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Temporal Trajectories: A Comparative Analysis of Mexican and Vietnamese Students' Strategies in the Canadian Edugration System

Trajectoires temporelles : une analyse comparative des stratégies des étudiants mexicains et vietnamiens dans le système d'éducation canadien

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**Temporal Trajectories: A Comparative Analysis of Mexican and Vietnamese Students’
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**Trajectoires temporelles : une analyse comparative des stratégies des étudiants mexicains
et vietnamiens dans le système d’éducation canadien**

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Abstract

This paper compares Mexican and Vietnamese international students’ and graduates’ migration decision-making while navigating Canadian policies merging international higher education and migration or the “edugration system.” While this system offers a delimited temporal framework and a linear pathway to permanent residency (PR) for international students; we argue that it does not align with the temporality of international students’ and graduates’ plans and aspirations. We draw from interviews conducted with 15 Mexican students and six graduates as well as 10 Vietnamese students and 11 graduates. Our findings highlight participants’ migration strategies for transnational social mobility, from childhood to postgraduation. These strategies unfold distinctively in time, depending on the region of origin. Rather than embracing the homogenizing edugration time frame, there is a need to emphasize international students’ and graduates’ own temporality to foster a nuanced and critical understanding of their migration pathways.

Résumé

Cet article compare les prises de décision migratoires des étudiants et diplômés internationaux mexicains et vietnamiens alors qu’ils négocient les politiques canadiennes qui fusionnent l’enseignement supérieur international et la migration ou le « système d’éducation ». Bien que ce système offre un cadre temporel délimité et une voie linéaire vers la résidence permanente (RP) pour les étudiants internationaux, nous soutenons qu’il ne s’aligne pas sur la temporalité des plans et des aspirations des étudiants et des diplômés internationaux. Nous nous basons sur des entretiens menés avec 15 étudiants et six diplômés mexicains, ainsi qu’avec 10 étudiants et 11 diplômés vietnamiens. Nos résultats mettent en évidence les stratégies migratoires des participants en vue d’une mobilité sociale transnationale, de l’enfance jusqu’à après l’obtention de leur diplôme. Ces stratégies se déploient dans le temps de manière distincte, en fonction de la région d’origine. Plutôt que d’adopter le cadre temporel homogénéisant de l’éducation, il est nécessaire de mettre l’accent sur la temporalité propre aux étudiants et aux diplômés internationaux afin de favoriser une compréhension nuancée et critique de leurs parcours migratoires.

Keywords: international higher education, international students, temporality, migration policies

Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur international, étudiants internationaux, temporalité, politiques migratoires

Introduction

Since the 2000s, Canada has created a clear pathway to permanent residency (PR) for international graduates, following a linear succession from study permit to postgraduation work permit (PGWP) to PR. This three-step process merging higher education and migration has been conceptualized as “edugration” (Brunner, 2022a) and is now overtly supported by the Canadian government (Schinnerl & Ellermann, 2023).

The first step of Canada’s edugration system consists of welcoming international students¹, who pay higher tuition fees, compensating for the underfunding of universities (Desai Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Guo & Guo, 2017). Secondly, upon graduation from a designated learning institution (DLI), students can obtain a PGWP, introduced in 2003 to enhance Canada’s competitiveness in the international education market by allowing graduates to stay and work in Canada for up to 3 years. Finally, international graduates are considered “ideal candidates” for PR, considering their Canadian credentials, proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages, and work experience. Programs such as the federal government’s Canadian Experience Class in 2008 or the provincial nominee programs (PNPs) managed by individual provinces are meant to retain international graduates by giving them an advantage in Canada’s human capital-based immigration system (Bozheva, 2020; Desai Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Papademetriou & Hooper, 2019). While there are some pathways allowing students to obtain PR without a PGWP (e.g., through a few PNPs), most international students go through a three-step edugration path (Brunner, 2017, 2021; Schinnerl & Ellermann, 2023).

Research has identified a gap between portrayals of international graduates as “ideal immigrants” and their actual challenges. They often face difficulties in the job market and obtaining PR (Dam et al., 2018; Desai Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Sabzalieva et al., 2022; Brunner et al., 2024), with lower economic outcomes compared to local peers (Schinnerl & Ellermann, 2023). Language barriers, integration issues, and discrimination hinder their access to “high skills” jobs required for a competitive PR application (Dam et al., 2018; Wang, 2018; Sabzalieva et al., 2022). Critics also argued that the education-migration system is “bound up in an ongoing settler-colonial system” (Brunner, 2022b, p.94) and reinforces global inequalities, emphasizing the dominance of Western education (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016; Brunner, 2022b). These challenges occur within a broader trend towards “heterogeneous, precarious and temporary forms of migration” (Robertson, 2013, p. 159). In this paper, we considered how different international students respond to these shifts towards temporary migration. Instead of focusing on the challenges international students encounter in “fitting into” the edugration system, our study explored their strategies for navigating it, often operating on different temporalities that may not synchronize with the system.

By comparing how Mexican and Vietnamese international students navigate the Canadian edugration system, we considered the intersecting factors that shape international students’ experiences rather than treating them as a homogenous group (Choudaha et al., 2012). In 2021, Mexico and Vietnam ranked among the top 10 countries of origin for international students in Canada, with 11,550 and 16,284 students respectively (Institute of International Education, 2022). Therefore, they represent significant groups, yet their experiences remain understudied in

¹ In this paper, we draw from the Canadian government’s definition of international students as “non-Canadian students who do not have ‘permanent resident’ status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education. In other words, international students are those who have come to Canada expressly to pursue their education” (Statistics Canada, 2010).

comparison to students from other major sending countries such as China and India (Curtin et al., 2019; Liu, 2017; Marom, 2022; Wadhwa, 2016). Moreover, the comparison of these two groups allowed us to illustrate how the reproduction of social class and power dynamics between countries involved in international education varies across different global regions.

Other comparative studies have emphasized how students from different countries access information and select their study destination (Choudaha et al., 2012; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017), “acculturate” in the receiving country (Dailey-Strand et al., 2021; Li et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), and experience racialization upon migration (Houshmand et al., 2014; Yao et al., 2019). Our comparison avoided essentializing students and their culture (Liu, 2017) or falling into methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002), and instead examined how intersecting factors such as country of origin, culture, family background, and social class concurrently shape students’ experiences.

This paper aimed to shed light on Vietnamese and Mexican international students’ strategies towards the edugration system. While this system constitutes the policy framework for international students, we critically assessed its normative assumptions about international students’ intentions and actual experiences. Our analysis showed the complexity and diversity of students’ migration pathways, challenging the edugration framework as a one-size-fits-all analytical and temporal model and highlighting discrepancies between the system’s expectations and students’ actual experiences.

Theoretical Framework

We drew attention to students’ temporality and how it shapes their decisions and migration pathways. We define students’ temporality as the temporal aspect of their migration and life aspirations, acknowledging that these are situated in place and time but are also future-oriented (Carling & Schewel, 2018) and responsive to what Erdal and Oeppen (2022) called the “on-goingness of migratory processes.” We built on scholarship that emphasizes time as a constitutive feature of migration (Griffiths et al., 2013; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Robertson & Ho, 2016; Carling & Collins, 2017), showing that while the “processual nature of migration temporality” (Griffiths et al., 2013, p. 15) is acknowledged in migration studies, it is often viewed as a linear process, overlooking individuals’ desires and aspirations within complex migration policy ecosystems. By comparing the temporal expectations of international students and those of migration policy, we were able to understand how the linear pathway of the edugration system is not necessarily compatible with international students’ temporalities and desires.

We centred international students’ temporalities by not narrowing our findings to their experiences after arriving in Canada. Rather, we explored how the desire to live abroad was generated across their lifetimes, and how their future aspirations evolve during their time in Canada (Findlay et al., 2012; Lipura & Collins, 2020). As Cwerner (2001) noted, migration should not be seen as a totalizing social condition; international students experience time as immigrants but also as family members, romantic partners, and caretakers which also impact their immigration and settlement decisions. We attempted to move beyond traditional focuses on “migrant’s productive midlife” that informs both policymaking and migration research.

While we faced a common challenge of collecting data at specific moments in migrants’ lives, study participants vary in age, migration status (i.e., different points along the edugration pathway), and life experiences. This variation allowed us to consider how their migration aspirations evolve as they navigate the edugration system, challenging the linear outcomes expected by Canadian edugration policies. Immigration policies are constructed around a linear

timeline aiming to regulate migration by categorizing individuals' statuses at specific points and envisioning an ideal migrant progressing through arrival, settlement, integration, and eventual naturalization or return. However, Griffith et al. (2013) argued that "migration journeys rarely conform to expectations of sequential trajectory, instead involving diversion, repetition and simultaneity" (p. 10). This paper sought to uncover international students' complex trajectories, deviating from the linear pathway envisioned by the edugration system.

By focusing on international students' own plans, desires and ideas of success, we observed how they create strategies to navigate the edugration system and challenge that system's expectations towards them. We argue that centring temporality fosters a more nuanced and critical understanding of international students' migration pathways.

Methodology and Participants' Demographic Data

Our comparative analysis drew from semi-structured interviews conducted as part of two ethnographic studies, to answer the following research question: How do Vietnamese and Mexican international students navigate Canada's edugration system? One study examined the experiences of Vietnamese recent migrants in Vancouver and Paris with a specific focus on highly skilled migrants returning to Vietnam. The other study centred on highly skilled Mexican migrants in Canada and the United States and their understandings of citizenship and identity in a transnational context. Both studies obtained institutional ethics approval from the University of British Columbia (protocol numbers: H21-01771, H21-03396 and H21-03331-A002, H19-01550X). All participants gave informed consent via an online or paper form. For the purpose of this article, we drew solely on data collected from participants who have been international students in Canada (i.e., who have held a Canadian student permit).

From the first study's data, we drew upon interviews conducted with 21 Vietnamese international students and graduates. Ten Vietnamese international students participated in online interviews. Five Vietnamese graduates residing in Vancouver underwent in-person interviews with optional follow-ups. Six Vietnamese graduates who had returned to Vietnam each completed an in-person interview. Interviews were conducted between August 2021 and February 2023, in English, and addressed their migration (and return) decision-making as well as their experiences in Canada, with a specific emphasis on participants' sense of belonging to Canada and Vietnam.

From the second study's data, we drew upon interviews conducted with 15 Mexican international students and six graduates. The interviews, conducted in Spanish and translated by the author, took place in two stages: from July to August 2019 and from November 2021 to August 2022. Many Mexican international students had participated in multiple study programs; thus, the number of programs exceeded the number of interviewees. All Mexican participants were living in Vancouver at the time of the interview.

While the interviews were conducted before and after the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, none of the participants mentioned COVID-19 as a deterrent to their long-term migration plans, beyond temporary disruptions such as access to biometric centres for visa processing and compliance with shelter-in-place policies.

Table 1 presents our participant demographics in terms of gender, age, type of program, and migration status at the time of the interview. We used pseudonyms when including quotations in this article. While most Mexican participants were studying in graduate programs, most Vietnamese participants had been undergraduate students. As we will discuss in the findings, this difference in the sample illustrates the different strategies employed by students from the two countries to navigate the edugration system. Furthermore, including participants with different

migration statuses allowed us to examine their experiences at different points in time along the education temporal framework (e.g., while studying, after graduating, after obtaining PR). In both studies, interviews were recorded, transcribed in their entirety, and analyzed with a specific focus on students' educational and migration plans, goals, or strategies.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Category	Mexico	Vietnam
Number	21	21
Gender	13 women / 8 men	12 women / 9 men
Age	23 to 40+ years old	19 to 35 years old (average = 25.47)
Type of program	12 graduate programs 4 language exchange programs 4 undergraduate programs 3 exchange programs *Some participants participated in 2+ programs and are counted twice in the type of program	17 undergraduate programs 4 graduate programs
Migration status at the time of the interview or at the time they left Canada for those who had gone back to Vietnam	13 study permits 2 PGWP 3 PR 3 Citizens	12 student permits 2 PGWP 5 PR 2 citizens

Our analysis was also informed by our positionality, and we engaged in reflectivity throughout the study. Both authors came to Canada as international students in 2018 for postgraduate education. The first author is a Mexican woman, and the second author is a White French woman. While our experience as international students helped build rapport and relate to the participants in our studies, we were careful to centre their voices, question our assumptions, and consider how our different race, class, and gender intersectional identities shaped data collection and analysis. For example, while the first author could rely on autobiographical elements from her Mexican international student background, the second author maintained closer proximity to the data, occasionally consulting Vietnamese colleagues to ensure the rigour of her interpretations.

Findings: Different Strategies Regarding the Edugration System

In this section, we examine participants' strategies to navigate the edugration system and reveal a gap between students and the edugration system's temporalities. Firstly, we situate participants' strategies in the context of their family background. Secondly, we highlight participants' linear or circular migration pathways to obtain PR. Finally, we examine participants' intentions of settlement or re-migration, upon "completing" the edugration path. Our themes and subthemes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes of Interviews

Themes	Subthemes		
1. Preparing from a young age and migrating at the right time	Early life education and experiences shaping future edugration decisions	(Vietnam) Migrating young to spend formative years in "the West"	(Mexico) Migrating after undergraduate education in Mexico to alleviate the cost of edugration
2. Strategies to obtain PR: linear vs. circular edugration path.	(Vietnam) the cost of following the linear edugration path	(Mexico) circular migration to bypass the costly edugration linear path	
3. Stay or return? Leveraging Canadian education	Staying in Canada to get the return on edugration investment	Making plans beyond one's productive midlife	Assessing opportunities and costs in the sending and receiving countries given different geographic and economic situations

Preparing From a Young Age and Migrating at the Right Time

In both the Vietnamese and Mexican cases, early life experiences influenced edugration choices. However, a notable difference we found between the two groups was the time and age when participants first entered the edugration system. Many Vietnamese students arrived in Canada at a young age, sometimes as early as high school. Whereas, in the Mexican case, most participants had pursued undergraduate education in Mexico and gone to Canada for short temporary study experiences such as exchange programs or language schools during their undergraduate degrees. They were considering options to remain permanently in Canada at a later age. Therefore, the difference in education level between the Vietnamese and Mexican participants, with the former being mostly undergraduate students and the latter being mostly graduate students, illustrates the two groups' diverging temporal strategies to navigate the edugration path.

Many Vietnamese and Mexican participants were prepared for education from a young age. For example, they had received intensive English-language education in primary and/or secondary school, following their parents' desire to facilitate future migration. We found that this trend primarily involves middle-class families who view English proficiency as crucial for international mobility amid political and economic uncertainty in their home countries. English's global dominance supports this open-ended mobility, even if destination decisions are made later on. Thuy, a Vietnamese student commented:

As far back as I can remember I was always gonna study abroad because my parents have been talking about it for just way too long and they put me into international school specifically so that I can study abroad.

Like this participant, several Vietnamese students did not consider completing any postsecondary education in Vietnam. Thuy acknowledged that by participating in the international school system, her family was already considering future steps for her international migration, such as studying abroad. This highlights the role of future-oriented (Carling & Schewel, 2018) temporal strategies for international students. Like Thuy, most Vietnamese participants came to Canada to complete undergraduate education. In fact, some of them came to Canada even before graduating from high school. There seems to be a belief that Canada or "the West" is very "different" or "distant" from Vietnam (Delaisse & Zhang, 2024), and it is best to migrate at a young age, sometimes during adolescence, or the "critical" years of transition to adulthood, when one is most capable of adapting or "assimilating" into the host culture. Bo mentioned:

In 2016 when I was only 17, that was also my first time being away from home for such a long time, so it's also a transition for me ... I actually first went to the language center for like six months. Then I returned to Vietnam for like 3 months. Then in May 2017, I started a very quick four-month very intensive high school program. After that, I moved on to do college and post-secondary work ... Canada is, well, actually where I study and spend most of the time, like in a very critical year, like in the period that I start to explore more about everything around me.

There were also a few Vietnamese participants who migrated later in their 30s (e.g., after working for some years in Vietnam). In contrast, most Mexican participants had completed some postsecondary education in Mexico before coming to Canada for postgraduate education. They adopted this strategy mainly because higher education in Mexico is more affordable than studying abroad, and Mexican credentials are more easily recognized by Canadian institutions due to internationalization agreements. In addition to this, there is a sense of cultural proximity with Canada and the United States given the regional context; therefore, Mexican participants did not seem to consider that they needed to migrate as soon as possible to "acculturate" as opposed to their Vietnamese counterparts. For example, Ricardo explained,

As a child, I never felt like I was living in the Mexican culture because it was, I mean, my family is very North-Americanized, I feel like we live very close to the border, our vacations were in the United States and everything was very North Americanized, so I never felt like I was attached to the Mexican culture.

Several participants came to Canada on one or several short stays first (e.g., exchange programs) before pursuing a permanent settlement. These short stays contributed to creating what Robertson and Ho (2016, p.2266) identified as the "blurry definitional edges of 'migrant' or 'nonmigrant,' including students, returnees, tourist-workers, rural migrants and mobile elites." For example, Ana recalled her multiple exchange programs while she did her undergrad at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) that led her to the University of British Columbia (UBC):

I did 3 months at the Université de Montreal, it was in French, so I didn't really understand much, luckily the professor I worked with did speak English. Then I went on a 6-month exchange, I went to the United States, to UC Berkeley and stayed an additional three months on a research internship. And after that exchange I also came to Vancouver for a research stay at UBC, for 3 months as well, and that's when I decided to stay for the master's with the funding I got.

Participants like her, who had migrated at a later age would rather build on previous experiences abroad that made them consider the Canadian edugration system as an ideal system that would facilitate their mobility. Regardless of their age upon arrival, most Vietnamese and Mexican participants had chosen Canada for its edugration system. They had some understanding of the linear path of studying, working, and obtaining PR, based on information from agencies, friends or family that had gone through the edugration system before.

For both Vietnamese and Mexican participants, the temporality of their international education experience includes years before obtaining their first student permit in Canada. It was initiated at a young age, and it involved their families' decisions aiming at social class reproduction and/or transnational/cosmopolitan social mobility. Moreover, based on cultural influence and geopolitics between sending and receiving countries, participants seemed to have different beliefs of "when is the right time" to migrate. For Vietnamese students, it seems that becoming cosmopolitan involves spending their youth or "formative" years in Canada, including undergraduate education or sometimes as early as secondary education. Whereas Mexican participants tended to migrate at an older age and shape their edugration strategy after short stays during their undergraduate degrees which influenced their choice to pursue permanent residence in Canada through postgraduate education.

Strategies to Obtain PR: Linear vs. Circular Edugration Path

While Vietnamese participants tended to follow the "linear" path of edugration, Mexican participants rather engaged in circular migration. Vietnamese participants would obtain a study permit, and then a PGWP upon graduation and some of them had obtained PR based on their Canadian credentials and work experience. Mexican participants, however, would often go back and forth between Mexico and Canada, in part due to the geographic closeness of both countries. A minority of Mexican participants did not necessarily choose, or were eligible in the case of short programs, to obtain the PGWP after their studies, but rather went back to Mexico for a few years and applied for PR through the Express Entry program.

Vietnamese participants tended to migrate for the entire duration of their undergraduate programs and follow the edugration pathway outlined by Canadian policies. This decision might be explained by the physical and perceived cultural distance between Vietnam and Canada as well as the desire to spend formative years abroad, as we discussed in the previous section. Moreover, exchange programs for Vietnamese students in Canada appear less common. For example, Vietnam is not part of the countries eligible for Mitacs, a Canadian research organization that supports summer internships. The linear edugration process could be quite lengthy and lead to significant pressure. Participants had to "use their time" wisely while on student permits and PGWP so that when these permits expire, they have the capital (i.e., language skills, valuable work experience, etc.) necessary to submit a competitive PR application.

The duration of participants' study permit is flexible and dependent on the length of their program. However, in this context "time is money"; the longer the program, the higher the total amount of international tuition fees to pay. Khanh described the vicious cycle she found herself in. She had extended her program to improve her English skills before entering the job market,

which led to extra costs. To cover these, she had to work in Vietnamese businesses alongside her studies, leaving her with inadequate time to focus on learning English effectively:

My original target was to be here, to be Canadian. So, I need to study and then graduate and then find a job and then apply for [PR] but because I'm not confident in my English ability, I tried to extend my study length to 4 years so I could become confident in my English. The COVID-19 pandemic made me change my Program from two years to four years, so it means that I need to have more money to finance my extra two years. So, I need to spend more time working, rather than focusing on studying English. So, let's say my English-speaking skills are kind of bad because I didn't focus on it much. I was focusing on working to have money to finance my studies.

Tram felt pressured by her temporary PGWP, viewing the 3-year visa as a limited window to gain necessary work experience for her PR application. Furthermore, the precariousness of this temporary status created power dynamics with her employer, who could validate or undermine years of her work experience. She explained,

After you graduate, you have 3 years of open work permit where you can work wherever you want, which is basically there is a deadline, after three years if you can't find work you have to go home ... you have to do a specific job at a specific level that is suitable for your degree or diploma so if you don't do that, none of that experience counts, and then if it doesn't count then you cannot apply for PR ... [The employer] will pressure [international graduates] into working even more and more and they can't complain because if they complain, the employer says "I don't like you anymore" so it's a lot of pressure.

In contrast, some of the Mexican participants appeared to escape the temporality imposed by the education system by engaging in circular migration between Canada and Mexico. Rather than entering Canada for 4-year undergraduate degrees, Mexican participants participated in short exchange or research programs which allowed them to return to Canada for postgraduate education or employment. For example, some of them had support from research organizations such as Mitacs, which provided summer funding for internships while they were in undergraduate programs in Mexico and subsequently provided funding to return to Canada for graduate studies. This strategy allowed them to navigate the "complex series of contingent and conflicting constraints and expectations associated with particular institutions" (Cwerner, 2001, p. 18) in this case, the constraints established by the traditional education pathway. As a result, circular migration between Canada and Mexico contributed to alleviating the cost of international education. As explained by Natalia, who had access to Mitacs through her undergraduate university in Mexico:

A big part of the motivation (to do Mitacs) is that they give you the scholarship to come back for a master's degree ... from there, I became familiar with how the funding works and also how to apply for the permits. I don't remember, at what point I found out that after applying for PR it is much simpler than in other countries, it was after I came here that I started to know everything about the policies.

Participants found alternative ways to obtain PR and/or citizenship. For example, Jimena was determined to follow the pathway of least resistance towards Canadian citizenship:

When I came as a student, Vancouver was really the city that I had met and fallen in love with, and I've always wanted to return. When I graduated I started to research about the possibility of emigrating, and I found out that they had an open program. When I was on exchange I did internships in a company. I went back to graduate, learned French and applied to Express Entry in Quebec.

Jimena was able to return to Mexico and obtained a Canadian job offer which facilitated her Express Entry in 2018 and citizenship in 2022, although she had never held a PGWP. Of the Mexican participants, six had obtained PR and none of them had been on a PGWP. Three of the participants were on the PGWP hoping to apply for PR. These nonlinear approaches to the edugration pathway allowed Mexican students to establish connections with key individuals and organizations, such as Mexican and Canadian universities, research organizations, and potential employers, that facilitated their future mobility. We still consider that all participants were part of the edugration system, as they all held study permits, but they went beyond the linear pathway of the edugration system we found in the Vietnamese case.

With the previous examples, we have highlighted the problematic temporal framework of the edugration system: from the costly time on student permit to the restricted time on PGWP. Vietnamese adherence to this framework was costly to them, and Mexican participants found ways to go around that system by engaging in cycles of stay and return.

Stay or Return? Leveraging Canadian Education

We examined participants' experiences beyond the narrow temporal framework of the edugration system that ends when international graduates obtain PR. While some participants had obtained PR or citizenship, we asked about their plans to settle, return, or remigrate regardless of immigration status. While most Mexican participants aimed at settling permanently in Canada, some of the Vietnamese graduates were considering returning to Vietnam, with some already having done so. Here, it should be noted that the project from which the data of Vietnamese participants were derived, focused on the return of Vietnamese highly skilled immigrants. Nevertheless, despite the edugration system aiming to retain international graduates or provide "opportunities" for settlement in Canada, several participants who went through this system intended to return home or utilize their Canadian-acquired skills to relocate to another country.

Several Mexican and Vietnamese participants perceived their investment in mobility as a choice they must see through, despite the difficulties. Given the considerable amount of time and money spent on their migration, return to the country of origin did not seem like a reasonable option. Marcela, a Mexican student, was adamant in expressing that she could not complain about Vancouver because she made the choice to move there and was committed to her decision:

When I came to Vancouver and it was like okay, I'm here now. I didn't even do that much sightseeing; I was focused on making a life here. I've been asked: Do you like Vancouver? And I answer: Yes, what I've seen. And if I don't like it, I already decided to be here, you know? I mean, I'm going to make myself like it ... It's a different mentality, knowing that I'm not here on exchange, I came here to stay.

There is a sense of urgency and seriousness with which international students pursue their edugration goals, although they are not fully committed to living in Canada permanently. For some Vietnamese students, edugration was rather a way to gain capital in Canada, which would be valued back in Vietnam. Tung explained his postgraduation plans:

I just have short-term plans to do business, to work here [in Canada], to have experience and maybe open a business here to have some capital, money and more experience. So that, at the age of 30 or so, I can come back to Vietnam to work there. Because the economy there is more dynamic so, with the experience and the capital, I think I can earn more money there. But in the long term, I think I would stay here, like when I get to retire because life here is slow and the environment is pretty.

Here it is interesting to note that the temporality of this participant's plans extended beyond the acquisition of specific migration statuses and encompassed not only his "productive midlife" but also his retirement. Naturally, the shorter-term goals appeared to hold more certainty compared to the long-term ones. On the contrary, some Mexican and Vietnamese students felt they had to "make it" and settle permanently in Canada to fully benefit from their postgraduate education, as explained by Natalia:

I know that when I return to Mexico my PhD in Neurosciences will be used to hang it on the wall. ... But I feel that the best way I can help our country is not being in the country. Or come back after having created a career here and have enough tools to be able to say, "You have to listen to me."

In this example, Natalia negotiated her current feelings and strategies, expressing a preference to stay in Canada, but also considering return migration if conditions were to improve, such as securing an international career to boost her salary prospects. There is a sense of constant negotiation of current events with future possibilities, with international students viewing Canadian PR or citizenship as an expansion of their mobility rights, offering more flexibility. Thai, a Vietnamese graduate, also explained that he wanted to stay in Canada until obtaining citizenship, so he would gain mobility rights before returning to Vietnam to live closer to his family:

Participant: I probably want to get [PR], maybe citizenship in Canada, and then I'll go back ...

Researcher: why do you want PR?

Participant: ... I think I mean like 'cause if you want citizenship—

Researcher: You need to go through that, yeah.

Participant: You need to be—and then the reason why I want to get citizenship—a Canadian passport is that it has more benefits compared to a Vietnamese passport.

Despite time-space compression, we suggest that the physical distance between Vietnam/Mexico and Canada still influenced participants' decisions. Only one Vietnamese participant could travel back and forth due to flexible work in Vietnam; for others, the distance and time difference made remote work impractical. Furthermore, Vietnamese participants' decisions to go back to Vietnam were often shaped by the country's flourishing economy and policies encouraging the return of international graduates (Gribble & Tran, 2016; Pham & Saito, 2020).

For Camila, a Mexican international student, the considerable closeness between Mexico and Canada made her choose Canada over other countries with similar migration policies, such as Australia or New Zealand: "in case of any emergency, I can be there that same day." Similarly, Fernanda, a recent master's degree graduate, mentioned that, upon graduation, she could take advantage of remote work options to go to Mexico for longer periods of time, rather than using up her vacations:

Before the pandemic, I went twice a year. And then it was COVID and I didn't go for 2 years. But I just went, and I plan to go back later in the year. I plan to go again 2 times a year ... When I went as a student I didn't worry about work, and this last time I went I worked remotely for 2 weeks ... I feel it's more likely to ask to go for longer (with remote work).

Many participants aimed for PR or citizenship, but their plans extended beyond obtaining these statuses. Thus, assuming that desire for PR equals permanent settlement in Canada oversimplifies their intentions, overlooking the broader rights and opportunities these statuses afford beyond residency. While the education system aims at retaining migrants with high human capital, participants could feel that their capital would be more valued elsewhere.

Discussion

Our findings highlight that students' temporality (Barber & Lem, 2018; Collins, 2018; Griffiths, 2021) might not align with the edugration system. On the one hand, the temporality of students' strategy often extends beyond the edugration timeframe, involving early-life parental choices and long-term plans that exceed their "temporary" experience in the system. On the other hand, not all students aim to undergo the linear edugration pathway towards a permanent settlement; they might navigate that system with different goals and timelines.

In this section, we first discuss how the edugration system's narrow temporality primarily serves the interests of the Canadian state, despite its portrayal as a "triple-win" for students, higher education institutions, and the Canadian state. We then question the system's linear and uniform approach, highlighting the power dynamics it reproduces between students, their home and host countries and how these dynamics manifest differently across various regions of the world. Finally, we showcase the misalignment between the edugration system and students' temporalities, emphasizing the importance for researchers to prioritize the latter. This way, we expand upon earlier criticisms of the edugration system (Robertson, 2013; Stein & De Andreotti, 2016; Brunner, 2022b; Brunner et al, 2024) and develop a novel perspective by exposing the system's limited and uniformizing temporality.

The edugration system imposes a certain temporality on students. For example, study permits are valid for the duration of their programs. The PGWP is a 3-year nonrenewable visa. Some years of work experience are required to submit a competitive PR application. International students might remain under a "temporary" status for many years before achieving permanent residency. This temporality serves the state primarily, as the edugration system is designed within a narrow timeframe when students and graduates are at their prime age for productivity and can benefit the Canadian economy. While portrayed as a "triple win," providing (1) education and citizenship benefits to students, (2) revenue to institutions, and (3) human and economic capital to Canada (Brunner, 2022a); the edugration system appears rather costly and constraining for students, with many clear benefits for the Canadian state.

Firstly, while on a study permit, "time is money" as international students pay higher tuition fees compensating for reduced state funding in universities (Findlay et al., 2012; Guo & Guo, 2017). Secondly, the PGWP, although presented as an opportunity for international graduates, provides the Canadian state with young workers, to whom it has little obligations in terms of welfare or settlement services, given their temporary status (Shokirova et al., 2022). Students and graduates must bear the cost of their integration over these years before becoming permanent residents. Robertson (2013) argued that temporariness functions "as a particular temporal disciplinary practice," allowing the Canadian government to test graduates' labour market integration during 3 years of PGWP, before selecting them for PR. The edugration system thus acts as a "tunnel in which entrance is staggered across different phases of temporariness before the right to PR can be achieved" (Robertson, 2013, p. 84).

The linear edugration system effectively positions international students and graduates as probationary immigrants (Ellermann & Gorokhovskaia, 2020) until they become permanent residents. That linearity mirrors ideologies of assimilation and integration "from alien to citizen" (Robertson, 2014, p. 1927). Indeed, edugration is about acquiring capital that will allow for integration in Canada (in the form of obtaining PR) or to achieve "Western" cosmopolitanism (Igarashi & Saito, 2014) that can be used elsewhere. That system capitalizes on "the dominance of a hierarchical global imaginary rooted in Western supremacy which dictates the desirability of its education" (Brunner, 2022a, p. 30). Our findings highlight how the physical and constructed social

distance between sending and receiving countries influenced students' strategies and timelines for acquiring this capital. Some Vietnamese participants felt compelled to spend extensive time in the edugration system while Mexican participants opted for shorter stays. Beyond the edugration system's standardized temporal approach, comparing these two groups underscores how class reproduction and power dynamics between sending and receiving countries in the context of international education play out differently in different regions of the world.

While the edugration system's temporality favours the state's pragmatism, students' desires and decisions are much more fluid and evolving, not solely driven by economic opportunities. Indeed, our findings echo the study by Netierman et al. (2022) which highlighted that international students' migration plans develop over time during their experience in Canada and are shaped not only by employment opportunities but also by familial obligations, for example. Moreover, while Netierman et al. (2022) examined international students' decision-making process, our findings also capture the perspectives of international graduates at different intervals postgraduation. Even several years after graduation or after "completing" the edugration pathway by obtaining PR and/or citizenship, participants' choices were still evolving, as they reassessed their situations regarding employment, family, and overall quality of life. Rather than accumulated and constant efforts towards a goal set initially, participants' pathways were shaped by several decision-making moments and multiple temporalities and rhythms across the past, present, and future (Griffiths et al., 2013). In this study, thinking beyond the fixed visa categories (Landolt et al., 2022) or the linear path of edugration and situating students' edugration strategies in the broader context of their life course (Findlay et al., 2012; Lipura & Collins, 2020) was key to understanding their experiences.

We acknowledge the limitations of our comparisons, as this paper draws from two studies employing similar methodologies (ethnography) and methods (qualitative interviews), yet not originally designed for comparison. We carefully analyzed the interview guides and ensured the questions were comparable across both participant groups before conducting a joint analysis to identify common themes (as illustrated in Table 2). This approach helped mitigate the impact of originally conducting separate studies.

Conclusion

This study comparatively examined the strategies of Vietnamese and Mexican international students and graduates regarding the edugration system. Our research indicates a disconnect between students' temporality and the temporal framework of the edugration system. The system's narrow focus primarily benefits the Canadian state, even though it is presented as a mutually beneficial arrangement. Not all students adhere to a linear edugration pathway towards permanent settlement, and their strategies span a broader timeframe. We urge further research to avoid embracing linear three-step education pathways as the default, normative, or preferable temporal framework of all international students' experiences. Instead, we argue that researchers should centre students' own temporalities and strategies for navigating the education system, which can take many different forms.

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