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Qualitative Research with Former International Students: Reflections on Conceptualization, Planning and Relational Engagement

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Abstract

The number of international students seeking a foreign education, particularly in Westernized countries, has grown dramatically over the past decade, and is predicted to continue to increase, despite a period of disruption due to COVID-19. Given this growth, there is a significant body of research on key insights into the initial transition experiences, both academic and personal, of international students to the host country, with a developing body of research exploring their post-study transition. Understanding these post-study transitions is important in creating policy and services that appropriately support international students. Due to the diverse and sometimes complex post-study pathways of former international students, accessing this population to conduct qualitative research can create challenges for researchers. To help address these challenges, the authors highlight three critical considerations based on their qualitative research experiences in Westernized countries with former international students, including conceptual understandings, logistical planning, and relational engagement. Moreover, the authors share examples of pragmatic solutions related to challenges with conceptual understandings, logistical planning, and relational engagement in qualitative research with former international students. The purpose of this article is to start and invite discussion around how best to reach, access, and work with former international students to expand qualitative research on the post-study experience.

Keywords

former international students, qualitative research, research design

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Qualitative Research with Former International Students: Reflections on Conceptualization, Planning and Relational Engagement

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The number of international students seeking a foreign education, particularly in Westernized countries, has grown dramatically over the past decade, and is predicted to continue to increase, despite a period of disruption due to COVID-19. Given this growth, there is a significant body of research on key insights into the initial transition experiences, both academic and personal, of international students to the host country, with a developing body of research exploring their post-study transition. Understanding these post-study transitions is important in creating policy and services that appropriately support international students. Due to the diverse and sometimes complex post-study pathways of former international students, accessing this population to conduct qualitative research can create challenges for researchers. To help address these challenges, the authors highlight three critical considerations based on their qualitative research experiences in Westernized countries with former international students, including conceptual understandings, logistical planning, and relational engagement. Moreover, the authors share examples of pragmatic solutions related to challenges with conceptual understandings, logistical planning, and relational engagement in qualitative research with former international students. The purpose of this article is to start and invite discussion around how best to reach, access, and work with former international students to expand qualitative research on the post-study experience.

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Introduction

Despite COVID-19 and the resulting health measures, including border and travel restrictions and temporarily disrupted international mobility trends (OECD, 2022), over the past several decades there have been shifts in the recruitment, motives, and trends of international student mobility, particularly in Westernized countries (Choudaha, 2017). Accompanying this increase in international student numbers has been corresponding interest in research to better understand international students' experiences, historically on their initial transition into the destination country, and in particular their academic adjustment (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Researchers have examined influences on the personal experiences of international students, including interpersonal relationships (Rivas et al., 2019), language ability (Trenkic & Warmington, 2019), diverse cultural norms (Jackson et al., 2013), mental health concerns (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016), and the availability of local social support in relation to their academic experiences and career goals (Arthur, 2017).

A growing area of research focus is on the post-study experiences of international students (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2016), which demonstrates their

highly varied journeys (Lee, 2021; Tran et al., 2020; Woodend & Arthur, 2018). The post-study transition and experiences represent a critical period as many international students seek a foreign education as part of a long-term career goal to enhance their future employment prospects (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). For example, it is generally assumed that a degree from a university in a westernized country is valued by employers, both locally and internationally (Tran & Vu, 2016). Yet, many international students face challenges post-study that depreciate their investment in an international education, such as under-employment (Heyes et al., 2017; Loo et al., 2017). Moreover, although there is research to suggest that international students find some existing supports helpful (Kambouropoulos, 2014; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012), they also indicate gaps between their identified needs and available institutional resources and support (Arthur et al., 2022b; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2013; Loo et al., 2017). These gaps are particularly prevalent post-study, when they are often no longer on campus and have less access to student-services (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Tran et al., 2022).

As well, there remains a dominant assumption about international students either staying to live and work or return to their country of origin post-study; whereas, former international students' realities are more complex; for example they might go to a different country, or return to their country of origin for a period before coming back to the country of study (Arthur & Nunes, 2014; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Lee, 2021). Further research is needed to understand this complex and varied post-study experience to appropriately support international students in preparation for and through their post-study transition. Although survey-based (i.e., quantitative or brief set responses) research is helpful to understand educational outcomes (e.g., employment, earnings, where they live/work now), more qualitative, experience-based data is needed to contextualize and conceptualize former international students' varied journeys. From our experience petitioning former international students to participate in qualitative research and then designing studies to gain an in-depth understanding of their diverse post-study experiences can pose challenges. Unaddressed, these challenges may create barriers to conducting qualitative research with former international students.

In the current article, we provide key considerations and potential directions for interviewing former international students, as well as designing and engaging in qualitative research for appropriate and effective investigations into their post-study experiences. These considerations and directions are based on our pragmatic reflections of our successes and challenges in conducting research, both in the Australian and Canadian contexts, with this diverse population post-study (i.e., lessons from research). Specifically, we offer three main considerations including conceptual understandings, logistical planning, and relational engagement in research with former international students, with practical examples of how we addressed these considerations.

Researchers' Perspectives: Positionality, Experience, and Pragmatic Reflections

To contextualize the considerations and potential actions we share in this article, we first position ourselves, briefly detail our experiences that support our expertise, and indicate how pragmatism informed our reflections.

Statements of researcher positionality are critical to qualitative research because they provide a window into the researchers' worldviews, including where they are coming from in engaging in the research (Bourke, 2014; Darwin Holmes, 2020). This window is helpful to readers as it contextualizes the researchers' interpretations so that readers can make determinations about the transferability of the findings to their contexts (Dodgson, 2019). Given the self- and co-reflective nature of this article and the points that we offer to support

ongoing qualitative research based on these reflections, we briefly share the following positionality statements:

The first author, Jon, is a White, queer man who is a settler on the traditional and unceded territory of the *lək̓ʷəŋən* peoples in Canada. Jon has not experienced an international career transition as an international student; however, he has personal experience with international career transitions as the son of immigrants to Canada as well as having lived and worked in Japan and Australia. Jon is also an assistant professor and registered psychologist who has worked with international students on research and for academic, career, and personal concerns in post-secondary settings. Jon conceptualizes research from subjectivism ontological perspective where there is not one “true” knowable experience and approaches research from a social constructionist perspective where understandings of what is “true” are formed through interactions with others and the environment (Galbin, 2014). Taken together, Jon’s understanding of former international students’ experiences is influenced by his beliefs that their post-study pathways are highly diverse in reflection of the heterogeneity of this population and their respective contexts, yet they share many of the same needs, despite their diverse pathways, as a function of their status as international students.

The second author, Nancy, is a White, cisgender woman who grew up in a rural area of Canada and moved to an urban area of Canada in another province to pursue educational and employment opportunities. Nancy has experienced migration to another country and currently lives in an urban area of Australia, acknowledged as the traditional lands of the Kaurana people. Nancy’s experience with international students includes counselling and coordinating international student services in higher education, instructing international students, and serving as a homestay parent to younger international students. Nancy’s program of research has focused on the career transitions of international students and the process of identity construction during cross-cultural interactions. Nancy’s personal and professional experiences have shaped her views about culturally responsive and holistic approaches to service provision for supporting diverse international students.

In terms of our expertise in providing suggestions regarding qualitative research with former international students, we both have experience in conducting qualitative research related to international career transitions and experiences and have collaborated on several projects with international students (e.g., Arthur et al., 2022a; 2022b; Woodend & Arthur, 2018). Projects included the experiences of high school international students, international students immersed in study, international students transitioning out of study and into the workforce, and international students more established in their post-study careers. These projects, our expertise, and the considerations noted in this article are situated within our Westernized contexts (i.e., Australia and Canada), which will have ideas that are transferable to international contexts but will not be generalizable to all contexts. It is through these experiences and comparing the design and process of the different projects that we have generated these lessons from research.

For the suggestions we make in this article, we used pragmatic thinking (Biesta & Burbules, 2003) to synthesize our positionality, experiences, and expertise in an atheoretical way to suit different qualitative approaches. Specifically, through discussion we identified post hoc research design and planning considerations and potential directions to address common challenges in conducting research with former international students. These practical considerations and potential directions are not intended to be formal and prescriptive, but instead to demonstrate examples of “what works” in being flexible and adaptable to access former international students and further contribute to the knowledge about their lived experiences post-study. Our aim is for this article to serve as an invitation for researchers to consider how they can transfer and/or adapt these ideas to their international contexts of future inquiries, and then to add to them through reflecting on their research experiences.

Considerations for Designing Qualitative Research with Former International Students

To support qualitative researchers in conceptualizing their research with former international students, and designing their studies, we will review three key considerations based on our experiences. Specifically, in the following sections, we will provide reflections about conceptual, logistical, and relational considerations.

Conceptual Understandings

Before conducting research with former international students, researchers are encouraged to carefully review any conceptual considerations that could help or pose as barriers for shaping an appropriate and feasible study. Conceptualization is an important starting point in qualitative research design and involves reviewing key concepts, groups, and existing ideas related to the area of study (LeFebvre, 2017). One such consideration that we have found helpful in framing our research pertains to views about the international student population. For instance, we encountered challenges in determining inclusion criteria for who constituted a “former international student” and then how to appropriately represent the experiences of diverse groups of people within this population. There is often an expectation in research methodologies, including qualitative methods, that the participants included will have similar and targeted characteristics. (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The goal of recruiting participants with these similar and targeted characteristics is to learn about specific experiences and perspectives to have findings that offer implications relevant for this group of people. For example, many qualitative research designs target understanding experiences based on gender. For former international students, seeking similar characteristics may result in stereotyping or continuously segmenting of people into increasingly specific groups, resulting in inappropriate and ineffective implications (Jones, 2017). International students are highly diverse, representing people from various countries and intersecting cultures and identities, as well as different levels of education (e.g., secondary school, undergraduate and graduate level) and disciplines (Arthur, 2019; OECD, 2022).

Rather than segmenting groups of people, an alternative perspective is for researchers to consider what specific phenomenon they are investigating and then recruit different perspectives and experiences around that similar phenomenon (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Even the degree to which international students’ experiences are distinct from local students has been contested, with Jones (2017) arguing that artificial separation has obscured commonalities across student populations. From this position, we invite researchers to consider similarities between the experiences of local students in their education to employment transition, and whether the characteristic of “international student status” is the targeted phenomenon for investigation. At the same time, it is important to note any nuances in experience that are related to international and cross-cultural differences. Although this point is relevant to current international students, it is particularly the case for former international students whose post-study experiences are highly varied, for example where they live and work across their lives (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019).

Secondly, there is often an expectation of linear pathways (i.e., international students will either return to their country of origin or stay in the destination country; Lee, 2021). In our research, we were often challenged to reconsider who qualified as a “former international student;” for example, if an international student graduates, returns to their country of origin to work for a few years then returns to the country of study to pursue an advanced degree, are they a “former international student?” Moreover, former international students may seek post-study opportunities across a variety of contexts (e.g., starting in the destination country before returning to the country of origin, or pursuing other international education or employment

experiences). Post-graduation plans are often fluid, as former international students compare employment opportunities across country contexts and position their plans accordingly (Arthur et al., 2022b; Zhan, 2022).

As such, we further encourage researchers to consider that separating perspectives based on participant characteristics may create fractured and disembodied understandings of the post-study experience with limited utility or obscure critical implications useful across this population. This was a challenge that we encountered in research with former international students. Namely, seeking a clear participant group with specified characteristics to meet methodological rigour required increasingly specific characteristics that excluded a substantial portion of the former international student population. In addition, we reflected about our taken-for-granted understandings and the complexity of participants' multiple transitions and post-study pathways, which required returning to our conceptualization of what the study was aiming to understand. For example, when focusing on the post-study experience, some participants had multiple transitions involving post-study experiences, such as working after an undergraduate degree before completing a graduate degree and then returning to the workforce (Woodend & Arthur, 2018).

Logistical Planning

In terms of logistical considerations when conducting research with former international students, one challenge that we encountered in our research was that students who have graduated are harder to contact and motivate to engage in research than are those who are currently enrolled in academic programs. For this reason, recruiting former international students to participate in studies may be a barrier to learning about their post-study experiences (Zhan, 2022). In previous studies with international students (Arthur et al., 2022b), while enrolled in academic programs, we found that potential participants are easily accessible through email listservs, posters on campus, word-of-mouth, and credit-for-participation schemes (e.g., in psychology courses). Moreover, the incentives for participation (e.g., small denomination gift cards) are typically enticing to students who benefit from incentives and often do not have a high-paying, full-time job. In many ways, the approach to recruitment is like recruiting domestic student participants, demonstrating an example of how there may be fewer differences than expected between the populations (Jones, 2017).

Once graduated, however, we have found that students' affiliation with their universities tends to diminish as they become involved in their post-study lives. There are multiple demands on their time, including strengthening their affiliation with employers, increasing their community connections, and shifting family responsibilities (Loo et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2020; Woodend & Arthur, 2018). In our research, we found that initial approaches to recruit former international students begins with convenience sampling of people who have still maintained some connection to campus (e.g., working in the university International Student Centre). Reaching former international students can be even more complex in that they may seek post-study lives away from the local context, even if they stay in the country where they studied (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019), which includes searching for opportunities elsewhere in the destination country. Importantly, many former international students return to their country of origin, and others still pursue different international experiences (e.g., outside of the destination country or their country of origin), further complicating the recruitment process.

Although video communication has made geographical distance easier to manage in conducting research, former international students, particularly those who have lower competence or confidence in their language abilities in the language the research is being conducted in, may prefer in-person communication. In our research we have found that many former international students prefer to meet in person as they explained that it can be less

daunting to read social cues and express ideas in another language than over telephone/video conferencing (Ammigan, & Laws, 2018). Limited ability to attend an in-person research study could be a barrier to their participation post-study. In addition, the incentives for participating in research that are considered appropriate by many research ethics committees are a token gesture of minimal financial value and may not be enticing when the former student is in full-time work (i.e., value for time).

Although there may be fewer barriers to conducting research with former international students who have stayed local and connected to the university, it is critical to also reach those who have moved to other locations, in order to gain diverse perspectives from this population. In our research, participants have shared with us that they are aware that there is a bias while in study toward the Western, local context and that perspectives from other country contexts are often overlooked. Specifically, for qualitative studies, gaining rich contextual information of diverse experiences is essential to understandings of phenomena. We will provide some examples of creative solutions in the potential directions section of this article.

Relational Engagement

A final key point that we will note in conducting effective research with former international students is relational considerations. There may be a difference in power and privilege based on social position that could affect the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Oakley et al., 2022; Tilley, 2016). We have found that this consideration is particularly important when working with participants from the global south as researchers in and from the global north. Although demographics in higher education faculty are shifting to be more diverse, researchers in westernized destination countries are still more typically White and male (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Rodriguez, 2015), which does not match the diversity found in the international student population (OECD, 2022). For example, the first author, Jon, presents as White and male. In his interviews with former international students in Canada, Jon noticed that participants were perceiving him as Canadian and closer in age, although this fact was not stated. The second author, Nancy, is a professor, older than most international students, and presents as White and female. Assumptions about identities and power differences, may be transferred from the researcher to participants, and vice-versa, leading to false assumptions and expectations.

Based on our perceived identities, participants sometimes – at least initially – seemed hesitant to share negative experiences about Canadians in the workforce, as any form of criticism may be regarded as disrespectful. Participants indicated that they “hated to say” or suggest problems with Canadian society. When participants did share their negative experiences (e.g., discrimination, systemic barriers), they typically apologized for seeming “ungrateful.” They would often quickly follow up a criticism with an aspect of Canada that they appreciated. This dynamic may also be reflective of the marginalized status of some international students who might feel that they cannot risk disclosure that could be a perceived risk to their immigration and/or employment status.

Scholars have noted that historical colonialism and current global power structures have perpetuated the ideology of Western superiority and benevolence in sharing access to Western education to students from countries with developing economies (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). As a result, some former international students, in relation to a researcher who represents the dominant population, may feel as if there are appropriate and inappropriate topics to discuss. There may be a difference in power and privilege based on social position that could affect the relationship between the researcher and the participant, and this needs to be considered and addressed (Oakley et al., 2022; Tilley, 2016). Otherwise, power differences could unintentionally lead to concerns about what former international students are

sharing in research studies and the extent to which some aspects of social desirability influence the types of experiences shared. In turn, the depth and breadth of international student accounts influence how researchers are interpreting these findings, and how policymakers, organizations, and practitioners are using these findings to inform policy and service provision.

Potential Directions for Supporting Qualitative Research with Former International Students

To support researchers in thinking creatively about how to address potential challenges in conducting qualitative research with former international students, in this section we offer some of the ideas we have used in our projects based on the previously discussed conceptual, logistical, and relational considerations. These ideas are grounded in our experiences conducting research in westernized countries (i.e., Australia and Canada) and are intended as a starting point to encourage engaging in specific brainstorming to researchers' international contexts.

Considering Appropriate Research Conceptualization

In thinking through conceptual understandings of our research with former international students, we incorporated specific approaches to reflect on their experiences prior to, during, and post-interviews. One approach was continuously returning to our subjectivist perspective where we challenged our assumptions about former international students' experiences (Darwin Holmes, 2020). Although we both had prior experience and expertise in working with international students (e.g., as researchers and counsellors), understandings from one experience do not necessarily translate to another. Discussing our expectations and reflecting about how such prior experience might shape our understandings about international students, and then specifically former international students, was an ongoing process. Although reflection is a common element of qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019), it is often relegated or taken up explicitly in the data analysis portion of the study. Rather than waiting until the data analysis portion of the study and attempting to eradicate or bracket our prior experiences, we sought to leverage our expertise for ongoing reflection. This approach was important in refining our overarching research questions prior to engaging in our projects, determining participant criteria, and informing interview questions, and then also our data analysis process and presentation of findings.

Checking whether individuals share in these common experiences creates room for novel discovery. For example, borrowing from our backgrounds in counselling psychology, Anderson (2012) described this approach as a *not-knowing position*, used to invoke curiosity in the seemingly mundane. Minuchin et al. (2014) referred to it as being flexible to alternative understandings of individuals' experiences that depart from one's expert hypothesis. From our research experience, Moules et al. (2015) likened this approach to being open to whatever new information may come from interactions with participants. Although many qualitative approaches (e.g., interpretative phenomenological analysis; Smith et al., 2022) allow and direct the researcher to ask open-ended questions about participants' experiences, including questions that might be assumed (e.g., that the participants completed high school in their country of origin), we suggest that this reflective approach extend to all stages of the research process. Through this process, researchers are encouraged to surface assumptions and expectations that they hold about international students generally, the nature of their transitions, and what they might expect to occur during the post-study experience specifically.

Adopting a not-knowing position invited complexity into our interpretations of the findings and helped to provide a detailed representation of the participants' experiences, while

remaining open to divergent experiences. Rather than forcing interview material into categories, we decided to embrace the diversity of participants' accounts, which were influenced from both home and destination country contexts. That way we remained open to exceptions and sought to better understand the meaning of those experiences and how they might be relevant for adding to conceptual understandings about international student transitions. Due to the complexity of qualitative research findings, this approach is consistent with *transferability* of the findings to other contexts. Briefly, transferability opens up possibilities for researchers to demonstrate how findings could be applicable to different situations and populations through rich descriptions of what occurred for the current participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Specifically, these rich descriptions may better represent the heterogeneous international student population in an embodied and comprehensive way, rather than forcing categorization and commonalities or overly distilling and simplifying naturally complex experiences.

Addressing Logistical Challenges

For addressing the logistical challenges, we used several approaches. One way was forming working relationships with alumni services, international student services, and career services at the universities where we conducted research, all of which tend to have some ongoing connection with former international students, post-study. For instance, alumni services often contact graduates about opportunities to continue to be involved with the campus community (e.g., mentorship, donations), career services may offer services to former students, including international students, and international student services may provide ongoing resources around immigration or have connections with key contacts in many countries of origin. At the same time, university personnel may also have strict rules for access to their alumni and serve as gatekeepers of access to potential research participants. The purpose of research may or may not be connected to the aims of alumni services and access to participants may require negotiation and multiple levels of approval. Taking the time to establish, and then maintain positive relations with student services can be an essential way of extending invitations to participate in research, beyond former international students that are voluntarily still involved in the campus community. For instance, continuing to support student services objectives beyond the research project (e.g., helping to update infographics used by personnel with international students to be aligned with updated research).

Additionally, extending beyond campus resources, connecting with local immigration resources can also be a helpful strategy, as some recent immigrants may be former international students (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). We want to acknowledge that many organizations and services, both on and off-campus, may have hesitations about assisting in research outside of their department/organization, particularly about releasing their email listservs. As such, forming a strong relationship with these services over time is critical for negotiating requests for research assistance. As gatekeepers to accessing international student participants, we have heard from our partner organizations and service personnel that they receive multiple requests each year for research. Beyond building a trusted relationship, researchers also need to consider the value to service providers and strengthen mutual interests in assisting with participant recruitment. Rather than "taking from" service providers, we advocate that it is an ethical issue for researchers to compensate for their time and share findings to inform service provision. For example, researchers need to be mindful about establishing the benefit of the study to the service providers and offer to contribute resources back to the research site. In our research, we have included needs of partner organizations in our research questions, offered to provide an executive report of the findings to inform service provision, present at staff meetings to share findings and engage discussion about the

implications for service delivery, and develop research-informed resources for use with current international students.

There are also pragmatic decisions that make a difference, particularly for qualitative research, which often involves a greater time commitment of participants, and partner organizations that support recruitment, than quantitative or survey-based research. When available, request personal rather than school-assigned emails, as some former students may discontinue use of their school assigned email account post-study. Another way we approached this challenge was offering an incentive that would appropriately compensate for an hour of time for someone with a degree (e.g., if minimum wage is \$15/hour, then offering \$25 for a one-hour long interview). Along with compensation, we offered a variety of ways in which former international students could participate (e.g., in-person, telephone, video conference), as well as flexible interview times, to help with any barriers due to location, timing, comfort, or preference. We also made a key decision regarding advance notice of the research questions that we would use during interviews. Initially, we decided to provide the research questions for potential participants to review before the interview to help mitigate concerns with English language ability, if they had any. However, we have found that many participants, regardless of language considerations, appreciated receiving questions prior to a research interview, as this helped them to feel more comfortable with the nature of the study (e.g., personal information requested).

Making Relational Considerations

Turning to the relational considerations, continued diversification of higher education researchers may help by creating representation and new norms about appropriate discussion topics; however, there are also steps researchers from the dominant population can make. It was important for us to first recognize and reflect on our social positions, and, importantly, how participants are perceiving these identities. As we modelled at the beginning of this article, positionality is emphasized in qualitative research, often for researchers to reflect on how their identities and experiences influence their interpretation of findings (Bourke, 2014; Darwin Holmes, 2020). Particularly for those who are researching within an academic setting, it may be easy to forget the degree to which a researcher's acquired experience and knowledge is taken for granted in a local or national setting, not just in the interpretation of findings, but in conceptualizing, constructing, and conducting qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019).

Attending to awareness of our social positions allowed us to change the ways in which we engaged with subsequent participants. Specifically, the first author drew upon clinical training as a counsellor to communicate in ways to provide a safe and collaborative research relationship, characterized as empathetic, genuine, and unconditionally supportive (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). For instance, he provided several opportunities before, during, and after each interview to check with participants about their comfort in sharing. The second author has emphasized the importance of an informed consent process beyond the initial description of the study. Uncertainty about the research process and how participants' information will subsequently be used, or to whom results will be distributed, underscores the importance of an ongoing consent process. For example, we have taken the time to clarify several times what we do with interview information how names are used or not, how individual and group examples would be used, given participants the option of using pseudonyms, and offered to clarify what information would and would not be included in public reports.

Moreover, we normalize a range of experiences that all students have during their post-study transition (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Woodend & Arthur, 2018). In doing so, we have tried to create safety and space for international students to discuss difficult situations along

with successes, which is essential to rapport-building for conducting interview-based qualitative research (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007; Ryan et al., 2009). For example, if we noticed an individual participant was only noting positive experiences then we would explicitly invite stories about challenges and vice-versa. We would also acknowledge the potential hardship in challenging experiences and the victories in newly found learning and feelings of success when participants did share them to further validate their importance to participants' journeys. In these ways, consent for participation extended beyond the initial conversation and signing of the consent form, to considering consent as a process that extends throughout the interviews with participants. This is a particularly key point for some former international students who may not be familiar with research and who also may be unsure about the authority of the researcher and how their information may be used (e.g., misconception that federally funded research informs government decisions around an individual's immigration or employment status).

Conclusion: Extending the Invitation

In this article, we presented three considerations for conducting qualitative research with former international students. First, we addressed conceptual considerations regarding framing the study aims, scope, and implications to represent the highly diverse international student population. Second, we outlined logistical considerations to effectively reach former international students to recruit them as research participants. Finally, we focused on several relational considerations related to perceptions and assumptions by either the researcher or participants that may influence the content shared by former international students.

There can be many challenges associated with conducting research with former international students due to their diverse pathways; however, it is critical that researchers represent their voices and experiences as they are important for informing evidence-informed policy and services (Scott et al., 2015). In the current internationalization of higher education era, there is increased financial pressure within and across countries to pursue a greater market share of international students (Choudaha, 2017; OECD, 2022). There have been calls for this push toward recruitment to be matched with accountability for the support of international students (Arthur et al., 2022b; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2013). As such, researchers need to be innovative in the formation, recruitment, and implementation of studies to learn more about former international students' experiences and expand this developing body of literature on the post-study experience.

We want to recognize that potential biases do not end when interviews are completed. Through many discussions, we contemplated the implications of our interpretations of the participants' experiences in creating the findings, given our social and academic positions relative to our participants (Darwin Holmes, 2020). An outcome of these reflections and discussion was creating this article to highlight key considerations to support researchers in conducting appropriate and effective research with former international students. We hope the points raised will help to stimulate additional discussion and consideration about the ways that research with international students can illuminate their experiences, beyond their initial adjustment to inform their longer-term transition experiences post-study for comprehensive understandings.

Although we have highlighted key insights from our experiences, there remain gaps in best practices for facilitating access to former international students. For instance, reaching former international students who discontinued studies (i.e., no longer students but are not alumni), maintaining long-term contact with former international students who leave the country of study, and tracking former international students who have multiple international transitions post-study, among others. Importantly, we acknowledge that our experiences,

examples, and suggestions are based on our positions as scholars in Westernized countries. As such, we invite other researchers to reflect about their experiences, challenges, and successes in conducting qualitative studies with former international students to continue this discussion.

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