisting of grades 7 & 8 9 ages 12-14 (Waddington, 2018). Then secondary education runs from grades 9-12. The secondary system in the Caribbean is from grades 7 – 11 with an upper level of grades 12 & 13 or 6th form. Some schools in Ontario also have a grade 12+. After grade 12 it is either college, university, or vocational schools for students (Waddington, 2018). Likewise, in the Caribbean, after grade 12, it is unto the university or college if the student has secured enough subject passes to gain entry.

The curriculum in high school is made to prepare students for entry into college or university. In Canada, college refers to a community college or a technical or applied arts school (Waddington, 2018). Many students use it as a pathway into university. The degree structure at a Canadian university is the same as the US: Bachelor's degree usually takes 3, 4 or 5 years to complete. The Master's degree usually takes two years to complete, and the PhD specialized degree usually take between 3-6 years to complete (Waddington, 2018).

In Jamaica, a Bachelor's degree takes 3-4 years to complete. The Master's program can take between 18-24 months and the Ph.D. program can take between 3-7 years to complete. Territories and provinces are fully responsible for all their tertiary institutions. The provincial governments provide the majority of the funding. School fees, the federal government, and research grants also contribute to the institution's funding.

According to Waddington (2018) one difference between the US and Canada is that there is no accrediting body that oversees their universities. Canada has a degree-granting authority via an Act of Ministerial Consent from the Ministry of education in each province. Only one federally funded university in Canada possess degree-granting power – The Royal military College of Canada (The Education System in Canada, 2020).

Equity in Education

Equity in education means that students should be allowed the maximum opportunities/resources that will enable them to reach their full potential without limits based on community background or “dispositional characteristics” (Luke, Woods, Weir, 2013). According to Weir (2013), the three criteria for justice are redistribution, recognition, and representation. In a study conducted by Ling and Nasri (2019) it was revealed that the four main issues in equity in education are: health equity, equipping educators to take action, building relationship for student success, and providing an environment where immigrant students can feel welcome and have equitable access to higher education. They asserted that in a multi-cultural society, differences should be welcomed and appreciated. Positive cultures should be encouraged in schools so that

every student, regardless of ethnicity or background can be equally successful (Ling and Nasri, 2019).

The above recommendations as proposed by Ling and Nasri (2019) aligns with the Polarities of Democracy theory that came out of critical theory and builds upon emancipation, freedom, and eliminating dominion/control by any one group (Benet, 2013). POD extends on the premise that the sets of opposites operate interdependently and in dealing with a solution, we have to examine both sides of the opposing spectrum so that each opposing side/group benefits from a win-win situation. This can only become reality if the needs and desires of each are carefully balanced (Benet, 2013).

According to Naser (2003) quality of educational opportunity across nations has not existed as a political product of any one significant group. Moreover, it is not considered by those who would be concerned with equal educational opportunity policy and research (Stanford, 2002). Equal educational opportunity is framed by methodological nationalism which has resulted in systemic blindness that has led to creating national communities that are separated. This has led to “great controversy” regarding its definition, conceptualization, and proliferation of research theory discrimination. Yet, these discriminations are seldom investigated, questioned, or challenged and arises only when a global international or comparative approach to education research and theory is required or necessary (Stanford, 2002).

The international organizations geared towards dealing with issues of inequalities and injustices between nations continue to adopt and embrace educational concepts that systematically render these inequalities invisible and inadmissible (Ling and Nasri,

2019). Ling and Nari (2019) further opines that these organizations want to increase the levels of quality and access for poorer students and nations and realign inequalities between students within nations. These organizations want to do so without first addressing the inequalities in education that exist between different nations and nationalities.

Since education is organized nationally, it would be best to tackle this matter at the national level. This might work if nations worked discrete and autonomously, but no nation works in a vacuum (Sweetman, 2012). Inequality in education can also be viewed not just between individuals wishing to compete in the global job market but also by nations to compete with each other for a larger share of the economic pie (Sweetman, 2012). Globalization can be seen as a hindrance or facilitator of equity and equality, depending on which lens you use (Rubaii, 2016). Developed nations have capitalized on this ideology, which increases their economic gains to normalize and neutralize educational inequalities both in opportunity and outcome (Skeldon, 2009).

The question could be asked whether developing countries could also capitalize on this opportunity? Surely, it could be a win-win situation for both regions. The host country benefits from a qualified workforce, increased capital gains and a stronger economy. Similarly, the developing country could benefit from remittances, exchange in labor, skills, and training opportunities through some sort of memorandum of understanding between the two regions. These are areas that could be further explored.

Equity in Education and Nontransferability of Qualifications

A review of the literature revealed that studies have been conducted on the migrant community across several countries/territories and their challenges in obtaining employment. Previous significant research has documented issues relating to the lack of recognition and the devaluing of foreign credentials (Alboim, Maytee Foundation, 2002, 2003; Bloom, 2002; Grant, 2000; Brower, 1999, Sempter, 2001). This was also supported by Chui (2003) who writes that lack of Canadian experience and transferability of foreign credentials were cited as the most critical barriers to employment.

Studies have also been done on the migrant community in Europe, UK, North America, and Australia (Lancee & Boi, 2017), (Moskal & North, 2017), (Hagan, Lowe and Quingla, 2011) and (Breen, 2016). Hogan, Lowe and Quingla (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between human capital and economic mobility within the USA's Mexican immigrant community. The participants for his study were drawn from workers employed in the unregulated US economy. For example, construction, private childcare, and healthcare.

Lancee and Boi (2017) investigated the transferability of skills and qualifications of immigrants living in Europe and the U.K. His findings suggest that having a foreign degree or non-Western degree is associated with lower income and employment. His findings supported the case that earning one's degree or qualifications outside of the host country affects the immigrant's wage potential negatively due to the limited transferability of their credentials (Lancee & Boi, 2017). They further assert that the differences in the earning potential can be explained by the differences in skills between

holders of native degrees. Similar research conducted by Moskal & North (2007) examined the educational system in Europe as it relates to equity in education.

Equity in education has gained much traction due to Europe's refugee crises (Kothoff, 2016). Moskal and North (2007) sought to explore how educational systems and processes can be more fair, and inclusive in terms of access, experience and outcomes for migrants and refugee students. They also investigated the role of education in the social and integration process of women in the U.K. Buzdugan (2009) asserts that an immigrants' education has an impact on earnings and that Canadian work experience seems to have more value to employers (Buzdugan, 2009).

The fact that foreign work experience is not valued despite living in an era of globalization and geographic mobility, is indeed puzzling. Also, foreign education is a disadvantage to the immigrant in the labor market (Chui, 2003). Of note, is the fact that white immigrant's credentials are devalued while minority immigrants experience lack of credential recognition. This observation was also noted by Lancee and Boi (2017). This distinction is an important point to make in terms of future research and policy implications (Buzdugan, 2009).

Breen (2016) conducted a study on Irish immigrants working in Australia. Their findings suggest that educational systems and processes need to be fair and inclusive, so that it offers more support to the integration process of migrants and refugees. They suggest that the current education system's policy formulation and structure need to be more mindful of the migrant and refugee communities. The suggestions of fairness and inclusivity were also highlighted by Reitz, Curtis & Elrick (2012).

Hogan et al (2011) focused their study on the Latino community in America. They wrote that there is very little discussion in the literature regarding how immigrants working in the unregulated industry respond to and resist discrimination, as well as maneuver blocked mobility. In essence, they hoped to offer a sociological alternative to understanding skill acquisition, learning and economic mobility within the Latino immigrant community.

The above studies focused on different migrant groups, and the challenges they faced in obtaining employment. No study has yet examined the issue of nontransferability of skills and qualifications from the perspectives of the people responsible for evaluating credentials and formulating policies, nor from the perspective of the Caribbean diaspora members. The lack of research on this sub-group and phenomenon is apparent.

Moskal and North (2017) suggest that further investigations be done to ascertain how education systems and processes can be equitable. Per Lucas & Beresford (2010), success or failure in education is associated with socioeconomic factors. Understanding the interplay between these factors may improve the employment and educational outcomes for the immigrant population. Thus, equity in education is a key role in fair hiring practices and employment outcomes. Is the way forward the way of policies and programs or another? I would surmise and say that it will require a combination of policies/programs as well as established and published evaluation credential standards.

Policy Implications and Benefits

Policy is a discursive and emotional area with complex dynamics (Fineman, 2008.) Paying attention to policy proposals is important because policies govern our

world and guide outcomes that is supposed to improve lives (Treat, 2016b). The most important policy question might be how well the average immigrant in each visa class successfully integrates into the labor market after meeting the relevant immigration requirements and moving to Canada? Another policy question could be why isn't the Canadian Skilled Visa Program as successful as it could be? Another area of interest is the brain drain and brain gain for both territories (Treat, 2016b). While there are arguments for both sides, for the purpose of this paper, I'll focus on policies that address, training, education, and integration.

Canada has capitalized on benefitting from foreign talent to drive its economy, balance its GDP and maintain a stable labor force (Sheldon, 2009). Freedom to move is deemed a basic human right (United Nations Declaration, 1948). Everyone has the right to travel and return, but not the right to move intentionally, hence the international immigration policy. Canada's labor market is considered to be inflexible and can be made more efficient, reducing unemployment in the long run (Standford, 2000).

In order to respond to the various experiences, values and knowledge, equity and widening participation of policy understandings and approaches need to be reframed (Bietsa, 2010; Peters and Treat, 2016). Equity policy is a recent political phenomenon in higher education. One such disparity that should be examined is the difference in the recognition of foreign credentials. To expand, white immigrant credentials are devalued, and minority immigrant's qualifications are not recognized (Buzdugan, 2009). Does this have to do with the educational standards and practices in the country of origin? Despite claims of objectivity, policy approaches and their narratives are created, implemented,

and governed with “broader politic investments and subjective positionings and interests”. Political goals and intentions often drive policymakers and policy framings (Treat, 2016).

Hermans & Singh (2019) and Boyask, Figure and Lubienenski (2017) suggest that its absence is a key dimension of a framework of social justice (Fraser, 1997; Figure & Lubienenski, 2017). The three realms are redistribution, recognition, and representation. He argued that the 3 R’s need to be coexist for socially just participation to be possible. Policies are too often framed through the values, judgments, perceptions, and views of the white middle class (Burke, 2017). Immigrants are in fact more qualified than the average Canadian, yet Canadian employers discount the very criteria that gained them entry into the country (Grable, 2009). Immigrants feel that obtaining post-secondary Canadian education will put them at an advantage to enter the Canadian job market. 82% of immigrants had to undertake some Canadian training and or education (Grable et al, 2009). But the entry path into the Canadian job market is not clear or barrier free (Anisef et al, 2003).

According to Chui et al (2008) by 2030, immigrants will account for all net growth in the Canadian population, and by extension the labor force. It is crucial that the many stakeholders, credential assessors, employers, policy makers, gatekeepers etc. reevaluate their treatment of foreign credentials and establish mobility agreements or some similar agreement between Canada and the immigrant’s country of origin (Chui et al, 2008).

Burke & Lumb (2018) purport that we are all evaluators, and we should move from decontextualized projections to engaged evaluative collaboration and multiple viewpoints. Through collaboration between, researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders, we can gain necessary insights and cultural knowledge that give us the critical awareness to challenge our own imaginations and thinking (Burke & Lumb, 2018). Rigor and contextualization will keep the policy process complex while making space for multiple experiences, diverse cultural knowledge and lived educational experiences. Policy understanding is important for the multiple marginalized groups that exist in society.

Similar suggestions were also asserted by Buzdugan (2009) who supports the case for qualitative studies that explore the hiring practices of employers and the professional assessment procedures of assessment agencies. The results may provide more answers to the low integration, deterioration of labor market outcomes, and low transferability (Picat & Sweetman, 2005; Wosnick, 2003; Frenette & Morrissette, 2003; Li, 2003). Programs that question the effectiveness and rationale of a program that sources immigrants with a high level of education and low labor market outcomes will help to provide answers to this phenomenon.

Summary

The Caribbean region has a long history of migration. The Caribbean diaspora migrate to other countries as a means to improve their standard of living and gain access to opportunities that they would not have had in their home country. Canada has proven to be a popular destination among the Caribbean diaspora because of its skilled migrant

visa program that are opened to highly skilled individuals. Many Caribbean immigrants gain entry into Canada through this system that awards points to highly skilled and educated applicants. However, upon entry into Canada, the very criteria that gained them entry is not sufficient to gain employment. Several factors have been identified as barriers to entry. They are: lack of Canadian qualifications, lack of communication skills specific to the workplace, nontransferability of foreign credentials and discriminatory hiring practices (Chui, 2003).

Canada needs immigrants to sustain its labor force, drive its economy and keep the country's GDP balanced. However, the lack of successful integration into society by immigrants and other newcomers causes an increase in poverty levels (Buzdugan, 2009). More inclusive programs for integration such as, training, bridge programs, internship, mentoring, among others are needed. Rawls theory of social justice supports the idea of leveling the playing field. This theory seeks to advocate for a system that secures the rights, duties, influence, opportunities, and advantages in the society, and promotes fair distribution. Rawls' opportunity theory argues that the social and economic inequalities need to be arranged, so that positions are opened to all under equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971). This theory aligns with the premise of equal opportunity and social justice regarding immigrants. This research seeks to explore the inequality in the labor market and the lack of credential recognition for Caribbean immigrants.

Moskel & North (2017) suggest that further research be done to understand how the educational systems and social and economic processes can be equitable. This suggestion was also reiterated by Breen (2016) who stated that the educational and hiring

processes need to be fairer so that immigrant communities are successfully able to integrate into society. In applying the social justice, and equity framework, immigrants will be granted equal opportunity to fairly compete for jobs in the Canadian labor market. As it is now, the labor market is heavily skewed against foreign credentials and experience and put immigrants at a severe disadvantage.

Some of the suggestions presented by other researchers included further qualitative studies to explore the hiring practices of employers (Buzdugan, 2009), and programs to evaluate the evaluation process of credential assessments and policy amendments (Chui et al, 2008). More reporting and transparency were also recommended. In addition, evaluative collaborative efforts involving rigor and contextualization among multiple stakeholders as it relates to research, policy formation and processes were also suggested (Burke & Lumb, 2018). Immigrants can be positive contributors to their host country, but programs/systems could be more inclusive to facilitate not frustrate or impede their integration into society. Rapid and successful integration into society benefits not only the immigrants but the economy, and by extension, the country as well. The next chapter will give details on the research design and methodology that will be utilized to inform this qualitative research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the barriers to recognition and acceptance of Caribbean degrees as providing the equivalent competencies for similar profession and industries in Canada. The qualitative design was the research design that guided the study. Qualitative research is used to know the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social, cultural, or human problem (Creswell, 2009). In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and methodology, role of researcher, approach, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of the Caribbean diaspora and other stakeholders regarding the barriers to or facilitators of improving the recognition and transferability of Caribbean credentials in Toronto, Canada? The central concept of the study was equity in employment opportunities for Caribbean immigrants. I sought to explore the perceptions of Caribbean immigrants and other stakeholders on the recognition and transferability of credentials and how the recognition and transferability factor could be improved. Improving the recognition factor is likely to improve their employability factor. As a result, Caribbean immigrants would be better able to compete in the Canadian job market and obtain meaningful employment in their area of training.

According to Ravitch & Carl (2016), a qualitative research design establishes the way a researcher thinks out, plans, and executes a study. Research design is how a

researcher combines the theory, concepts, objectives, research questions, and data collection methods so that each component is closely aligned and flows. From the research questions to the setting and participants, all components should operate in tandem to provide answers (Ravitch & Carl (2016). The qualitative design was selected for this study because it allows the deep analysis and detailed information of the participants, which aligns with the nature of the study. Qualitative research also provides the best method to explore the phenomenon under study. Qualitative researchers must consider the audience of their study (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is a powerful inquiry that is inductive in nature, uses grounded theory, and gathers information in the real world rather than in a lab (Patton, 2015).

The entire research process is inductive and iterative. Each element is constantly being shaped as it responds to real-time learning. Previously, qualitative designs mainly dealt with three kinds of studies: ethnographic, phenomenological, and grounded (Hollowitz & Torres, 2003; Johnson et al., 2001; Nose, 1989; Richards & Morse, 2007; Smith Becker & Cheater, 2001). However, newer methodologies, such as discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, systems theory, generic qualitative inquiry, and life history, have emerged and are relatively widely accepted. A GQS does not attach itself to any one methodology (Kahle, 2017). GQSs create a free space in which researchers can use multiple tools and approaches that may or may not lead to new approaches. Per Merriam (2009), these studies can stand alone as a justifiable approach.

I selected the qualitative research design because my study was concerned with garnering the perceptions and viewpoints of the Caribbean diaspora in Canada and

employees working in organizations serving the immigrant community. This study was not geared toward obtaining quantifying data. Thus, a qualitative study was better suited to the type of data I was interested in collecting. A qualitative design was most well-suited to providing answers to my research question.

Methodological Approach: Generic Qualitative Study

GQSs involve collecting, analyzing, modifying, refocusing, and identifying and reducing threats of validity (Maxwell, 2013, p.2). A GQS is defined as research that is not bounded by any one established philosophical assumption or methodology (Caelli et al, 2003). Like qualitative descriptions, interpretive descriptions are “built upon constructivist epistemological assumptions”; this methodology is socially constructed through the subjective person who experiences it (Thome, 2008, p. 49).

Some advantages of GQSs are that they are flexible, allow use of multiple methodologies, advance theory, articulate new approaches, and are useful when more than one methodology is needed to answer a research question. A GQS is also useful when the phenomenon is complex and needs several forms of analysis (Kahle, 2014). According to Creswell (2008) the phenomenological design and the case study could also be used in qualitative research; however, neither of these designs would have provided me with the rich perspectives and life experiences of the participants in this study.

In contrast, some of the disadvantages to GQS are that it does not confine itself to any one methodology or framework; thus, the study’s methodology and framework could be poorly designed and articulated. Other disadvantages are GQS’ lack of extant

literature and method slurring (Kahle, 2014). The GQS is also not as popular as other research approaches, such as the phenomenological approach.

I chose to use the GQS over a case study or phenomenological approach because they would not have provided me with the flexibility of using several methodologies to understand the complexities of the phenomenon. William and Kostere (2008) opined that this is a significant advantage of the GQS design. Also, the GQS fits my personality, research discipline, and focus, and it is a growing trend among qualitative researchers (Caelli et al., 2003). More importantly, this approach aligned with my topic, RQs, sample, and research process. For example, GQS uses purposeful sampling, and its method of data analysis uses multiple themes along with the interpretation of complex issues.

Role of the Researcher

I am a Jamaican born of immigrant parents. I have lived in Jamaica, China, and Japan. I also have family members and friends who are immigrants living in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I selected this topic came as a result of my experiences and the experiences of my friends and family. Thus, I know firsthand of the struggles and challenges immigrants encounter. While this phenomenon is not new, it is unique to Canada as this country offers the skilled migrant visa that grants qualified immigrants the opportunity to live and work in Canada.

I played several roles in this study, such as observer, participant, and observer-participant. I experienced difficulty remaining objective. However, I limited my bias by consulting with other researchers and peers, keeping a journal, and by keeping my

emotions in check (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I believe that while my closeness to the subject matter may be viewed as a limitation, it was also a strength. I was able to identify and approach the study both as a researcher and a population member, and I was very familiar with the topic.

When collecting data, I endeavored to not lead the responses or participants or provide leading questions to skew the research in a certain direction. I wanted my research to be organic and truthful. Patton (2015) stated that reflexivity is revealed in the analysis and reporting stage. Balancing, describing, and interpreting the data are key so the reader can sense the views and perspectives of the participants within its rightful context (Patton, 2015).

In addition, in qualitative research, a researcher is the main instrument in the study. As such, I needed to be bias free and recognize the power I had to influence the participants and, by extension, the findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, I approached this task from an inquiry standpoint and did not try to influence the participants. I allowed the data to develop organically. This ensured the responses would be valid and objective. Knowing my strengths, weaknesses, and motivation and being generally self-aware helped me in this regard. Per Rubin and Rubin (2012), in understanding another's experience, self-awareness and monitoring are important.

Other ethical issues I was mindful of were the possible repercussions that could befall the participants of the representing agencies. Based on the nature of the study and information being sought, participants could lose their jobs, be demoted, or be transferred. Participating in the study could also cause a strain in the relationship between

staff and employer. Thus, I endeavored to counter this possibility by protecting the identity of the participants and by wording and paraphrasing their responses carefully. In addition, as per the request of the employees, I did not include the name of the organizations in the study.

Ethical Considerations

There are ethical guidelines and protocols that must be followed when conducting any form of research (Yip et al., 2016). When research involves human beings and animals, researchers must ensure that all procedures and activities governing the research adhere to ethical standards. Participants expect to be treated respectfully and ethically (Ensuring, n.d.), and ethics are principles that govern research (Parveen, 2017). Some of ethical considerations include how the research structured and how the participants will be protected (Parveen, 2017). Some institutions have their own guidelines; however, according to Smith (2013), clear guidelines to follow and keep in mind are the protection of intellectual property, consciousness of multiple roles, informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, and adherence of ethical protocols.

Per Research Excellence (2017), research is a multistage process of investigating that leads to new insights and knowledge to be effectively shared. A researcher is obligated to ensure that participants are respected and protected, which can be done using informed consent forms and informing participants of the purpose of the study, duration, expectations, and their right to stop or withdraw at any time without any liability (Ensuring your research is ethical, n.d.). Providing information on the study, such as the risks and potential benefits, is required to ensure voluntary participation (O'Sullivan et

al., 2017). Another ethical aspect is the safety of the participants and that researchers do no harm to participants, knowingly or unknowingly. Researchers should ensure that the place of the research is clean and safe and that no physical, emotional, or psychological harm will befall the participants, especially when working with vulnerable populations such as children, elderly people, and mentally disabled people (Ensuring, n.d.).

For my research, I obtained informed consent from all participants, and I informed them of the risks, benefits, purpose, and duration of the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from or stop the interview at any time without any liability (Yin et al, 2016). I did not work with any vulnerable population; however, the participants from the representing agencies could have suffered negative repercussions such as loss of job, demotion, or backlash from their employers based on the information they provided. Thus, I made them aware of this and ensured their identity was protected. The guidelines of the IRB were sought and adhered to.

Another area of ethical consideration is the use of neutral language and confidentiality and privacy. The identity and information received from the participants should be protected and concealed (Ensuring your research is ethical, n.d.). No identifying data like names, job titles, and locations should be used. Honesty and integrity should be upheld throughout the entire research process, and the results should be reported in an accurate and objective manner (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). I did not use the names of the participants; I used pseudonyms to protect their identities and to safeguard their information.

IRB Compliance

Before beginning the data collection process, I obtained the approval of the IRB. Walden University's IRB governs all research undertaken at the university (Walden University, n.d.). The main purpose of the IRB is to ensure that all research at the university complies with ethical standards of the school and federal regulations. All students are required to obtain approval from the IRB before they begin the recruitment and data collection portion of their study. The approval number given by Walden's IRB for this study is 05-28-2021-0557284. In addition to IRB approval, I also obtained the informed consent of all the participants. Walden University has emphasized the importance of adhering to the standards and protocols of the IRB (Walden University, n.d.). Failure to adhere to strict guidelines of compliance, safety, and confidentiality of participants and information could result in rejection of my study and dismissal from the university (Walden University, n.d.). I followed all the ethical steps as articulated by the university and the IRB.

Methodology

Participant Selection

For this study, Caribbean immigrants living in Toronto, Canada, and educated at a Caribbean university were identified as the sample population. The Caribbean participants had to be living and working legally in Canada, hold either permanent resident status or have obtained citizenship. The population was purposely selected. This method of selection allows the identification and selection of participants who can provide information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Participants from the organizations working with the immigrant population were also purposely selected. Purposive sampling focuses on characteristics of a population that will enable the researcher to answer the research question (Lester, 1999). In addition, this sampling technique allows a researcher to recruit participants from a targeted population who are eligible, willing, and available to participate in the study (Lester, 1999).

Recruitment

The recruitment efforts covered the GTA only. Participants were recruited via LinkedIn. The snowball method of sampling was also used. The sample size included 15 participants over the age of 18 who were either originally from the English-speaking Caribbean or were employees of organizations serving the immigrant population or working in the accreditation industry. The Caribbean participants met the following criteria: (a) be over 18 years of age; (b) hold at least a bachelor's degree from a Caribbean university; (c) have graduated from a Caribbean university; (d) be legally living and working in Canada for at least 6 months; and (e) hold either a residence permit or have obtained Canadian citizenship. For employees to participate in the study, they had to meet the following criteria: (a) have experience working with immigrant groups/populations; (b) can be recruited through social media; (c) be over 18 years of age; and (d) be willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Sample Population

Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to deliberately select participants who can provide the information needed for a study that could not be provided by other

sources or populations (Creswell, 2014). Criterion sampling approach works in harmony with purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Ravitch, 2010). Criterion sampling is also a sampling procedure used extensively in qualitative research.

Instrument

I used two interview guides I created: one for the Caribbean immigrants and the other for the employees of the representing agencies. Both guides consisted of an informed consent portion that was read to the participants before the interview began. Participants were also required to reply by email stating their consent. The bottom half of the interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions with some questions having subquestions. These subquestions were necessary to facilitate further probing. The interview questions were derived from the research question and were designed to obtain the information needed for the study. Before asking interview questions, I asked three or four warm-up or lead-in questions. This is necessary to encourage participants to relax and to build rapport and trust (Yin et al, 2016). Building rapport was essential to create the kind of dynamics needed to have a free-flowing dialog.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection included in-depth interviews and a case study. Interviews were the main method of data collection because it allowed me to do in-depth probing. It also allowed me to get the rich narratives that could be expressed freely by the participants. Interviews were chosen over other methods of data collection, for example focus groups. While focus groups also provide rich narratives, they work best when the researcher is

experienced and is thus not recommended for inexperienced researchers. In addition, other personnel like a facilitator would be required.

Observations, while also useful, would not be the procedure that would best provide me with the answers for my research questions. Observations are ideal when the researcher is a participant and is involved in the data collection. It is useful in participatory studies that focus on variables like behavior, aggression, anger, motivation etc. Thus, this type of data collection would not align with my research focus or questions. Data saturation was acknowledged when the collection of additional information yielded no new insights/knowledge, and there would be no further need to continue interviewing participants. According to Creswell (2013) for phenomenological studies, saturation can be achieved between 5-25 participants. Morse (1994) recommends at least 6 participants. For my study, data saturation was reached at the 12th participant. A case study was also used to obtain data. The case study consisted of one Caribbean immigrant who is living in Canada but was educated outside of the Caribbean. She was also interviewed. The case study was done to evaluate if there were any differences and/or similarities as it relates to the recognition of degrees and the job-hunting process.

The participants who obtained by doing a search on LinkedIn. The names that appeared in the search were sent an email invitation. The email included information about the study, criteria for participating and sought to ascertain if it would be something that they'd be interested in doing. If they expressed an interest in participating, they were sent another email with the informed consent. They were asked to read and reply to the email stating their consent. They were also asked to keep a copy for their records. After

their consent was received, a zoom meeting was scheduled at a mutually convenient time. Participants were emailed the date and time of the meeting along with the password and meeting ID.

These steps ensured that only people meeting the criteria were selected. For the respondents not meeting the criteria, a thank you message was sent, thanking them for their interest in the study. All participants were reminded that the study was totally voluntary and that they were free to pull out of the study at any time without any liability on their part. The interviews were semi-structured. An interview protocol consisted of approximately 10 open-ended questions was also used. Prior to the actual start of the interview permission will be obtained to audio record the interview.

The interviews were recorded on Zoom and lasted between 20-60 mins. A couple interviews exceeded 60 mins. The interviews were done over a four-week period. Based on my sample population, two sets of interview guides were used. One for the Caribbean immigrants and one for the participants from the representing agencies. The interview guide for the Caribbean immigrants was also used for my case study participant. The identity of the participants was protected, and pseudonyms were used in the discussion section. Each participant was assigned a number and a pseudonym.

Some of the questions that were asked are: Tell me about a time you were denied a job based on the place of education? Are you now working in the profession to which you were trained? How long did it take you to obtain a job in the field to which you were trained? Are you paid in line with industry guidelines? Notes were taken during the interviews. At the end of the interview, the participants were thanked for participating.

They were advised that it may be necessary to contact them to clarify responses or to do over the interview. They were also given the opportunity to request to see the findings of the study if they so desired. A day or two following the interview, email messages were sent to the participants thanking them for their time and for participating in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Patton (2015) the researcher should be emphatic but grounded in mindfulness. The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the data collected and to see how well it aligns with or refutes previous research and theories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Audio transcriptions were done following the interviews and the first step was to do a comprehensive reading of the data. I re-read the transcripts many times to understand the information collected. I also looked for specific answers to my research questions.

The next steps were note taking and identifying the themes. The data were coded first by hand then I created word clouds, or groupings for the codes in Atlas.ti. Data that were gathered from the interviews and case study were analyzed using the theming method of analysis. The data in essence is taken apart and then put back together in an effort to examine, understand, and summarize the findings (Creswell, 2005). The theming method of analysis was selected as it allowed me to categorize emergent themes and related words/phrases. This analysis allowed me to find patterns and to identify emerging themes and information that could shed light on the complexities of the phenomenon being explored (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Then, I categorized the data. I examined each set

of data and categorized similarities, differences and patterns or overlap and put them into units.

Based on the research questions, I sought to ascertain the perspectives of the Caribbean diaspora and the employees of the representing agencies regarding the nontransferability of Caribbean credentials, strategies that can be employed to mitigate this practice, and whether one industry or sector is more affected. The data were separated into occupation/sector, gender, highest level of degree, salary and years lived in Canada.

Emergent themes were further defined into categories and sub-categories based on the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Coding procedures were used to identify and understand inferences, meaning and implications. Multiple analysis of categories and codes were done to show connection and relevance. Findings were also compared and contrasted with previous theories and research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Similarities were reiterated and discussed. Opposing viewpoints were also highlighted and discussed. According to Saldana (2017), in coding data we seek to make sense of the information collection and it must be guided in the research questions, theoretical framework and other theories.

Peer Debriefing and Detailed Notes

Peer debriefing is an excellent tool that the researcher can use to ensure transparency. I used peer debriefing to help me reduce researcher bias. It also encouraged greater recording and reporting of accurate information. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) it can help the researcher to provide more credible and trustworthy data. This is

especially necessary if the researcher is inexperienced and is working alone (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Other benefits of peer debriefing are that it helps to bring more awareness of biases, creates an atmosphere of monitoring and self-reflection, and helps with problem-solving. I also kept detailed notes and journaled my thoughts to help reduce my bias.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations of the study were its small sample size. A larger population would have enabled generalizations to the wider population. Thus, the findings are restricted to this particular sample population and context. Based on the nature of the study, I was not able to find willing participants from any of the credential evaluation organizations in Canada. Having this insight could have added further substance to the study. Other limitations included the subjective views and biases of the participants and the researcher.

Internal Validity

Reliability and validity are critical issues in research. Qualitative studies in general are usually high in validity but low in reliability (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). Validity or trustworthiness is an important strength in qualitative studies. It is therefore advisable that researchers carefully select the data collection methods and participants. Multiple methods of data collection are also recommended as this helps to improve the trustworthiness of the study (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). The use of multiple data collection methods is called triangulation. The methods of the study and how the participants are

selected and interviewed must be justified. To help with rigor, qualitative designs need to be emergent and responsive to the “complexity of the phenomenon” being studied. Clarity of core constructs, terms, theoretical framework, and methodology are necessary. Moreover, each component in the study should be firmly justified (O’Sullivan et al, 2017).

Some of the following strategies can be used to ensure validity. Triangulation, peer debriefing, audit trail, thick descriptions of data, situates your study as it relates to other research, theories and contexts, participation validation strategies, among others. For my study, I utilized peer debriefing, thick descriptions of data and triangulation. These strategies helped to improve reliability. Qualitative studies are not known to be high in reliability however, the reliability aspect of the study can be improved by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Each one of the above standards are addressed in detail below.

Credibility

In qualitative study, credibility refers to how well the study seeks to measure what it purports to measure (O’Sullivan et al, 2017). In other words, it’s the study’s internal validity. This is directly related to the research design, instrument, and data. One can achieve credibility by using a variety of strategies, for example, member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, among others.

To ensure credibility in my research, a transcript of the interview as well as the research instrument were sent to the participants for checking. Thus, if any responses were incorrectly phrased, the participants were given the opportunity to correct same.

Any changes or modifications requested of the participants were done. Member checking is an important strategy in getting direct feedback and accuracy as it relates to the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the interview (Merriam, 2009). Data saturation also helped in this regard. Interviews continued until no new information/insight was received. I also followed the guidelines of Walden's IRB and ethics committee as it relates to participants confidentiality and security of data.

Transferability

In its simplest form, this refers to the generalizability of the study. Qualitative studies are bound by time and, context, thus, generalizability refers to how well the study can be extended to a broader context without losing its rich descriptions (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). A good question to ask is how well can the findings be made applicable in other contexts or with other participants? Strategies to improve transferability include thick descriptions of the data as well as contexts. This will allow other researchers to be able to use aspects of the study and findings instead of replicating the design and findings (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). To ensure transferability, it is also good practice to ensure maximum variability in the sample used, this will ensure greater application of the research findings by the reader of the study (Merriam, 2009).

To help obtain transferability in my study, I utilized two educational regions. The case study participant while a Caribbean immigrant was not educated in the Caribbean. She obtained her degree from a foreign university. I compared the experience of this participant to that of Caribbean nationals who gained their credentials in the Caribbean. Thus, the differences, helped to account for the transferability factor of country of study.

In addition, several professions were used in the study, so the findings can be applied to other professions as well.

Reliability/Dependability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement that is repeated many times (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). Merriam (2009) states that reliability is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be replicated. Reliability in this sense refers to the stability, equivalence, and internal consistency. In brevity, stability is how well the results can be achieved on a repeated basis. Equivalence reveals that the results are not too far apart when repeated, regardless of who's doing the testing, and across versions and time (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). And lastly, internal consistency applies to measures that measure multiple items. The foregoing speaks specifically to quantitative research, however, in qualitative research we can ensure reliability by having properly trained personnel and proper supervision of the data collection, data entry process, and personnel.

In qualitative studies, we focus on the dependability of the findings instead of the reliability. Qualitative studies are deemed dependable as they can be consistent and stable over time. In this regard, dependability means that the data and data collection methods are consistent throughout the study. In addition, the data answers the research questions and is thus dependable. A solid research design, a clear rationale as to why these were chosen and ensuring triangulation and sequencing of methods will help in achieving research dependability (O'Sullivan et al, 2017).

Merriam (2009) describes reliability as the extent to which, or how well can a study be replicated. By keeping audit trails and detailed journaling of the data collection process, instruments and procedures will help in the dependability process. These documentations along with reflexivity of the researcher throughout the entire process could help the study be replicated by another researcher. To improve the dependability of my findings, I kept detailed journals and had proper audit trails of the instrument, data collection process, and analysis.

Confirmability

Objectivity is not a strong point in qualitative research (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). However, researchers can instead seek to have confirmable data. Therefore, qualitative researchers do not pursue objectivity in their study, rather that their findings can be confirmed (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). We can improve confirmability by acknowledging and taking steps to reign in our biases. These biases can be in check through our self-knowledge, and awareness. Reflexivity, triangulation, and external audits are useful tools that can be used. The researcher cannot be separated from the study as they are the main instrument (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, being aware and being opened to being challenged by peers, mentor, and others with regards to our motivation, understanding, and interpretation throughout the research process, will help to improve confirmability. To assist with confirmability, I consulted with my peers, research committee and adhered to the guidelines of the IRB.

Ethical Procedures

Before beginning the actual data collection, I obtained the approval of the IRB. In addition, each participant had to complete a consent form prior to conducting the interview. I briefed them on the description, purpose, duration, and voluntary aspect of the study. They were given all the information that they needed to make a voluntary decision to participate.

One of the ethical considerations in research is the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the information provided. To address these issues, I did not use the participants name and they were assigned a pseudonym. To protect the confidentiality of the information provided their files were labelled with an ID number instead of using their name. All notes, recordings and transcriptions were stored securely on my computer. Each participant's transcriptions and notes were saved in a separate file and were protected by a password. Only me as the researcher knew the password to unlock each file or had access to the computer.

Data for the interviews were stored on a USB device that I alone had access to. All interview notes, interview guides, signed consent forms and recordings were kept securely in a draw at home accessible only by me. The file name of each person had the ID number that was assigned to them after receiving their consent form. The date of interview, special notations, evaluations, and start and stop times were also included in the file. I live alone, thus no other person had access to my computer or USB drive. In addition, my computer has a lock screen that needs a password to unlock it. This password was only known by me so the information on my computer was secure. Thus,

the identity and privacy of the participants were protected. The data will be stored for two years after completion of the study, then the notes, files, and records will be destroyed.

Summary

The qualitative design and the generic qualitative inquiry/approach informed this study. The research questions were used to guide the study, the data collection, and the data analysis process. All ethical requirements as it relates to approval, recruitment of participants, informed consent, confidentiality, integrity, and objectivity were followed. Participants were purposely selected and included 15 Caribbean immigrants, males, and females between over 18 years of age and employees from organizations that provide services for the immigrant population. A criterion list was used to ensure that the participants selected were able to provide the information needed to answer the research questions. Participants were informed of the purpose, duration of study, its benefits, and risks as well as their voluntary rights. The identity and confidentiality of the participants and data collected were protected by not using their names or any other notable identifiers.

Approval from the IRB as well as informed consents from all participants were obtained. Data were collected by way of interviews, documents, reports, and a case study. Data were analyzed using the theming method of analysis and were driven by the research questions. Data were first coded manually then electronically using ATLAS.ti. Findings were compared and contrasted with previous studies and other theories.

The limitations of size, researcher bias and inexperience were countered by peer debriefing, reflexivity, keeping detailed records and triangulation of data. These tools

helped to improve reliability and validity. In the subsequent chapter, the findings emerging from the study along with a detailed analysis will be reported.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this study, I explored how the recognition and acceptance of Caribbean degrees could be improved based on the strategies put forth by various stakeholders. Some of the stakeholders included Caribbean immigrants, immigration workers, accreditation officers, and recruiters. Specifically, I sought to reach a better understanding of the phenomena of the nonrecognition and/or the undervaluing of Caribbean credentials and to present newer insights.

The research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of the Caribbean diaspora and other stakeholders regarding the barriers to or facilitators of improving the recognition and transferability of Caribbean credentials in Toronto, Canada? In this chapter, I preview the results from the interviews. I explain the setting, demographics, data collection and analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and provide a summary. I present the eclectic viewpoints and perspectives of people from varying cultures, industries, and experiences whose voices have previously been absent in the literature.

Setting

Participants were recruited via social media, mainly LinkedIn, and lived in Kingston, Jamaica, and Toronto, Canada. I also used the snowball method of sampling to recruit additional participants. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and took place between June 6, 2021, and July 3, 2021. Many participants appeared nervous while on camera, and at their request, most of the interviews were audio recorded only. This

nervousness may have hampered their ability to express themselves as fully as they would have done in other circumstances or situations, such as having a phone or in-person conversation.

Demographics

The 15 participants were recruited based on the criteria listed below. For the case study, the participants had to be born in the Caribbean and attended a university overseas. The Caribbean immigrants had to be living in Canada for at least 6 months and were graduates of a Caribbean university, holding at least a bachelor's degree. They had to be over 18 years of age and hold either a residence permit or have obtained Canadian citizenship. For employees to participate in the study, they had to meet the following criteria: (a) have experience working with immigrant groups/populations; (b) can be recruited through social media; (c) be over 18 years of age; and (d) be willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Data Collection

The purposive method of sampling was used to recruit the participants. Fifteen participants were recruited to take part in the study. The participants consisted of 13 Caribbean immigrants and two employees. The participants were recruited via LinkedIn and snowball sampling. One participant was located in Jamaica and worked in the education and accreditation industry. The other 14 participants lived in Toronto and its surrounding environs. Most participants worked in the GTA.

Thirteen participants were Caribbean immigrants who were graduates of a Caribbean university, were living in Canada, and were over 18 years of age. Participants

had either a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. The case participant had two bachelor's degrees: one obtained in Canada and the other obtained in Jamaica. She was born in the Caribbean. Two participants worked in organizations that served the immigrant community or education/accreditation industry. Table 1 shows participants' information, including pseudonym, age range, gender, country of birth, highest degree earned, and Caribbean university attended.

Table 1

Participants' Information

Participant (pseudonym)	Age group	Gender	Country of birth	Highest degree	Caribbean university attended
Ann	35–49	F	Jamaica	LLB	UWI Mona
Carter	18–34	M	St Vincent	LLB	UWI Cave Hill
Duayne	35–49	M	Trinidad & Tobago	BSc	UWI St. Augustine
Dominic	18–34	M	Barbados	BSc	UWI Cave Hill
Florel	18–34	F	Dominican Republic	M.D.	Universidad Autonoma De Santa Domingo
Leroy	35–49	M	Jamaica	MSc	UTECH
Dolleen	35–49	F	Jamaica	BSc	UWI Mona
Joanie	35–49	F	Jamaica	BSc	NCU
Carine	50–64	F	N/A	N/A	N/A
Perry	50–64	M	Jamaica	BSc	UWI Mona
Richard	35–49	M	Trinidad & Tobago	BSc	UWI St Augustine
Princeton	50–64	M	Jamaica	LLB	UWI Mona
Sabitara	35–49	F	Jamaica	MSc	UWI Cave Hill
Rojaro	35–49	M	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gail	35–49	F	Jamaica	BSc	UTECH

Note. NCU = Northern Caribbean University; UWI = University of the West Indies; and

UTECH = University of Technology.

Participants were located through a contact search on the social media website LinkedIn. The search words used were *Toronto* and *University of the West Indies*. I used the names and contact information that showed up in the search list to send email invitations to potential participants. If they agreed to participate in the study, they were sent an informed consent form. Participants were asked to read the informed consent form and to reply by email stating their consent. Participants were also asked to keep a copy of the informed consent form for their records. Upon receipt of their formal consent, an interview was scheduled with each participant at a mutually convenient time. The Zoom invitations were then sent to the participants via email. The invitation included the date and time, meeting ID, and password to log into the Zoom session. Participants were also recruited via snowball sampling. Participants referred other participants who were contacted by email first to confirm they met the requirements. If they met the criteria, the above procedures were also followed to obtain their consent and schedule an interview. All referred participants met the criteria.

The data collection took place over a 1-month period (June 6, 2021–July 3, 2021). Interviews were the main method of data collection, which allowed me to do in-depth probing. All interviews were conducted using Zoom. A semistructured one-time interview session along with an interview protocol were used to guide the interview. Two interview guides were used: one for the Caribbean immigrants and one for employees working with the immigrant community or the accreditation entities. Nomura (2009, as cited in Turner, 2010) purported that uniformity in questions allows for consistency in the structure and focus.

The interview guide for the Caribbean immigrants consisted of approximately 10 questions and included such questions as: How long are you living in Canada? How long did it take you to find employment after moving to Canada? Are you paid in line with industry guidelines? The interview guide for the employees also consisted of 10 questions. According to Lester (1999), in-depth interviews and the purposive method of sampling offer the best analysis to explore complex phenomena. Zoom was chosen as the online conferencing application because it allowed access to participants who were hard to reach and located in remote areas (Opdenakker, 2006). Zoom was also approved by the IRB.

The Zoom audio sessions were recorded to capture participants' responses and to ensure accuracy when transcribing. Some disadvantages of using audio recordings are that you miss out on facial expressions, gestures, and body cues that could have added further insights into how participants were feeling (Opdenakker, 2006). However, while I would have preferred the interview to be video recorded, participants were reluctant to do so. I adhered to their wishes. The Zoom interviews took approximately 20–75 minutes. The average time was 35 minutes. A case study in the form of an interview was conducted with a Caribbean immigrant who obtained her degree overseas. An interpretivist approach was used to inform the study.

The original data collection outlined in Chapter 3 included the review of published reports and documents available on the internet. However, due to complications in obtaining the clearance to use these documents, this method of data collection did not occur. The data received from the 15 participants, however, provided

rich information and keen insights that enabled me to answer my research question. I was also able to obtain the views of multiple stakeholders. This enabled me to view the phenomena from several different lenses for multiple analyses of perspectives, which aided in ensuring the objectivity of the findings.

In data collection, I was surprised by how reluctant and shy people became when they were told the interview would be audio recorded. Some participants were hesitant to use Zoom and requested other applications, such as WhatsApp, GoToMeeting, and Skype. I was also surprised by the unwillingness of Caribbean immigrants to participate in the study. I had to triple the number of invitations sent in the first week to reach the necessary number of participants. I thought the opposite would occur and I would be flooded with willing participants. I did expect hesitancy from employees in organizations that serve the immigrant community, but I encountered a challenge from only one of these organizations in finding willing participants.

Some participants declined from doing the interview when they were informed that it would be recorded. I believe more people would have participated if the interviews had not been recorded. I also believe several of the participants would have been more expressive if the interviews were not recorded. However, to ensure accuracy of data, the interviews had to be audio recorded. Challenges were anticipated and contingency plans, such as using Walden's notice board and announcement services to recruit participants, were considered if needed.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the audio immediately following the interviews. I edited the transcripts the same day, depending on the time of the interview. Due to the time differences, some of these interviews were conducted at odd hours in the morning to accommodate participants' availability. So, in some situations, it was not feasible to transcribe or edit the recordings immediately after.

I read transcripts while listening to the playback of the audio to ensure accuracy. Corrections were highlighted and corrected. Then, I read the transcripts several times to immerse myself in the data and to marinate in the information given. Afterward, I highlighted common words or phrases that were repeated by participants and did a first coding of the data. I also highlighted responses that were opposing or contradictory and made note of the differences. In addition, I highlighted any word or phrase that stood out.

For a more detailed analysis, I looked for specific answers to my research questions. For example, I asked about the barriers to recognition of Caribbean degrees and strategies that could be used to counter or remove these barriers. I also used the following categories to code the data based on the questions in my interview protocol: number of years in Canada, age group, highest level of qualification, profession, satisfaction with salary, views on regional and international accreditation, and the role of perception and marketability.

Data were coded first by hand using a pen highlighter to group words, phrases, and categories. To assist with the second round of coding, I created an MS Excel spreadsheet and copied and pasted the responses that best answered or provided insights

to the question or codes. I also created word clouds, or groupings, for the codes in Atlas.ti to help with the next stage of the data coding and analysis. Creating word clouds helped me to reduce the word count and identify themes more easily and quickly. Large word groupings with similar words were reduced depending on the word mix or alterations of the same word. I also created code files. The results from the analysis of the responses revealed six main themes. Subthemes were also identified.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Internal Validity

To ensure validity and trustworthiness in qualitative studies, a researcher needs to ensure rigor and transparency in selecting the methodology and deciding who the participants will be. In addition, using several methods of data collection can improve trustworthiness of a study (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers can improve the trustworthiness of a study by clearly identifying how the data were collected, how the analysis was done, what measures were employed to achieve trustworthiness, and how proper records were kept. Making such identifications will outline to the reader what steps were taken and help guide other researchers conducting similar studies.

Some of the strategies I used were peer debriefing, thick descriptions of data, and triangulation. I used two methods of data collection, a case study and semistructured interviews. These methods helped to improve the trustworthiness of the information presented. A total of 15 participants were interviewed, which was sufficient to provide rich descriptions of data. I also kept detailed records of my transcripts and coding.

Credibility

To ensure credibility of responses, I made sure to listen to the recordings several times to check for any errors in the transcription. Errors noted were duly corrected. In addition, I emailed the interview transcripts for the members to check. This process ensured further accuracy as the participants themselves checked and corrected their own transcripts where necessary. All discrepancies and errors raised by participants were corrected and reworded. This helped to improve the trustworthiness of the interview process.

According to Merriam (2009) member checking gets the participants direct feedback thus ensuring accuracy of the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the interview. In addition, I made sure to follow the guidelines of Walden as it relates to protecting the confidentiality of the participants. Thus, pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. Information that was collected for the study was kept securely, stored, and locked away in files in my home. Computer and audio files were also protected by a password. The folder holding this information was also locked with a password that I alone had access to.

Transferability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), transferability in the study pertains to the process whereby the findings of the study can be transferred or applied in other contexts. Therefore, the differences/similarities of the experiences and perspectives of Caribbean immigrants and the sample selection accounted for transferability in different immigrant groups and settings. Thus, to assist in obtaining transferability in my study, I utilized two

educational regions. The case study participant was a Caribbean immigrant who studied at a university abroad.

This participant was compared with the other Caribbean immigrants who studied at one of the Caribbean universities. No two persons experience or viewpoints will be exactly the same, however, they may share many similarities. The differences noted were further explored. Thus, the differences accounted for the transferability factor of country of study. In addition, several professions were used in the study, so the results will be able to be applied to other professions as well. By extrapolation, the results of this study can help future Caribbean immigrants, educators, immigration professionals, credential evaluators, recruiters, and employers to transfer the results of this study. I hope that the results of this study will help to enhance sensitivity and improve the awareness of the caliber of students coming from universities in the Caribbean.

Dependability/Reliability

Merriam (2009) states that reliability is the extent to which the results in qualitative research can be copied or reproduced. We can improve the dependability of our results by having a solid research design and keeping proper audit trails. Thus, through proper supervision of the data collection process, instruments and procedures, the declaration/disclosure of the researcher's biases and her attempts to control and monitor these biases through peer debriefing would assist in the study being easily replicated by other researchers. To this end, I kept a journal and recorded my thoughts and emotions during the study. I also kept detailed records of the data collection steps and procedures.

My peers and Chair were contacted when needed to discuss my thoughts, questions, or any difficulties that I encountered.

Qualitative studies are deemed dependable as they can be consistent and stable over time. In addition, the data collected for my research could answer the research questions and would thus be considered dependable. A solid research design has a clear rationale as to why this design was chosen. Also, ensuring triangulation and sequencing of methods will help in achieving research dependability (O'Sullivan et al, 2017).

Confirmability

In qualitative research, researchers seek to have data that they can be confirmed as it is seen to be highly subjective (O'Sullivan et al, 2017). For this study, I sought to reduce the subjectivity of the data presented by taking steps to reign in my biases. This was done through consultation with my peers and Chair. I also utilized the process of self-checking and self-awareness to identify and reduce these biases. While the researcher cannot be separated from the study, we need to be highly self-aware and be constantly evaluating our thoughts and feelings. To assist with confirmability, I practiced reflexivity and questioned everything as it relates to each step of the research process. I endeavored to be objective. Above all, I made sure to follow the strict protocols/guidelines of the IRB.

Ethical Considerations

To develop a framework of mutual respect and fairness, each participant's culture and personal beliefs were respected. For example, because of religious reasons some participants declined doing interviews during their Sabbath hours. I was respectful of

their religious beliefs and was happy to reschedule. I was also mindful of the time differences between countries and bore the brunt of the inconvenience in times to facilitate their availability. I made myself available to fit their convenience. Also, the participants were apprised of their rights to stop, withdraw, or refuse from answering any questions that they wanted to. They were also asked to read and keep a copy of the informed consent for their records.

The aims/objectives of the research were also clearly articulated to them during the recruitment process. In addition, before beginning each interview, I again gave them the opportunity to ask any questions or seek any clarifications that they may need. After the interview, a copy of the audio file was emailed to the participants. All participants and research sites remain confidential. Materials, transcripts, and summary of the findings were made available to all participants. Moreover, I attempted to interpret the data collected with very little personal bias. While my personal biases cannot be separated from the study, I tried my best to counter/reduce these biases.

Results

According to Saldana (2006) coding of data should begin as soon as we start the data collection process. I began coding the data after my fifth interview. Qualitative data helps to bring a deeper understanding to the phenomena being studied. It makes sense of the data by organizing the data into manageable chunks (Saldana, 2006).

The themes that emerged during the data analysis provided direct and indirect answers to the research question. For the first cycle coding, the following themes and codes were identified: Acclimatization and continuation process, refine roles, job

hunting, perception of quality, perception change, awareness and recognition/accreditation, efforts to enter industry, alternate jobs/lower pay, lived experience, degree acceptance/devaluation/nonrecognition, international standards, acceptance and resilience, mindset, quality standards, acceptance and survival, coping mechanisms, retooling, re-schooling, career change, core curriculum, universal or common standard, sensitize employers, agencies/recruiters and strategies, raise profile and increase awareness/ educational and sensitization campaign, association body or council.

For the second cycle coding, I used the Atlas.ti software to further categorize the themes and I grouped similar codes and themes to make the analysis more compact. I also used word clouds in Atlas.ti to aid in reducing the number of words for each code/category. This was done for each interview that was saved as a word document. The codes were saved in separate files. The following six major themes emerged: (a) assimilation/transition process, (b) barriers to recognition of Caribbean degrees, (c) coping mechanisms, (d) accreditation and streamlining Caribbean degrees, (e) organizations that help immigrants, and (f) strategies to improve recognition of Caribbean degrees. Subthemes were as follows: (a) profession/skill, accreditation and evaluation of credentials, job hunting and degree recognition, working in their profession; (b) perception, quality, lack of awareness, lack of sensitivity, discrimination/racism; (c) resilience, mentorship/coaching, survival jobs/retooling/reschooling, career change; and (d) role of accreditation (regional/international), world ranking. The second coding helped to further define the data. The themes that emerged reflects how the information

aligns with the main research questions. The flow of information was almost like an upside-down triangle. Table 2 below shows the participants' satisfaction with their wages.

Table 2

Participants' Wage Satisfaction and Working in Field Trained

Age group	Participants per age group	Male	Female	Satisfaction with wages	Working in field trained in	Earning minimum wage
18–34	3	1	2	2	2	0
35–49	8	3	5	1	4	3
50–64	2	2	0	0	0	1
Over 65	0	0	0	0	0	0

Theme 1: Assimilation Process

All immigrants entering Canada, have to go through an assimilation process which includes finding housing, employment, opening a bank account, finding schools for their children if any, obtaining health, car, and other insurances. Also, integrating in church, school and family life of the community and generally finding their way around. For most of the Caribbean immigrants interviewed, finding employment and housing were their main challenges. However, for the purpose of this interview, only challenges with finding employment were focused on.

In finding employment, participants had to go through a job-hunting process which included, sending out resumes, signing up with a mentor/coach, registering with

recruitment agencies and going on interviews. The most frustrating and disappointing aspect for Caribbean immigrants was the nonrecognition or undervaluing of their skills and qualifications. However, their drive and resilience keep them motivated. Below are the comments that were shared by an employee who works with immigrants.

Rojaro: An employee at one of the entities serving the immigrant population

Rojaro: There are quite a few challenges that immigrants face. The fundamental thing I feel are the phases around economic advancement. When I say economic advancement, I mean finding gainful employment and not be working at survival jobs or be underemployed. The second is finding access to capital for immigrants to start new businesses or be entrepreneurs... The third area I feel is finding affordable housing. A lot of people face these challenges yes, but it is more prominent for immigrants.

One participant stated that he had no major problems with the recruitment agencies and in fact found them very receptive of his skills and qualifications. He further stated that in his experience, it was the employers who had an issue with his non-Canadian degree/qualifications.

Richard – Has a bachelor's Degree in Engineering from the University of the West Indies (UWI) St Augustine

Richard: I would say the recruiting agencies were not bad towards accepting my qualifications. It was when it reached the employers that a lot of them told you that you had to go back to school to do an engineering degree...Others told you that you had to do a bridging course which would take like a year and a half.

Interestingly, the question of degree recognition seemed to be nonexistent for certain professions like the IT industry, and executive level positions. It was explained that for people at the senior executive, director and VP level positions, recruiters and employers were more concerned with their reputation...past achievements, performance, what you're known for in the industry, what you can bring to the organization.

Qualifications didn't seem to be a main priority for these individuals.

Duayne: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (St Augustine)

Duayne: In my experience, I've had only situations where I've needed to provide it in academic scenarios. So, with the level or role I guess, the bigger question is regarding my experience, what have I done? What have I accomplished? What have I created and what have I been involved in from a strategic standpoint? In my VP role, there are highly strategic roles that are more focused on what you have done in other companies while you were there...my experience. However, the release of an offer letter is contingent on a background check, criminal record, and drug tests...those sorts of things, which you would have to pass. The last thing is usually an educational check.

For immigrants coming into the Canadian market. They have to work twice as hard to prove themselves and prove that they are capable of doing the job. Having the prerequisite skills and qualification, are not enough to secure you an interview or a job. Participants felt that they are under constant pressure to perform, and this is observed even before they start working.

Leroy: Has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from University of Technology (UTECH)

Leroy: So, when you register with these recruiting firms, right? They kind of test your skills first...you get the chance to showcase your skills. So, you're taken to the job site along with other applicants and then they would show us the problems/challenges they are having and ask us to demonstrate our skills...what we can do to fix it. If they are impressed with you, then they'll call you back for an interview in front of a panel and you have to pass another round. Now you have to convince them that you can do the job, they know we are from the Caribbean and so we have to work much harder to prove ourselves.

One participant expressed her frustration with getting certified. She stated that there were inconsistencies with the process. She stated her doubts regarding the process that they used to assess her credentials.

Ann: Has a Bachelor's degree in Law from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Ann: So, the process here is you could either get told you have to go to law school here or do some exams to get qualified. Coming from the Caribbean, and Canada is also commonwealth, I did not have to redo law school, but I did have to sit some exams. And I found out...a very arbitrary process, who had to do what. And other lawyers had to do either more or less than what I did. Another classmate of mine, we had the same qualifications, she has a first degree and a law degree, went to the same school in Jamaica and graduated at the same time. I graduated at

the top of my class. She did not. She had one less exam to write than I did. She had to do 5. I had to do 6. I really wonder what do they use to determine what exams do I really need to do? I wanted to appeal, but was warned by other lawyers who had already gone through the process not to appeal. One Jamaican lady appealed the process and ended up with more exams being added to her list. While Canada is seen as a lucrative move for many, the difficulty with assimilating into the country and obtaining meaningful employment were deterrents for many potential immigrants. This could mean that many more immigrants would come to Canada to help to build its economy, however, they may stay away or migrate elsewhere. It is imperative that immigrants do their research and prepare well for their immigration journey. This could help reduce some of the frustrations and disappointments while job hunting.

Dolleen: Has a bachelor's degree in management studies from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Dolleen: I know someone who says sorry, they're not coming to Canada...He says it's a backward step because wherever you are in life, whatever the profession, when you come here...and the degree that you have, it's a step back. Your qualification is not recognized, and you have to do other things. So do your research first...prepare. It will prove very helpful.

Several participants confided that they were not being paid in line with industry wage guidelines and are in fact earning minimum wage. Two participants, Gail and Perry were very vocal and expressed their frustration and disappointment with the process. The

participants felt that it was an injustice for them who were qualified, and experienced professionals yet had to be working for minimum wage. What was supposed to have been a temporary situation, turned out to be the norm for them.

Perry: Has a Bachelor's Degree in Emergency Healthcare from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Perry: Well, um...no. Not exactly. I'm working as a care worker. That is what I'm currently doing now. And I'm basically just a few cents above the minimum wage.

Gail: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of Technology (UTECH), Jamaica

Gail: The job that I have now... to be honest, it's a part-time job that I've had now for the past three (3) years, right? And the accumulated increase per year has been a dollar. Well, they say that the government has put the minimum wage to \$15.00 and I'm still earning below that. So, I would say no. I'm not paid in-line with industry wage guidelines.

Other participants were more fortunate as they were able to negotiate their salaries. One participant stated that he upgraded himself. He knew the pay scale and knowing what he was worth helped him to negotiate and obtain a salary that was satisfactory to him.

Leroy: Has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from University of Technology (UTECH)

Leroy: Yes, because I negotiated. I was aware of the salary scale, so I was able to negotiate the figure that I wanted. Because as I said before, I did some upgrading. Plus, it all depends on the company, too. Some companies are better paying than others. But it's up to you to negotiate and ask for what you know you are worth. In most cases you might not get it. But you know, it is up to you to accept or reject...what is within that range. Table 3 below shows participants' occupation, years living in Canada, and highest level of qualification.

Table 3

Participants' Occupations

Occupation	Number of participants	Years living in Canada	Highest qualification
Teacher	1	15	BSc
Medical doctor	1	2	MD
Engineer	1	10	BSc
IT professional	1	5	Msc
Emergency management Technician	1	11	BSc
Radiologist	1	5	BSc
Lawyer	2	6	LLB
Immigration specialist	1	N/A	N/A
Accreditation examiner	1	N/A	N/A
Global HR professional	1	3	BSc
Cyber security specialist	1	1	MSc
Investment banker	1	6	BSc
Accountant	1	5	BSc
Clerk of court	1	31	BSc

Theme 2: Barriers to the Recognition of Caribbean Degrees

One of the main frustrations for Caribbean immigrants, is the lack of recognition of their degrees and the lack of transferability of their skills and qualifications. Having a

non-Canadian degree and having non-Canadian experience, puts them at a disadvantage. Many of them came to Canada on the Skilled Migrant Visa Program and their professions are listed in the occupations in demand list. Many were under the misconception that they were wanted and that jobs would be readily available for them. In their view, their degrees were already vetted and accepted by the Canadian embassies in their home countries and the Canadian Immigration Council (CIC). This misconception was quickly clarified upon their arrival into Canada.

Dominic: Has a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (UWI) Barbados

Dominic: It was a mixed bag of reactions...even though I was at an advantage of having a double major, not many people were aware of the University of the West Indies. So, in most cases it wasn't very well received.

One participant stated that he had to go back to school and do some short courses that would make him more marketable. He said that he realized from early on that some sort of retooling and/or reschooling would have to take place if he was to get a job. So, he wasted no time and went back to school right away.

Leroy: Has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from University of Technology (UTECH)

Leroy: It was challenging because once they look at your resume', and you know, see where you're coming from, there are challenges. It raised a red flag... and you know that they look down on your qualifications and experience. So, for most of us who come here, you have to at least rebrand yourselves and make sure that you

are marketable. So, we try to tailor our skills...get skills that will help us. For example, in my field, I did the Six Sigma Black Belt Training. I also did a project management and assurance quality course. These are skills that I acquired that enhanced my degree in Canada.

One participant, Carine, stated that there was this pervasive mindset that anything from up north is better. People generally questioned the quality of education obtained in the Caribbean islands. In their view, a third world country would produce a third world degree.

Carine: Has a Ph.D and works at an accreditation entity in Jamaica

Carine: The general psychology for these groupings and I believe that you know, is that whatever is from the north is superior to those down south...that kind of thing. So, we want the best.

Most applicants stated that they were well received in the job interviews. However, while no specific reasons were given for them not getting the jobs, certain things were implied or nuances were picked upon which shed light on the employers' views of Caribbean universities, and their perception of the quality of the degree. This could be attributed to a number of factors. Such as, lack of awareness, lack of sensitivity to immigrant groups as well as subtle hints of racism and discrimination.

Dominic: Has a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (UWI) Barbados

Dominic: Well, it wasn't explicitly said. But the person doing the interview focused on the degree. So, they were like so what was the experience of the

university there? Did you have classroom classes like every day? And you know...it felt a bit condescending and insulting you know. And this is...was pre-pandemic and the employer was asking if our programs were held in the classroom....So, it was a shock to me to have to explain to him that we learn exactly the same way. We do the same number of courses, etc. ... Some were diplomatic and some were direct with it.

One participant stated that she believes that having a Caribbean degree didn't help them much in terms of obtaining employment and was an actual barrier. She also stated that a general lack of awareness of the school was another contributing factor.

Sabitara: Has a Master's degree in Communication Studies and a LLB in Law from the University of the West Indies, Mona

Sabitara: I think that being educated in the Caribbean and then coming to a first world country puts us at a disadvantage for the same reason I mentioned before. People are just not familiar with a lot of the universities in the Caribbean. Even if they may know of the name, they don't know what to make of the quality of the degrees. Especially when you're in a country where the job market is so competitive, right? Now, I think that their preference would definitely go to persons who were educated locally.

A similar sentiment was also expressed by another participant. He said that it was difficult for immigrants to find meaningful employment because of the unconscious bias that exists. He stated that employers still seemed to prefer Canadian experience even over

Canadian qualification. He stated that it was better than what it was before. Interestingly, getting Canadian schooling was no guarantee for obtaining jobs.

Rojaro: An employee at one of the entities serving the immigrant population

Rojaro: I think that there is a lot of change than how it was five years ago. There is more sensitivity and more awareness, but definitely more work needs to be done in these areas. The fact that there is an unconscious bias needs to go or be reduced. It's important that you know, companies start practicing more inclusive hiring.

It has been implied that recent immigrants coming to Canada are more qualified than Canadian-born nationals, yet the success rates for finding successful and suitable employment was low. Participants felt that if they had known about the nonrecognition factor or undervaluing of their credentials before coming to Canada, they could have better prepared themselves. One such applicant described his disappointment with an interview that he did.

Perry: Has a Bachelor's Degree in Emergency Healthcare from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Perry: It was a frustrating experience. I had high hopes and expectations of getting back into the field that I was in before I migrated. On my first set of interviews, the employer's first question to me was if I had a license. I said that I wasn't aware that I needed a license. He told me that if I didn't have the license, I would need to go to one of the approved universities and do over the program. If I had known this before coming to Canada...my qualifications were submitted, vetted,

and accepted for the skilled migrant program. It was also a joint degree with the University of Rochester in the USA. So, I thought that it would have been accepted in Canada...Low and behold when I come here now, they're telling me that they don't recognize my credentials and I basically had to go back to school which I couldn't do at the time as you know, I had a family to take care of.

Two participants had a different experience than the others. One was a trained teacher from Jamaica and the other was a Senior Executive HR Manager from Trinidad and Tobago. Both had years of experience in their respective field. For these two individuals, they were able to assimilate easily into their profession. Joanie proudly expressed that she had no difficulties transitioning into her profession and ultimately, Canadian society. She is a trained teacher with over 15 years of classroom experience. She passionately stated that this is not unique to her situation and that Caribbean teachers have an easier time getting into their profession.

Joanie: Has a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education from the Northern Caribbean University (NCU)

Joanie: Well, personally, I believe that there are a number of stigmas out there in terms of immigrants settling into a first world country. But everyone's experience is different. For me, as an educated professional, I would believe, or I would say that... that perception is false. Wherever we are, as trained teachers, trained for example in the Caribbean, I see where a number of people have transitioned seamlessly into Canadian society. And they are doing very well, right?

Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms

One of the realities facing immigrants, is the realization that if they are to survive in Canada, they'll need to utilize various types of coping mechanisms. This can be taking on survival jobs, going back to school to get recertified and/or retrained. Other coping strategies include utilizing the services of a mentor/coach and depending on family members to assist. This strategy is not always available, so some may end up seeking funding from the government in the form of welfare support.

Gail: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of Technology (UTECH), Jamaica

Gail: It has not been...it has not been easy. They have not been very receptive because since I have been here over 5 years now, I have not been able to get a job in my career field. As a matter of fact, I have had to consider changing my career field. I'm now working full-time and going to school part-time to become a nurse (RN).

It is assumed that having Canadian credentials would put the immigrant at an advantage. But this was not so for some. Even with having both Canadian experience and Canadian qualification did not prove helpful in this participant's experience.

Ann: Has a Bachelor's degree in Law from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Ann: I went to a Canadian university... University of Waterloo. I had a Canadian degree and I had worked in Canada before, so I also had Canadian experience, but my law degree is from Jamaica. Whenever I applied for jobs, they would look at

me and say, but you're a lawyer. You're overqualified etc. So, I couldn't get a job as a lawyer, and I couldn't get other jobs because I was overqualified and underqualified at the same time. You know what I mean?

The participants explained that immigrants can obtain work more easily in the retail trade, food industry, factories, construction, and other similar menial jobs. As a result, many high-skilled professionals work in the above areas. Thus, while they are not unemployed, they are considered underemployed. Many immigrants are forced to do these survival jobs as they have families to provide for.

Carter: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill)

Carter: I really can't say for sure why I was unable to pick up a job. I don't know whether it was a culmination of the timing or the conjunction with being from the Caribbean. It took very long for me to find a job. But I do think that having a degree from the University of the West Indies... it just raised eyebrows. UWI is not exactly the most well-known of universities despite the high caliber of students that it turns out... This is different across industries because I did have to work in construction and do other type of manual jobs and those kinds of things to survive. And of course, you had no difficulty getting those kinds of jobs. At that time, your degree is more seen as an advantage. You're viewed as hardworking and industrious and that kind of stuff.

The participants with whom I spoke, expressed their deep pride in the reputation held of Caribbean people. One participant stated that we are known for our strong work

ethic and drive. Another participant stated that we had a responsibility to uphold this standard in the workplace as it would be to our advantage when seeking employment.

Duayne: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (St Augustine)

Duayne: We in the Caribbean, Caribbean nationals, we have developed a reputation for doing great work. Unfortunately, we know that not everyone has the same work ethic...but I think that credentials may open the door, but what keeps us there is really everything else that we learned from our parents and grandparents growing up. The strong work ethic, drive...and we're starting one step behind. So, we know that we have to put our best foot forward and work, you know, perform.

Some participants disclosed that they were forced to retool and retrain. Some also have had to consider jobs in other fields or even switch careers completely. Or do it temporarily until they are able to transition into their professional field. Below are the comments that were made by one of the participants.

Princeton: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Prince: This thing for me not getting into the industry, there was just too many indifferences in the early days, and I wasn't getting those types of jobs. So actually, what happened is, I went into ...I went into accounting as I needed a job that would yield me some money. Later on, I decided to do my own thing...and started to work with some law practitioners.

One of the regulated professions that find it difficult to obtain a job in their field of training are medical doctors. One participant is a trained medical doctor who explained that she knew beforehand that her credentials would not be accepted. Thus, she made sure to do a course back home that would make it easier for her to transition into the labor market in Canada. She stated that she is not working as a doctor currently and works in disability management.

Flore: Medical Doctor with a Ph.D from Universidad Autonoma de Santa Domingo

Flore: I understood from the beginning that my medical degree was not going to be accepted here and my masters is in healthcare administration... I was working on that before coming to Canada. So, I planned to continue working in that field when I got here. I also knew there would be no issues with that degree...I currently work in disability management.

Theme 4: Accreditation and Streamlining of Degrees

Immigrant policies in many countries highlight the need to have a pool of high caliber talented individuals - immigrants who are well trained and experienced. Upon arrival, internationally trained professionals find it difficult to find employment, especially in regulated professions. Many of these regulated industries require that they have the necessary licenses or certification before they can work in their field.

The purpose of accreditation is to assure employers that the holder possesses the necessary skills and training needed to perform these jobs effectively. The paradox is that while these professions are in high demand locally, the re-accreditation requirements

process takes years to complete. The governing body that has oversight of accrediting programs and courses main mission is to be the center of excellence, enabling regional and international development through higher education quality assurance. Carine an employee of one of these institutions shared the following:

Carine: Has a PhD and works at an accreditation entity in Jamaica

Carine: Our mandate is to provide quality education for our stakeholders...to give that reassurance to the employers and students...I would say that this institution's standard is...of a worldwide standard. And we go through a very rigorous progress with the educational institutions to ensure that this happens.

A strategy that was explored to combat the recognition factor was whether having our education system streamlined with foreign universities, in terms of credits, uniformity in curricula, duration, etc. would be to an immigrant's advantage. The viewpoints expressed by the participants were varied.

Ann: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Ann: I'm not sure what you mean by streamlined. Is it the content that we are we're streamlining or is it that we're moving from three years to four years?...Maybe they look on the fact that you got your degree in three years instead of four years. But it's not all programs that could be done. Some things like teaching, policing, maybe... but I don't know because even as a lawyer to practice in another province I would have to get re-certified as the laws in each province is different. So, I don't think that we could develop some kind of you know...not a transferability thing. There are gonna be some...some professions

that you are just going to have to...because you need to make sure that the people that are practicing know the specific nuances, etc. of the jurisdiction of industry that they're in.

One participant shared her experience with getting her credentials evaluated. She stated that she had hoped that getting her credential evaluated would have opened doors for her. But that was not her experience. She explained that it did not help much in terms of reversing the employers' perception or nonacceptance of her qualification.

Gail: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from the University of Technology (UTECH)

Gail: Well, you know they will say stuff like, have you had any formal education in this country since you've been here. And you will tell them what you know because when you come to a foreign country you have to get your degree evaluated. They have to see that it carries the same weight as you know this country's standards, and so on. And even with all of that, I got my degree formally evaluated and it was deemed to be on par with theirs, the employers still did not accept it. They still think about it as being lesser than you know if you had been schooled here.

Other immigrants shared the view that the quality of education in the Caribbean is not lower and that we do not need to streamline our degrees to match theirs. The education system in the English-speaking Caribbean is based on the British education system which is regarded as one of the best in the world. Caribbean nations place a high

value on education. One of the participants stated her views on the quality of education received.

Sabitara: Has a Master's degree from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Sabitara: If I am 100% honest with you Carla there are many instances where I think that we are required to do more and go more in depth in the Caribbean than is required here. So, I personally don't think that the quality of education is lower in the Caribbean...but it's valued lower....The general perception is that we come from a poor country so there's no way that our education could be as good as it is here. I really don't know what in the mind of employers could change that perception.

Some participants felt that streamlining Caribbean degrees to meet international standards may help. They opined that doing so could help them integrate quicker as their credentials would be more readily accepted. Moreover, they would not need to do bridging programs or pre-requisite courses to get up to par. Many nurses, doctors, engineers etc. who have migrated to Canada had to complete bridging programs to meet the host country's standards.

Gail: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of Technology (UTECH), Jamaica

Gail: Well, I think it would be a start right because basically people don't like things that are different. They have some sort of fear of it. I think that we need some sort of collaboration between the countries you know in terms of the

education system so that they can be confident...that what's been taught is up to their standard.

The above sentiments were also echoed by other participants. One participant opined cautiously that as a Caribbean people, our institutions should be focusing on becoming internationally accredited. He further opined that doing so was necessary if we wanted to compete on the global stage.

Duayne: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (St Augustine)

Duayne: If we are truly going to be global, if we're going to attract global talent and if we're going to have our citizens reach out and work in companies in an international forum, we must look for international accreditation. We cannot just rely on regional accreditation.

Another participant also shared that our Caribbean universities should seek international accreditation. He further stated that he understood why they didn't but that it was something that they should at least look into.

Richard: Has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from the University of the West Indies (St Augustine)

Richard: I think they should look at it...well, I understand why they don't do it that much, right? I understand why they don't. But I think that they should look at getting international...more international accreditation because with the international accreditation, it will open up our university. Also, to other people coming to the Caribbean together to do the programs. And it signifies...it will

open up people from the Caribbean being able to get jobs abroad. I understand that there will eventually be a brain drain where everybody might want to leave the Caribbean to get a job in like a developed nation. But it could open up a lot of avenues. Both for the individual and the university.

Theme 5: Help For Immigrants

Canada is one of the main countries that seem to be attractive to immigrants. Its stable economy, quality healthcare, social services and world class education makes it a top destination. The Canadian government has made several services and programs available to assist immigrants with the transition process. An employee of one of these entities stated the following.

Rojaro: Employee of one of the entities serving the immigrant population

Rojaro: We actually work in the middle between employers and immigrants. We work with employers and other stakeholders to offer programs that would in effect help immigrants. The four main programs are: the track mentoring partnership...where employees volunteer to mentor newcomers in the country.

The other program we have is the career advancement program and we sign up with large employers and they use the immigrant talent that already exists. Our third program is called the professional migrant network which is for professional immigrants. Our fourth program is the track learning which is centered around diversity and inclusion, or learning.... these services are always available, there is no time-limit.

Canada has several organizations that work with immigrants to assist them with the integration process. For example, the credential evaluation services and immigration centers that offer help with mentoring, training, coaching, loans, etc. The Work Global Canada, Immigrant Employment Council, Free Food in Canada, Center for newcomers, ACCESS Employment and the Toronto Region and Immigration and Employment Center (TRIEC) are just a few. The Ontario Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act (2006) mandates that there is transparency in assessing immigrants' credentials.

The TRIEC provides programs for short-term training, credential assessment and examination and licensing fees, and career advancement programs. They also provide sensitivity training for employers to help remove barriers in the recruitment process. Canada also offers loans to internationally trained immigrants. These loans are called the Foreign Credential Recognition Loans Program. And this program is a nonprofit charity, funded by the Government. An immigrant can borrow up to CA\$15000.00. Canada recognizes that it can be costly to pay for the licensing and training required to return to work in your profession and offers help with this process. They also offer one-on-one career counselling.

Dolleen: Has a Bachelor's degree in Management Studies from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Dolleen: Everything is available to you here as an immigrant to help with finding a job and so on. Loans to go back to school, pay for exams and certifications etc. But resume preparation, hiring a coach/mentor and stuff like that, you'd have to

pay for these services. Ahm...I think some places offer the resume preparation for free.

Canada has also made it easier from some professions to integrate quicker into their specific field of training compared to previous years. For example, 20, 30 years ago, it didn't matter where the lawyer was trained, they had to do a bridging program at one of the recommended universities in order for them to get re-accredited and do the bar exam. Today, the requirements have been lessened.

Princeton: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Prince: They may give a little leeway here and there. Like as I said to you before there is a rule here now that if you have... if your LLB degree was earned in a commonwealth nation and you were practicing law in a commonwealth country for at least five (5) years, prior to coming to Canada, then you don't have to do the bar exam. But if you weren't then you'd have to go from foundation ...ABC foundation and study all over again. This was not the case for me when I came to Canada 30+ years ago.

One of the participants, who is also a teacher stated happily that she didn't have to do any additional courses. And that it is different for teachers. She stated that she had a bachelor's degree before coming to Canada. She also stated that the Canadian government gives loans to immigrants so that they can go back to school and do additional courses if it is required.

Joanie: Has a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education from the Northern Caribbean University (NCU)

Joanie: In terms of your qualification. So, if you only have a teaching diploma or certificate in that specific area, example primary or secondary level, you would have to do additional courses to matriculate...to be employed. Canada gives loans to immigrants to help them to do this. But once... in my experience, I already had a Bachelor's so I didn't have to do any additional courses or anything like that to be certified by the teaching board.

Theme 6: Strategies to Improve Recognition/Acceptance

One of the main aims of doing this study, was to ascertain strategies to counter/reduce the nonrecognition of Caribbean degrees. It was also a major theme in my research question. The following responses were made by the participants.

Princeton: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Princeton: My suggestion is that there should be some sort of co-operation or memorandum of understanding between countries and there should be some standard. To say that this is a standard that is you know, international. Like the ISO that governs the making of products/goods...they need to have that too for academics. But I think that it has to do more with GDP and the wealth of nations...or a country.

When an individual decides to migrate, it is a major disruption in their life. The confusion, frustrations and natural uncertainty that comes with such an undertaking can be reduced if they research and plan ahead. This was one of the strategies that was suggested.

Dolleen: Has a Bachelor's degree in Management Studies from the University of the West Indies (Mona)

Dolleen: So I think there are challenges with the transfer of your skills and your educational degrees.... The thing is the preparation and information. You have to first find out what it will take and what you will have to do to assimilate easily. You have to ...people have to prepare and plan ahead before coming.

One participant expressed that the Canadian government is working with other country's educational institutions to train their students. She opined that this is a good strategy and one that would help future immigrants who may be thinking of relocating to Canada in the future.

Joanie: Has a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education from the Northern Caribbean University (NCU)

Joanie: Well, I have heard that the Canadian government have been trying to bridge the gap for immigrants. They have a number of programs whereby they send people to institutions in these developing countries to train the students in accordance with Canadian specifications. So, when they migrate, they are better able to transition into whatever area they were trained in, which I think is a very good strategy.

One of the strategies that was also mentioned was that immigrants could get a jump start so to speak and do some of the courses that they would need to do in Canada in their home country. The participant felt that if this was possible, it would make the transition process faster and easier.

Flore: Has a MD from the Universidad Autonoma de Santa Domingo

Flore: Well, I guess they could make programs available, specifically for international graduates and have them go through the processes, maybe even before they come to Canada. That they...to have their degrees validated. So once an immigrant comes to live here, their degrees are already accepted. That would be an amazing approach because that would mean that you'd be ready to go into the workforce. So, it would be some sort of arrangement between Canada and Jamaica.... at the government level.

The advantages of shortening the process so that immigrants can get into the workforce quicker was seen as an advantage not only for the immigrants but for the government as well. Also, the time and costs to do these courses and examinations were not seen as being helpful. While one participant agreed with this point, he contended that this burden should not be placed on the home country or universities.

Rojaro: Employee of one of the entities serving the immigrant population

Rojaro: I don't think we should put that responsibility on the home country. I don't think that is the solution. I think that there has to be more of an awareness, more of a push from the respective industries, for example, the healthcare sector to essentially lessen the time and find out ways where immigrants can move quickly into their area of training...how can we as a community integrate this challenge into the workforce? If you were a dentist before, and working for many years, you should not have to wait for two or three years and do ten different exams before you can work here again.

One participant had differing views. He was quick to report that our universities needed to market themselves more so that employers and individuals in international markets are made aware of the quality of our graduates and the quality of our education system.

Duayne: Has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West Indies (St Augustine)

Duayne: I think perhaps our universities need to market themselves and market their graduates and the quality of their graduates in international markets. Not just locally. Alumni associations need to get more involved in supporting graduates in different jurisdictions/areas and in different countries, and perhaps look at the infrastructure and network too to leverage the best examples of that. If others feel.... there's a reason why HR companies and recruiters look toward university graduates here. The universities here are doing a good job about marketing what their graduates are doing and how they're achieving things.

One participant was enthusiastic when making his suggestion. He said that we needed to appeal to international students. He stated emphatically that the Caribbean region needed to market and sell what they were good at. He revealed that no one university is good at everything, so we should find out what our niche area is and capitalize on it. For example, track and field (sports). We are seen as one of the best in this area. People would come to our universities to learn how to run as fast as the Olympic champion, Usain Bolt.

Carter: Has a law degree from the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill)

Carter: Yes, it's a difficult one, because it really depends on the appeal of Caribbean universities to you know Canadians, Americans, and UK students. It would be more like the demand, I guess. Why would these students want to attend our universities? So, I guess it's a circular approach because what would bring them to our universities would be the recognition and the seamless transition of their degrees back into their chosen job market in Canada. We have the advantage of nice weather, cheaper tuition, the cost of living is cheaper too than say in Canada, and so on, so there is no reason apart from the recognition and transition back into Canadian life that I would want to attend a Canadian university over a Caribbean one. But even if you promote all you want, if there isn't a seamless transition back into Canadian life, you 'll not attract students....I also think that our universities should capitalize on our niche areas, for example marine biology, offshore banking laws etc. I think there are many programs that we could build a niche or reputation for. No one school is the best in all subject areas....capitalize on our niche market and then build an undisputed expertise...brand

Summary

This chapter highlighted the various components that were used to conduct this study. I tried to ensure that the research question, aims, design, approach, sample size, criteria for participants, informed consent, and the recruitment process were all fully aligned and supported the overall theoretical framework and concept of the study. I also followed the ethical procedures and processes to ensure compliance with Walden's IRB and general ethics governing scientific research. The limitations of the study, such as

small sample size, researcher, and participant bias as well as sample population were disclosed and addressed throughout the study. For example, through the use of peer debriefing and reflexivity, I reduced researcher bias and improved confirmability of the results.

The insights revealed a practical understanding of the barriers to the nontransferability of Caribbean degrees and strategies that can be utilized to reduce these barriers. For example, some of the barriers to the nonrecognition of Caribbean degrees was the lack of awareness of these universities, and a general unawareness of the Caribbean region. Employers were also unaware of the caliber of graduates coming from these universities. Some of the strategies presented including more marketing and promotion of Caribbean universities as well as a memorandum of understanding at the government level between the two territories.

Further analysis of the results revealed suggestions for future research that could extend understanding of this phenomenon. The proceeding chapter will report on the interpretation of the results of the research, potential for positive social change, as well as present some recommendations, commendations, and provide a summative conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I sought to ascertain the barriers to the recognition and acceptance of Caribbean degrees and strategies that could be used to remove or reduce these barriers for Caribbean immigrants in Canada. I also sought to understand the phenomenon through the lenses of different stakeholders. Based on the rich narratives of the participants, I was able to gather new insights and a greater understanding of the topic under study.

In this chapter, I present the major findings in relation to the literature from Chapter 2 and the theories that informed the study, the theoretical framework, and the research question. Relevant applications associated with the study are addressed in the interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, policy and practice, implications for positive social change, implications for future research, recommendations, and the conclusion.

Interpretation of Findings

The key findings of the study revealed that the barriers to the recognition of Caribbean degrees are based on several factors: a lack of awareness of schools outside of Canada and the quality of education these schools provide, a natural preference to hire Canadians and individuals with Canadian experience, the requirements of some regulated professions, and a general reluctance of employers to be more inclusive in their hiring practices. The strategies included raising the profile of Caribbean universities, joint programs/initiatives between universities in the two regions, and a government-level

memorandum of understanding related to movement of people between the two territories. Hearing the perspectives of the various stakeholders helped to add objectivity to the findings and presented a balanced and candid snapshot of the current reality. Understanding the struggles, frustrations, and victories of this population is the first step on the path to fairness, justice, and inclusion.

Barriers to Recognition/Acceptance

Lack of Awareness

The study results revealed that while the participants were educated and experienced professionals, they had difficulty in obtaining jobs in their field. Participants were asked about their educational background and general questions about their university by their employers. However, the questions asked revealed that little is known of schools outside of Canada and the quality of education offered. This lack of awareness severely hampers immigrants' employability. This finding aligns with the work of other researchers as well.

According to Weiner (2007), lack of recognition of foreign credentials, communication skills, Canadian experience, and discrimination are seen as the main barriers to successful job employment. Sweetman (2012) asserted that immigrants are not doing as well as they could be and are experiencing low levels of income due to the devaluation or lack of credential recognition. In addition, Moskel and North (2017) suggested that the place of education is important to employers.

Reitz (2006) purports that as a result of this nonrecognition or nonacceptance, immigrants end up working in survival jobs so they can earn income to take care of

themselves and their families. Participants expressed that they often make a transitory plan to work on doing the courses and/or obtaining the necessary licenses to reenter their profession. If they have limited finances, they may need to secure a loan to cover the costs. The process to obtain certification in Canada can take an average of 2–5 years, and for some professions, it may take even longer (Blain et al, 2015).

Perception of the Quality of the Degree

Participants routinely shared that the perception of the quality of the degree was another barrier. Participants expressed that while there were no specific statements made as to the quality of their credentials, the questions asked, and the line of questioning revealed potential employers' thought patterns. Some participants reported that these perceptions were often implied but not specifically said. The unspoken notion was that foreign degrees were not as good as local/domestic degrees. In contrast, Massey et al. (2007) reported that 4% of Black students in Ivy League colleges are Caribbean immigrants with Jamaicans comprising 20.5%—the highest percentage of Black Caribbean immigrants.

According to Little (2003) there is not much of an economic advantage in having a foreign degree. Domestic or local degrees are valued higher. Immigrants who attended a high-ranking Canadian university were 40% more likely to receive a callback (Drospoulous, 2011). Due to this low level of integration, many skilled immigrants with university degrees often work jobs that require only a high school diploma (Li et al., 2006). Only 5% of immigrants with foreign-sounding names, education, and experience receive a callback for an interview (Drospoulous, 2011). The general perception by

employers is that because they lack knowledge about foreign universities, they are unsure of the quality of the degree. Therefore, these employers prefer to hire candidates who attend schools they have a familiarity with. According to Li (2003), immigrants who have lived in the country for a longer time or who may belong to certain regulated professions may have higher success integrating in the labor market than more recent immigrants.

Some participants had an easier time transitioning into the Canadian labor market. Participants who were in the information technology, teaching, and legal professions seemed to fair better than others. Credential recognition also did not seem to be a factor for senior executive and vice-presidential roles based on participants' responses. According to participants, in these senior executive positions, employers were more interested in their accomplishments and what they were known for in the industry rather than their specific credentials.

Racism and Discrimination

Participants indicated that employers aim to be more inclusive in their hiring, and there has been some improvement compared to previous years. However, the participants indicated the persistence of underlying elements of racism and discrimination that prevent them from obtaining jobs and/or having their credentials accepted. Participants stated that this racism was never overtly displayed, but certain nuances, actions, and behaviors revealed the biases of potential employers. Participants stated they were still being discriminated against because of their country of origin and place of education.

According to Li (2008), immigrants in the labor market are somewhat invisibilized. For many immigrants, their foreign credentials are racialized as their

credentials vary according to an immigrant's racial background. For example, immigrants from developing countries with medical degrees have a harder time being able to practice in their profession. However, admission to residency programs is easier for medical doctors holding a degree from Europe (Fortin & Renaud, 2004). In this way, the level of transferability is unequal. The pathways to integration can happen at varying speeds and varying investments of time, energy, and money. Depending on the country where a medical degree was obtained, integration could take between 3 and 10 years according to participants' responses.

Similarly, Chui (2003) purported that the credentials of White immigrants are valued while non-White immigrants experience a lack of credential recognition. This distinction is important in terms of future policy research. Breen (2016) also suggested that educational systems and processes need to be more equitable and inclusive, so that immigrants and refugees are able to integrate more easily. Employers tend to want to hire people who look like the employers do or who are from the same group as the employers are (Eid, 2002; Chicha, 2002). Those potential employees who do not fit in or who do not correspond to the norm are considered problematic. According to Buzdugan (2009), racial and economic discrimination have become more evident due to differences in the wage gap among immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and White people. Reits et al. (2012) purported that while there are programs and policies that aim to be more inclusive, and equitable, immigrants still struggle to find employment and integrate into society.

Lack of Canadian Experience

Several participants shared their surprise with employers asking them for relevant Canadian experience. Participants found this frustrating and unreasonable given that they were recent immigrants. Participants found that even if they had relevant work experience, it was not accepted if it was obtained outside of Canada. According to the participants, this is just one of the barriers immigrants experienced when seeking employment in their field. Nonetheless, when immigrants' skills are underutilized, it can cost the economy 2.3 billion dollars annually (Wat & Bloom, 2001; Li, 2004).

According to Bouchard (2006), immigrants who lack knowledge of Canadian culture, workplace norms, and other needed skills are seen as disadvantageous. Chui (2003) argued that in this era of globalization and increased movement of people, it is paradoxical for employers to persist in asking for Canadian experience and qualifications from immigrants. Chui further stated that he did not understand the rationale to value foreign experiences lower than Canadian experiences. Wayland (2006) argued that the difficulties facing immigrants is a Canadian problem and not an immigrant problem and that more needs to be done to help immigrants successfully integrate into society.

Lack the Requirements of Regulated Professions

Participants explained that the requirements to work in their area of training in Canada were a barrier. Having credentials and experience was not enough to grant them entry into their field. Participants also expressed disappointment and frustration with the process. The immigration policies of Canada include the sustained recruitment and retention of highly skilled professionals to maintain and enhance Canada's long-term

economic growth and development (Grant & Sweetman, 2004). However, the strict requirements of many of these regulated professions make it difficult for immigrants to work in their field. Moreover, it will take immigrants can find it cost and time prohibitive to complete the necessary bridging programs, courses, and exams to qualify for the needed license or certification.

Aydemir & Robinson (2006) posit that Canada could lose immigrants as they would just move on to other countries where they are better able to integrate into society. Sweetman (2012) expressed similar comments that immigrants face challenges transitioning into their host country. Weiner et al (2007) also posit that even though they may be better educated than their predecessors the devaluing of their credentials and lack of recognition compounds their integration challenge. Chui (2003) also suggested that lack of Canadian experience and transferability of foreign credentials were the main barriers to employment. Unfortunately, many immigrants are unaware of the credential challenge that they will face in Canada and come to Canada unprepared (Bouchard, 2006, & Li, 2003).

Ngo and Este (2006) purport that social and structural barriers prevent the immigrants from joining their profession. Licensing and other certification were seen as being structural barriers. These institutions were seen as acting as gatekeepers to exclude qualified and experienced professionals and separated individuals who are not considered part of the norm. Ngo and Este (2006) also wrote that participants with training and education that closely matched the Canadian standards, were proficient in English and

had support from family and other community organizations were more likely to obtain professional certification sooner.

For many immigrants, the path towards credential recognition and accreditation is an uphill and unclear task, with many inconsistencies. And takes place in a highly competitive context with “social ideologies, economical and subjective undercurrents” (Blain et al, 2015).

Some participants became frustrated with the process and ended up switching careers or going back to school to study in other fields/industries. Sawchuk (2008) asked, how can immigrants achieve justice in terms of credential recognition? How can we benefit from an immigrant’s professional expertise more quickly and effectively? He stated that this is a research area that need to be further explored due to its impact on the political, economic, and policy outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of the study. The main limitation was its small sample size. While a larger sample would have given more information, the 15 participants provided sufficient data for me to conduct a robust inquiry. I also achieved data saturation around my 12th participant. At that time, the information became repetitive, and no new insights were being unfolded. However, maybe knowing more about their lifestyle, religion and habits could have shed more light on their approach to job-hunting and migration. Knowing these additional variables could have provided more knowledge as it relates to their life philosophy and motivation/drive.

Another limitation of the study includes the biased and subjective views of the researcher and participants. This study sought to understand the viewpoints and perspectives of the participants based on their lived experiences. I am aware that my personal biases as well as the biases of the participants could result in the misinterpretation of the views expressed. I could also have missed vital information needed to make specific interpretations because of my knowledge of the situation and my experience as an immigrant worker.

I am also cognizant that my study could come across as bias due to my personal experience and kinship to the Caribbean community. However, I tried my best to control this bias and my emotions by consulting with other researchers and peers to gain different viewpoints and to challenge my thinking. Throughout this study I aimed to be objective and fair.

Due to the nature of the study, it was challenging to recruit participants from the credential evaluation entities in Canada. Despite my best efforts, and reaching out to my contacts to assist, I was unable to secure a participant. I believe that having this perspective would have further strengthened and added fresh insights to bring about a better understanding. Especially as it relates to making invaluable suggestions and strategies to remove these barriers. However, I am confident that I was able to collect enough of an eclectic viewpoint to add value, objectivity, and substance to the study.

In addition, widening my sample population to include Caribbean immigrants from other provinces could have added depth to the study. It would have also reduced the challenge that I unexpectedly encountered in limiting my sample to participants from the

Toronto area only. This study is therefore limited to Caribbean immigrants in the GTA area of Ontario, Canada

Recommendations for Further Research

Caribbean immigrants will continue to come to Canada. Despite the many challenges, it is still seen as a viable option to potential immigrants. Additionally, Canada relies on immigrants to sustain its labor force and drive its economy and it is thus a mutually beneficial situation for both parties. While there is evidence that the Canadian government has implemented several programs/services to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Canadian society, it remains an elusive dream for many. Immigrants still struggle to obtain gainful employment in their professions and remain underemployed years after living in Canada, and even after obtaining the required Canadian courses/accreditation.

Further research could be done on other immigrant groups and populations to ascertain if there are any significant differences between groups. For example, a study on immigrants who migrated twenty (20) and thirty (30) years ago compared to recent immigrants. This would shed some light on how immigration policies have changed over the years, and its effect on the population. Doing a quantitative component to this study would also strengthen the findings and present a numerical analysis of the current situation. Adding the covid variable in an era of a global pandemic could also provide additional insights in understanding this phenomenon.

Other researchers have highlighted the need to evaluate the effectiveness of specific immigration policies/programs and credential evaluation processes (Buzdugan,

2009; Moskal & North, 2017). For example, how effective are the bridging programs or the services offered by the Immigrant Employment Center for newcomers? This would give specific information regarding which programs are working, those that aren't and those that need re-tweaking.

A comparative study could also be done between countries that offer similar skilled visa programs. For example, Australia and New Zealand. How are the immigrants in these countries faring compared to immigrants in Canada? Maybe with the same sample population or other population groups. Insights from these studies could be shared with the respective governing bodies.

Clearly, there needs to be more initiatives, programs and changes to existing policies and programs which could result in significant positive changes in the credential evaluation process and in the hiring practices of employers. Why are the existing programs and services not as successful as they could be? While there has been some improvement in the last five years, it is worse than what it was thirty or forty years ago. This would imply that changes were made to immigration policies/programs that are not proving to be as successful.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was the social justice theory (Rawls, 1979). He advocated for a just society in which goods, services, opportunities, and rights are equally distributed among individuals. This theory was chosen as it aligns with my research theme of equal opportunities for Caribbean

immigrants within the context of the Canadian labor market. In applying this theory to the study, there are several implications for positive social change.

This dissertation can make a valuable contribution in the area of social change as it relates to the successful integration of Caribbean immigrants at the individual, familial and community levels. These changes can prove lasting and serve to improve the economic prosperity and standard of living for current and future generations of Caribbean immigrants. According to Standford (2000) the Canadian labor market can be made more flexible and efficient which will improve unemployment numbers in the long run. It will also help to improve their wage-earning potential.

The study sought to give the perspectives and viewpoints of Caribbean immigrants and other stakeholders. In addition, through their voices, we were able to hear their ideas for strategies that could improve the situation. They would be the best expert in this subject as it is their reality and are thus able to make recommendation based on their lived experiences. These recommendations could help policymakers choose the best practice/program required to support Caribbean immigrants through their assimilation process.

The following encompassing recommendations were made by the participants and are offered in this paper. They are related to changes to immigration policy/programs, university operations/course structures, and collaboration between government bodies and other stakeholders. They are as follows:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or some sort of cooperation be established between the two regions - Canada and the Caribbean/Jamaica that outlines the agreed standards, waivers and agreed processes regarding the movement of people.
- Raise the profile/increase awareness of Caribbean universities in Canada. This could be done through (marketing/promotion overseas).
- Solicit and engage the active involvement of Alumni Associations of the various Caribbean universities in migrant dominated countries and regions. For example, networking, mentorship, and training, etc.
- Seek international accreditation/World branding for e.g., ISO (International Organization for Standards for goods. Have something similar for academics
- More inclusive hiring practices and recruitment processes. For example, the Canadian government implements a hiring policy (minority and inclusion act/clause) which states that employers are required by law to employ a certain percentage of immigrants. This percentage would depend on the size and workforce of the entity.
- Establish an oversight board for the regulated professions to ensure transparency, accountability, and consistency.
- Reduce time, requirements, and general bureaucratic process to work in your profession
- Collaboration of courses – Our local universities offer joint programs in conjunction with Canadian universities

- Improve the relationship between universities. For example, visiting lecturers from both regions exchange lecturers at the schools on a short-term basis. Also, student exchange programs.
- Some of the required courses required by the regulated profession association/bodies in Canada be offered in the Caribbean or online. In this way, potential immigrants can do some of it in their home country and may even qualify for certification before coming to Canada
 - Published standards and guidelines as it relate to foreign credential evaluations and make it available to employers/organizations.
 - Caribbean universities find their niche area and/or brand and capitalize upon it. For example, marine biology, offshore banking tax laws etc. Be known for this course worldwide
 - Develop a government registry of top international universities for popular migrant countries and their ranking. Employers could go online and check these universities. For example, India, China, Caribbean, African countries, Philippines, Eastern Europe etc. Employers who are unaware of the foreign schools could go online and check the government's registry re quality standards and Canadian equivalencies.
 - The skilled migrant program vet qualifications for regulated professions during the application process. This way, applicants will know from early on what is lacking and what they will need to do to work in their profession before migrating.
 - The Canadian government select several universities overseas where they send teachers annually to train students for specific programs/professions in demand. For

example, e.g., nursing, engineering, dentistry, etc, this will prove beneficial to graduates if and when they decide to migrate to Canada.

Recommendations

Canada is one of the few countries that offer entry into their country by way of the skilled migrant visa. As a result, many immigrants from all over the world are able to benefit from this initiative. They have been able to come to a new country assimilate and some have successfully transformed their lives, at the individual, familial and community levels. Additionally, immigrants are appreciative of the programs and services offered by the Canadian government to help the immigrant community such as the Immigrant Employment Council, Center for Newcomers, Work Global Canada. Also, the services offered by the TRIEC such as the mentorship and career advancement have proven beneficial to many. And the Canadian government is to be commended, however, more can still be done.

This study seeks to present a fair and candid assessment of the plight of the immigrant community, specifically Caribbean immigrants, what their struggles are and what could be done to improve their major challenge of integrating successfully into the Canadian labor market. Immigrants can be positive contributors and role models in society if they are given a fair chance/opportunity to do so.

Policy and Practice

I sought to address the gap in the literature by exploring how the standards/quality of Caribbean credentials could be strengthened or streamlined so that they meet international standards from the perspective of those responsible for setting and

evaluating these credentials. The findings of the study addressed the gap in the literature. Many sides of this matter were examined, and the stakeholders gave their varying and opposing views. What is clear is that it is a complex phenomenon with no simple or straightforward answer. And, the stance taken, would be based on which side of the table you sit. Is the glass half-full or half-empty?

From the thirteen Caribbean professional immigrants interviewed, six were working in their field of training and only three were satisfied with their salary. Four participants were earning minimum wage. Several immigrants were satisfied with their assimilation journey, most were not. Some persons argued for an international standard for Caribbean credentials others argued against it saying that the standards were on par but that this was not known. Thus, herein lies the challenge.

What was agreed on however, was that the policies, processes, and systems should be improved and made more efficient and transparent so that the integration process of Caribbean immigrants can be as consistent, seamless, and quick as possible. Immigrants should be provided with the necessary support, resources, and pathways to facilitate their certification and integration into Canadian society.

With globalization and the expanding number of immigrants and refugees coming in from other countries, the education systems and integration processes need to be fair and more inclusive. This study reminded us that immigration policies and programs need to be more mindful of minority groups and refugees so that they can be better supported as they integrate into their host country. If highly skilled professionals are truly wanted in Canada, do not just say it, show it.

Conclusion

The challenge of the nontransferability of skills and credentials is not unique to Caribbean immigrants or to Canada. Canada was the country of focus as it seeks to attract skilled professionals into their country by way of the skilled migrant visa programs (Reitz, Curtis & Elrick, 2012). The Caribbean population was selected as it is largely underrepresented. Canada is purported as needing these skilled professionals to fill in-demand jobs. The irony is that qualified professionals are screened and allowed into the country to fill these in-demand jobs, but upon entry they are screened out from getting the very jobs they were accepted in to fill. Immigrants need jobs, and there are jobs in various locations across Canada in need of the skills that they bring. However, due to bureaucratic processes and requirements, ne'er the two shall meet. Or at least, not right away.

In this study, I sought to explore the barriers to the recognition of Caribbean degrees and presented strategies that could be used to counter/remove these barriers. It addressed the gap in the literature by explaining how the standards of Caribbean degrees could be streamlined to meet international standards through the perspectives of those responsible for setting and evaluating these standards. It gave keen insights into the struggles and the resilience of Caribbean immigrants and how they overcame these challenges.

Over the years, many informal discussions have taken place about this topic, however, the time is now opportune to go a step further. Policies and programs are needed that will shorten the time and improve the requirements for immigrants to become

Canadian certified so that they can work in their profession. Shortening the steps and processes will benefit not only the Caribbean immigrants but the Canadian government as well. For example, it will reduce the amount of funds paid out in welfare support to immigrants (Thornton et al, 2019).

This research is completed. The recommendations have been made. The question now is, will anything be done about it? It is hoped that the findings of this study will go towards bringing about sustainable social change at the judicial and policy levels that will positively impact the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada.

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Appendix A: Email Invitation to Caribbean Immigrants

Hi

My name is Carla Ibanzo and I'm a doctoral student at Walden University. I'm conducting a study on the challenges facing Caribbean immigrants in the Canadian labor market and you're being invited to participate in the study. I'd love to hear your perspective/views on the challenges that immigrants face, specifically as it relates to credential recognition and acceptance. Please note that I'm seeking graduates of a Caribbean university who live in Toronto, Canada. The title of the paper is: Exploring the non-transferability of the skills and qualifications of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada.

If this is something that you'd be interested in, kindly reply to this email stating your interest.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Kind regards,

Carla Ibanzo

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Employees

Hi

My name is Carla Ibanzo and I'm a doctoral student at Walden University. I'm conducting a study on the challenges facing Caribbean immigrants in Canada and you're being invited to participate in the study. I'd love to hear your perspective/views on the challenges that immigrants face, specifically as it relates to credential recognition and acceptance. Please note that I'm seeking individuals who have experience working with immigrant groups/population. The title of the paper is: Exploring the non-transferability of the skills and qualifications of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada.

If this is something that you'd be interested in, kindly reply to this email stating your interest.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Kind regards,

Carla Ibanzo

Appendix C: Interview Guide, Caribbean Immigrants

Section A

Thank you for agreeing to the interview and for allocating time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview. My name is Carla Ibanzo and I'm a doctoral student at the Walden University. You were recruited and invited to participate in this interview to assist me with my study. The title of the paper is: Accreditation and Licensing: Exploring the non-transferability of skills and qualifications of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada.

By participating in this study you agree to:

-Participate voluntarily in the interview.

-Agree to a 45-60 mins time-frame.

Please note that there will be minimal risk to you the participant. Your identity and the information received will be protected and kept confidential. This interview is totally voluntary and you are allowed to pull out of or stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audio recorded and notes will also be taken. You can request to see them at any time.

Section B

Questions

How are you doing?

How has your day been going so far?

Did anything extraordinary/exciting happen to you today?

What area in the GTA do you work?

1. What's your age group 18-34, 35-49, 50-64 over 65?

a) How long have you been living in Canada?

2. What's the highest level of degree and what was it awarded in?

a) What was the duration the course?

b) What Caribbean university did you attend?

3. How has your experience been with job hunting and degree recognition/acceptance?

a) Can you explain how receptive were employers and recruiting agencies towards you?

b) How did the experience differ according to industry, level etc

c) Tell me about your best and worse experience?

4. Are you now employed in the field to which you were trained?

a) How soon were you able to obtain a job in your area of training after moving to Canada?

b) To your knowledge, are you paid in line with industry wage guidelines?

5. What are your views/perspectives on the transferability factor of degrees? In other words, why aren't Caribbean degrees recognized?

a) Tell me about a time when you were denied a job because of the place of education and how often has this happened?

b) What were some of the reasons given for the rejection/decline?

c) Were the employers diplomatic or direct with giving you the reason for rejection?

6. Please explain if you had to do make-up courses, do over your degree, get Canadian certified etc?

a) What other coping mechanisms/strategies did you use to offset the employability challenge? (coach, mentor, professional resume service, volunteering etc)

7. In your view, to what extent does the "perception" influence the acceptance and recognition of third world vs first world degrees and how would this translate to the quality of the degree?

8. In your view, how can the curriculum of Caribbean degrees be streamlined to meet international standards? For example, credits, curricula, matriculation, duration, etc.

a). Could you share your perspective on whether tertiary institutions should be focusing on regional or international accreditation? Why or why not?

9. What can be done in your view to improve the perception and recognition of Caribbean degrees? What strategies would you suggest?

10. Do you have anything to add that wasn't discussed/What are your parting thoughts?

Thank you for your participation. It is appreciated. I'll be analyzing the information gathered to include in my research. I'll be happy to send you a copy of the findings if you'd like.

Again, thanks for your time and best wishes.

Appendix D: Interview Guide Employees

Interview Guide (Employees) Section A

Thank you for agreeing to the interview and for allocating time out of your busy schedule to participate in this research. My name is Carla Ibanzo and I'm a doctoral student at the Walden University. You were recruited and invited to participate in this interview to assist with my study. The title of the paper is: Exploring the non-transferability of skills and qualifications of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Canada.

By participating in this study you agree to:

- Participate voluntarily in the interview.
- Agree to 45 - 60 mins time-frame.

Please note that there will be minimal risk to you the participant. Your identity will not be revealed and the information given will be protected and kept confidential. This interview is completely voluntary and you are allowed to pull out of or stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audio recorded and notes will also be taken. You can request to see them at any time.

Section B

Questions

How are you doing?

How has your day been going so far?

Have you always wanted to work in the _____ industry?

What do you find most interesting/exciting about your job?

1. What are your views on the quality/standard of Caribbean degrees and credentials?
2. What are some of the differences that you've observed between the educational system in the Caribbean and Canada?
 - a) Can you explain any impact that these differences may have in terms of employment?

3. How does one's "perception"(employers, recruitment agencies, etc) influence the acceptance and recognition of Caribbean degrees?
 - a) Do you think that the connotation of "third world" vs "first world" impacts the perception of the quality of the degree? Why or Why not?
 - b) How can the curriculum of Caribbean degrees be streamlined to meet international standards? For example, credits, curricula, matriculation, duration, etc.
4. In your view, should tertiary institutions be focusing on regional or international accreditation? Why or why not?
 - a) Describe in brief the accreditation process and procedures?
 - b) Should educational institutions be working towards curricula uniformity, international accreditation, or other standardized protocols? Why or Why not?
5. What are your thoughts on the non-transferability factor of Caribbean degrees?
6. In your view, do you think that local accrediting agencies should be under the purview of government ministry/agencies or the private sector? Why or Why not?
7. Do you think this would impact the quality aspect of the degree? Why or Why not?
8. What are your thoughts regarding the worldwide university rankings? For example QS World University Rankings.
 - a) Should Caribbean universities seek to be included in these rankings? Why or Why not?
 - b) Would that help with the international recognition factor? Why or Why not?
9. What are some strategies or programs/policies that could be employed to mitigate or remove the barriers to recognition? (Government, universities, local accrediting bodies)
10. Are there any other thoughts/comments you'd like to share?

Thank you for your participation. It is appreciated. I'll be analyzing the information gathered to include in my research. I'll be happy to send you a copy of the findings if you'd like. Again, thanks for your time and best wishes.