

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION TO ESL PROGRAMS  
IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS  
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze policies and practices that facilitate and hinder international student admission to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, from the perspective of institutions themselves.

Since 1986, a proliferation of ESL programs for international students have emerged in public and private post-secondary institutions in B.C. and numbers of international students in the non-university sector of education in Canada have grown. The governments of B.C. and Canada recognize that English language training is a growing business in Canada and the world.

Admissions procedures are but one factor of many that influence a student's decision to apply. This study assumes that streamlined admission to ESL programs will make Canada more attractive, and therefore increase its numbers of international students, a goal that exists for public and private institutions, for internationalization and economic purposes.

The research question was: What facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia? Secondary questions were: How can admissions policies and procedures be more effective and more efficient? What are the implications for change at the institutional, provincial, and national levels?

Over a six-week period in 1999, the author interviewed admissions personnel at forty post-secondary institutions in B.C. (sixteen public and twenty-four private),

comprising 60% of those that met the selection criteria of providing year-round ESL to international students and having been in operation for three years. The interviews were transcribed and the data were analyzed with data from a questionnaire and written institutional material.

The study finds and presents some institutional factors relating to documents, personnel, communication, fee payment and other issues that facilitate and hinder international student admission to ESL programs. However, the study also identifies areas beyond the control of institutions that, from the perspective of admissions personnel, may have a greater effect on international student admission to ESL programs and therefore on increasing the number of international students in Canada.

The author makes ten recommendations for institutions and concludes with seven questions for future research.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AACRAO	American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
ACCC	Association of Canadian Community Colleges
ACISI	Advisory Committee on International Students and Immigration
APF	Asia Pacific Foundation
ARUCC	Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
BCCIE	B.C. Centre for International Education
CAGS	Canadian Association of Graduate Studies
CAPLS	Canadian Association of Language Schools
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CBIE	Canadian Bureau for International Education
CEC	Canadian Education Centre
CFS	Canadian Federation of Students
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration/Immigration Canada
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
IC	Industry Canada
IIE	Institute of International Education
MAETT	Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology
NACC	National Association of Career Colleges
NAFSA	Association of International Educators
PASBC	Post-Secondary Application Services of British Columbia
PELSA	Private English Language School Association
PPSEC	Private Post-Secondary Education Commission
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UKCOSA	United Kingdom Council for Overseas Students Affairs
WUSC	World University Service of Canada

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze those policies and practices that facilitate and those that hinder international student admission to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, from the perspective of institutions themselves.

### **Context**

Internationalization -- defined as a process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world (Francis, 1993) -- has been a goal of post-secondary institutions in Canada since the early 1990s. By definition it encompasses many activities, one of which is to increase the ratio of international students to Canadian students in public post-secondary institutions (Knight, 1995).

International students are students studying in Canada either as a visitor or on a Student Authorization issued by Immigration Canada (CIC). International students bring to Canada wide-ranging cultural, intellectual and economic benefits. There has been a growing interest not only institutionally, but provincially and nationally, in increasing Canada's share of the international student market (Francis, 1993; Humphries, 1997; Tillman, 1995).

In the early 1980s, with the number of people immigrating to B.C. from Asia beginning to climb, the British Columbia Ministry of Education issued the following statement: *The Mission for international education in the post-secondary sector is the*

*effective delivery of educational services to enhance academic, cultural, and economic links with the world community and, in particular, with the Asia-Pacific nations.* In the mid-1980s began the proliferation of international student English as a Second Language program units within public institutions, and the birth of private ESL schools whose primary purpose was to serve international students. At the same time international student demand for ESL programs was increasing globally.

The University of British Columbia began to admit international students at the undergraduate level in the mid-1980s. By 1995, about 4% of undergraduates at UBC were international students (McInnes, 1995). At Canadian universities the national average was 4.3% in 1996 (Humphries, 1997), which was five percentage points below the 10% goal set by countries of the European Union, the United States and Australia. The University of British Columbia's aim is to eventually reach 15% (Lewington, 1994).

In 1994 "international education" became the third pillar of Canada's foreign policy, reflecting the nation's interest in building economic ties with the Pacific Rim and other countries (Tillman, 1994). Federal initiatives that support this have included

- participation of representatives of the private sector and universities on annual economic tours to different regions of the world by "Team Canada" -- so-called because it includes the Prime Minister and provincial Premiers;
- a contribution of \$1.5 million towards a three-year trilateral student mobility program between Canada, the United States and Mexico in 1993, which was extended in 1999;
- and

- the opening of fifteen Canadian Education Centres in cities throughout Asia, Latin America, and Australia, including: Bangkok, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Singapore, Seoul, Taipei, Beijing, Mexico City, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo and Santiago, and Canberra.

Despite the changes in policy, the numbers of international students at universities declined nationally in 1996-97 according to the 1996-97 National Report on International Students in Canada (Table 1) (Humphries, 1997), although according to the same study, numbers have grown in Canadian secondary schools and colleges. These data do not include those students who have visitor status and are studying English as a Second Language at public and private institutions in Canada, a number which is reported to be in the thousands according to anecdotal accounts of administrators of private ESL schools in British Columbia.

Table 1. International Students in Canada by Type of Study and University Level, 1993-94 to 1996-97.

Year	Elem./Sec.	Coll./trade	Undergrad	Grad.	Total Univ.	Total
1993-94	27,280	24,792	21,869	15,609	37,478	89,550
1994-95	26,656	21,909	21,264	12,929	33,193	81,933
1995-96	27,092	26,897	22,449	13,428	35,877	89,997
1996-97	30,124	33,552	22,782	12,870	35,652	99,605

Source: The National Report on International Students in Canada (Humphries, 1997)

According to the 1998-99 National Report on International Students in Canada (Humphries, J. and Kane, M., 1999), international student enrolment in B.C. was 15% (12,000) of all the international students in Canada in 1990-91 and increased to almost 25% (20,200) of the national total in 1997-98. Enrolment in Quebec increased from 12,100 or 15% in 1990-91 to 17,000 or 21% in 1997-98. However, over the same period, enrolment in other provinces remained stable with only slight increases or decreases, and the known number of international students in Canada in 1997-98 (99,000) was about the same as it had been ten years earlier. In contrast, according to the same source, enrolment increased in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia over the same period. Describing the trend of international student enrolment in ESL programs over the years, or comparing the number of international students studying ESL in Canada with those in another country, such as Australia, is impossible with the very general data available.

Some international students intent on getting a higher education in Canada come to this country prior to having completed high school. They can complete high school and upgrade their ESL skills simultaneously, which can mean a better chance for admission to a college or university program than if they wait until after completing high school in their home country. In B.C., most public colleges and some private institutions offer high school completion for adults, and students have the opportunity to enrol in a university transfer program, which is a one- or two-year program that will allow them to complete the equivalent of the first and second years of university and achieve the necessary academic standing required for admission to university.

International students, unless in Canada under sponsorship, are self-funded and pay the full cost of their post-secondary education. A portion of the revenue from their tuition fees can help support and maintain their institution's existing infrastructure and programs. In the 1990s, while there was growth in the numbers of international students coming to Canada, public institutions had to deal with shrinking budgets as a result of decreased federal and provincial funding for public post-secondary education, in addition to a tuition fee freeze for domestic post-secondary students in B.C. Consequently, post-secondary institutions began marketing programs and recruiting students in Asia and Latin America. This placed an even greater emphasis on increasing the numbers of international students in both academic programs and non-academic programs such as ESL.

A number of Canadian public post-secondary institutions have always provided language training for new immigrants. The wide variety of ESL programs that exist in B.C. have been classified into English for Academic Purposes, English for Access, and English for Work (B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, 1998). The objective of English for Academic Purposes is to provide "the language skills necessary to enter academic, technology, career, and vocational programs, including those requiring English 12 prerequisites...[and those skills for] functioning effectively in formal, extended, unpredictable, and challenging situations typical of a North American academic environment (p.9)." The goal of the English for Access is to "provide students with the language and socio-cultural skills to function, participate and contribute effectively in Canadian society... to provide students with their initial English learning experience... to incorporate adaptive skills in addition to language skills (p. 35)." English for Work

provides "courses and programs offered in public post-secondary institutions and in the workplace, designed to assist the learner in achieving his/her language and workplace goals (p. 55)."

Mastering English, whether for conversational purposes or as preparation for academic study, is an ongoing process. In B.C., English as a Second Language programs can be taken full-time, or part-time -- which is defined as 18 hours or less per week for the purposes of this study; they can be long-term, or short-term -- which is defined as three months or less for the purposes of this study. Programs serve international students and immigrants. According to a survey of ESL international students in the basic English language skills program at Vancouver Community College, 51% had plans for further (unspecified) post-secondary education (VCC, 1997).

In Canada, the private sector is a relatively new provider of education (Dennison, 1995), especially in the field of ESL training. However, ESL has become a business not only for private providers but for public providers. There is a proliferation of ESL programs for international students in both the public and private educational institutions in B.C., and both types of institutions generate revenue from these programs. Whether the ESL programs are provided by an individual private institution or they are provided by a special program unit within a public institution, they are operated as businesses: 100% of the costs to run the programs must be recovered from tuition fees. It is for this reason that both public and private providers are included in this study.

Because learning a language is an acquired skill that requires ongoing refinement, levels within ESL programs range from basic beginners to university entrance. However,



the factors or conditions under which students may be admitted to ESL courses at private institutions or public post-secondary institutions -- which have the broader mandate of providing post-secondary career, vocational, technical or academic programs, will be governed by the principles under which these two types of institutions operate. The implications are that admission of students applying to ESL programs based in public post-secondary institutions is governed by those principles that are set in place for institutions that are publicly-funded, cater mainly to Canadians, and provide programs for which there are academic and language level entrance requirements. On the other hand, admission of students to ESL programs in private institutions is governed by principles set in place for privately funded institutions that may cater only to international students and may only provide ESL programs for which there is no need for academic and language level requirements.

ESL programs provided by public post-secondary institutions fall under the authority of the B.C. Ministry of Education: Colleges and Institutes Act and Universities Act. B.C. has twenty-five public post-secondary institutions: five universities, five university-colleges, twelve colleges and three institutes, most of which began to offer ESL programs for international students in the mid- to late 1980s. ESL programs provided by private post-secondary institutions fall under the regulations of the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. (PPSEC). The private post-secondary sector in B.C. grew from 300 institutions with 52,000 students in 1992 to 1,100 schools with 190,000 students in 1998 (V. Osborn, personal communication, June 5, 1998). In 1999, 139 of these

schools offered ESL programs, and most schools were located in downtown Vancouver (PPSEC, 1999).

Once in Canada, students tend to shop around from institution to institution -- private or public -- until they find the school with the "right" ESL program and the right price for them. In Vancouver, approximately 25% of international student applications to ESL programs in public and private institutions come from students who are already in Canada, according to anecdotal accounts of people interviewed for this study.

Joint partnerships exist between a few institutions in the public and private sector. For example, the ESL component of an "ESL plus Business" program at a public institution is provided by a private institution.

The Canadian government recognizes that English language training is a business in Canada and that world-wide demand for ESL training has increased. In 1999, Industry Canada, with the additional support of other federal agencies including the Department of Canadian Heritage, Language Training Canada, the Canadian Tourism Commission and the Canadian Education Centres Network, conducted a survey "to gather information on the size of the language training industry, its characteristics and the role played by foreign students". The 1998 Survey of Providers of Training in English and French as a Second Language found that

"...about 290,000 participants were enrolled in classes in 331 private schools and 159 public institutions in 1998. The industry, which employed about 11,000 people, had estimated revenues of \$300 million. One-third (33%) of these schools were in Quebec, 28% in Ontario, and 23% in British Columbia. Foreign students, who comprised 39% of the total enrolment in second-language training, paid about \$125 million in tuition fees in 1998. Overall, close to two-thirds of the foreign students were from Asian countries. Between 1994 and 1998, total enrolment grew at an annual average pace of 22%. Many schools (52%) were small businesses with annual second-language training revenues of

less than \$500,000. Nearly 23% were mid-sized schools with revenues between \$500,000 and \$2 million, about 10% had revenues of more than \$2 million, and 15% did not state their revenue. (Statistics Canada, personal communication, November 18, 1999)."

The following is a compilation of factors mentioned in discussions with personnel who advise students and factors found in brochures and literature for prospective students such as *The Saturday Night University Planner 1995* (Fraser, J. and Oberdorf, C., 1994).

Factors a student may consider when choosing a place to study include:

- an institution's admission requirements, size, location, facilities, atmosphere, and reputation;
- program type/cost;
- availability of co-op programs (combining work experience and study);
- availability of scholarships/bursaries;
- transportation; and
- preparation for graduate school.

Additional factors that international students may have to consider include:

- English language proficiency requirements;
- obtaining a letter of acceptance from an institution in order to obtain a visa (Student Authorization) from Immigration Canada;
- paying tuition fees which are set at a level that will cover all the costs of instruction, currently approximately \$850 a month for full-time ESL study at a public B.C. institution;
- paying tuition fees before arriving in Canada in order to obtain the letter of acceptance;
- providing proof they will have financial support while in Canada;

- the number of students who come from their home country or speak their native language at the Canadian institution;
- class size;
- safety of the location;
- climate/weather;
- provision of recreational activities;
- the availability of homestay; and
- the type of food available.

The decision to enrol in an ESL program is clearly complex and may be influenced by a wide range of factors. Even broader issues may have a bearing on enrolment, such as institutional capacity to admit, competition within the industry, and other factors that are beyond the scope of this study. This study limits itself to the application process because students who encounter obstacles applying to an ESL program may choose another country in which to study ESL, thereby reducing the potential for subsequent enrolment at a Canadian post-secondary institution and/or travelling and spending money while in Canada.

The information on tuition, programs, etc., that international students who are applying to ESL programs require influences their decision to enrol. Students who do not obtain the correct information on what is required of them or who have trouble obtaining it either directly from the institution or indirectly from other sources may not only have their admission to the institution hampered, but their admission to the country.

The traditional view of admissions is the institution's processing of the student's application to study at the institution. The broad view of admissions includes marketing and the student getting the appropriate visa to enter Canada. Institutional admissions policies and practices, provincial regulations, and national immigration policies and practices affect not only international student admissions and the goals of post-secondary institutions and governments, but the economy of Canada. It is in this context that the research question and significance of examining admissions policies and procedures are addressed.

### **Research Question**

The central research question is: What facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia? Secondary questions are: How can admissions policies and procedures be more effective and more efficient? What are the implications for change at the institutional level, the provincial level, and the national level?

Related questions are: What are the policies for international student admission to ESL programs at public and private institutions in B.C.? What are the procedures for students applying from outside Canada and what are they for those students applying from within Canada? Is there any divergence between policies and procedures and practice and if so, in what way? Are there differences in admissions practices between public institutions and private institutions? How and to what degree do factors within the control of institutions help or hinder international student admission, factors such as program

types, size or nature of the student body, links with other institutions, goals of students, etc.? Do factors beyond the control of the institution have an impact on admissions, and if so, what are they and how do they affect admissions? These are the questions that provided the focus for the study and are reported on later in this work.

### **Significance**

This study acknowledges the demand for ESL programs worldwide, and assumes that if admission to ESL programs in Canada could be simplified and streamlined, more international students may find Canada a more attractive destination for ESL training.

International students and institutions will benefit from admission procedures that are as obstacle-free as possible. Smoother admissions may allow students easier access to institutions initially, and easier transferability between institutions once in the country. Increased international student enrolment will enable the public post-secondary sector to reach its target ratio of international students to Canadian students, thereby contributing to internationalization of the campus. It will also assist institutions with their budgets.

While this study uncovers some practical information for institutional admissions personnel to facilitate admission procedures for international students wishing to study ESL in Canada, it also identifies areas beyond the control of the institution that may have a greater effect on international student admission to ESL programs.

A project was undertaken jointly by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and

the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) entitled *The Global Economy and the Internationalization of Advanced Learning: Towards a Planning Framework* (Tillman, 1997). The goal was to begin to develop a framework around which institutions and governments could begin structuring their relationships so that they might provide a more orderly and effective presence in the global marketplace and a more understandable, sustainable, coordinated and accessible support framework in Canada to meet the needs of students, institutions and governments. A study of many of the issues identified was recognized to be beyond the scope of any one organization, institution or government let alone one individual. However, a bottom-up or inside-out study of one aspect, such as this one on admissions, provides some insight into what we are doing well and how we can do better. If Canada is to be competitive globally, it is imperative that international student access to its public and private post-secondary institutions be as free of obstacles as possible.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The second chapter of this thesis reviews the literature on international students. The third chapter describes the methodology used and the strengths and weaknesses. The results of the research are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. Chapter Four highlights the admissions policies, the admissions procedures, the divergence between policies and procedures and practice, and the various other factors that help and hinder admissions and are within the control of the institution. Chapter Five presents the factors at provincial, federal and other levels that affect international student admissions to ESL

programs but are beyond the control of the institution. Chapter Six presents a summary of the study, recommendations for institutions, and areas for further research.



## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

### Review

There is a paucity of literature on international students in general and very little on policies and procedures regarding international student admissions in Canada. However, related information for this topic can be found in bibliographies, books, theses, studies, reports, articles in journals and newspapers, presentations made at conferences, institutional brochures for ESL programs, provincial government regulations for public and private providers of education, membership criteria of ESL organizations, and minutes and e-mail communications of national and provincial committees and organizations. Information can also be gleaned from professionals in public and private education institutions, organizations, and government. Both the amount of information that is available on international students and the format in which it is found reflect the relative youth of providing education for international students in Canada, especially in non-university areas such as English as a Second Language, private institutions, and secondary level schools.

### *Bibliographies*

Bibliographies with an international student focus have been written in the US and Canada. *Governmental and Institutional Policies on Foreign Students: An Overview and Bibliography* (Lulat, Altbach and Kelly, 1986) presents a comprehensive overview categorizing policy issues under these major headings:

- governmental level: 1. population (macro) 2. economics 3. foreign policy.
- institutional level: 1. population (micro) 2. logistics 3. administration and 4. academic issues.

The sub-topics and questions presented under these headings reveal that policy issues are interconnected within and between levels and not simple to deal with. To relate this to the situation in Canada, for example, recruitment can be an admissions matter at the institutional level, and at the same time be encouraged at the governmental level by Canadian foreign policy and by provincial and federal promotional and marketing initiatives such as those of the B.C. Centre for International Education and the Canadian Education Centres.

Much of the literature in this bibliography is research conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE), NAFSA: the Association of International Educators, and similar organizations in Australia and Europe. There was nothing in this bibliography specifically referring to barriers or ways to facilitate admission of international students. This work is more valuable for its extensive essay on policy issues than for its bibliography as materials are largely American and dated.

A later work, *Foreign Students and International Study: Bibliography and Analysis, 1984-1988* (Altbach and Wang, 1989), includes a short essay on trends in international education research, and a descriptive bibliography divided into thirty categories such as bibliographies, legal issues, and attitudinal and behavioral studies. In the essay, it is noted that the literature is dominated by the concerns of the major host countries of international students: the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, and that the

growth of material in the area of education policy is largely due to the whims of the sources -- agencies such as the Institute of International Education (IIE), NAFSA: the Association of International Educators, the United Kingdom Council for Overseas Students Affairs (UKCOSA), the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). It is noted that while the youth of the field allows for research of a groundbreaking nature, there are few established methodologies, and that privately-funded students and the foreign student "industry" are areas where research is needed, specifically the topic of recruiting foreign students, on which research is non-existent. This comment could have been written more than a decade later, as the situation remains unchanged in 1999. Although one of the thirty sections is devoted to reference material on recruitment policies and procedures and another to admissions policies and procedures, the references are of a very narrow focus. This work is enlightening if only for its essay on the state of research on international students.

*International Students in Canada: A bibliography of recent published and unpublished sources with a bibliographic essay* looks at what was written between 1978 and 1988 (Sinclair and Bartlett, 1988). The authors note the scarcity of comprehensive studies on international student issues saying that there is a need for articulation and improvement of policies and services. Their method for gathering the literature was extensive, yet they do not include any documents such as institutional admissions policies and procedures, saying that these are *for* students rather than *about* them. The short introductory essay mentions two particular areas where research is lacking: international

students in the secondary and non-university sectors of education and international education in individual provinces of Canada.

These three bibliographies provide a historical background to a wide range of issues regarding international students. However, they contain literature dating back twenty years. An update would be informative especially if there were more on what has been written and researched in Australia, which according to anecdotal accounts has increased its share of the international student market significantly over the past decade.

### *Books*

In two historical works on higher education in Canada there are references to the existence and growing importance of international students. One work is a cursory overview of the higher education system in Canada which in a section on students gives trends in enrolment of international students at graduate, undergraduate, college and trade levels of education in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, and comments on the need for effective information materials for foreign nationals (Gregor and Jasmin, 1992). The other work deals with community colleges in Canada and the challenges and opportunities they face (Dennison, 1995). In the latter work, Knowles mentions entrepreneurship in community colleges in Canada and the external causes, including reduced government funding, international competition, new technology, changing demographics and demands in program mix, and notes that "it is not uncommon for the revenue from international education activities to represent between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of the entire college budget" (p. 196). In her conclusion, she notes that although these entrepreneurial activities

are not new, the expansion of them is, and that as a result, organizational structures and processes within colleges will be need to be created to support the needs of the marketplace (p. 204). In his summation and in reference to the challenges presented by Knowles, Dennison cautions that while these activities are increasingly more necessary and while there are positive effects such as raising the stature and profile of colleges and demonstrating their relevance to the community, they also cause increased demands on the institution's human and material resources and can draw attention away from the needs of the traditional clientele (p. 281).

#### *Theses, Studies and Reports*

Slightly more recent than the previously mentioned bibliographies, works by Pengelly (1989), Gallagher (1993), Francis (1993), and Knight (1995, 1997) reveal in their literature reviews that not much has been written on the subject of international students in Canada.

Pengelly (1989), in her major paper *The Development of International Education Activities in British Columbia 1978-1988*, states that while being diverse, the literature has a narrow focus and research is lacking on the non-university sector of education. She recommends further research on institutional policies, such as those policies that guide recruitment.

Gallagher (1993), in her thesis *Issues of Adjustment: A Case Study of International Students Attending Vancouver Community College*, echoes what Pengelly says about the diversity of what has been written. Francis (1993), in *Facing the Future:*

*The Internationalization of Post-Secondary Education Institutions in British Columbia*, reiterates in her literature review what Pengelly and Gallagher have said about what has and has not been written, which covers works written between 1985 and 1993.

*Facing the Future: The Internationalization of Post-Secondary Education Institutions in British Columbia* is a seminal work which defines internationalization of post-secondary institutions in British Columbia (Francis, 1993). Written in the context of facing future challenges and opportunities, this work is of high caliber. In her literature review, Francis notes that her study reflects both the distinction of the diversity of post-secondary institutions and the fine line between literature pertaining to colleges and that pertaining to universities. Francis finds that the literature lacks discussions of problematic efforts detailing pitfalls and errors in the attempt to internationalize (p. 11). Discussions of what hinders admissions would fall into this area.

Knight expands the research on internationalization in Canadian post-secondary institutions in three other studies. In the first, *Internationalization: elements and checkpoints*, Knight (1994) notes that expressed commitment in the form of a policy statement is needed to stimulate and inform practice (p. 8). With regard to international students, Knight lists the following checkpoints for internationalization (p. 10):

- number of international students (holding Student Authorizations) and scholars on campus;
- percentage of total student enrolment that this number represents;

- support services/office for international students: advisors; orientation programs; social/cultural/peer programs with Canadian students; international student clubs; newsletters; ESL/FSL programs;
- enrolment target for international students as percentage of total student enrolment (5-10% suggested);
- existence of programs to use international students as resources for curricular and extracurricular activities.

In this work, Knight (1994) presents a conceptual framework for the process of internationalization on campus which includes, within the environment of a supportive culture, the two-way flow between the following phases: awareness; commitment; planning; operationalizing; review; and reinforcement.

Knight, in her article *A National Study on Internationalization at Canadian Universities*, notes that much of what has been written in Europe, Canada, Australia and the USA on the topic of international student mobility and internationalization of higher education is fragmented (Knight, 1995, p.29) and in her conclusion she asks if universities are identifying and addressing obstacles to student mobility. These sources underscore the need for research on international student issues such as admissions policies and procedures.

Finally, in *A Shared Vision? Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education*, Knight (1997) reports the perspectives of institutional, government and private sector stakeholders on internationalization. Of note are her findings regarding the barriers to internationalization, and how differently they are

perceived by the three stakeholders, which may explain the influence that both internal institutional and external governmental factors have in facilitating and impeding admissions of international students.

In the conclusion of her latest work, which probes the issues and challenges of internationalization, on the topic of rationales that drive international education and internationalization, Knight (1999) raises the following question: "Is there a gradual but perceptible shift from academic cooperation to market driven competition and will it increase and have more influence on shaping the nature of international education?"

As mentioned earlier, there is an extensive discussion of international education policy in the work by Lulat, Altbach and Kelly. Two works on Canadian policy are written by the CBIE. *The Right Mix* (CBIE, 1981) deals with institutional policies, and while the report and recommendations are outdated, they provide historical background to issues regarding international students such as immigration policy development with respect to Student Authorizations. In a section on policies related to admissions, the policies are mainly to do with regulating the number of international students, and recruitment and language competency of international students. This reflects concerns in the past that international students may out-number or take seats away from Canadian students in programs. Included in *The Right Mix* is a Criteria for Ethical Recruitment taken from recommendations made at a meeting of NAFSA in 1980, which recommends that institutions have appropriate policies for recruitment and admission including a system of written criteria.



The second work, *Canada and International Student Mobility: Where to Now?* (Fox, 1987), is a discussion paper whose purpose was to raise questions regarding Canada's policies in international education and presents institutional, provincial and federal level policy-related issues that were predominant in the mid to late 1980s.

At the institutional level, policies were related to recruitment, admission, curricular relevance, support services, and institutional programs for Canadians. At the provincial level, policies were related to the funding of education, differential fees, and health care. Policy issues at the federal level were related to immigration, employment, taxation and benefits, funding of education, and scholarships. The questions were: Do we view international education exchange and mobility as important? Do we want international students in Canada? What is the return we seek from their presence? What kind of international students do we want? and How many international students do we want and what is our saturation point? (pages 7 -11).

While illustrating the inter-relatedness of jurisdictions regarding international students, *Where to Now?* raises many questions which are still being asked today despite the change in focus from how many international students might choose post-secondary education in Canada and should the number be restricted, to how Canada could encourage more international students to choose Canada as a destination. Recruitment is included in the section on policy issues at the institutional level. Two points are raised on admissions. The first concerns language requirements and academic requirements. The second point concerns English language competency, and whether a TOEFL score accurately predicts ability to do well in an English-language post-secondary institution.

CBIE's *Inventory of Impediments Facing International Students Wishing to Study in Canada* (CBIE, 1987) though over ten years old may still be true to some extent today as to people's perceptions of what hinders admissions, such as the lack of sufficient information for students wishing to study in Canada; procedures for application for Student Authorizations; prohibitions on opportunities to work while in Canada; and inadequate support services for international students. Impediments are presented with a commentary and a note as to the jurisdiction or jurisdictions of the issue. Seven obstacles are discussed:

- the lack of information on a variety of matters, including programs, admission requirements, and immigration regulations for students wishing to study in Canada
- cumbersome procedures for application, verification and renewal of Student Authorizations
- prohibitions on opportunities for international students (or their spouses) to work
- international students (and their families) being denied access to Canadian health care programs and benefits
- the administration of visa requirements resulting in expensive and time-consuming trips by students to obtain new visas
- differential fee policies, their diversity, and their methods of implementation resulting in ill-feeling towards Canada and making Canadian institutions accessible only to the rich of the world.

While changes have been made in provincial health care policies to allow students to obtain health insurance, and differential fees have been accepted as a fact of life, the other obstacles remain though perhaps not to the same degree as they were in 1987.

*Overseas Students in Australia: Policy and Practice* is a compilation of articles focusing on international students in Australia (Williams, 1989). While no articles deal with admissions policies and procedures specifically, the appendix does include A Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Full-fee Courses to Overseas Students by Australian Higher Education Institutions and an accompanying Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions Offering Full-fee Courses for Overseas Students. The Code of Ethical Practice, which reiterates and augments the ethical recruitment criteria mentioned in *The Right Mix*, deals with eleven issues, including marketing, promotion, welfare of the student, personnel and courses overseas, and one item related to admissions (p.146):

2.9 Institutions should provide to prospective students accurate and comprehensive information on the institution, on admission requirements and procedures, on the courses available and on costs, living conditions, accommodation and other services. Advertisements should not include misleading or ambiguous statements about the nature of the course, the cost or the award.

The guidelines refer to a number of issues, including infrastructure, fee approval, promotion (marketing) overseas, visits, agents, information for and counselling of students, admission, pre-arrival information, arrival and registration, and student support - welfare, staff support, feedback, and return home. The section on admissions deals not only with academic requirements and language competency, but fair treatment of international students, processing applications quickly, and following the country's federal regulations with regard to accepting students at the institution (p.150):

7.1 Institutions should be satisfied that candidates selected for admission are suitably qualified both academically and in English and are capable of benefiting from the course.

7.2 Offers of admission should not be made to overseas students on a less selective basis than those made to prospective home students.

7.3 Institutions should facilitate swift responses to enquiries and applications and ensure that all necessary documentation is sent at the earliest possible time.

7.4 It is a requirement that institutions send the appropriate copy of all Acceptance Advice forms to the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) after completing the confirmation of arrival/enrolment section. DEET must be advised of any subsequent course changes relative to full-fee paying overseas students.

These criteria are of a general nature and not specifically related to admission to ESL programs.

Studies were undertaken by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) in 1998 to look at admissions policies and procedures that facilitate and accelerate international student admission at a selection of universities, colleges and institutes across Canada.

*In College and Institute Admissions for International Students: A Guide for Admissions Officers*, Bennett (1999) researched the practices at four colleges and institutes across Canada. This guide includes a practical description of international student admission procedures which are primarily from the institutional perspective:

1. responding to a student's request for information
2. receiving applications from the student (using methods of submission such as e-mail; using selection criteria if a program is heavily subscribed; and checking that an application is complete: with the form, application fee, academic transcripts, and language proficiency score.)
3. evaluating academic transcripts

4. securing seats in programs that are also subscribed to by Canadians
5. issuing the official letter of acceptance (in a timely manner, and with all the information required by Citizenship and Immigration, thus facilitating the student's application for Student Authorization)
6. providing pre-arrival information, such as maps, airport reception details
7. providing orientation, to handle such things as finding accommodation, adjusting to living in Canada, the college's policies, academic orientation, etc.

The guide explains:

- obtaining a Student Authorization: what it entails, and how long in advance a student should apply
- medical requirements, including both the medical exam needed in order to obtain the Student Authorization and the medical insurance required once in the country
- terms and conditions relating to the Student Authorization, such as those relating to type of institution and employment

For admission of international students to Canadian colleges Bennett's recommendations (p. 12 - 14), which reiterate those seen in *The Right Mix* and *Canada and International Student Mobility: Where to Now?*, are:

- that the goals and policies of admission reflect those of the college, and include academic characteristics of the prospective student, numbers of students desired, geographic areas to be emphasized or discouraged, and extent to which the college's financial resources will be available to the student;
- that admissions materials clearly describe Canada's education system, admissions procedures, costs, academic and language proficiency levels required, and refund policies;
- that recruitment be ethical;
- that admissions personnel be competent;

- that the admissions office be coordinated with the areas responsible for language training, academic programs, advising; and
- that the student program be studied periodically in order to improve admissions criteria, procedures, and processes.

*A Warm Welcome? Recruitment and Admissions of International Students to Canadian Universities: Policies, Procedures and Capacity* (AUCC, 1999) was more extensive than the CBIE study both in the number of institutions studied and in the amount of background material it reviewed. It had a broad focus and yet dealt with major policy issues in depth. It collected information from eight Canadian universities across Canada in the form of documents and interviews, in addition to supplemental material from studies that had been conducted at other universities to garner student concerns. Recruitment and admissions practices were considered for graduate and undergraduate levels separately. The study also addressed language competency and the university's capacity to accept international students: services, faculty, support staff, student mobility, and scholarship resources. There was a summary of case-study practice. The paper concluded with implications for public policy, grouping the issues into those related to, provincial government policies, immigration policies, federal support, and the Canadian Education Centre Network. Areas for further action were: self-evaluation by Canadian universities, exploring partnerships, advocacy, and continuing research. Both the CBIE study and the AUCC study deal with public post-secondary institutions and provide a reference point to which this author's study can be compared. However, there is no similar research on international student admissions to private post-secondary institutions.

Every two years the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) compiles a national report on international students in Canada which not only provides trends in enrolment numbers and areas of study, but also contains short essays providing critical analyses of current issues in international education from a Canadian perspective, for example *Beyond 1993: Educational Exchange and Collaboration in the Americas* by George Tillman, and *Japanese Students in Canada* by Armelle Grippa (in Humphries, 1993); *Recent Directions in Government International Education Policy* by George Tillman (in Humphries, 1995); and *Canadian Education, Asia Pacific Relations, and Asian Student Mobility* by Bernard Luk (in Humphries, 1997).

The data in the CBIE National Reports, although clearly the most comprehensive available on international students in Canada, are however at best a guide to the trends in enrolment. The data are collected from two different sources. Information from registrars of individual public post-secondary institutions provides Statistics Canada with information on university level international students. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), through its statistics on Student Authorizations, provides data on international students at the non-university level, such as those in colleges, trade programs, and secondary schools. Compared to statistics on university-level international students, statistics are less precise for international students in the college system, and even less precise for students in ESL programs and students in secondary schools; data are non-existent for international students who are in Canada studying ESL while on a tourist visa.

At the provincial level, the B.C. Centre for International Education (BCCIE), collects information from the public sector on specific numbers of international students in

ESL programs of less than three months in length (BCCIE, 1998). However, although this information fills a gap in the data base, it is only a fraction of the real number of ESL students in B.C.

First of all, international students who are in full-time ESL programs of more than three months in length at public post-secondary non-university institutions are recorded under the more general categories of programs in which they are registered, such as training, university transfer, or career programs. Therefore, precise numbers of ESL students are not known. However, anecdotal information shared at the quarterly membership meetings of the BCCIE reveals that the number of international students in ESL programs is growing in B.C.

Secondly, the numbers of international students who are in Canada on tourist visas and studying in ESL programs at public and private institutions is not collected by either Statistics Canada or Citizenship and Immigration, or any provincial organization. However, informal studies conducted by the Private English Language School Association (PELSA) have indicated that there is a large number of international students studying ESL while on tourist visas in the private sector, and that their expenses represent a significant amount of revenue, as indicated by participants in this author's research:

#### #1 Private institution

"...PELSA did a study.....on the potential economic impact of ESL ... just private schools... I figured at that time, about three years ago [in 1996], that the ESL industry in Vancouver, and that's just the private schools, brought in to the economy of Vancouver about \$100 million to \$120 million a year. That's more money than what the hotels do... And how did [the study] [come up with that]?... [They] figured out the average number of students per month and there were 67 schools registered with PPSEC and...used a conservative number, about \$2000 per student."



## #2 Private institution

(Interviewer: "When you say we've got all these students on visitor's visas, how many students do we have on visitor's visas, not just in B.C. but across the country?")

"No one has any idea, because there are no statistics on students on visitor's visas. Statistically they are tourists. Every statistic that Canada has [on students] is [by] student visas. They say there are this many students because there were this many student visas issued. I would say that the typical ESL school would be 50 to 80 percent visitors visas, and there are 100 to 150 schools."

Therefore, although some statistics are being collected, they are not sufficiently disaggregated to provide provincial or national trends in ESL enrolment, and as a result stakeholders at institutional, provincial and national levels lack comprehensive information about international students in this increasingly important "non-university" sector of education in Canada. Knowing the enrolment trends of students in ESL programs is a key issue for those personnel involved in promoting Canadian education to international students. More data are required in order to determine more accurately the costs and benefits of having international students in Canadian institutions (Diambomba, 1993, 1995).

Having said that, there has been recognition at the federal level that there is a need for more information on the language training industry in Canada. Statistics Canada with the support of Industry Canada, Canadian Heritage, the Canadian Tourism Commission and the Canadian Education Centres Network, and Language Training Canada conducted a survey of public and private providers of English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language programs in Canada, *The 1998 Survey of Providers of Training in English and French as a Second Language*. Although the full analytical report was not available at the time this thesis was completed, the preliminary findings indicate that 23%

of Canada's language schools are in B.C., and that international students paid about \$125 million in tuition fees in Canada in 1998 (personal communication, Statistics Canada, November 18, 1999). Industry Canada hopes to be able to repeat the survey.

### *Articles in Newspapers and Journals*

International student enrolment trends have been the subject of numerous articles in Canadian newspapers and journals of international education organizations in Canada, for example in reaction to the enrolment boom in 1993 (Bacigalupo, 1993), to the decline on internationals students at the university level (Serious decline..., 1994-95; Lewington, 1995, p. A5), and to the closures in 1998 of some private providers in B.C. as a result of the slump in the Asian economy (Bell, 1998, p. A1, A10; Gawthrop, 1998).

Admissions is the first "after-sales" step for a student, and improving it can potentially have a positive effect on marketing. Marketing is a topic of more recent literature as a result of decreased government funding and the focus on increasing enrolments. Articles have been written in the local and national Canadian newspapers on selling education in B.C. (Daniels, 1995), and on attracting foreign students to Canada (Feschuk, 1994). Presentations have been made at conferences on the benefits of and obstacles to studying in Canada (Humphries, 1994a and 1994b). There have been two cost-benefit analyses of international students (Diambomba 1993, 1995), and a handbook on marketing has been written by the B.C. Centre for International Education (BCCIE, 1997). The latter includes a list of systems and policies that institutions need in order to influence international marketing activities. BCCIE recommends the following policies and services particular to international clients be articulated and agreed to:

- i. financial policies, including resources for international activities, fee structure for educational programs or products, refund policies and the sharing of risks/revenue within the institution;
- ii. admissions policies, including entrance requirements, processing times and procedures;
- iii. program policies including accessibility, flexibility, adaptability, and quality assurance;
- iv. special support services for international clients, including customized correspondence, orientation program, ESL training, student advising, homestay and airport reception;

BCCIE also recommends that a mechanism be established for systematic monitoring and review of policies, procedures and programs relevant to international clients (BCCIE, 1997, p. 15).

#### *Meetings of National Non-Governmental and Governmental Groups*

A communiqué was released by the American organization the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) after it held a teleconference regarding the effects of the Asian economic crisis on international student enrolment in countries that host international students from Asia. An underscoring theme of the conversation was the need to emphasize quality through improved products and services to international students. Illustrating the inter-relatedness of visas and admissions, a recommendation was made that immigration authorities be lobbied to expedite visa processing in order to make it faster, smoother, and more customer-oriented for students to study in [the host country] (NAFSA, 1998).

In Canada, in 1995, the Advisory Committee on International Students and Immigration (ACISI) was formed following a resolution made at a national conference of the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) and consultation between Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Industry Canada, and five non-government organizations. The group, which meets two times a year, consists of the three federal government representatives CIC, CIDA, and DFAIT as well as the provincial level Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC). Non-government representatives include

- the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC);
- the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC);
- the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT);
- the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS);
- the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE);
- the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS);
- the National Association of Career Colleges (NACC);

Representatives from other organizations invited to comment or participate when issues concern them include

- the Asia Pacific Foundation (APF);
- the World University Service of Canada (WUSC);
- the B.C. Centre for International Education (BCCIE);
- the Private English Language School Association (PELSA);
- and the Canadian Association of Language Schools (CAPLS); and
- and the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC).

The purpose of ACISI is to improve the process of admitting students into Canada to study. Several issues that are reported in this author's research have been on the agenda of the ACISI meetings, such as the speeding-up of admissions processes at post-secondary institutions and the exemption of Student Authorizations for students wishing to study ESL or FSL for period of six months or less (ACISI minutes, April 3, 1998, and April 6, 1999).

### Summary

Bibliographies, literature reviews of theses, and various studies, reports and articles reveal what has and what has not been written about international students in Canada. There is general information concerning the history of international students in Canada, enrolment trends, internationalization, and policies, but just one document specifically on the impediments for students wishing to study in Canada. The Canadian Bureau for International Education conducts research on international education in Canada on a regular basis, and therefore is the source of much information on international students in Canada. Minutes of meetings of the Advisory Committee on International Students and Immigration (ACISI) show that admission is an area of concern in public and private post-secondary sector education for international students in Canada.

There is no theoretical or conceptual literature on the topic of admissions of international students in post-secondary education in Canada. What exists are general policies of how to and how not to conduct admissions procedures regarding international students, such as the ethical guidelines for recruiting (CBIE, 1981) and CBIE's impediments to admissions (CBIE, 1987), which both illustrate the broader aspect of

admission. The Australian Code of Ethical Practice and Guidelines (Williams, 1989, p. 146-150) also focuses not only the application procedures but getting the student into the country. Recommendations are made in the discussion paper *The Global Economy and the Internationalization of Advanced Learning: Towards a Planning Framework* (Tillman, 1997) to provide a framework by which to present a more orderly picture of Canadian education to the international students of the world.

A review of the literature shows that what little there is on international students is of a general nature, and though there is an interest in international students in Canada, there is a gap in the research on admissions policies and procedures for ESL international students studying in public and private post-secondary education in B.C.

Based on the limited literature, and the admissions policies and guidelines noted, the author decided to interview professionals in public and private institutions to determine what facilitates and what hinders the admission of international students to ESL programs at public and private post-secondary institutions in B.C. The next chapter will explain how the research was conducted.

### **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the methodology used to examine what facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in B.C. It presents the method, how the participants were selected; the instrumentation used to collect the data; and the procedures used to collect, record, analyze and report the data. The chapter concludes with the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology.

#### **Method**

Interviews were the primary method used to collect data on the admissions policies and procedures for international students applying for English as a Second Language programs at B.C. institutions. Written institutional documents and participants' responses to a questionnaire were supplemental sources of information.

Personnel at public and private institutions completed a questionnaire, submitted written material and were interviewed in order to collect detailed information and perceptions as to what facilitates and what hinders the admission process, both at the institutional level and beyond. Questions focused on admissions policies and procedures for international students applying both from outside Canada and from within Canada; the divergence between policies and procedures and practice; institutional factors that facilitate and hinder admissions procedures; and factors beyond the control of the institution that facilitate and hinder admissions. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed.

## Participants

A list of institutions providing English as a Second Language was compiled from two sources: the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. list of private institutions providing ESL in B.C. (PPSEC, 1998), and the list of public post-secondary institutions providing ESL in B.C. in *ESL Programs in the B.C. Public Post-Secondary System* (BCCIE, 1998). The membership criteria for two organizations, the Private English Language School Association (PELSA), and the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS) helped form the selection criteria for participants. Public institutions comprising universities, university-colleges, colleges and institutes were selected on the basis of offering year-round ESL programs for international students and having been in operation for at least three years. Private institutions were selected on the basis of being registered with the B.C. Ministry of Education's Private Post-Secondary Education Commission (PPSEC) (a provincial body that regulates private sector post-secondary education in British Columbia) and having offered year-round ESL programs for international students for at least three years.

Fifty private institutions and nineteen public institutions met the selection criteria. From those sixty-nine institutions, personnel who were most familiar with international student admissions policies and procedures were invited to participate. Personnel from forty institutions -- twenty-four private institutions and sixteen public institutions -- participated in the study.

From information supplied by interviewees, nine participating institutions had under fifty international students in their ESL programs (four public institutions and five



private institutions) and twelve institutions had over 200 international students in ESL programs (five public institutions and seven private institutions) (Table 2).

Table 2. Size of Participants' Institutions by Approximate Numbers of International Students in ESL Programs

Type of institution	1-49 students	50 - 99 students	100 - 199 students	200 or more students	Total
Public	4	4	3	5	16
Private	5	7	5	7	24

### Instrumentation

The instrumentation consisted of a two-page questionnaire that was designed to take twenty minutes to complete (Appendix Ic), and interview questions that were designed to be answered in thirty to forty-five minutes or less (Appendix IIb). Each of the interview questions is presented below with the corresponding questions from the questionnaire as they pertain to admissions policies, admissions procedures, divergence between policies and procedures, and factors affecting admissions.

#### *Admissions Policies*

In order to determine how many institutions had written policies, the questionnaire asked:

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1. Does your institution have *a written (i.e. official, approved) admission policy* regarding international students applying for ESL programs? ☐yes ☐no

---

The interview question was:

“What are your institution’s/department’s policies regarding the admission of international students to ESL programs?”

### *Admissions Procedures*

Some international students apply to institutions from outside Canada and others are already in Canada when they apply. For background information on procedures the questionnaire asked:

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2. Does your institution have *written admissions procedures (i.e. laid-out steps)* regarding international students applying for ESL programs? ☐yes ☐no

---

4. Over the past 12 months (Jan./98 to Dec./98), approximately what percentage of applications to ESL programs did your institution receive

approx. %. or fraction

a. ...from international students *outside* Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

b. ...from international students *already in* Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

*If it is easier, you may use a fraction, e.g. 1/3, 2/3.*

---

5.a. Over the past 12 months, the number of applications to ESL programs from students *outside* Canada has:

☐increased ☐decreased ☐remained stable

5.b. Over the past 12 months, the number of applications to ESL programs from students *already in* Canada has:

☐increased ☐decreased ☐remained stable

---

In the interview the author asked for details about procedures for applying from outside Canada:

“Briefly take me step-by step through the application process for an international student who is applying from outside Canada for admission to an ESL program at your institution: the steps, personnel involved, turn-around time, and what facilitates/hinders the process.”

To see if there were differences in the procedures depending on the country a student was applying from, the questionnaire asked:

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6. Over the past 12 months, approximately how many international students who applied to ESL programs from outside Canada and were admitted (accepted) were unable to register due to visa rejection?

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<i>country of origin</i>	<i>number of students</i>	<i>type of program applied for</i>
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and the following question was asked in the interview:

“What, if any, are the differences in the process for students applying from *one country* versus *another*?”

To see if there were any differences between procedures for applying from outside Canada and from within Canada, the next interview question was:

“Take me step-by-step through the application process for an international student who is applying for admission to an ESL program from within Canada: the steps, personnel involved, turn-around time, and what facilitates/hinders the process.”

#### *Policies and Procedures versus Practice*

In order to probe for more information that might reveal factors that facilitate or hinder the admissions of international students into ESL programs, the next interview question asked if there was any divergence between policy and procedure and practice:

“Is there any divergence between the policies and procedures set out in your institution or department and what happens in practice? If yes, in what way? What short cuts are taken? What short cuts could be taken?”

#### *Factors Affecting on Admissions Procedures*

To probe further, on the questionnaire the author asked what the ESL program offerings were and whether the institutions also offered programs other than ESL to international students:

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3. In what types of ESL programs were international students registered at your institution between Jan. 1/98 and Dec. 31/ 98?

a. Short-term programs (3 months or less):

type of program*	pt/ft**	start date	length of program	application deadline

## b. Long-term programs (more than three months):

type of program*	pt/ft**	start date	length of program	application deadline

\*e.g. ESL/Tourism, ESL/Business, etc.

\*\*Part-Time = less than 18 hr./wk; Full-Time =18 hr. /wk or more

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7. Do international students apply and qualify to be admitted to register in ESL programs and non-ESL programs concurrently at your institution? If so, what non-ESL programs do they apply for?

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To determine whether or not the above factors affected admissions, the interview questions were:

“What is the effect on the admissions procedure if a student is concurrently applying for ESL and other credit or non-credit programs, such as high school completion, university transfer, business, tourism, etc.?”

“In your view, are there any other factors affecting admission procedures, e.g. type of ESL program, length of ESL program, size or nature of student body, time of year of start-dates, frequency of program offerings, application deadlines, links between the institution and other educational institutions, the students’ goals for the future, etc. If yes, what are these factors and what are the effects on the institution? What are the effects on the student?”

To determine if there were any factors beyond the control of the participant that had an effect on the admission of international students, the author asked:

“In your view, are there any policies or procedures beyond your or your institution’s control that affect admissions for international students to ESL programs? If yes, what are these, and what effects do they have?”

Finally, participants were asked:

“Is there anything else you can tell me regarding what facilitates or hinders the admission of international ESL students? Do you have any suggestions as to how to improve the process?”

So as to leave no stone uncovered, the questionnaire also asked if there was any information regarding admissions that could be garnered from student surveys that may have been conducted within the institutions:

- 
8. a. Has your institution conducted a survey with your international students that included questions related to admissions? ☐yes ☐no
- b. If yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. What did it tell you if anything about policies or procedures at your institution or beyond the control of your institution?
- 

An informed consent letter (Appendix Ia) and a consent form (Appendix Ib) accompanied the two-page questionnaire (Appendix Ic) that was sent to prospective interviewees. A request for written policies and/or written procedures or a procedural manual (Appendix IIa) accompanied the list of interview questions (Appendix IIb) that was subsequently sent to confirmed interviewees.

### **Procedures**

The questionnaire and interview questions were piloted with admissions personnel at two public post-secondary institutions. One person recommended that the questionnaire include a question on the percentage of students that were admitted by an institution but were unable to attend due to visa rejection, as well as the countries of origin of those students and the programs they had been admitted to. The reason given was that this data would help the institutions in their efforts to lobby Immigration Canada to review their visa policies for prospective international students.

The questionnaire had originally asked for the percent of international students who simultaneously apply for and are admitted to ESL programs and credit courses for

high school transfer, credit courses for university transfer, or certificate or diploma programs. The second person with whom the instruments were piloted noted that providing information might be difficult because at some institutions there were no "ESL programs"; ESL courses were instead provided through continuing studies, and ESL courses were not always restricted to international students. The same person noted that "apply for and are admitted" was unclear because students may apply but not qualify to be admitted. The question was changed to ask simply if students applied to ESL and non-ESL programs concurrently.

The second person also recommended that the word "program" be defined. The question was revised to include a break-down of short-term programs (three months or less), and long-term programs (three months or more), with sub-categories of part-time (less than 18 hours per week) and full-time (18 hours per week or more).

The same person suggested the interview end by asking participants if they had any suggestions to improve the admissions process. Changes were made to the questionnaire and list of interview questions.

After reading the membership criteria for the Private English Language Schools Association and the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools, the author decided on the criteria by which to select participants, which were that they provide year-round ESL programs for international students and that they had been in operation for a minimum of three years. Through telephoning 139 private ESL institutions that were registered with the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. (PPSEC), the author found fifty who met the selection criteria. During these telephone calls the author

asked for the name of the admissions contact person and requested that the school send written material, such as brochures, on their ESL programs.

By e-mail the author contacted international education personnel at each of the nineteen public post-secondary institutions offering ESL programs to international students listed in the BCCIE publication on ESL programs in public institutions in B.C. (BCCIE, 1998) and determined the appropriate admissions person to contact.

In February 1999, sixty-nine potential participants were sent an informed consent letter which explained the purpose and procedures of the study; a consent form; and a two-page questionnaire. Consenting participants were asked to return the consent form and questionnaire to the author either by mail in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided or in person at the time of the interview.

Over the following few weeks, the author contacted each prospective participant by telephone. If the signed consent form and questionnaire had already been returned, an interview was scheduled. If the consent form had not been returned, the author verified receipt of the initial package and answered questions as needed, and in some cases confirmed participation and arranged interviews.

Those who consented to participate were sent a confirmation letter with the interview time, list of interview questions, and a request that any written admissions material, such as policy documents or procedural manuals, be brought to the interview.

Initially personnel from forty-one of the sixty-nine institutions consented to be interviewed -- 17 of the 19 public institutions and 24 of the 50 private institutions. Thirty-nine complete questionnaires and one page (the first page) of one questionnaire were

returned -- 17 from the public institutions and 22 and one-half from the private institutions. Regarding the one and a half questionnaires that were not returned, one participant was sent another questionnaire and when that was not received by the researcher, a follow-up call was made but the researcher did not receive the questionnaire. The second participant said that they would mail the second page of their questionnaire but the researcher did not receive that either.

One participant from a public institution responded to the interview questions by e-mail, but as this did not allow for in-depth probing into the questionnaire and interview responses, the data from that person's questionnaire and e-mail responses were not used in the analysis.

At one institution, one person was interviewed for the first seven questions and another for the last question, collectively making one interview.

Forty interviews were conducted, 16 with personnel from public institutions and 24 with participants from private institutions, representing close to 58% of those that met the selection criteria. Public institutions made up 84% of the potential public sector participants and 40% of the total participants. Private institutions made up 48% of the potential private sector participants and 60% of the total participants (Table 3).

Questionnaires were reviewed before each interview. Over a period of six weeks, in March and April 1999, the author conducted 29 interviews in person and 11 over the telephone (Table 4). Interviews in person tended to be approximately 45 minutes or longer, while over the telephone they tended to be less than 45 minutes. Thirty-nine interviews were audio-taped with consent of the interviewees.



Table 3. Numbers of Institutions, Participants, Questionnaires and Interviews

Type of institution	Number of institutions that met the selection criteria	Number of institutions that agreed to participate	Number of questionnaires used	Number of interviews conducted
Public	19	17	16	16
Private	50	24	22.5	24
Total	69	41	38.5	40

Table 4. Number of Interviews Conducted in Person and over the Telephone

Type of institution	Interviews in person	Interviews over the telephone	Total
Private	20	4	24
Public	9	7	16
Total	29	11	40

The author transcribed the thirty-nine audio-taped interviews and summarized the non-taped one. A copy of each transcription/summary was sent to each respective participant for verification of information before the data was sorted for analysis. Interviews and questionnaires from personnel from forty institutions formed the body of data for analysis.

The author collated the questionnaire data from public sector participants and private sector participants separately; all the responses to each question were grouped together. The same process was used to collate the data from each question in the interview.

Question by question, data from questionnaires and interviews from the public sector participants and private sector participants were analyzed. Written materials provided at the interviews were reviewed. The public and private sector data were then compared for each question. The author analyzed the data. The analyses were then synthesized and the results are reported herein. For confidentiality, the results are reported in such a way that they can not be linked to individuals or institutions by name.

The results are presented and discussed and summarized, and recommendations are made for institutions. Areas for further research are suggested. Participants will be given the summary and recommendations.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology**

#### *Strengths*

A strength of this study is the perspective of the researcher, who has been a teacher of ESL to international students in B.C. for the past decade and during part of that time an administrator of programs for international students at a large public post-secondary college; she is therefore aware of the issues at the institutional level. Also, through ten years' involvement with provincial and national international education organizations, the researcher has a broad perspective of Canadian provincial and national policy issues vis a vis international students. However, with this background knowledge and experience, there was a need for the author to remain objective when conducting her research.

The study was conducted with admissions professionals in sixteen public post-secondary institutions and twenty-four private post-secondary institutions, and therefore gives a comprehensive picture of international ESL student admissions from the institutional perspective.

Education falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces in Canada. This study focuses on the situation for international students in one province in Canada. In 1998-99 B.C. had approximately almost 25% (20,200) of the national total of international students according to statistics from universities' enrolments and Student Authorizations. From this data alone, B.C. had the second highest number of international students in the country after Ontario. In addition to the known number of international students, participants in this study claim there are thousands more international students on tourist visas studying ESL in B.C. Due to B.C.'s provincial government support of international education over the past decade, B.C. is one of the most progressive provinces in the country in the promotion of education to international students.

Whereas other studies have looked at post-secondary institutions across Canada, this research is limited to institutions in one province. Not only is this study limited to one province, but it pertains to international ESL students specifically -- a significant segment of the international student population in B.C.

The provision of ESL programs for international students in public post-secondary institutions in B.C. is relatively new. The private providers of ESL to international students, which is also a relatively new phenomenon and about which little if anything has been written, are not only included but major participants in this study.

*Weaknesses*

A limitation in the scope of this study is that although it is about international student admission, no students were interviewed for their perceptions of what helps and what hinders admission. Secondly, the admissions person is but one of many involved with international students in ESL programs, and while a significant number of people are interviewed, the study lacks the perspectives of other people on international student admission, such as those who market programs and recruit students, and program planners, advisors and instructors. However, the methodology provides the basis for a follow-up study of the perceptions of students and others regarding admissions policies and procedures.

International student admission includes not only step-by-step application procedures, but academic and/or language requirements and assessments, fee payments, and the issuance of acceptance letters for Student Authorizations. It was not possible for the researcher to focus in depth on all of the details of all these aspects. For example, with regard to turnaround time for sending out letters of acceptance to the student, the responses to the question could not be verified. Also, although the number of people involved in the admissions procedure was asked for, the roles of those people were not. Finally, a lack of specifics given in questionnaires resulted in idiosyncratic reporting of data; for example, one participant wrote "India and Pakistan" in response to the question on countries from which students had not been able to register.

Using the interview technique for the main source of data collection is a limitation in that interviewees may not have had all the facts.

Although many interviewees mentioned the practices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the official policies and regulations of CIC were not researched in the literature. Though CIC processing of applications for Student Authorizations seems to be the main problem for admissions personnel, the regulations of Citizenship and Immigration Canada have nothing to do with educational institutional admissions per se. The author has attempted to correct any errors in information or misperceptions about CIC, however, based on experience and/or personal consultations with informed people.

This chapter has explained the method used, the participants and procedures as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology. Chapters Four and Five will present the results.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS:

### INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

The central research question was what facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, and to determine this the author asked admissions personnel:

- What policies and procedures exist?
- What divergence is there between policies and procedures and practice?
- What shortcuts are taken or could be taken?

This chapter presents a synthesis of the data that was collected.

#### Admissions Policies

##### *Background Information*

Over 80% of participants indicated on the questionnaire that their institutions had a written (i.e. official, approved) admission policy regarding international students applying for ESL programs (Table 5).

Table 5. Number of Institutions with Written Admissions Policies.

Type of institution	Written admission policies	No written admission policies	Total
Public	15 (94%)	1	16
Private	17 (77%)	5	22
Total	32 (84%)	6	38

The written material that participants provided to support this question included program brochures, calendars, and information sheets that were mainly for student use. Little in the way of actual policy documents were supplied by participants from either the public sector or the private sector. Seven public post-secondary institutions submitted calendars with information on all programs -- ESL and non-ESL -- for international and domestic students. Ten public institutions submitted brochures with their program information for international students, which included, but was not limited to, ESL programs. Twenty private institutions submitted brochures with their institutional and ESL program information. Participants from both public and private institutions submitted some information on loose sheets, such as application forms and program outlines.

Brochures from six public institutions revealed policies. Brochures from two institutions noted the deposit. A brochure from one institutions mentioned academic requirements. Brochures from two institutions mentioned a language proficiency level. Brochures from two institutions mentioned a refund policy.

Brochures from eleven private institutions contained policy information. Five explained the refund policy. Two said that students should be aware that there was a refund policy.

### *Interview Responses*

Participants were asked what their institution's policies were. All sixteen public sector participants and twenty-one of the twenty-four private sector participants mentioned having policies (Table 6).

Table 6. Types of Policies as Reported by Interviewees.

Policy areas	No. of public institutions	No. of private institutions
1. Minimum age level	16	16
2. Minimum English language proficiency	16	NR*
3. Minimum level of education	7	3
4. Amount of fees and fee payment schedule	NR	8
5. Being able to satisfy Canada Immigration requirements	NR	7
6. Minimum hours or duration of enrolment	2	3
7. Giving an English language placement test	NR	2
8. Nationality quota	NR	9
9. Providing and publishing a refund policy	NR	2
10. Monitoring students' provincial medical insurance	1	1
11. Not displacing Canadian students	1	NR
12. Students starting at beginning of term	1	NR
13. Admitting students from "countries where there is no political economic or social strife"	1	NR

\*NR not reported

Both the public and private institutions were primarily concerned with a minimum age requirement. From there, their concerns differed. Interviewees from public institutions mentioned policies which were primarily concerned with academic requirements. Some



institutions also had policies requiring a particular level of English language proficiency. On the other hand the private sector mentioned policies that were primarily concerned with financial issues such as fee payments, and with their students satisfying Immigration Canada regulations. A description of the policies follows.

#### *Minimum Age Level*

One hundred percent of interviewees mentioned they had a policy for minimum age. For example, of the interviewees from public institutions, nine said the minimum age was 18. Six said the minimum age was 17. One said the minimum age was 19 but younger students were allowed if they had completed high school. One said the age was 16 if the student was from South America "because they graduate at a younger age usually".

Of the interviewees from private institutions, ten said the minimum age was 18. Seven said it was 16. Four interviewees mentioned a difference for summer programming: one said they accepted 8 to 17-year-olds; one said they accepted 13-year-olds; and one said they accepted students aged 15 to 18.

#### *Minimum English Language Proficiency*

Six public institution interviewees (37%) mentioned having a policy on English language proficiency for students applying to their ESL programs. Three said their admission requirement for international students was "below 550 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)", the level that was required for their regular academic programs. One said their requirement was "6 years in English". One said the requirement was "basic" English. Only one interviewee from a private institution mentioned that there

was a language proficiency requirement, which was that students had to have a “basic” level of English.

#### *Minimum Level of Education*

Interviewees mentioned academic requirements but did not provide specific details. Seven interviewees from public institutions said they had some form of academic policy: five said their policy was that students must have either Grade 12, high school completion, or Form 5; one said students required 10 years in a 12-year system. Three private providers mentioned that they had academic requirements but gave no details.

#### *Amount of Fees and Fee Payment Schedules*

Fee payment was the policy area mentioned second most often by the private sector. Eight private sector interviewees mentioned having a fee payment policy. One interviewee mentioned that three months’ tuition was required; one said students had to pay for a minimum of four weeks. One said that the balance of fees had to be paid 15 days prior to classes starting. The remainder mentioned that deposits and balances were required. Fee payment policies were not mentioned by the public sector.

#### *Being Able to Satisfy Immigration Canada Requirements*

Seven private sector respondents mentioned having a policy that students satisfy the requirements of Immigration Canada. Most responses were simply that there was a policy. One respondent added that they did not check visas.

#### *Minimum Hours or Duration of Enrolment*

Two public interviewees mentioned that they had a policy that students must be enrolled full-time. In the private sector, three interviewees mentioned having a policy on

the minimum length of study: one said the minimum was two weeks; one said the minimum was four weeks; and one said they had a two-week minimum in summer.

#### *Giving an English Language Placement Test*

One public sector interviewee and four private sector interviewees mentioned having a policy of giving an English language assessment test to new students.

#### *Nationality Quotas*

Nine private institutions mentioned having a policy for a maximum quota of between 25% and 30% for any one nationality. The topic of nationality quotas was mentioned subsequently in the interview and is discussed in more detail later.

#### *Providing and Publishing a Refund Policy*

The private sector is required by the provincial regulatory body to publish on its application forms a refund policy. Two interviewees from private institutions mentioned that there was a refund policy. No public institutions mentioned refund policies.

#### *Monitoring Students' Medical Insurance*

International students who are studying in B.C. on a Student Authorization are required by the Ministry of Education to have medical insurance. Two interviewees, one from a public institution and one from a private institution, mentioned having a policy for monitoring medical insurance.

#### *Not Displacing Canadian Students*

In the B.C. public education system, it is a policy that Canadian students not be displaced by international students. One public sector interviewee mentioned having a policy of not displacing Canadian students.

### *Students Starting at the Beginning of the Term*

One public sector interviewee mentioned having a policy that students had to report for class on the first day of the term.

### *Admitting Students from Countries with No "Political, Economic or Social Strife"*

One public sector interview mentioned having a policy of not admitting students from "countries where there was political, economic or social strife."

### *Discussion*

To summarize, thirteen types of policies related to ESL admissions were indicated by interviewees and supported by data from the questionnaires and printed institutional material. While certain policies are determined by the institutions themselves, others have their origins in the regulations or practices of the provincial or federal governments.

Categories of institutional policies were:

1. Minimum age level
2. Minimum English language proficiency
3. Giving an English language assessment test
4. Minimum educational achievement
5. Amounts of and schedules for fee payments
6. Minimum hours or duration of enrolment
7. Maximum quotas of any one nationality
8. Students attending the first three classes of the term, and
9. Admitting students from countries which had no "political, economic or social strife"

Categories of provincial policies were:

10. Providing refunds and publishing the refund policy
11. Monitoring students' provincial medical insurance, and
12. Not displacing Canadian students.

The policy that affected admissions and originated with federal regulations or practices was:

13. Being able to satisfy the requirements of Immigration Canada.

On the surface, apart from a minimum age level, policies appear to be different for the public and private sector. However, though not reported, both types of institutions in fact give language assessment tests for placement purposes and have refund policies.

Interviewees from private institutions frequently mentioned the provincial requirement for private institutions to comply with and publish the designated refund policy. The policy, which is mandated by the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. (PPSEC) was viewed as a hindrance to admissions by those in the private sector. The author, being curious about the issue of refunds and how the public and private institutions dealt with refunds, reviewed the refund policies in the calendars, brochures, and loose sheets submitted by interviewees.

Private post-secondary institutions in B.C. must register with PPSEC and must use the refund policy regulated by them (Figure 1). Reflecting the PPSEC regulations on refund policies, brochures from thirteen private institutions had a refund policy clearly stated either on their application form, on a separate sheet, and/or in their brochure. The policies of four institutions were slightly different: one institution gave more generous refunds than PPSEC required, and the others gave refunds that appeared to be slightly less than those required by PPSEC.

Four participants from private institutions submitted material that stated that their refund policy was in accordance with the provincial government's regulations, but they did

not state what that policy was. Five participants submitted supporting documents in which the refund policy was not included. Two participants said their material was on the internet.

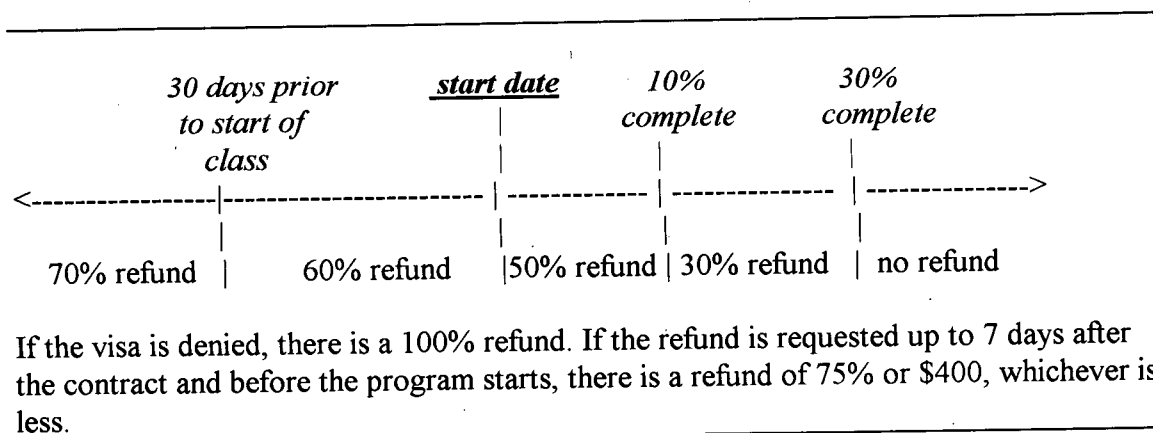


Figure 1. PPSEC refund policy for private post-secondary institutions.

Public post-secondary institutions set their own refund policies. They are not required to state their refund policy on their application form. In most cases, admissions information for international students is buried in institutional calendars and not easy to find, even if one is fluent in English and familiar with the Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Seven public institutions submitted their general institutional calendars. Calendars from three public institutions mentioned refund policies in vague or general terms. One institution's calendar mentioned that all courses were non-refundable unless specified as being eligible for a "partial refund", in which case the refund was "partial" before class started and "partial" during the first 10 days of the term. One calendar contained a general

statement that fees and charges were determined by the vice-president and approved by the Board of Governors. Under refunds, one calendar referred the student to the registration guide for refund dates, but did not mention amounts. Ten institutions submitted brochures, four of which mentioned a refund policy.

Four public institutions had clearly stated refund policies but the policies were not consistent. For example, at one institution the refund policy was 50% for withdrawal before the first day of classes; at two institutions the policy was 80% minus \$100 or an administrative fee for withdrawal before the first day of classes; and at one institution there was a 90% to 100% refund for withdrawal before the first day of classes. Two institutions gave a 50% refund for withdrawal during the first two weeks, whereas one institution gave a 75% refund for withdrawal during the first 7% of the term.

### **Admissions Procedures**

#### *Background Information*

Close to 80% of all participants indicated on the questionnaires that they had written procedures regarding international students applying for ESL programs (Table 7).

Table 7. Number of Institutions with Written Admissions Procedures

Type of institution	Written procedures	No written procedures	Total
Public	14 (87.5%)	2 (12.5%)	16
Private	16 (72.7%)	6 (27%)	22
Total	30 (78.9%)	8 (21%)	38

Part of an institution's admissions procedures may involve issuing a letter of acceptance to the student. Regardless of the origin of the application -- from outside Canada or from within Canada -- a student who is planning to study in Canada for more than three months is required to obtain a Student Authorization. This entails getting a letter of acceptance from the prospective institution and submitting it with the visa application to a Canadian visa office. This letter is not issued until the institution receives the appropriate admission documents and/or tuition fee payment. Immigration Canada also requires that students prove they have sufficient financial means for the period that they will be studying in Canada.

Students who apply to institutions from within Canada may be on Student Authorizations or tourist visas. They may be making their first application to study at a Canadian institution after they have entered Canada as a tourist, or they may be transferring from one institution to another. Students may need to change from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization if they are in Canada and decide they want to study more than three months. The amount of time and effort it takes an institution to process an application is affected by whether or not the institution is required to issue a letter of acceptance.

Students who are on a tourist visa or who have a valid Student Authorization and are already in Canada when they apply to an institution do not require a letter of acceptance, unless they need to obtain or extend their Student Authorization. Not requiring a letter of acceptance facilitates the admission process.



In order to gain a sense of the ratio of applications originating from students outside Canada to those originating from students within Canada, the questionnaire asked for the respective percentages of applications received. The question also asked if this number had increased, decreased or remained stable between January 1998 and December 1998. Because the number of students enrolled was provided by participants during the interviews, the author was able to do a very general calculation of how many students went through the process of applying from outside Canada and how many went through the process of applying from within Canada.

For both the public and the private institutions approximately 77% of applications originated from outside the country while approximately 23% of applications originated from within Canada. The number of students applying from outside Canada was approximately 4,000 versus approximately 1,100 applying from within (Tables 8 and 9). According to approximately 79% respondents, the percentage of applications had either increased or stayed the same over the past year.

Table 8. Percentage of Applications and Numbers of Students Originating from Outside Canada, and Trend.

Type of institution	% of applications from outside Canada	Number of students	Trend over past 12 months
Public	71.9%	1,620	75% said the number had increased or stayed the same
Private	82.5%	2,468	72.7% said the number had increased or stayed the same
Average = 77.2%		Total = 4,088	Average = 73.8%

Table 9. Percentage of Applications and Numbers of Students Originating from Within Canada, and Trend.

Type of institution	% of applications from within Canada	Number of students	Trend over past 12 months
Public	28.1%	630 students	87.5% said the number had increased or stayed the same
Private	17.5%	523 students	82.6% said the number had increased or stayed the same
Average = 22.8%		Total = 1,153	Average = 85%

The author observed that although both public and private institutions appear to have the same proportions of applications originating from outside Canada to those originating from within Canada, there are slightly more applications originating from outside Canada at private institutions than at public institutions, and conversely there are slightly more applications originating from students within Canada at public institutions. This observation is made from very general data and is therefore difficult to interpret. One would need to collect more precise statistical and attitudinal data to determine not only numbers of applications but students' reasons for choosing various institutions and whether recruitment efforts are also a factor.

### *Interview Responses*

Interviewees were asked about the application procedures for students applying from outside Canada and those for applying from within Canada. The question was broken into four parts: the step-by-step procedures; the number of people involved; the turn-around time; and what helped and what hindered the process.

### *Step-by-step Procedures*

The step-by-step admissions procedures for students applying to both public and private institutions were similar (Figure 2). A student enquires about the program, either directly to an institution or indirectly through another person, such as an agent, a friend or a relative. The information then given to the student might include an explanation of admission requirements such as academic transcripts, a TOEFL score, and fees. The student then applies to the institution, either directly or through an agent, via e-mail, fax or mail, and includes some or all of the following with the application form:

- academic transcripts
- TOEFL score
- application fee
- tuition fee deposit
- full payment of tuition fees
- proof of age
- medical insurance premium
- if the student is underage, a special statement from the student, parent or guardian

Next, the institution processes the application, which may include some or all of the following steps:

1. handling the money
2. entering information into the data base
3. preparing the letter of acceptance
4. signing the letter of acceptance
5. assigning a student number

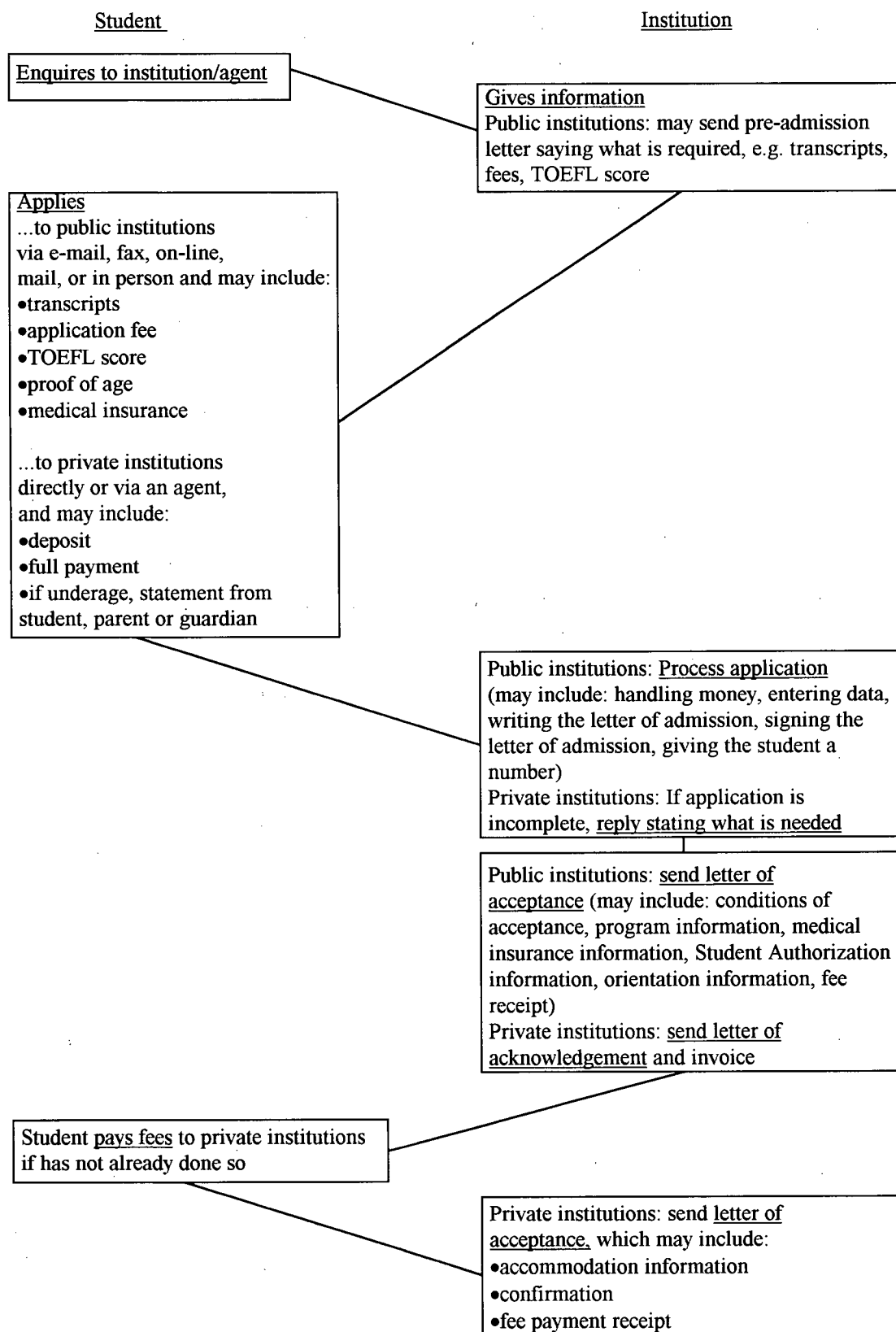


Figure 2. Application procedures for students applying from outside Canada.

If the application is incomplete, there may be a reply stating what is needed. The institution then sends out the letter of acceptance, which includes some or all of the following:

- conditions of the acceptance
- English language program information
- medical insurance information
- information for Student Authorization application
- campus orientation information
- fee receipt
- if fees not paid by this point, a letter of acknowledgement and invoice

Conditions of the acceptance were not explained, but they could be that the student would subsequently be eligible for a career program if they reached a certain level of English and if there was space available, or that the student had to study full-time or from a certain date to a certain date take an assessment test on a certain date. Payment of fees indicates a degree of commitment from the students upon which institutions can issue a letter of acceptance.

If the student has not already done so, he/she then sends in the fees or transfers the funds, and then the institution sends a letter of acceptance, which may include:

- accommodation information
- program confirmation
- receipt of fee payment

For interviewees from public institutions, the primary concern was for academic transcripts and a TOEFL score. Most public post-secondary institutions in B.C. offer academic, career, or vocational education, the admission to which requires transcripts. Many students progress from ESL into these programs as quickly as possible. Adult students may also complete high school through courses offered in the college sector in

B.C. These programs also require transcripts. The author observed that, transcript evaluation was not mentioned as a part of the application procedures, although it was an institutional function.

One interviewee from a public institution that did not offer lower-level ESL programs said that they used the TOEFL score as a screening device to ensure that students were not admitted with a level of English that was too low for the level of ESL courses they offered. Public sector interviewees did not mention deposits or fees, except to say that money was handled. Some public institutions will not accept faxed applications, and some will. Some public institutions will accept e-mail applications.

Interviewees from the private institutions did not mention the initial steps of enquiring and getting information. The procedures for making deposits and fee payments were mentioned. On the topic of agents, in some cases institutions allowed agents to delay fee payment until the student gets a visa. Some agents reserved blocks of seats and pay for the whole block even if they do not have actual students by the application deadline.

One major difference between the application procedures for international students applying to ESL programs from outside Canada and the procedures for students applying from within the country is that when the students are in Canada, they can apply to the institution and be admitted on the spot if their visa is valid and appropriate. A letter of acceptance would not be necessary unless the student required a Student Authorization. The student therefore would not need to make an advanced fee payment either. Thus the admissions procedure is much simpler.

One interviewee mentioned that applying from within Canada enabled language assessment at the institution, but did not give details. It may have been that the institution could then use its own assessment tests rather than require a TOEFL score.

*What helps admissions procedures.* Interviewees claimed that receiving complete application forms helps the process. Not only policies but information and instructions need to be clear.

One public institution mentioned that they did not require an application fee, which simplified the process for the student and for the institution.

*What hinders admissions procedures.* What hinders the process according to interviewees was receiving incomplete applications; requiring a TOEFL score and academic transcripts; and having to process \$US. The latter was said to involve more administration due to the computer system in use at the institution; as a result the admissions process was protracted slightly.

#### *Number of Personnel*

To process applications from students applying from outside Canada, more personnel appear to be involved at public institutions than at private institutions. For 39% of the private sector interviewees, compared to 12% of the public sector interviewees, only one person was involved processing applications from students applying from outside Canada. Two or more people were involved for 87% of the public sector compared to 43% of the private sector.

To process applications from students applying from within Canada, fifty percent of interviewees from public institutions and 61% of those from private institutions did not mention the number of personnel involved. However, over 43% of public and 30% of private sector participants responded that the same number of people were involved as with applications from students outside Canada. In other words, one, two or more people handled admissions depending on the institution. Eight percent of the private interviewees said fewer people were involved.

Interviewees were not asked specifically what the roles of personnel were or if they had other duties besides international student admissions. However, one public institution interviewee did say that a cashier handled the money, a clerk handled the data entry, a clerk prepared the letter of acceptance, the Registrar's office signed the letter, and a clerk assigned the student number. At another public institution the personnel were a cashier, a records person, and an assessment person.

Below are excerpts from interviews with participants at whose institutions three or more people were involved:

#1 Public institution providing ESL and other programs:

"The application arrives ... [the] application form, transcript or transcripts, and application fee. Those are the only three things needed for ESL. Once that arrives ... it goes to the cashier, who deals with the money part, and then gives it to a clerk, who makes a computer entry into our data base, creates a physical file as well, and passes it to our associate registrar, who does international admissions. She reviews it, sends it back to the same clerk for the acceptance letter, and when we mail the acceptance letter, we add an information sheet about the ESL program, and pre-testing, and ... a sheet about an orientation. Then the letter is mailed and that's basically it.

"... We do all of it in the Registrar's office, and so... the clerks, of which there are probably eight or ten, have divided the alphabet up, so depending on... the last name, that's the person who... But basically only three people: cashier, clerk, and Admissions officer."



#2 Public institution providing ESL and other programs:

"...quite a few people: A, the secretarial support person, who keeps the records of the documents; B, who assesses the documents; and C from continuing studies, who processes the money..., so a money person, an assessment person and a records person.

At the institutions where only one or two people were involved, the procedures at one institution involved the International Education office and the registrar. At another institution one person did everything including homestay. At the third, the person who had done the marketing overseas in a country also processed the applications from that country; in addition there was a clerk who handled the invoices. At the fourth institution, the two people involved were the registrar and an account.

Excerpts from interviews with participants at whose institutions one or two people were involved:

#4 Public institution providing ESL and other programs:

"We generate the letters of acceptance out of the International Education office; we process the applications out of our International Education office, but we do have the registrar sign the letters."

#5 Private institution providing ESL programs only:

"I do it all. I get the application, I do the letter of acceptance, I do the booking confirmation, I phone the homestay coordinator. I set up the homestay. I do it all."

#6 Private institution providing ESL programs only:

"Basically only two people. One would be the registrant and ... depending on the country of origin... the registrant will be our marketer of that country, so if it's a Japanese student, the Japanese marketer... Chinese, the Chinese marketer, etc. .... And then our accounts receivable clerk... follows up on invoices and checks invoices."

The author observed that for both public and private institutions the main duties are handling the money and writing the letter of acceptance. According to interviewees at public institutions, a third duty was to enter data. Again, transcript evaluation was not mentioned.

The author was curious about the context in which personnel were operating: whether the institution was public or private, whether the institution was strictly an ESL institution or offered other programs besides ESL, whether all the students at the institution were international students or included domestic students as well, the size of the international student population in ESL programs, and the percentage of applications received from overseas. To examine this, institutions with different levels of staffing were selected. A summary of the contextual details appears in Table 10 and a discussion follows.

Table 10. Number of Personnel Involved by Type of Institution and Programs Offered, Number of International Students, and Percentage Applying from Outside Canada.

Number of people involved in admissions/institution #	Type of institution/type of programs offered	Number of international students in ESL programs	% of international students applying to ESL from outside Canada
three or more:			
#1	Public/ESL and non-ESL	100 - 199	75%
#2	Public/ESL and non-ESL	50 - 99	50%
#3	Public/ESL and non-ESL	1 - 49	95%
two or fewer:			
#4	Public/ESL and non-ESL	1 - 49	80%
#5	Private/ESL only	1 - 49	95%
#6	Private/ESL only	over 200	90%
#7	Private/ESL only	50 - 99	80%

At institutions #1, #2, and #3 more than three people were involved in the admissions procedures. The numbers of international students in their ESL programs varied from less than 50 to between 100 and 200. All three were public institutions that provided ESL and non-ESL programs. In other words, both international and non-international students were applying to ESL and non-ESL programs at the three institutions.

At institutions #4, #5, #6, and #7 two or fewer people were involved. All but one of these institutions were private and provided only ESL programs. In other words, at three institutions the only type of students were international students and the only type of programs were ESL. Thus the process of admitting students was simplified compared to the process at institutions #1, #2, and #3.

Institution #3 had a relatively small number of international students in its ESL programs and yet three or more people were involved in admissions. One explanation could be that the three people were also involved with admission of domestic students. Institution #6 was a private ESL-only institution with over 200 students and yet two or fewer people were involved with admissions. The possible reason that private institutions could handle the procedures with fewer people than public institutions may be because their institutions are ESL-only and therefore they do not have to deal with other types of programs or domestic students. Collective agreements of one or more unions may also be a factor in the number of people involved in admissions at public institutions.

Another possible explanation as to why fewer people are involved in private institutions, according to comments from one interviewee, is that the majority of students

in private institutions are on tourist visas not Student Authorizations. Students who are on tourist visas do not need a letter of acceptance to be drafted by the institution, which means that the admissions process is simpler. In all but one of the seven institutions, 75% or more applications originated from outside Canada, which reflects the ratio of 75-25 reported in the questionnaires, although one cannot assume that all students who apply from outside Canada do so because they want to study for more than three months and require a letter of acceptance for the purpose of obtaining a Student Authorization.

*Using agents in Canada.* Besides possibly requiring a letter of acceptance, another difference between the procedures for students applying from within Canada versus students applying from outside Canada was the phenomenon of students using agents in Canada to assist them in applying to institutions, which was mentioned by 22% of interviewees from private institutions and 6% of those from public institutions. One interviewee mentioned that the phenomenon began in 1996 and has grown since then.

Excerpts from interviews with participants from three private institutions:

#1

"...by 1997, we had about three or four local agencies and they were targeting ...Korean students only. Then the Korean crisis took place in November of 1997. They shifted their attention toward the Japanese.

".... And the students don't seem to mind because they shop around. ... and they [the agents] say, 'I'll match the lowest price in town.' .....but what really worries me is we're dealing with education. We're not dealing with computers, or tape-recorders, or..."

(Interviewer: "Is there any other group that these agents work with besides Koreans and Japanese students?")

".... Latin Americans, Chinese, doesn't matter.....A typical example is these individual students, they come by, and they get our brochure, and then they go to a local agency, and then enrol."

#2

"[Students] may also apply through local agents here. [The agents] want to provide better services and they usually come and pick up letters for the students."

#3

"With local agents, [the student] comes to us for the information...but we'd rather the agent collects the money...[The] agents have to pay the full tuition and then we pay them the commission."

One interviewee raised the concern that education was being sold like computers in a store. Another mentioned that they found some agents to be unscrupulous with regard to the information they provided and the fees they charged. However, another mentioned that students do not mind going through local agents because it helps them compare what is available.

*What helps and what hinders the process.* Both the public and private sector interviewees mentioned that not having enough personnel hinders the process although the public sector had more personnel involved in the process and mentioned it more frequently than did interviewees from private institutions. Public sector interviewees also mentioned having one person to handle the whole process in one administrative area would help. Another mentioned that being small allowed one to give personal service. The private sector mentioned that it helps to have overseas agents.

### *Turnaround Time*

For applications originating from outside Canada, over 60% of interviewees claimed that turnaround time for institutions to issue letters of acceptance was 48 hours or less.

For applications originating from within Canada, interviewees from both the private and public institutions said that the process can be faster, simpler, and more

straightforward than applying from outside Canada unless a Student Authorization or extension of Student Authorization is required. In that case students would have to follow the procedures for applying from outside Canada, which would require fees to be paid before the institution could issue the letter of acceptance. It was mentioned that some students do not apply to the institution early enough to get a Student Authorization from Immigration Canada before classes start.

Whereas 44% of interviewees from public institutions mentioned that the turnaround time was faster with applications from within Canada than it was for applications from outside Canada, most private institution interviewees said that the turnaround time was the same, meaning that it was either within 24 hours or the same day according to eight interviewees and within 48 hours according to four. However, one interviewee said it could take one or two weeks, and one said it could take from 15 minutes to one year. The point made by interviewees from private institutions was that turnaround time could not be any shorter than it already was.

*What helps the process.* Interviewees from both public and private institutions repeated that what helps shorten turnaround time is the student having all the requirements for the application, in addition to using fast communication methods, such as faxing and applying on-line.

Interviewees from public institutions also mentioned admissions were facilitated by having sufficient personnel, being able to accept fee payments on-line by VISA or Mastercard, accepting faxed documents from students, being able to send faxed letters of

acceptance to students in countries where the Canadian visa office accepted faxed copies, and using couriers.

Interviewees from private institution also mentioned admissions were facilitated by receiving the payment and receiving it in a timely fashion.

*What hinders the process.* According to interviewees from public institutions, having to mail the original letter of acceptance to the student rather than sending it by fax or e-mail delayed the turnaround time. One public institution interviewee mentioned that e-mail enquiries were a hindrance if there was not enough time to handle them.

What slowed things down according to interviewees from private institutions was if there were any special circumstances, such as requests for homestay, non-scheduled start dates, slow payment of fees or no payment of fees.

A summary of what helps and what hinders admissions for students applying from outside Canada and is within the control of the institution appears in Table 11.

### *Discussion*

The step-by-step admissions procedures were straightforward. Applications were handled by fewer people in the private sector than in the public sector, and agent involvement was mentioned. However, the differences in numbers of personnel involved may have been influenced by job descriptions, union issues, and other factors such as whether the student population was solely international or included domestic (Canadian) students, and whether all the programs were ESL or whether there were other programs.

**Table 11. What Helps/Hinders Admissions for Students Applying from Outside Canada and is Within the Control of the Institution**

	What helps admissions	What hinders admissions
documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receiving complete application forms (public/private)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receiving incomplete applications (public)</li> <li>• own institution's admissions requirements (TOEFL, transcripts) (public)</li> </ul>
personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having enough manpower; or one person doing it all in one administrative area; being small enough to give personal service (public)</li> <li>• working with agencies (study abroad agents overseas) (private)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not having enough personnel (public/private)</li> </ul>
communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using fast communication methods: fax, on-line (public/private); using couriers (public)</li> <li>• accepting faxed documents from students (public)</li> <li>• being able to send faxed letters of acceptance to students in countries where the Canadian embassy accepts faxed copies (public)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• handling e-mail enquiries (public)</li> </ul>
fee payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not requiring an application fee (public)</li> <li>• accepting fee payments on-line by VISA or Mastercard (public)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having to process \$US (public)</li> </ul>

By the nature of their responses, interviewees from both the public and private institutions realized the need for fast turnaround time. However, both types of institutions mentioned factors that were beyond their control, either as a result of student practices, provincial regulations, or federal regulations and practices. These will be discussed further in Chapter Five.



For applications from within Canada, it can help if the deadline date for applications and fee payments is as close as possible to the start of classes, and secondly, if there is sufficient space and manpower to test students who apply to the institution at the last minute.

Other factors that help are if the student is already in the country and has a visa, and knows about the ESL programs and institutions in Vancouver. However, the student needs to meet all the necessary application requirements such as being the minimum age.

What hinders the process but is within the control of the student, in the cases where it is an admission requirement, is not bringing academic transcripts from the home country.

The factors that help and hinder admissions for students applying from within Canada and are within the control of institutions are summarized in Table 12. Chapter Five deals in more detail with factors that affect admissions but are beyond the control of institutions.

Table 12. What Helps/Hinders Admissions for Students Applying from Within Canada and Is Within the Control of the Institution

	What helps admission	What hinders admission
documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if application/fee payment deadlines are close to start of classes (public)</li> <li>• if there is the space /manpower to test the students as they turn up at the last minute (public)</li> <li>• the student is already here in the country (public)</li> <li>• the student knows the ESL industry in Vancouver (private)</li> <li>• if the student has all application documents (private)</li> <li>• if the student has his/her transcript if it is required (public)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not bringing their transcripts with them from home country (public)</li> <li>• having poor communication with local agents (private)</li> <li>• the requirement of getting a Student Authorization or extending the length of time a visa is valid or changing from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization (public/private)</li> </ul>

### **Differences in the Process for Students Applying from one Country Versus Another**

The author wanted to identify any differences in admissions procedures that might be related to the country from which a student applied. It is common knowledge amongst admissions personnel in the ESL field in B.C. that some international students who apply to an institution from outside Canada and are accepted cannot always get a visa to enter Canada.

#### *Background Information*

The questionnaire asked, in general, from which countries students who had applied to ESL programs and been admitted (accepted) were not able to come to Canada because their applications for Student Authorizations were denied.

Five interviewees (25% of the interviewees from public institutions and 4% of the interviewees from private institutions) said they did not know the answer to this question, and one of each of the public and private institution interviewees said that no students were unable to come due to visa rejection. However, participants who did answer the question mentioned a total of 21 countries. Public institution interviewees mentioned 79 students from 14 different countries or regions. Private institution interviewees mentioned 135 students from 14 countries or regions. The figures are summarized in Table 13 and discussed below.

Approximately 84 students who were applying from China were not able to register due to their visa application being rejected; 42 had applied to public institutions and 42 had applied to private institutions. With respect to students applying from other countries, responses from the public and private sectors differed. Responses were not

always specific; in some cases countries were lumped together, such as “India and Pakistan”, or “Eastern Europe”, and numbers of students were approximations.

Table 13. Approximate Numbers of Students Not Able to Register, by Country

Country	Number of students applying to public institutions in B.C.	Number of students applying to private institutions in B.C.
China	42	42
Colombia	6	54
Korea	1	13
Russia	NR*	9
Pakistan	5	NR
India	4	NR
“Pakistan and India”	8	NR
Ukraine	1	4
Ghana	4	NR
Venezuela	NR	4
Indonesia	2	NR
Mongolia	2	NR
Japan	NR	2
Turkey	NR	2
Kenya	1	NR
Uzbekistan	1	NR
Kosovo	NR	1
Slovakia	NR	1
Czech Republic	NR	1
“E. Europe”	NR	10-20
Libya	1	1
Saudi Arabia	1	NR
Bulgaria	NR	1
Total	79	135

\*NR not reported

According to interviewees from public institutions, after China, the top countries from which students were eligible to study but not able to obtain visas were:

1. and 2. “Pakistan and India” (17 students)
3. Colombia (6 students)

According to interviewees from private institutions, after China, the top three countries from which students were eligible to study but not able to obtain visas were:

1. Colombia (54 students)
2. Korea (13 students)
3. Russia (9 students)

The author notes that Koreans coming to Canada as tourists do not at the time of writing this need a tourist visa, and therefore they would only need a Student Authorization if they wanted to study more than the maximum three months allowable by Immigration Canada for students who are tourists.

There are a number of possible explanations as to why more students were mentioned by private sector interviewees than by public sector interviewees. The private institutions may have larger numbers of ESL international students applying than the public institutions. However, anecdotal accounts are that the majority of students at private institutions are on tourist visas. That the institution only provides ESL programs and no other programs may make it more difficult for students to obtain a Student Authorization to study at that institution. Perhaps because the student populations at private ESL-only institutions are all international students and number in the hundreds, private institutions may be better able to track this kind information than those public institutions whose populations include both domestic students (landed immigrants and Canadians) and international students and whose total student numbers are in the thousands. Perhaps because expenses at private institutions are covered in total by revenue from international students, they might track this information more precisely than the public institutions, who receive funding from sources that are federal -- in the case of

subsidized funding for ESL for new immigrants -- and provincial in addition to the revenues from international student unsubsidized tuition fees.

### *Interview Responses*

Thirty-seven percent of public sector interviewees said there was no difference for students applying from different countries. According to the perceptions of other interviewees, country of origin affected institutional practices and whether or not the student was permitted to enter Canada.

### *Institutional Practices*

Admissions practices that are affected because of a student's country of origin are summarized in Table 14. One interviewee from a public institution claimed that there was a greater degree of flexibility to accept the students from certain countries. They waived both the requirement for submitting originals of documents and the deposit deadline. Rather than being seen as positive, these practices were seen by the interviewee as being unfair to students applying from the other countries.

Table 14. Institutional Practices That May Directly or Indirectly Affect Admissions According to a Student's Country of Origin

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Practices within the institution:

- degree of flexibility to accept student
  - waiving the requirement for originals of documents
  - waiving the deadline for deposit payment
  - having different fee structures
  - having a nationality quota
  - ability to interpret grades in English differently  
(e.g. students from Asia vs. students from Europe)
-

One private institution had a different fee structure for students depending on their country of origin. The amount students paid varied according to the country the student was from and students were allowed to spread their fee payments over time rather than pay all at once up front. This fee structure was implemented to enable students who might otherwise not have been able to afford to study as a result of the downturn in the Asian economy.

Some respondents mentioned having a nationality quota, in which case only a certain percentage of students would be admitted from each country. Students applying from countries for which the quota of applications had been reached would be told to reapply at a later time. Nationality quotas will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

One respondent mentioned interpreting grades in English language skills differently. For instance, in their experience a student coming from a European country was more likely to have a higher level of English language skills than a student who had completed the same level of education in an Asian country.

According to interviewees country of origin affected on institutional practices more indirectly than directly, for example in the way that a student may handle his/her application or whether a student can obtain the visa to enter Canada.

### *Discussion*

According to 87% of respondents (14 from the 16 public institutions and 20 from the 24 private institutions), a number of students who applied from certain countries and were eligible for ESL did not get visas, especially if those students were from China. The

data for this question are idiosyncratic and not verifiable. However, country of origin appears to have a great effect on admissions in the broad sense than on actual admissions procedures that are within the control of the institution. The responses also show that when admissions personnel consider what helps or hinders admissions, they include these external factors in the admissions process.

### **Policies and Procedures versus Practice**

In the early part of the interview, interviewees mentioned the existence of written policies; however, few policy documents were submitted and most written material was in the form of promotional brochures and/or institutional calendars, largely for student use. In the interview, thirteen policy areas were mentioned, not all related specifically to ESL. Admissions procedures for international students applying from outside Canada and from within were straightforward, and interviewees provided some ideas as to what helps and what hinders the admissions process, including factors beyond their control. To probe more deeply into what facilitates and what hinders admissions at the institutional level, the author asked:

- Is there any divergence between the policies and procedures set out in your institution or department and what happens in practice?
- What shortcuts are taken?
- What shortcuts could be taken?

The data are reported as they relate to the thirteen policy areas and the procedural aspect of admissions.

### *Divergence*

Interviewees from fourteen public institutions and sixteen private institutions mentioned that there was divergence. According to both public and private institution interviewees, there was divergence in the policies regarding minimum age requirement and the pre-payment of fees. For the public sector there was additional divergence concerning academic requirements, the policy of starting on the first day, English language proficiency level, taking an assessment test, and practices related to Immigration Canada regulations. For the private institutions, there was divergence in the policy on nationality quotas.

#### *Minimum Age Requirement*

Both the public and private sector interviewees mentioned that they waived the minimum age requirement in certain cases, for example if the student was turning the age required before they actually started classes, or if, having met the student, it was felt he or she would fit well into the class in terms of maturity.

#### *Pre-payment of Fees*

Public sector interviewees mentioned various ways that they were flexible with the fee payment deadline, such as waiving the late payment charge; issuing the letter of acceptance before the fees were paid; and allowing students to study monthly or pay monthly instead of by the semester. One interviewee mentioned that they assessed the student's English language proficiency level before the student paid their fees.

Private sector interviewees mentioned delaying the fee payment deadline if a known agent was making the application; issuing a letter of acceptance without having received the fee payment; allowing the student to start before fee payment had been



received if applying via an agent; and allowing the student to pay their fees on a different fee schedule, for example over time rather than all at once up front.

#### *Starting at the Beginning of Term*

The public institution with the policy of de-registering students who did not attend the first three days of the class mentioned that they did not enforce the policy, explaining that it was there to discourage students from missing the first few days.

#### *Nationality Quota*

Some private sector institutions waived their policy on nationality quotas.

#### *Academic Requirements*

Students were allowed to submit faxed academic documents rather than the originals according to an interviewee from a public institution.

#### *English Language Proficiency Level*

One institution mentioned that they contacted TOEFL directly to get the student's score.

#### *Ability to Satisfy Immigration Canada Requirements*

One public institution mentioned that they allowed a student to register before their Student Authorization had been received. Presumably the student was applying from within Canada and either needed to change from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization or needed to extend an existing Student Authorization. Institutions can allow students to register without a valid visa, but if they allow a student to start classes before he/she has received a valid visa, then the student would be breaking an Immigration Canada regulation and would risk being expelled from Canada and banned from re-entry.

One private institution mentioned that they occasionally issued letters of acceptance for periods of study shorter than three months. The interviewee said that the letter of acceptance was requested by the agent, who felt it would help the student get a visa. It was not clear if the visa in question was a tourist visa or a Student Authorization. Students do not require a Student Authorization for periods of study of less than three months.

### *Other Areas of Divergence*

Divergence was also mentioned in other areas. Public sector interviewees mentioned being flexible with the application deadline. This was probably not mentioned by the private sector because few private institutions claimed to have deadlines. One private institution mentioned giving scholarships for 100% of fees to refugees on occasion. Another mentioned accepting a student after the usual application deadline if the student was from Japan. The third mentioned adapting a course for students who tested too low for the original course.

### *Possible Shortcuts*

When asked what shortcuts were taken or could be taken, 85% of interviewees -- 11 from the 16 public institutions and 23 from the 24 private institutions -- either did not respond, said that they could not think of any shortcuts, or said that they felt that they had taken all the shortcuts that they could. Some suggestions were made for changes in areas outside admissions but within the control of the institution. Suggestions were also made for changes at provincial and federal levels.

Age and academic requirements were two policy areas where interviewees felt there could be shortcuts. One private sector interviewee felt that it was possible to lower the minimum age to 15 if the student fit into the class. One public institution interviewee felt that the institution should not require academic transcripts for students going into ESL programs.

Regarding payment of fees, one public institution interviewee felt that on-line fee payment should be allowed. One private institution interviewee said that they issued a letter of acceptance saying "fees paid" when they were not paid, or not fully paid. The researcher did not probe for further information. This would appear to be treading on dangerous legal ground.

Other shortcuts would affect turnaround time, for example having on-line applications, which was mentioned by public institutions; eliminating the acknowledgment letter, mentioned by one public institution; not waiting for the student to receive Student Authorization, mentioned by one public institution; smoothing out or eliminating telephone registration for international students trying to register for ESL programs, mentioned by one public institution; and having the "international department" merge with Admissions/ or have one person do all the data entry, mentioned by one public institution.

According to interviewees, a number of institutional factors beyond the control of the admissions personnel affect admissions, such as English language proficiency tests; transcript evaluation; capacity/space/funding; doing group bookings; using agents; and being able to provide accommodation.

### *English Language Proficiency Tests*

Two interviewees from public institutions mentioned English language proficiency tests. One interviewee said that they would like to see their institution accept more of the various tests that were offered elsewhere so that students having taken those tests previously would not have to take additional placement tests. Another said admissions was facilitated by students being able to take their institution's assessment test before they arrived in Canada to avoid waiting to take a TOEFL test.

#1

"And so we are trying to push our ESL department [to recognize] tests like IELTS. ...Maybe that could be used for placement into to ESL as well.... [Students] start trying to do their test for the university level...that didn't work... so then they have to write another test. It can go on and on and on."

#2

"...One other thing in terms of facilitating admissions for students from overseas is ...our .... placement test which, if you're in Canada, can be used as an entrance requirement. We have an overseas version of it that we will give to institutions or agents to administer overseas, which will help students who don't want to wait for a TOEFL score."

### *Transcript Evaluation*

One interviewee mentioned that for students applying for ESL and non-ESL programs concurrently, transcript evaluation slowed down the admissions process.

### *Capacity/space/funding*

Three interviewees from public institutions were concerned with the effect that admissions had on space, funding and capacity to admit, saying that they did not physically have room for students, or that students had to be turned away because there was little chance of them being able to get a place later on in career programs.

#1

"...We have a space problem. Again, that comes down to funding. It's difficult for us to expand to accommodate domestic and international students because we are... already operating at 50 percent capacity above what it was originally intended to do."

#2

"...we sometimes counsel students out of our ESL program, those who think that by coming into our ESL program they may get into our career program.... because of space and long waitlists."

#3

"...we can't really advertise some of our popular courses because they're oversubscribed already."

### *Group Bookings*

One interviewee claimed that doing group bookings was a very effective way to facilitate the admissions process particularly for students in Latin American countries from which it was difficult to get student authorizations.

"If there's someone working in that country on a student's behalf or on a group of students' behalf, or if there's a group of students from a particular school in a country as a group, that vastly increases the chances of getting a student authorization. It facilitates the process."

### *Agents*

Using agents to facilitate admissions was mentioned often; however, one interviewee mentioned that they had found that some agents sometimes did not tell the truth to students or charged double the tuition fees to provide their services. They had to involve a lawyer and the assistance of PPSEC in order to find out what their institution's legal rights were.

### *Accommodation*

One interviewee mentioned that they felt not being able to provide accommodation affected their admissions, although they did have information on how to get a host family.

Thirty percent of interviewees, four from public institutions and eight from private institutions, suggested shortcuts in areas that were beyond the control of the institution. The public sector mentioned three areas: practices of the Post-Secondary Application Services of B.C. (PASBC), TOEFL, and Immigration Canada. The private sector mentioned three areas: practices of the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission (PPSEC), Immigration Canada, and Health Canada. These are discussed in the next chapter.

### *Discussion*

In admitting international students to ESL programs, divergence between policies and procedures and practice was minimal, both at public and private institutions. Though some factors within the control of the institution were mentioned, participants felt they were doing what they could as far as short cuts were concerned and could not see many ways to streamline procedures within the admissions area of their institution. However, as with responses to the interview question on what facilitates and what hinders admissions procedures, interviewees reported far more policies and procedures that were beyond their control, some of which were within the control of the institution, where they perceived shortcuts could be taken.

The next section presents data from questions that probed further into specific institution-related factors that affect admissions.

### **Specific Admissions-Related Factors**

Two interview questions focused on whether the admission process was affected by specific admissions-related factors, such as students applying for admission to ESL and other programs concurrently, ESL programming, the numbers and nationalities of international students applying, the links with other institutions, or the students' goals for the future. This section will deal with each of these aspects separately, with the background information presented first followed by the interview responses.

#### *Applying for ESL and Other Programs Concurrently*

##### *Background Information*

In some public post-secondary institutions, ESL programs are offered by separate units of the institution that have their own separate admissions, whereas in others ESL programs are offered by units whose admissions is more closely associated with admissions for the other programs offered at the institution. Respondents from fourteen (87.5%) of the public institutions indicated on the questionnaire that students could apply and qualify to be admitted to register in ESL and non-ESL programs concurrently at their institutions, whereas respondents from two public institutions indicated that students could not apply and qualify to be admitted to register in their institution's ESL and non-ESL programs concurrently.

Respondents from twenty-one (87.5%) of private institutions reported that their institutions offered only ESL programs. In the interviews it was revealed that an additional four private institutions were linked with public institutions to provide combined ESL and non-ESL programs.

*Interview Responses*

While the public sector perceived that applying for non-ESL programs and ESL programs concurrently had some effect on admissions procedures, the interviewees from private institutions that provided other programs besides ESL did not. Some interviewees felt that it was the student who was affected rather than the admissions procedures. The biggest effect of applying for ESL and non-ESL programs concurrently was with regard to issuing the letter of acceptance, which again is a requirement that has its origin in federal regulations.

*Public sector.* Five of those participants in public institutions that provide non-ESL programs said that students applying for ESL and non-ESL concurrently would need to supply more information or documentation, such as transcripts and TOEFL scores.

One interviewee said if the student was from China or India and wanted "ESL only", they would put the student's future program on the letter because if the letter designated the program to be "ESL only", the student would not get a visa. Two interviewees said there would be a slight delay in order to customize the letter of acceptance, or issue a "conditional" letter of acceptance. One said that the turnaround time would go from two days to two weeks as the application had to go to the respective non-ESL department. One interviewee said that the amount of fees would differ if a student was either in or applying for continuing studies in addition to ESL, in which case the student could pay the domestic student fee for the continuing studies course.

*Private Sector.* The seven private sector participants whose institutions directly or indirectly provided other programs besides ESL said that applying for ESL and non-ESL



programs concurrently had no effect on admissions procedures. Of the four participants who said they had links with other institutions, one said the students came to them for basic English before going on to other programs at the other institution, which carried out the admissions procedures. Another said both institutions issued a letter of acceptance and the student would submit both letters together when applying for their Student Authorization. The third interviewee said they issued a combined letter of acceptance on which both institutions' names were written.

### *Programming*

#### *Background Information*

Students who want to study for three months or more require a Student Authorization according to Immigration Canada regulations, and the application for a Student Authorization requires an official letter of acceptance from the institution. In the questionnaire, participants were asked what types of ESL programs they offered; whether they were part-time or full-time; what the start dates were; how long they were; and what the application deadlines were. This information was examined in two categories of programs: short-term programs (three months or less), and long-term programs (more than three months).

The responses revealed that a wide variety of ESL programs are offered by both the public and private sector starting at various times, running for various lengths of time, and with application deadlines ranging from three months in advance to the very last minute.

Regardless of whether students are in the country on a tourist visa or a Student Authorization, with this multitude of short-term ESL programs to choose from students can and do change schools.

Students who wish to study for more than three months, which is the length of time after which a Student Authorization is required, have a number of three- or four-month programs to choose from. However, some ESL students may choose a series of short programs for their three months or more of studying. In this case, if the student is on a tourist visa and the total length of time studying is going to exceed three months, he/she would need to begin the process of getting a Student Authorization, and must allow sufficient time for the institution to issue the "letter of acceptance" and tuition fee receipt that are both required by the Canadian visa office before it can process a Student Authorization application. This requires the student to be aware of application deadlines. At private institutions short programs are offered more frequently and in many cases there is no deadline for applications. However, at most public institutions application deadlines are much earlier than they are at private institutions.

More data that was reported for short-term and long-term ESL programs can be found in Appendix III and Appendix IV.

### *Interview Responses*

The author asked if factors such as type of program, length of program, time of year of the start date, application deadlines, and frequency that the program was offered affected the admissions procedure.

*Program type.* For 55% of interviewees, 11 from public institutions and 11 from private institutions, there were no effects on admissions procedures due to program type. Interviewees from both public and private institutions said that the main effect that programs had on admissions was on capacity to admit.

Two interviewees mentioned that students sometimes had misconceptions about programs. One said that because the school was affiliated with schools in other countries, students tended to think that the B.C. school would offer the same program as affiliates in another country, whereas they did not. The other interviewee said that students thought that their school offered certain courses whereas they actually only offered information on where and how to apply for those courses. This points to the need for information to be presented clearly to students.

One institution's co-op program, which included English plus a volunteer practicum, required an extra letter from applicants, which affected administrative procedures.

Another two interviewees said that certain specific test preparation courses sometimes caused a problem with admissions. One said that its course was popular for students from certain countries because it was the entrance test used by universities in those countries. However, that resulted in unilingual classes, which was not popular with students and so the institution had to drop the course. Another interviewee said that sometimes students apply for a specific test preparation course, but on arrival place too low for it, so they have to be placed elsewhere.

*Length of program.* For 80% of interviewees, 13 public sector and 19 private sector, length of program did not affect admissions procedures. Six interviewees said that program length only affected admissions procedures if the student required a letter of acceptance in order to get a visa. One private sector interviewee said students who did not require a Student Authorization did not pay their deposit (make a commitment) in advance either, and so the school could not anticipate enrolment from those students, which affected the institution's ability to plan ahead.

One interviewee mentioned that their programs were a minimum length of four weeks but they sometimes did not fit with the same four weeks that people could take the course, and therefore the institution lost potential students.

*Time of year of start-dates.* Over 80% of interviewees, 14 from public institutions and 19 from private institutions, said that time of year of start dates had no effect on admissions procedures. For the others, two said that sometimes there was a conflict between the academic schedules in other countries and their start dates. Other comments were that weather or climate in B.C. sometimes affected whether students would apply at certain times of the year; another mentioned that enrolment was higher in summer, so there was more work to process applications. Another mentioned that if students chose to come at certain times of year, they would have more program choices, for example, for certain test-preparation courses that were only offered at certain times of the year.

*Application deadlines.* For 85% of interviewees, 11 from public institutions and 23 from private institutions, application deadlines did not affect admissions. Public interviewees for whom there was an effect commented that if students were not assessed

in time, they had to defer their registration to the next term. Another noted there was a difference between the way international students' applications and local domestic students' applications were handled, in that the latter can receive a conditional letter of acceptance until the grades from high school are received, whereas the international students can not. One interviewee mentioned that for some of their long-term ESL programs the application deadline had long since passed for students who applied in Vancouver and therefore they were unable to start the programs although they were there before the start date. Another mentioned that greater flexibility with deadlines made processing applications more labour intensive. Another mentioned that they allowed students from Hong Kong to apply after the deadline because they knew the students were likely to get a visa much faster from that country than from other countries. Two interviewees from private institutions mentioned that the deadline was waived if space was available.

*Frequency of program offerings.* For 86% of interviewees, 13 from public institutions and 24 from private institutions, frequency of program offerings had no effect on admissions procedures. Some comments were that offering frequent programs was labour intensive. Many interviewees commented that offering programs frequently was because of student demand.

"It's ridiculous, labour intensive, but we do it for the students"

"We're getting more and more requests for one-month programs, for example [in] the summer, and we don't offer them, so we're losing potential students"

Comments from three interviewees on the topic of offering programs with weekly start dates were:

"It's good for the client"

"Having start dates every Monday really helps us, makes us more flexible"

"The clientele demands [frequent start dates]; if they want a 48-week course starting next Monday, we can do it"

According to one interviewee, the positive effect of having frequent program offerings was that if a student missed one application deadline, they did not have to wait long for the next one. On the negative side, an interviewee said that students tended to apply closer to the application deadline for the short-term programs, which was not helpful for program planning.

In summary, while 45% of participants felt that program type had an effect of admissions procedures, only 15% to 20% of participants felt that length of program, time of year of start date, application deadlines and frequency of program offerings affected admissions.

#### *Size or Linguistic Background of the Student Body*

For over 60% of interviewees, 7 from public institutions and 18 from private institutions, size of the student population or linguistic make-up of the student body affected capacity to admit, class size, and the policies on nationality quotas.

### *Capacity and Class Size*

The main concerns for the 31% of the public sector and 45% of the private sector were that numbers of students could affect the general physical space availability, and capacity in special programs. Having sufficient staffing was an additional concern mentioned by the public sector.

One interviewee said that the more students there are, the wider the variety of programs an institution can offer. Two interviewees mentioned that at peak times there may be a need to rent extra space. One interviewee mentioned that class size was a factor for students in choosing where to study. Another mentioned that class size was a key marketing factor, though the smaller the classes, the more expensive they were to run, and fees had to be increased to cover the costs.

“Competition within the industry forces class sizes smaller. When our school first opened, we had a maximum of 15. ...And now....if we have 12 in a class, we’re hearing from students that’s too many in a class. Well, okay, we’ll have class sizes of 10 and then you increase the tuition fees and then you complain about that instead. The competition is fierce in that way. “

### *Nationality Quota*

Nine interviewees from private institutions reported that they had a nationality quota. Although nationality quotas are only found in private institutions, interviewees from both public and private institutions mentioned that it is something that students ask about and want. However, capacity to admit students is affected if the quota has already been reached. Reaching quotas, which happens frequently in the summer according to interviewees, means that some students may not be able to start on the date they want or study at the institution that they want.

#1

"We try to keep below 25% of any nationality, ideally 20%, and we can usually do that. Our target is 30% Asian, 30% Mexican/Latin American, and 30% European."

#2

"We have a quota system: 30% per nationality, which we try to encourage [with] the agents who are our partners overseas, because there was a time before the collapse of the Korean market, where...80% of the students were Koreans... But other students were complaining. They wanted a mix in the class. And also the Koreans...they came to Canada to learn English not to be in a little Korean environment, so that's why we [decided on] that policy."

#3

"...that's one of the first questions they ask: 'How many Japanese students do you have?'. So as a selling point for the school, we have to control that. Generally we try to keep it around 30 % . Around certain times of the year it's going to be more... up to as high as 40% or 50% sometimes."

One interviewee mentioned the downside of having nationality quotas is that students may go elsewhere if they can not be admitted to an institution for the time they want to study and also, the institution may lose the services of the agent completely.

The private sector also mentioned that not only numbers of students but age or professional background of students affects program offerings. It was reported that in summer students tended to be younger or professional and therefore they required more specialized programming.

These comments show how admissions is closely related to other operational aspects of institutions such as programming and planning.

### *Links with Other Educational Institutions*

Sixty percent of interviewees, ten from public institutions and eight from private institutions, reported that links with other educational institutions affected admissions



procedures. The comments can be described in terms of how links helped admissions and how they hindered admissions.

### *How Links Help Admissions*

Two interviewees from public institutions said that if student had a letter of acceptance with the letterhead of one of the partners, or letters of acceptance from each of the partners, it could give the student a better chance of getting a visa. Testing and other paperwork were handled by the partner institution, according to two interviewees. One interviewee reported that the positive effect of being separate but linked to a larger institution was that the student was considered to be part of the whole institution (the ESL and non-ESL population together). If students from the partner institution were handled as a group, it seemed to facilitate getting a visa. Having links was said to facilitate movement of students in both directions: institutions could send students to each other, and students could go on their own from one institution to the other, in order to take the appropriate programs for their level of English.

Comments from interviewees from private institutions were that the students want to see links between the private institutions and post-secondary institutions. One interviewee said that they market some programs of other institutions, for example, other schools' summer programs for children, if they themselves do not offer the programs but their students want them. It was mentioned that links with other institutions through organizations such as the Private English Language Schools Association (PELSA) help in policy-making.

### *How Links Hinder Admissions*

Comments from six public institution interviewees were that inter-institutional linkages involved more paperwork, more time, and more people. One interviewee from a public institution had trouble getting interim grades and proper documentation from the partner institution. One comment from a private institution interviewee was that the students needed to have their documents in order and in hand if they had intentions of continuing their education at a B.C. post-secondary institution.

### *Students' Goals for the Future*

For 70% of interviewees, 7 from public institutions and 23 from private institutions, students' future goals did not affect admissions procedures unless, according to five public institution interviewees, the student did not have a high enough TOEFL score for the non-ESL program that they were applying for in addition to ESL, in which case the institution had to issue a letter of conditional acceptance.

The majority of interviewees had not conducted surveys with students that revealed any information regarding admissions. 87.5% of participants from public institutions (14 interviewees) and 78% of participants from private institutions (18 interviewees) indicated that they had not conducted such surveys. Slightly more private institutions had conducted surveys than public institutions. Of the two interviewees from public institutions who had, one mentioned that students seemed satisfied with the institution's prompt service. Of the five private sector interviewees whose institutions had conducted surveys, one said that students were satisfied. However, another said a survey

they had conducted revealed that students found obtaining and extending visas difficult; another said that a survey they conducted in May, 1998 revealed that students were dissatisfied with service in Canadian visa offices and the length of time it took to obtain a visa.

### *Discussion*

Program type was reported to have an effect on admissions by 55% of interviewees. However, despite the variety of ESL programs offered in both the public and private sector, frequency of program offerings, application deadlines, length of program, time of year of start dates did not affect admissions according to 80% or more of interviewees. Related factors such as students' goals were reported to have no effect by 70% of interviewees. Size and/or nature of the student body was reported to have an effect for 60% of interviewees, although the effect was not directly on admissions but on planning and capacity. Links with other institutions helped and hindered admissions.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed factors that facilitate and hinder admissions of international students to ESL programs and are within the control of institutions. Results indicated thirteen admissions policy areas at public and private institutions, not all of which are the same for both types of institutions; one common to both was a policy on minimum age. Some policies arise out of regulations at provincial or national levels and are beyond the control of institutions. Results indicated that institutions' admissions procedures were straightforward, and some conditions for

facilitating admissions were given in the areas of documents, personnel, communications, and fee payment.. More personnel were involved in admissions at public institutions than at private institutions and possible reasons for this were suggested. In examining application procedures for students, it was revealed that country of origin had a more indirect effect on admissions, such as whether the student was able to obtain a Student Authorization, than a direct effect on actual institutional admissions procedures.

Analysis of the data on divergence between policies and procedures and practice, indicated some institutions relaxed their policies regarding minimum age, pre-payment of fees, academic requirements, and nationality quotas. The majority of interviewees indicated that they did not see any procedures where shortcuts could be made other than those regarding age, academic requirements and method of fee payment.

Institutional factors that affect admissions but are outside the admissions area included accepting more language proficiency assessments; faster evaluation of transcripts; having sufficient capacity, space, and funding; doing group bookings; using agents; and providing accommodation for students.

Interviewees felt that changes in provincial and national level regulations and practices would have a far greater effect on facilitating institutional admissions procedures.

Chapter Five presents the factors beyond the control of the institution that affect admissions of international students to ESL programs.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**RESULTS:**  
**FACTORS BEYOND THE CONTROL OF THE INSTITUTION**

The central research question was what facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. Although the final interview question allowed participants to express their opinions about factors that were beyond their control, factors beyond the control of the institution were mentioned in responses to all the interview questions. These factors, which included issues at provincial and federal levels, were a source of great frustration to interviewees and amounted to over one-third of all the transcribed interview data. They are presented in this chapter.

According to interviewees, a number of factors beyond the control of the institution directly affect admissions, such as access to TOEFL scores; competition within the education industry; and industry standards and cohesiveness and communication within the industry.

**Access to TOEFL Scores**

It was suggested that TOEFL scores be available on-line so that the students could get them more easily and more quickly. This may or not be possible due to privacy regulations, but perhaps if institutions were able to register with TOEFL, TOEFL might allow students to sign a waiver so that the institution could have access to the scores.

### **Competition Within the Education Industry**

Interviewees from two public institutions and one private institution mentioned that tuition at other schools can be both positive and negative for admissions. For example, if a new school opens up and offers a discount, students may transfer over to it. Two public institution interviewees reported that students had left B.C. because tuition was lower in another province. One claimed that the Alberta government subsidized its ESL programs for international students, resulting in tuition fees that were almost half what they were in B.C. On the positive side, one interviewee mentioned that students from a nearby institution whose fees were higher would transfer to their institution.

Two interviewees from private institutions felt that it was unfair that an immigrant services organization, which they perceived to be a public government-subsidized organization, provided ESL to international students at significantly low rates.

“There is an institution in Vancouver that has been offering ESL classes for \$200.....a month... And that’s really low, and we cannot compete... It is an institution that is...supported by the government... It is a public institution that offers service for immigrants, but now they have opened it for international students.... So it is quite hard for us... It is very difficult when a student who originally planned to stay here for a year, one day comes to see me and says, ‘I want a refund because I found a deal at this school’”

The author observed that the immigrant services organizations mentioned were registered with the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. (PPSEC).

Students at these particular schools are immigrants with a variety of language backgrounds, something which in addition to the low fees may attract international students. Their fees are low because instruction is provided by volunteers and the

institution only needs to cover the cost of materials (personal communication, April 12, 1999). This illustrates how broad the issue of providing ESL is.

One person said that they did not see other institutions being the competition, but rather other countries, such as Australia, the United States, and Britain:

"We're not seeing the school down the road as a competitor; we're seeing them more as a partner, and we're seeing the Australian and American and British schools as the competitors...Now if we have a student who wants a special program that we don't offer, I'll call somebody up and say, 'I know you have this' for a student interested. I might not have done that two or three years ago."

### **Standards, Cohesiveness and Communication Within the Industry**

Seven interviewees, all from private institutions, mentioned that they would like to see higher standards, more cohesiveness and better communication within the industry itself. It was seen to be important to have an organization for ESL institutions similar to other national organizations such as the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) in Australia, and the British Council. It was also suggested that the government provide more public awareness especially in areas where there are highly concentrated numbers of international students such as Vancouver so that students are aware of which schools are good and which are not so good.

Another interviewee mentioned that they felt that the industry itself needed to make government more aware of issues such as those regarding the issuance of visas.

One interviewee mentioned that because there were two organizations serving the interests of private ESL institutions in Canada -- the Private English Language Schools Association (PELSA) and the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS) -- they had to go to both organizations for information, and they felt that they

would like to see an amalgamation. Again, it was mentioned that the competitors were not other member institutions but other countries.

“...there can only be benefits if they both [public and private institutions] start cooperating. There might be things that the private industry does better and there might be things that the large public institutions can do better. But it is Canadian education and we should be cooperating and not fighting with each other.”

One interviewee mentioned communication was getting better with organizations like CAPLS and the Canadian Education Centres network, but that more communication and more research such as that done for this thesis would facilitate the admissions process.

Finally one interviewee valued being able to express concerns on visa issues at workshops held by Immigration Canada in Vancouver.

### **Provincial Level Factors**

Participants claimed that policies at the provincial level affected admissions. Issues that affected both public and private institutions were B.C. Medical Insurance, situations in other provinces, and articulation of ESL programs. Those that affected the public sector alone were the practices of the Post-Secondary Applications Services of B.C. (PASBC). The private institutions were affected by the regulations of the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission (PPSEC) such as having to use PPSEC's refund policies, students having to sign contracts overseas, and institutions having to publish agents' commissions. One interviewee felt PPSEC did not understand the realities of the ESL industry. Other interviewees perceived a lack of provincial government support for the private sector.



*B.C. Medical Insurance*

Fifteen percent of interviewees (four from public institutions and two from private institutions) mentioned provincial medical insurance policies although it was unclear as to how they affected admissions per se. Students are required by the provincial Ministry of Education to have B.C. provincial medical insurance if they are studying for more than six months in B.C. One interviewee claimed that it was an advantage to have public medical insurance because it was easier to use than private insurance if one got ill. Another interviewee said that it was much less expensive than private insurance.

However, on the negative side, it was difficult to monitor whether students were maintaining their medical insurance coverage, and secondly, one interviewee claimed that agents were not telling students about the health insurance policy because they wanted to sell private health insurance to students.

Finally, two interviewees mentioned that students were having trouble renewing their provincial medical insurance because it expired when their Student Authorizations expired and B.C. Medical was not letting them renew it without getting their visa renewed first. It was said to cause a problem because students did not know if they were covered while they were getting their Student Authorizations renewed. One interviewee mentioned that a student whose private insurance had run out was retroactively charged by B.C. Medical for all the months that she had been on the private insurance.

Another mentioned getting conflicting information from the medical services branch as to whether a student with a Student Authorization could get medical insurance if

they were not studying for more than six months and whether their coverage could continue while they were renewing their Student Authorization.

"...we're asked by the Ministry to monitor students having medical insurance, when the B.C. [medical insurance services] is making it extremely difficult for students to keep the current medical insurance when they keep cutting them off when they are in the midst of renewing their visa - so it's very difficult both from our point to monitor it and from the students point to keep up the medical ....and ... once the student gets their visa they are asked to back-pay for the medical for the period they weren't allowed to have it because in order to continue it, they must have continuous coverage... and so they are forcing students to pay for medical that they wouldn't give them...

"and then... they have to go and get private insurance, but the private insurance isn't supposed to be given to students once they have qualified for BC Medical. So it's a real Catch 22. It's very frustrating.

"... there are ministry guidelines that allow us to have international students... but the one that is most frustrating is the one to ensure that students have medical coverage, and that's almost impossible.

"But we require them to show it every time it is renewed, so we are keeping a record of that... When we see it the first time, we record the expiry date, so just before it expires, we send them a letter saying it's time for renewal, but the problem is that when they get that it's about same time the student visa expires..."

One interviewee recommended that students with six-month Student Authorizations be allowed to get B.C. Medical Insurance as soon as they arrive and not have to go through the 3-month waiting period, something all newcomers to B.C. must do. It would seem that there needs to be clarity on the policy because it is something that interviewees felt indirectly hindered the admissions process.

#### *Situations in Other Provinces*

One private institution interviewee mentioned that sometimes federal policies are interpreted differently in different provinces. For example, with respect to regulations for Student Authorizations, the interviewee claimed that in Ontario students had to enrol full-

time in order to get a Student Authorization, whereas in B.C. they did not, which could benefit those students who preferred to study part-time at a private institution. It was claimed that this arises from a federal regulation that international students who apply to certain types of institutions must either study full-time or study for more than six months, and that in B.C. private institutions are excluded because they are regulated, but in Ontario they are not. Another interviewee mentioned that he had found it difficult to get a clear definition of what constituted full-time. Nevertheless, interviewees from private institutions had mixed feelings about whether having the provincial regulatory body gave private institutions in B.C. an advantage or not over those in other provinces that did not have such a body.

As mentioned earlier, one interviewee from a public institution claimed that other provinces' policies of subsidizing international students' fees had a negative effect on their admissions.

### *ESL Articulation*

Two interviewees mentioned that a recent articulation of all the ESL courses in B.C. (Ministry of Advanced Education, 1998) should help facilitate admissions of students who moved around from institution to institution in the province because they would no longer need to be assessed at the institution they were transferring to.

"...Now that they've done the provincial [ESL] articulation,... for students who want to move around, that has helped in a sense, because we don't have to assess them. We don't require a TOEFL if they have something that is [equivalent to] ours."

### *PASBC Practices*

In response to the question on what shortcuts could be taken. One interviewee suggested that the Post-Secondary Application Services of B.C. (PASBC) should handle ESL applications. However, another interviewee suggested that if PASBC received applications that were strictly for ESL programs, they should ensure that those applications reached the prospective institutions in a timely manner. These two seemingly contradictory statements illustrated that the people in public institutions need more information as to what services provincial organizations such as PASBC provide.

### *PPSEC Regulations*

A suggestion regarding possible shortcuts came from the private sector, regarding the regulations the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission (PPSEC). Nineteen participants (80%) from private institutions mentioned that PPSEC affected admissions either negatively (nine interviews) or positively (nine interviewees). One person saw PPSEC as having both positive and negative effects.

Positive comments were that having a regulatory body was good for B.C.'s reputation, especially during times of crisis such as the slump in the Asian economy, when prospective students wanted to know how long the school had been open and if it was stable.

#1

"...I think PPSEC is pretty good. They definitely help us more than they hurt us... They give B.C. schools a pretty good reputation..."

#2

"...I'm very pleased that PPSEC has the refund policy system set up for all schools in the province, because otherwise we might not be protected and the students might not be protected."

Another interviewee mentioned that PPSEC regulations were good for consumer protection. However, the same person mentioned that he felt that the main purpose of PPSEC was to be a watchdog.

#3

"...This is the only province which has this kind of governing body. They tell us what to do and what not to do and stuff like that. In terms of putting a security bond, probably it's a good thing...in terms of consumer protection. ....That's good but well, they don't really seem to care. They aren't interested in what we are interested in, because there were some bad guys in the past, so they're here to police us."

Another interviewee felt that PPSEC showed students that practices such as giving refunds were standard, and not just random. One interviewee mentioned that B.C. schools should use PPSEC as a selling feature: that students were perhaps more protected than they were in other provinces, which did not regulate private schools in the same way.

On the negative side, one interviewee mentioned that the bond that PPSEC required from each school tied up valuable funds: that there was a minimal return for the amount invested in the bond compared to what it would get if held in an investment account. It was felt that PPSEC should let the industry determine their own individual refund policies.

#4

"We've got to work within these confines. And... there is a bond process in place to protect those students that ties up valuable funds that we could otherwise be investing somewhere else, or simply utilizing ...to bring that business in.....But...from a marketing point of view, B.C. schools could use that as a selling feature of these schools: that they are government-regulated, and that the students are somewhat more protected than what they would find in other provinces or in other countries."

### *Provincial Support for the Private Sector*

Three interviewees from private institutions mentioned that they felt provincial support for the private sector would help admissions. One interviewee who claimed that 60 to 70% of all international students in B.C. were registered at private institutions also claimed that private institutions felt that there was a government bias toward public institutions, citing the exclusivity of organizations, such as the B.C. Centre for International Education (BCCIE), and provincial trade missions to Asia, which included proportionately more representatives from public institutions than from private institutions.

"...Most private institutions feel that there is a government bias toward public institutions, and most private institutions could show things that would show that.

"...It's only recently that private institutions have been invited to go on political trips abroad. On a recent Team B.C. trip to Asia, there was one person from the private institutions, someone from the community colleges, SFU, UVIC, UBC. So there were four people representing international education in B.C. and there's no question if you did a headcount of international students in B.C., I would estimate 60 - 75 % of them are in private institutions, so you would think that on a marketing trip, 75% of the representatives would be from that area?"

One interviewee claimed that except as a destination for skiers, B.C. was unknown overseas in Japan, and mentioned that there needed to be more promotion of B.C. as a tourist destination, especially considering the current value of the Canadian dollar.

### **Federal Level Factors**

Interviewees claimed that changes in several national regulations or practices would facilitate the admission process, which illustrates that when institutional personnel think of admission, they include not only the step-by-step procedures for students to apply to an institution but also procedures for getting permission to enter Canada.

## *Visa Issues*

### *Country of Origin of Applications*

Participants claimed that applying from one country versus another had a minimal effect on admissions insofar as the institution's application procedures were concerned, but it had a major effect on whether the student showed up at the institution to register. Getting a visa was mentioned by 67% of interviewees, 10 from public institutions and 17 from private institutions, as being the biggest factor relating to country of origin that affected admission.

Practices at the federal level that may affect admissions are found in Table 15.

Table 15. Practices of Canadian Visa Offices That May Affect Admissions of Students According to Their Country of Origin

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Practices of Canadian visa offices in some countries:

- not issuing visas quickly
  - not issuing a visa for "ESL only" purposes
  - requiring proof of full fee payment
  - requiring a medical exam
  - not being accessible to admissions personnel in institutions in Canada
- 

The finding that many students from China are admissible by institutions but unable to obtain the necessary visa to come to Canada reiterates the information reported in the questionnaires. Forty percent of interviewees (four from public institutions and twelve from private institutions) mentioned that in certain countries it was relatively easy for students to get visas. However, Japan, Colombia, and Korea were mentioned as being both difficult and easy to get visas from; this shows that being easy or difficult is relative,

and succeeding in obtaining a visa probably depends on the situation in each individual case (Table 16).

Table 16. Countries and Regions Where It Was Reported to Be Difficult/Easy to Get a Visa According to Interviewees, by Public and Private Institutions.

Type of Institution	Countries and regions from which it was difficult to get a visa*	Countries and regions from which it was easy to get a visa
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China (mentioned by 8 interviewees)</li> <li>• Pakistan (4 interviewees)</li> <li>• Ghana</li> <li>• Ethiopia</li> <li>• Japan</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• India</li> <li>• "Africa"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japan (mentioned by 2 interviewees)</li> <li>• Colombia</li> <li>• Korea</li> <li>• Hong Kong</li> <li>• Taiwan</li> </ul>
Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China (mentioned by 7 interviewees)</li> <li>• Russia (4 interviewees)</li> <li>• Colombia (3)</li> <li>• Korea (3)</li> <li>• Japan (2)</li> <li>• Pakistan (2)</li> <li>• "Middle East" (2)</li> <li>• Ukraine</li> <li>• "Eastern Europe"</li> <li>• North Africa</li> <li>• Brazil</li> <li>• Paraguay</li> <li>• Ecuador</li> <li>• Chile</li> <li>• Venezuela</li> <li>• "South America"</li> <li>• Spain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (6)</li> <li>• Japan (5)</li> <li>• Taiwan (2)</li> <li>• "Western Europe" (2)</li> <li>• Switzerland</li> <li>• Germany</li> <li>• Brazil</li> <li>• Venezuela</li> <li>• Argentina</li> <li>• Ecuador</li> <li>• Turkey</li> <li>• "Asia"</li> <li>• Korea</li> </ul>

\* each country was mentioned by one interviewee unless otherwise noted



One participant claimed that visas were not a problem for South Americans because most come to Canada for less than three months, and therefore do not need a Student Authorization. Several responses to this question were qualified, for example that getting a visa was easy but took a long time:

“[For] students coming from Europe... it’s a very easy process. Swiss, French students have to make their application through the Canadian embassy in Paris. It is a slow process, but it gets done.”

Interviewees claimed that in certain countries getting a visa had improved, become easier or become faster, which shows that the situation is not static with regard to getting visas. For example, getting a visa from Mexico was said to have been easier “in the past 18 months” than it had been prior to that; getting a visa from Turkey and Ecuador had improved; Korea and Taiwan accepted faxed letters of acceptance which helped speed up the process; and it was a little easier for students from Mexico and Japan to extend their visas because they could go to the United States to do so.

Twenty-five percent of public institutions claimed that for students in certain countries, such as China, Indonesia and Korea, having the program designation of “ESL-only” on the letter of acceptance affects the chances of obtaining a Student Authorization.

Other interviewees reported that practices of Canadian embassies in certain countries make it difficult or slow for students to get visas, such as having to show proof up-front of full payment of tuition fees, according to two public institutions, and the requirement of getting a medical exam, according to four private institutions. Interviewees wondered why a medical exam was necessary and why the length of time it took to get a visa to study Canada was longer than it was for getting a visa to study in Australia.

"I think the government's making efforts to ensure that procedure is very uniform in terms of documentation, although some countries...are in a position to provide medical examination within the country within a quick turnaround time, whereas other countries require this information to be sent abroad to one of the central offices that Immigration and Health Canada have set up."

One public sector respondent reported that it was difficult to contact Canadian consulates in some countries and as a result they did not know if it was the student or the embassy that was slowing down the admissions process:

"....even when I've made direct contact with the embassy in parts of Africa to just get a sense of what timelines look like -- even to get a response from them to me takes a long time. .... You don't know how long...it is taking for the student to get information. You'd like to assume that they're getting things in as quickly as they can. But that might not be the case."

#### *Visa-related Issues*

When asked about possible shortcuts in admissions procedures in addition to suggestions for change at the institutional level, interviewees from public institutions recommended that more Canadian embassies accept faxed copies of letters of acceptance rather than the originals. Interviewees from private institutions had several suggestions, such as:

- simplifying and speeding up the process of issuing Student Authorizations
- reviewing the practice that does not allow Chinese nationals to get a Student Authorization to study "ESL only"
- having generic -- not school-specific -- visas for ESL student. In other words, not stating on the authorization that a student had to attend a certain school
- not requiring a Student Authorization if studying for less than six months
- not requiring a medical exam if studying less than 6 months
- allowing students to change their visa to a Student Authorization within Canada

All 40 interviewees mentioned that visas were a factor that affected the admission of students. Getting a visa was the biggest obstacle according to 70% of interviewees (14 from public institutions and 14 from private institutions). Interviewees noted that success in getting a visa depended on the country of origin of students.

Issues relating to Immigration Canada policies included:

1. getting a visa;
2. Immigration Canada's criteria for and/or consistency in issuing visas and rejecting visa applications;
3. getting a Student Authorization if applying for an English as a Second Language program;
4. having generic (not school-specific) Student Authorizations for students studying ESL;
5. having a standardized letter of acceptance;
6. having to switch from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization for periods of study over three months; and
7. getting a medical exam as a requirement for a Student Authorization.

*Getting visas.* Admissions personnel find getting visas an obstacle to admissions because they do not get the students who they accept, and they claim that they are losing business to other countries, such as the US, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK.

#### #1 Private institution

"... For language schools, the admission policies can be simplified... it's up to the individual schools. I think ours is very very simple. We don't require academic transcripts or anything like that, good turnaround rate, so I'm happy with that... The biggest problem is with external applications and student visas."

## #2 Public institution

"Well, it's the visa issue. [Can you explain?] Well, it's a complicated issue. I mean if students aren't being given their Student Authorization, it might be for good reason. We just don't really know. We don't control that. Presumably they're not being admitted for some kind of reason. But from our point of view it becomes a sort of stumbling block, and yes, we don't have any control over that. [And how would it be a stumbling block?] ...Well, we don't actually see the student. They don't get to us. ..."

*Criteria for issuing/rejecting visas.* Thirty-two percent of interviewees, six from public institutions and seven from private institutions, mentioned that criteria for issuing or rejecting visas were either unclear or inconsistent. Participants realized that Immigration Canada has reasons for rejecting visas and that the situation is not static; it might be easy to get visas from an embassy in one country and not in another, but that that might change at any time. Participants mentioned that a great deal of money was spent on marketing and that if a student did not get a visa, it was not a good return on the investment.

## #1 Private institution

"... I don't know what reason...of course the immigration officers are following their procedures, but sometimes it's ...like for no rhyme or reason... You know, they state, 'insufficient proof that the student intends to return.'"

## #2 Public institution

"I would say that the policies and procedures around decisions that are made in granting visas sometimes we don't understand or are frustrating.... we've had several students not be granted visas, and there are reasons I'm sure, but it doesn't seem to be consistent. ....But it really is stuff out of our control that is frustrating, because when the students have the money and meet all the academic requirements, it is difficult to understand sometimes why they aren't admitted or granted visas."

*Getting a Student Authorization to study ESL only.* Seven interviewees, five from public institutions and two from private institutions, mentioned that getting a Student Authorization to study "ESL programs only" was an obstacle. This comment was also

mentioned earlier in the interview in responses regarding the differences in application procedures depending on the country of origin of the applicant.

#### #1 Public institution

"....in the last two terms, particularly I guess last fall, I started to hear...that if the letter of acceptance says 'Student X has been accepted for full-time ESL program' ... some [Canadian embassies] are refusing to let the student get a visa to Canada, because they're saying, 'You can study English here.' China, Indonesia, and I've even had this from Korea."

#### #2 Public institution

"...We have the countries like China, who... it's the Canadian embassy.... that won't give a students visa to a student who wants ESL. They feel that that isn't a good enough reason to be coming to Canada....just for ESL."

Responses show that every case is different and that there are anomalies; the more countries that students apply from, the more differences.

#### *Having non school-specific Student Authorizations for students studying ESL*

*only.* One interviewee felt that the stipulations on Student Authorizations should be standardized, because one student could be authorized to study at a specific school whereas a second student could be authorized to study ESL at any school, and a third could be authorized to go to a college or university for higher education. The interviewee claimed that if in the first situation the student wanted to change schools, it meant that the institution had to call Immigration Canada and cancel the student's visa and the student had to change his/her Student Authorization in order to transfer to the other institution. The respondent suggested that not stipulating specific schools on authorizations for students studying ESL would help the admissions process. The author notes that there is only one form of Student Authorization and that the CIC officer has full discretion concerning any stipulations or restrictions to be made.

### #1 Private institution

"... A student applies from abroad and comes for 6 months, and after 4 months decides they want to study in Metrotown, Surrey or Alberta, and we have to call immigration and cancel the visa and they have to transfer....One of the main complaints is that they are all stamped 'student visa', but they don't all mean the same thing... they're all interpreted a bit differently."

*Having a standardized letter of acceptance.* Each institution issues its own letter of acceptance on its own letterhead and includes the information that is required by Immigration Canada. Immigration Canada has considered implementing the use of a standardized letter of acceptance for all schools, and at the time that this thesis was written, a standardized letter has been posted on the internet by Immigration Canada for optional use by institutions. One interviewee thought that having a standardized letter of acceptance would be a good idea but another did not think that it was necessary, saying that embassies their institution had contacted had had no problems with letters of acceptance.

*Having to switch from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization to study more than three months.* Twenty-two percent of interviewees, one from a public institution and eight from private institutions, mentioned that needing a Student Authorization to study for periods over three months was an obstacle for admissions. One respondent suggested three reasons why changing this policy would benefit admissions: first it would increase the number of students, secondly it would reduce the workload in the embassies and consulates, and thirdly it would mean more revenue, not only for the institutions themselves but for government in the form of taxes. It was also mentioned that having to

change visa status from tourist to Student Authorization meant not only a disruption in the student's studies but added costs.

#### #1 Private institution

"....After three months... what if they want to study for an extra month or two?... So what if they want to study for 10 months and travel for two?... There's a lot of frustration... Then students have to get a medical, and some have to go to another country to get a medical..... If you're on a tourist visa, you should be able to study as long as you want..."

Responses illustrate how issues such as visa extensions and medical exams are intertwined.

*Getting a medical exam.* Getting a medical exam was mentioned by 17% of interviewees (one from a public institution and six from private institutions) as being an indirect obstacle for admissions. Interviewees mentioned that it was expensive, intimidating, and time-consuming for students in countries where it had to be sent to another country for analysis. It was noted that Health Canada had made efforts to speed up the medical exam by appointing special doctors in certain countries as a pilot project so that the medical papers would not have to be sent out of the country. However, it was said that after some time, these "pilot projects" were still being run as such, even though they were working well. Attention was drawn to the fact that two arms of the government are involved: Health Canada and Immigration Canada, and one person suggested that if one spoke to Immigration Canada, they would blame delays in visas on Health Canada and vice versa. Some interviewees felt that students who are changing from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization should be able to get their medical exam done in Canada. One participant mentioned that there needed to be more such appointed doctors in certain countries like Mexico, so that if the one appointed doctor was away, others could process

the papers and there would not have to be a delay. Many also wondered why someone coming to study in Canada for three to six months had to have a medical while a tourist coming for the same period of time did not.

#### #1 Private institution

"...generally the length of time in processing visas is due the medical test. ...no tourist coming in needs a medical test and [they] can just easily bring in a disease as somebody coming in as a student."

#### *Other Federal-level Issues*

In addition to visa issues, other federal-level regulations that affected admissions according to interviewees included:

1. permitting international students to work;
2. promoting Canada as a destination for tourism and education;
3. Canadian Education Centres;
4. communication with the local Immigration Canada office;
5. having statistics on international students in ESL programs; and
6. Canada's refugee policy.

*Permitting students to work.* Four private institution interviewees felt that being able to work while being a student would help facilitate the admission of international ESL students. Responses that students were short of money suggests that the cost of living in Canada needs to be more explicit in all information provided by agents, Canadian Education Centres, and admissions personnel. Students have also mentioned that they do not understand why international students can work in Australia but not in Canada.



Other issues beyond the control of institutions at the federal level were: the promotion of Canada as a tourist destination and a place for ESL education; Canadian Education Centres (CECs); and having statistics on international students.

*Promoting Canada as a destination for tourism and education.* For seven per cent of interviewees, one from a public institution and two from private institutions, promoting Canada for tourism was seen as a need. This illustrates how closely related international students are to economic benefits, and how marketing related to admissions, and how policies of the federal and provincial levels of government affect admissions. One participant mentioned that they get a lot of tourism questions about Canada when they market their programs overseas. This person felt that more promotion of Canada as tourist destination would help promote Canada as a destination for education also. It was also felt that the ESL industry itself needs to do a better job of promoting to Canadians the benefits of having international students, and that Canada is losing out to its competitors the United States, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. It was mentioned that a lot of money was spent on attracting tourists to Canada, but that tourists spend a relatively short time in Canada compared with students, who not only pay for tuition and cost of living while here, but also travel while here, and in some cases are joined by their families and/or friends during their stay. In other words, the monetary spin-off effects of having students come to Canada should not be ignored.

It was felt that Canada was not as aggressive as other countries in promoting itself overseas, and that education is not recognized as a viable market. The fact that education is a provincial jurisdiction rather than national one was given as the primary reason.

Secondly, it was felt that the private sector received less support from the provincial government than the public sector did. It was felt that ESL units that are operated as business units within public institutions are not unlike private businesses and yet are not recognized as being private by the provincial government. The same respondent commented that in the United States all ESL schools, public and private, cooperate in their promotional efforts.

#1 Private institution

"We hear too from the agents ...the lack of promotion by Canada of Canada as a destination ... Also, the industry could do better at educating Canada and Canadian education officials of the benefits - jobs created, etc. - that we are already bringing to Canada... We need to keep working and promoting Canada because we are competing with the US, the UK, Malta, Ireland, Australia, Scotland, New Zealand."

#2 Private institution

"We're competing with countries like the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK. ... I believe that in some countries like Australia there is the opportunity for students to be able to work, and that obviously is a big attraction...the students being able to support themselves financially."

#3 Private institution

"We'd like to see students being able to work, not as part of their training program, just part-time -- four hours a day just doing something. A lot of our students don't realize how much it's going to cost them when they get here. So they're not spending any money, and they would if they worked."

#4 Private institution

"Now what the Australians have done ...[is] allow students to work up to 20 hours a week... It's not so much [for the] money, [as it is for the] experience [of] living and working in Canada, because they can learn a lot more."

*Canadian Education Centres (CECs.)* Fifteen percent of participants (one from a public institution and five from private institutions) said that Canadian Education Centres -

- federally- supported centres set up in fifteen countries to promote education in Canada -
- either positively or negatively affected admissions. It was noted that for any services one used to be able to get from a Canadian embassy to promote one's education business, one now had to pay a fee to the CEC that was over and above the CEC membership fee.

#### #1 Private institution

"...For a few years we've been members of the CEC network through Asia Pacific Foundation. I'm not overjoyed with the results we've received in the past few years, but the communication is getting better, and the CEC offices are working side by side with the embassies and we are finding this year that they are starting to lobby [them] on our behalf...

".... The CEC network hasn't done a lot to help us with our bookings. But ... [they] would say, "look at all the information we're distributing. We play a role. It might not be the booking role, but it's information role.

"....I'm happy to see, finally they're listening to the concerns of different sectors of Canadian education."

#### #2 Private institution

"...We used to get more students enrolling when we could place our materials in the embassies than we get now that we place our materials in the CEC offices. .... Anywhere where there still is no CEC, we tend to get requests for brochures and students contacting us saying they got the materials from the embassy and the reply."

*Communication with the local immigration office.* Seven percent of interviewees, one from a public institution and two from private institutions, mentioned that they would like to see better communication and clearer definitions from the local Immigration Canada office. One example was that it was unclear how many hours constituted "full-time". More important was the concern about the impression that the student gets when he or she gets different information from the institution and from the immigration office.

He or she thinks that the institution either does not know what it is talking about or that it is trying to sell the student more hours to make "full-time".

#### #1 Private institution

"...we get different information depending on who we talk to... A student has to be a full-time student to get a visa, but the definition of full-time seems to be unclear. Some people in Immigration say if we say it's full-time, it's full-time, but sometimes they say it's 25 hours, or 24 hours, or 20 hours a week. We've got booklets and guidelines but... it gets really confusing and frustrating, not just for us, but for our students also. They think we don't know what we're talking about, or that we're trying to sell them more hours. And then if we have a 9 to 11 class with a coffee break, is that a 2-hour class or?"

One interviewee mentioned that they would like to be able to contact Immigration Canada's Vancouver-based student liaison office. Two interviewees -- one public and one private -- mentioned that they would like to be able to participate in Immigration Canada workshops so that they could voice their concerns and be given a reply. This also points to the role that organizations such as the B.C. Centre for International Education could play in facilitating communication.

#### #2 Public institution

"It just seems to me that Immigration [Canada] should do a lot more...maybe even do more seminars or get involved more with the schools..... I mean do we ever have those meetings? Never. Canadian Immigration should be coming over and talking to us and I don't think there's any feedback or criticism or evaluation from our point of view as to what works and what doesn't."

*Having statistics.* One interviewee from a private institution mentioned that statistics were lacking for international students in Canada on tourist visas, but claimed that between 50 and 80% of students at the 100 to 150 private schools in Vancouver were on tourist visas. The same person mentioned that both the UK and Australia recognize the size of the ESL industry and support it through organizations such as the British Council

and, in Australia, the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS). He claimed that ELICOS works with both public and private schools and keeps statistics on how much revenue students bring into Australia through the airlines, etc., and the Australian government supports a portion of the marketing expenses for schools when they go abroad to market. This interviewee claimed that the extent and potential of the ESL industry is not appreciated.

#### #1 Private institution

"...there's a lot of Swiss or a lot of Germans or a lot of Japanese around these days. Well they aren't skiing. A lot of them are studying. Anybody knows a neighbour or a cousin or a sister who has a homestay student.... It's a huge business. And none of these people are accounted for statistically and so people see them and know they're there but they're unaware of the magnitude and statistics. ..."

*Canada's refugee policy.* Four private institution interviewees, 10% of participants, claimed that Canada's refugee policy had an indirect effect on admissions.

#### #1 Private institution

"To get to Canada a student has to wait typically a month to three months for a student visa from most countries.....It's a number of things. One, it's the refugee policy. I'm not saying that it's good or bad; I'm just saying that it holds everything up."

One interviewee claimed that the numbers of visas issued in Colombia had dropped due to an increase in applications for refugee status from Colombians in Canada. This was also felt to be the reason for the low number of visas issued by the Canadian Embassy in China. This shows again that the situation can change from one year to the next in a country. One interviewee recognized that reality that some students may not be bonafide and may have the intention of applying for refugee status when they get here, but felt that the percent was probably very small. Another interviewee recognized that there were

students who claimed refugee status, but said that the number was so small that it did not warrant concern.

### **Other Factors Beyond the Control of Institutions**

The data revealed other factors that affected admissions and were beyond the control of the institution including:

1. practices of students;
2. political or economic situations in other countries;
3. weather;
4. cultural differences;
5. money;
6. airline rates and schedules;
7. timing conflicts with overseas academic schedules;
8. agent-caused delays;
9. time differences; and
10. statutory holidays in Canada.

#### *Practices of Students*

Practices of students that affected admissions procedures included not applying in advance, using certain methods of payment such as paying in US funds, not being organized in submitting their application requirements, and cancelling their plans.

#### *Political and Economic Situations in Other Countries*

Three interviewees from the private sector mentioned that situations in other countries affect admissions. One mentioned that whereas it had once been difficult to get a

Student Authorization from Taiwan, the situation had gotten better due to Immigration Canada changes, and then worse again after the Taiwanese government changed its policy on military requirements for its citizens.

#### Private institution

"...A number of years ago in Taiwan, it took ...two days to get a visa into Australia; it took 10 days to get one into the States; and three months to get one into Canada. So we yelled and complained about that for a while and that got improved.... And then Taiwan changed their military requirements, so these are things that are beyond our control..."

One interviewee mentioned that the policies of other countries can sometimes benefit institutions. For example, the interviewee claimed that Japanese women over the age of 25 have a difficult time getting into the US to study, so they apply to institutions in Canada, where they can get in.

One interviewee said that the economic situation in Brazil was having an effect on the number of students applying from that country, and said that it had been the same for students from Korea.

Another interviewee said that if the policies and practices of other countries make it easier for students to enter, then students go there and not to Canada, thus indirectly affecting admissions to Canadian institutions.

#### *Weather*

One interviewee mentioned some students had the perception that Canada was all snow and ice in winter, which affected whether or not they would apply for admission.

### *Cultural Differences*

Two interviewees claimed that cultural differences have effects on admissions, such as how far in advance students apply; how organized they are with their application requirements; how they pay their fees; and whether they cancel their plans:

#### *#1 Private institution*

"...you're dealing with different cultures, different issues. The money side is always different. Some people like to use bank transfers; some like to pay you straight out... Some people cancel... Some countries always cancel, and some countries have huge visa problems and some don't.

"....[With] every application you get from Mexico, there will be problems with money. It's never get the right amount of money, and you never get it at the right time, and there's always changes.... Japan will be perfect to the letter. Business practices are totally different."

#### *#2 Private institution*

"....Students from Latin America and Mexico tend to apply at the last minute, and students from Asia tend to plan ahead."

### *Money*

One interviewee mentioned that money issues affect admissions, for example exchange rates and whether a student can indicate they have the means to support themselves while they are in Canada.

### *Airline Rates and Schedules*

One interviewee mentioned that airline rates and schedules indirectly affect the admission of students. For example, at one institution their summer programs run Sunday to Sunday but because direct flights from one South American country arrive in Vancouver on a Tuesday and depart on a Friday, the institution loses students whose parents do not want their children flying on anything but a direct flight.



### *Other Factors*

Other factors mentioned as hindrances to the admissions process that were beyond the control of the institution included timing conflicts with overseas academic schedules; agent-caused delays; time differences; and statutory holidays in Canada.

### **Summary**

Chapter Five has presented those factors that according to interviewees facilitate and hinder the admission of international students to ESL programs at public and private institutions in British Columbia and are beyond the control of institutions including practices at provincial and federal levels, and other issues. Chapter Six will present a summary of the study, recommendations for institutions, and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This final chapter presents a summary of the thesis, recommendations for institutions and areas for further research.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze those policies and practices that facilitate and those that hinder international student admission to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, from the perspective of institutions themselves.

Numbers of international students in the non-university sector of education have grown in Canada since 1988 (Humphries, J. and Kane, M., 1999). Since 1986, a proliferation of English as a Second Language programs for international students have emerged in public and private post-secondary institutions in the province of British Columbia. The governments of B.C. and Canada both recognize the world-wide demand for English language training and that it is a growing business in Canada.

Admissions procedures are but one factor of many that influence a student's decision to enrol in an institution. This study has assumed that streamlined admission to ESL programs will make Canada a more attractive destination, and therefore increase the numbers of international students in Canada, a goal that exists for public and private institutions alike, for internationalization and economic purposes. It is in this context that admissions policies and procedures have been studied.

The central research question was: What facilitates and what hinders international student admission to ESL programs in public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia? Secondary questions were: How can admissions policies and procedures be more effective and more efficient? What are the implications for change at the institutional, provincial, and national levels?

Sixty-nine B.C. institutions -- nineteen public institutions and fifty private institutions -- met the selection criteria of providing year-round ESL to international students and having been in operation for at least three years. Personnel from sixteen of the public institutions and twenty-four of the private institutions participated in the study - - comprising 58% of the number possible. Primary data was collected by interviewing participants over a six-week period in March and April 1999. Background data was collected in the form of a questionnaire and institutional written material.

The author asked many questions in the examination of international student admission to ESL programs and discovered some factors that might facilitate the process. However, although to some the admission process may be regarded as a major factor in increasing the number of international student, and some refinements can be made to current institutional policies and procedures, this study identified areas which may have a greater bearing of increasing the number of international students. For the purpose of increasing the numbers of international students in Canada, there are a range of factors that need to be examined including, on the macro level, the relationship between provincial and national level policies and institutional procedures.

Participants mentioned thirteen policy areas, some originating within institutions and others within regulations at provincial or national levels. One policy mentioned by all participants was a policy on minimum age. The author observed that there was no apparent need for specific admission requirements for ESL programs unless the ESL program was preparation for university entrance, in which case academic transcripts and an entrance requirement for English language proficiency level would be necessary.

Approximately 75% of international students apply to ESL programs from outside Canada and approximately 25% apply to programs from within Canada, according to general data supplied on the questionnaires. Results indicated that institutions' admissions step-by-step procedures were straightforward. The major difference between the process for students applying from outside Canada and the process for students applying from within Canada is that the latter is much simpler. If students are in Canada on a tourist visa or valid Student Authorization, they do not need a letter of acceptance and can be admitted on the spot. At public institutions, personnel were mostly concerned with getting academic transcripts and TOEFL scores from students, whereas at private institutions, making deposits and fee payments were the main procedures mentioned. Fewer personnel involved in admissions at private institutions than at public institutions. Private institutions noted that agents were involved in the admission of students both from overseas and within Canada.

The next section presents institutional factors that help and hinder admissions.

### *Institutional Level Factors*

Institutional factors that can help or hinder international student admission to ESL programs relate mainly to documents, personnel, communication, and fee payment issues.

The following section summarizes those factors that facilitate admissions.

#### *Institutional Factors That Facilitate Admission*

For applicants from outside Canada, the following factors facilitate admission.

(Brackets indicate whether the response came from interviewees from public or private institutions.):

1. Receiving complete application forms (public/private)
2. Accepting faxed documents from students (public)
3. Having enough manpower, or one person doing all the admissions work in one administrative area; being small enough to give personal service (public)
4. Working with agents overseas (private)
5. Using fast communication methods: fax, on-line (public/private); using couriers (public)
6. Being able to send faxed letters of acceptance to students in countries where the Canadian embassy accepts faxed copies (public)
7. Not requiring an application fee (public)
8. Accepting fee payments on-line by VISA or Mastercard (public)

For applicants from within Canada, factors that facilitate admission are:

1. If the student has all the necessary application requirements in hand (private)

2. If the student has his/her academic transcript in hand if it is required (public)
3. Having application or fee payment deadlines that are as near as possible to the start date of classes (public)
4. Having adequate space and manpower to assess the English language level of students as they turn up at the last minute (public)
5. That the student is able to apply in person, with visa in hand (public)
6. The student knowing about the ESL industry in Vancouver (private)

In terms of divergence between policies and procedures and practice, according to both public and private institution interviewees, the minimum age requirement was waived and certain changes were made to fee payment schedules. For the public sector additional areas of divergence that facilitated admissions were:

- being flexible with the application deadline
- assessing language level before a student paid their fees
- allowing students to register before their Student Authorization was received

Few private institutions had application deadlines. For the private institutions areas in which there was divergence included:

- waiving the policy on nationality quotas
- giving scholarships to refugees to cover 100% of fees
- allowing different methods of fee payment
- allowing agents to delay fee payment until the student gets a visa
- accepting a student after the usual application deadline
- adapting a course for students who tested too low for another course

### *Institutional Factors That Hinder Admission*

For applicants from outside Canada, factors that hinder admission are:

1. Receiving incomplete applications (public)
2. The institution's own admissions requirements, i.e. TOEFL, transcripts (public)
3. Not having enough personnel (public/private)
4. Not having enough personnel to handle e-mail enquiries (public)
5. Not being set up to process \$US (public)

For applicants from within Canada, factors that hinder admission are:

1. Students not bringing their transcripts with them from their home country (public)
2. Having poor communication with local agents (private)

### *Factors Beyond the Control of Admissions Personnel*

According to admissions personnel, the following institutional factors that were beyond their control could facilitate admission.

1. Accepting more than just one type of external English language proficiency assessment
2. Faster evaluation of academic transcripts if they were required
3. Having the capacity/space/funding to be able to admit all the students that applied
4. Using agents to facilitate admissions procedures
5. Students applying in groups
6. Providing accommodation for students

Although participants noted several institutional level factors that help and hinder admissions, they felt they had done all that was within their control to streamline their admissions procedures and that changes in provincial and national level regulations and practices would have a greater effect on facilitating admissions procedures.

### *Factors Beyond the Control of the Institution*

Responses revealed that when institutional personnel think of admissions, they include not only the step-by-step procedures for students to apply to an institution but also issues at provincial and national levels. As with institutional factors, factors beyond the control of the institution that either help or hinder international student admission to ESL programs related mainly to documents, communication, and fee payment. These factors were a source of great frustration to all interviewees and amounted to over one-third of all the transcribed interview data.

### *Factors Beyond the Control of Institutions That Facilitate Admissions*

For applicants from outside Canada, factors beyond the control of institutions that help admission are:

1. The student obtaining their visa in a timely manner (private)
2. Having good communication between Canadian Immigration officials in B.C. and consulates overseas (private)
3. Having linkages with other institutions



- Having a letter of acceptance with the letterhead of one of the partners, or having letters of acceptance from each of the partners could give the student a better chance of getting a Student Authorization.
- Processing students in groups seemed to facilitate the students getting a visa.
- The handling of testing and other paperwork by one institution reduced the workload for the other institution.
- In the case where one of the institutions provided academic, technical or career programs in addition to ESL and the other did not, students could apply to one or the other of the institutions and the admissions personnel would place students in the institution most suitable for the student's level of ESL. Also, if students themselves wanted to transfer from one institution to the other, it was easier for them.
- An additional positive side effect of linkages between institutions was that the students felt a part of both institutions, one of which might have been established longer and more well-known.
- Links with other institutions through organizations such as the Private English Language Schools Association (PELSA) were said to help in policy-making.

*Factors Beyond the Control of Institutions That Hinder Admissions*

For applicants from outside Canada, factors beyond the control of institutions that hinder admission are:

1. Having to mail the original letter of acceptance to the student rather than send it by fax or e-mail (public)
2. Currency fluctuations (private)

3. The student not getting a visa (private)
4. The student having to show proof of fee payment for visa purposes (private)
5. The student having to fulfill certain requirements to obtain a visa to study in a co-op program (private)
6. The institutions having to fulfill certain requirements if a student is under 18 (private)
7. Students overseas having to sign contracts with the institution (private)
8. Having to publish agents' commissions overseas (private)
9. Conflicts between timing of admission to programs and timing of academic schedules overseas (public)
10. Delays in admissions caused by agents (private)
11. The availability of airline flights that coincide with the start date of programs (private)
12. The time difference between B.C. and other countries (private)
13. The different statutory holidays in B.C. and in other countries (private)
14. The climate in B.C. (private)

For applicants from within Canada, factors beyond the control of institutions that hinder admission are:

1. Students not bringing their transcripts with them from the home country (public)
2. Institutions having poor communication with local agents (private)
3. Students having to extend the length of time a visa is valid (public/private)

#### 4. Changing from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization (public/private)

Ways in which links with other institutions hinder admissions are:

1. In the cases where one institution handled the paperwork, there is more work and more people are needed at that institution.
2. It can sometimes be difficult to get interim grades and proper documentation from the partner institution.

#### *Other Factors*

According to admissions personnel, the following provincial, national and other factors that were beyond their control could facilitate admission.

#### *Provincial Level Factors*

1. Using the ESL Program Articulation Handbook (B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, 1998). For students who chose to change institutions, it was hoped that assessment tests would be reduced or eliminated and students would find transfer easier as a result of the recent articulation of ESL programs at public post-secondary institutions in B.C.
2. Greater clarification of the role of the Post-Secondary Applications Services of B.C. (PASBC). It appeared that participants were unclear as to the actual role PASBC has regarding international students applying to ESL programs.
3. Clarification of some regulations of the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C. (PPSEC), such as students having to sign contracts overseas, and institutions

having to publish agents' commissions, which were seen to hinder the admissions process.

*Federal Level Factors*

All 40 interviewees mentioned visa-related issues that affected the admission of students. Getting a visa was the biggest obstacle to admission according to 70% of interviewees (14 from public institutions and 14 from private institutions). Whether the student was able to obtain a visa to enter Canada and affected his or her admission to the institution.

Interviewees claimed that the following factors would facilitate the admission process:

1. More Canadian visa offices accepting faxed copies of letters of acceptance rather than the originals
2. Not requiring students to obtain a Student Authorization if studying ESL for between three and six months
3. A review of the practice that does not allow students from certain countries to get a Student Authorization for the purpose of studying only ESL
4. Not requiring a student to switch from a tourist visa to a Student Authorization if he/she decides to extend his/her period of study after an initial three months
5. Allowing international students to change their tourist visa to a Student Authorization without having to leave Canada to do so
6. Not requiring students to have a medical exam if they are studying for under 6 months

7. Greater consistency in the ways Student Authorizations were issued and applications for Student Authorizations were rejected;
8. Speeding up the processing of applications for Student Authorizations
9. Improving communication with Canadian Education Centres
10. Improving communication with Immigration-liaison officials based in Vancouver

Additional factors that had the potential to facilitate or hinder admissions and were beyond the control of the institution included:

1. Being able to access TOEFL scores on-line for students
2. Practices of students such as tendencies to apply either far in advance or at the last minute, or to withdraw
3. Cultural differences of students, such how well organized they were in their approach to applying;
4. Competition with other institutions in the industry, both within B.C. and in other provinces
5. Communication and cohesiveness within the industry
6. Political or economic situations in other countries
7. Money, such as exchange rates or whether a student had enough to support themselves once in the country.

The topic of admissions is clearly very broad and complex, involving not only regulations of Immigration Canada but those of Health Canada as well. A strength of this study is that 40 interviews were conducted. However, a limitation is though it provides a particular perspective of admissions in depth, it is only one perspective and does not

include that of the students themselves, and marketers, instructors, counsellors, and others within and outside institutions who are involved in international student admissions. Acknowledging this limitation, this study finds that facilitating international student admission to ESL programs may be more related to factors beyond the control of the institution than to institutional procedures. Understanding all the factors helps institutions in shaping lobbying strategies, which although they are not a direct part of admissions affect admissions in the broader sense of the word.

The next section of this chapter presents recommendations for institutions.

### **Recommendations for Institutions**

Based on the findings of this study, the author makes the following recommendations for institutions:

*1. Policies on and affecting admissions should be clearly-stated and based on full consultation at all levels within the institution.*

Policies should reflect and inform practice and be clearly-expressed, communicated with consistency, student-centered, welcoming, and if possible, translated into the languages of the students.

International ESL students do not speak English as a first language. International students and domestic students have different needs. Application procedures, fee payment schedules, and schedules for refunds are different for international students than they are for domestic students. International students have not grown up with Canadian education,

and must adhere to regulations related to such things as student visas and medical insurance.

Information, such as that concerning the conditions under which a student is required to have a Student Authorization, should be communicated consistently by all personnel involved in admissions including agents, marketers, and admissions personnel, etc.

Admission to ESL programs unless they are for academic purposes should not require academic transcripts or TOEFL scores. Providing and processing documents slows down the application process. If English language proficiency must be an admission requirement for ESL programs, institutions should recognize more than one type of ESL assessment. Those public institutions which only provide programs above a certain level of English should have links with other institutions to provide the lower levels of English instead of requiring that students submit an English language assessment score as a prerequisite for admission.

*2. Admissions information should be available to students in as many forms as possible.*

One of the main obstacles to a speedy admission is submitting incomplete applications. Institutions need to provide information in a manner that is easily identifiable and readily accessible so that it is possible for students, and those that assist in the admission of students, such as Canadian Education Centre officials, institutional representatives or agents, to have the correct admissions information before students leave their country.

*3. Institutions should be set up with the right technology or technological services.*

With the advent of e-mail and the internet, students have come to expect faster service. They should be able to submit applications and make fee payments on-line. Institutions should accept major credit cards, and be able to handle fee payments made in US funds.

A professional agency may be more cost-effective to handle e-mail enquiries than using staff who have other functions in addition to admitting international students or admitting students to ESL programs. Institutions need to be able to accept faxes and be "open for business" 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in order to serve the needs of students in countries that may not operate on the same time zones or work-week as Canada.

Using couriers helps speed up the admissions process. "Just in time" delivery -- providing what is needed as soon as it is needed -- is the way business is done today, and ESL for international students is a business.

*4. Institutions should consider waiving the requirement for originals of documents.*

There may be situations where documents could be faxed to institutions, for example if the student is part of a group booking or from an institution overseas with which the institution has an established link. Students applying to programs that are not preparing for university entrance are less likely to be motivated to present fraudulent documents than they might be with applications to academic programs.

*5. Institutions should be aware that students applying from within Canada are using agents and they should consider using agents to facilitate international student admission.*



The phenomenon of agents facilitating admissions for students who are already in Canada is relatively new. Institutions should see how working with them can complement the use of their own institutional personnel. Using agents to explain program options and facilitate admissions saves institutions time. However, there have been reports of some unscrupulous practices such as giving false information and charging unreasonably high fees for services.

*6. Institutions should review their fee payment schedules.*

Requiring an application fee may slow down the application process, especially if an application is submitted without one. Instead of requiring full fee payment up front, institutions could institute an instalment plan. By being easier to cover costs, more students may be encouraged to register. Institutions that can not waive deposits should consider having more flexible deposit deadlines.

*7. Institutions should consider more flexible deadlines for applications.*

Some application deadlines are one, two or even three months in advance of the start date of ESL programs. However, students in Canada as tourists may not be able to wait one or two months to enter an ESL program, and students on Student Authorizations may decide to change their mind and withdraw from a program before it begins.

Being more flexible with application deadlines may necessitate commitments from personnel outside the admissions area, such as the assessment personnel, the program planners and the instructors. To get more people in public institutions to support flexible deadlines may require institutions to clearly state the benefits, in financial terms, of

admitting students, for example more funds for student services, more funds for scholarships, more jobs for teachers, etc.

*8. There should be greater communication and coordination among ESL providers, and among institutions, organizations and government departments involved in the admission of international students.*

Lack of communication is one of the main issues emerging from the comments and complaints of participants. By having greater communication and cooperation among providers of ESL programs and among institutions and the various governmental and non-governmental committees and organizations, there might be a long-term benefit to everyone in terms of increasing the number of international students.

The Advisory Committee on International Student and Immigration (ACISI), which has been formed by the federal government, is a useful first step in improving the dialogue between Immigration Canada and ESL institutions. Institutions need closer and more regular liaison with their representatives on the Advisory Committee on International Students and Immigration.

Institutions providing ESL programs should have a separate voice on the ACISI via a separate committee focusing on the ESL admissions issues, such as those regarding issuing Student Authorizations for ESL programs. As Industry Canada was one of the key agencies involved in the 1998 Survey of Providers of training in English or French as a Second Language, it would seem that their representative on the ACISI would be a likely person to head up this separate committee.

Institutions should look at where and how they can forge links with other institutions in B.C. via groups such as the Private English Language Schools Association, the Canadian Association of Private English Language Schools, the British Columbia Centre for International Education and the Canadian Bureau for International Education to complement each other's programs. Bilateral links between institutions in organizations, as well as between organizations would improve admissions for international students. The ESL industry in Canada is significant enough that it should have the support of the federal government to promote Canada as a destination for ESL education. Such a network would facilitate the flow of communication and information between students, institutions, Canadian Education Centres, and Canadian embassies/ high commissions/ visa offices, regarding issues that affect admissions.

*9. Institutions should keep statistical data on international student admission to ESL programs for lobbying provincial and federal level organizations and governments.*

The ESL industry is not new, but it is not clear precisely how many international students are in B.C.'s post-secondary ESL programs, how many are on Student Authorizations versus tourist visas, or how long international students actually spend in ESL programs in B.C.

Knowing the statistics on students in short-term ESL programs versus long-term ESL programs would assist institutions in their admission of international students by helping them anticipate and plan. It would also help institutions lobby and inform discussions at provincial and national levels on policy making and practices related to international student admission to ESL programs.

*10. Institutions should get Tourism B.C. and Tourism Canada involved.*

Some people who come to B.C. to study ESL do not know what the province has to offer in the way of tourism, and some people from non-English speaking countries who come to B.C. as tourists do not know what ESL programs the industry has to offer. An ESL Bureau located everywhere in Canada that there is a Tourist Information Centre or an Accommodation Bureau could allow potential students direct internet access to public and private institutions that provide ESL.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The research for this thesis has provided a methodology for looking at international student admission to ESL programs in British Columbia. It adds to the information and research on public and private providers of ESL in B.C. and in Canada, on international students in a non-university level sector, and on international students in individual provinces. However, more research is needed if Canada is to increase its numbers of international students.

The findings in this study illustrate the interplay between the institutional, provincial, and national levels with regard to admission policy issues, and underscore the fact that admissions and recruitment are inseparable, as noted in the policy document *The Right Mix* (CBIE, 1981). The three stakeholders, the institutions, the provincial government, and the federal government, have different influences in facilitating and impeding areas of internationalization (Knight, 1997), such as those concerning

international student admission to ESL programs. The main limitation of this thesis is that it does not include the perspective of students, and others at institutional, provincial and federal levels involved in international student admission to ESL programs.

The author recommends more thesis level research to probe further into international student admission to ESL programs, to complement the information that is available in the form of statistics, survey data, and anecdotal accounts. Questions which arose in the study and could form the basis for future research are:

*1. How do students perceive and experience admissions?*

*What are international students' perceptions of admissions policies and practices at public and private institutions?*

*2. What English language assessments exist for international students whose language proficiency is low and how do they compare?*

*3. What is the role of agents in admissions to ESL programs and what are the effects of agents, in Canada and abroad?*

*4. How do the policies and regulations of the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of B.C., the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology compare and relate?*

*5. How have international student ESL programs evolved in B.C. in the past decade?*

*How can the different providers complement each other to serve the needs of the students? How would program quality be affected by simpler admissions standards and procedures?*

6. *What is "the ESL industry" -- small business or education? What is the role of ESL in the public post-secondary institution? What is the interplay between recruiting and admitting international students to ESL programs? What are the economic benefits of ESL programs to institutions and how do institutions use them?*

*How do Canada's federal level regulations and practices concerning international student admission to ESL programs compare and relate to those of its competitors Australia, the UK and the United States?*

### **Conclusion**

International student admission to ESL programs is but one aspect of the many issues that are part of the framework with which governments and institutions might provide an effective presence of Canadian education in the global marketplace.

This study has attempted to develop a deeper understanding of admissions policies and processes with the goal of trying to make it easier for Canada and public and private Canadian education institutions to achieve their objective of enrolling more international students. It is hoped that this study has provided some insight into this topic. If Canada is to be competitive globally, international students should have access to Canada's public and private post-secondary institutions with as few obstacles as possible.

It is hoped that the recommendations put forward in this thesis will help facilitate international student admission to ESL programs in public and private institutions and inform discussions being held at provincial and national levels regarding international students coming to Canada. Facilitated admission of international students to ESL

programs means opening a door for students to academic, career or vocational education in Canada in addition to a cultural experience, and increasing the cultural and economic benefits for B.C. and Canada.

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Appendix Ia  
**Informed Consent Letter**  
on UBC Letterhead

February 18th, 1999

Dear

I am writing this letter to ask if you, or your designate, would consent to be interviewed for a study that I am conducting for a Master of Arts in Higher Education at the University of British Columbia. It is a unique study in that it is focused solely on admission to one area of education for international students, English as a Second Language; it includes both the private and public providers of ESL; and it is restricted to one province, British Columbia. (Please note that the study procedures have been approved by and follow the guidelines of the UBC Research Ethics Board.) The title of my study is:

***Admissions Policies and Procedures for International Students Enroling in English as a Second Language Programs at Public and Private Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis.***

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the research is to determine what policies and procedures facilitate and hinder the application process for international students planning to study ESL at public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.

**Benefits:**

The expected direct outcome of this study is to provide information that will assist personnel in facilitating and accelerating application procedures for international students; indirectly, it will contribute information to ongoing discussions being held at institutional, provincial, and federal levels on policies and procedures governing education and immigration for international students.

**Participants:**

The participants will be admissions personnel most familiar with international student admissions policies and procedures for ESL programs at

- public post-secondary institutions in B.C. that offer year-round ESL programs to international students, and have been doing so for at least three years; and
- private post-secondary institutions in B.C. that are registered with the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of British Columbia; offer year-round ESL programs to international students; and have been in business for at least three years.

**Confidentiality:** Codes will be used to identify all individuals and institutions involved in the study. The key to these codes will be kept separate from the data. Individuals and institutions will not be named anywhere in the study and data will be reported in such a way that it can not be linked to individuals or institutions.

**Study Procedures:**

The primary form of data collection will be interviews. Participants will be asked to complete a two-page questionnaire to provide background information on

- admissions policies and procedures;
- types of ESL programs;
- the ratio of applications received from students within Canada to those received from students outside the country;
- general trends in enrolment over the past year; and
- institutional surveys;

It will take approximately half an hour to complete the questionnaire, which participants will be asked to return with their informed consent form. A list of interview questions will be sent out in advance of the interview along with a request for admissions material, such as policy documents or procedural manuals, to be brought to the interview if available. The interview will be conducted by Cecily May, at a time and location convenient to the interviewee, and no more than one hour in length. At the start of the interview, the questions will be reviewed to allow for any changes the interviewee thinks might benefit the study. The interview will be audio-taped unless there are any objections. Each participant will be sent 1. a copy of the summary notes made for their interview for verification of information before it is used for analysis, and 2. a copy of the analysis and synthesis of all the data collected and the results and recommendations of the study.

**Contact:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact my thesis advisor, UBC Educational Studies Professor Thomas J. Sork at 604-822-5702. If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research subject, you may contact the Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration, Richard Spratley, Ph.D., at 604-822-8598.

**Consent:**

If you agree to be interviewed, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided, along with the questionnaire.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. I will follow up this letter with a telephone call to you in two weeks.

Yours sincerely,

Cecily May  
cc Thomas J. Sork

## Appendix Ib

[UBC Letterhead]  
**Informed Consent Form**

***Admissions Policies and Procedures for International Students Enroling in English as a Second Language Programs at Public and Private Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis***

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the research is to determine what policies and procedures facilitate and hinder the application process for international students planning to study ESL at public and private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.

**Benefits:**

The expected direct outcome of this study is to provide information that will assist personnel in facilitating and accelerating application procedures for international students; indirectly, it will contribute information to ongoing discussions being held at institutional, provincial, and federal levels on policies and procedures governing education and immigration for international students.

**Participants:**

The participants will be those admissions personnel who are the most knowledgeable of international student admissions policies and procedures at

- public post-secondary institutions in B.C. that offer year-round ESL programs to international students, and have been doing so for at least three years; and
- private post-secondary institutions in B.C. that are registered with the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of British Columbia; offer year-round ESL programs to international students; and have been in business for at least three years.

**Confidentiality:**

Codes will be used to identify all individuals and institutions involved in the study. The key to these codes will be kept separate from the data. Individuals and institutions will not be named anywhere in the study and data will be reported in such a way that it can not be linked to individuals or institutions - public or private.

**Study Procedures:**

The primary form of data collection will be interviews. Participants will be asked to complete a two-page questionnaire to provide background information on

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- types of ESL programs;
- the ratio of applications received from students within Canada to those received from students outside the country;
- general trends in enrolment over the past year; and

- institutional surveys;

It will take approximately half an hour to complete the questionnaire, which participants will be asked to return with their informed consent form. A list of interview questions will be sent out in advance of the interview along with a request for admissions material, such as policy documents or procedural manuals, to be brought to the interview if available. The interview will be conducted by Cecily May, at a time and location convenient to the interviewee, and no more than one hour in length. At the start of the interview, the questions will be reviewed to allow for any changes the interviewee thinks might benefit the study. The interview will be audio-taped unless there are any objections. Each participant will be sent 1. a copy of the summary notes made for their interview for verification of information before it is used for analysis, and 2. a copy of the analysis and synthesis of all the data collected and the results and recommendations of the study.

**Principal Investigator:** Thomas J. Sork, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, (Tel) 604-822-5702. (C. May's faculty advisor.)

**Co-Investigator:** Cecily May, Graduate Student, Department of Educational Studies, UBC, (Tel) 604-XXX-XXXX, whose research is for a graduate thesis for the degree of Masters of Arts in Higher Education, Department of Educational Studies, UBC.

**Contact:**

If I have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, I may contact Thomas J. Sork at 604-822-5702. If I have any concerns about my rights or treatment as a research participant, I may contact the Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration, Richard Spratley, Ph.D., at 604-822-8598.

**Consent:**

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records, and I consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature

Date

Telephone

e-mail

Appendix Ic  
**Questionnaire**

Code: \_\_\_\_\_

***Admissions Policies and Procedures for International Students Enroling in English as  
a Second Language Programs at Public and Private Post-Secondary Educational  
Institutions\* in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis***

\*“institution” refers to institutes, centres, colleges and schools.

Please return the completed questionnaire with the informed consent form.

**1. Policies.**

Does your institution have *a written (ie. official, approved) admission policy* regarding international students applying for ESL programs? ☐yes ☐no

**2. Procedures.**

Does your institution have *written admissions procedures (ie. laid-out steps)* regarding international students applying for ESL programs? ☐yes ☐no

**3. In what types of ESL programs were international students registered at your institution between Jan. 1/98 and Dec. 31/ 98?****a. Short-term programs (3 months or less):**

type of program*	pt/ft**	start date	length of program	application deadline

**b. Long-term programs (more than three months):**

type of program*	pt/ft**	start date	length of program	application deadline

\*eg. ESL/Tourism, ESL/Business, etc.

\*\*Part-Time = less than 18 hrs/wk; Full-Time =18 hrs /wk or more



4. Over the past 12 months (Jan./98 to Dec/98), approximately what percentage of applications to ESL programs did your institution receive

approx. %. or fraction

a. ...from international students *outside* Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

b. ...from international students *already in* Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

*If it is easier, you may use a fraction, e.g. 1/3, 2/3.*

5.a. Over the past 12 months, the number of applications to ESL programs from students *outside* Canada has:

☐ increased

☐ decreased

☐ remained stable

5.b. Over the past 12 months, the number of applications to ESL programs from students *already in* Canada has:

☐ increased

☐ decreased

☐ remained stable

6. Over the past 12 months, approximately how many international students who applied to ESL programs from outside Canada and were admitted (accepted) were unable to register due to visa rejection?

*country of origin*

*number of students*

*type of program applied for*

7. Do international students apply and qualify to be admitted to register in ESL programs and non-ESL programs concurrently at your institution? If so, what non-ESL programs do they apply for?

8. a. Has your institution conducted a survey with your international students that included questions related to admissions? ☐ yes ☐ no

b. If yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_

c. What did it tell you if anything about policies or procedures at your institution or beyond the control of your institution?

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it with the informed consent form in the envelope provided.*

Appendix IIa  
**Follow-up Letter**

**BY FAX to  
Mr.  
College  
Vancouver, BC  
V6E 1B5**

**2 pages including this**

April 15th, 1999

Dear Mr. :

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study:

***Admissions Policies and Procedures for International Students Enroling in English as  
a Second Language Programs at Public and Private Post-Secondary Educational  
Institutions in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis***

Attached please find a copy of the interview questions. Please do not hesitate to add or change any of the interview questions.

If XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX has any written admissions material that would help inform this study, such as brochures, policy documents or procedural manuals, please have them on hand for the interview.

I look forward to meeting with you **at 2:00pm, Friday, April 16th**. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes in length.

Your valuable time is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Cecily May  
Tel. xxx-xxxx

encl.

## Appendix IIb

### Interview Questions

#### **Admissions Policies**

1. What are your institution's/department's policies regarding the admission of international students to ESL programs?

#### **Procedures for Applying from Outside Canada**

2. Briefly take me step-by step through the application process for an international student who is applying from outside Canada for admission to an ESL program at your institution.

[steps, personnel involved, turn-around time, what facilitates/hinders the process]

3. What, if any, are the differences in the process for students applying from *one country* versus *another*?

#### **Procedures for Applying from Within Canada**

4. Take me step-by-step through the application process for an international student who is applying for admission to an ESL program from within Canada.

[steps, personnel involved, turn-around time, what facilitates/hinders the process]

#### **Policies and Procedures versus Practice**

5. Is there any divergence between the policies and procedures set out in your institution or department and what happens in practice?

[If yes, in what way? What short cuts are taken? What short cuts could be taken?]

#### **Effects on Admissions Procedures**

6. What is the effect on the admissions procedure if a student is concurrently applying for ESL and other credit or non-credit programs, such as high school completion, university transfer, business, tourism, etc.?

7. In your view, are there any other factors affecting admission procedures?

[type of ESL program, length of ESL program, size or nature of student body, time of year of start-dates, frequency of program offerings, application deadlines, links between your institution and other educational institutions, the students' goals for the future, etc.]

If yes, what are these factors and what are the effects on the institution?

What are the effects on the student?

#### **Policies or Procedures Beyond Your Control**

8. In your view, are there any policies or procedures beyond your or your institution's control that affect admissions for international students to ESL programs?

If yes, what are these, and what effects do they have?

**Is there anything else you can tell me regarding what facilitates or hinders the admission of international ESL students? Do you have any suggestions as to how to improve the process?**

### Appendix III Short-Term ESL Programs

Sixty-nine percent of participants from whom questionnaires were received (10 public sector participants and 22 private sector participants) indicated that they offered short-term ESL programs. ESL programs in the public post-secondary institutions are described in the ESL Articulation Guide as being English for Academic Purposes; English for Access; and English for Work (Ministry of Advanced Education, 1998). Within these categories are many types and levels. Reflecting the descriptions in this guide, there was a myriad of responses from both public and private participants as to the types of ESL programs, whether programs were part-time or full-time, the start dates, and the length of programs.

Public interviewees reported almost all short-term programs as full-time -- defined for the purposes of this study as 18 hours a week or more. Private sector interviewees reported that most of their programs were offered both full-time and part-time -- defined as less than 18 hours a week.

Deadline dates for applications ranged from three months prior to classes start dates to no deadlines. The significance is that private institutions had fewer and later deadline dates than the public sector institutions although some public institutions did show a very late deadlines.

One way to report the data on the types of programs is when or how often they are offered, for example: in the summer; at non-specific times, such as starting every Monday or monthly; and on a semester or quarterly basis.

*Short-Term Programs Offered in the Summer*

Six public institutions (37%) offered summer programs that started in May, June, July or August and ran for one to two months (Table 1). In comparison, two private institutions mentioned summer programs specifically, ranging from 2 to 5 weeks in length (Table 2).

Table 1. Public Short-Term Programs Offered in the Summer

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
May	2 months	2 months prior, but flexible
May	2 months	NR*
May or July	7 weeks	2 to 3 months prior
May or July	6 and 7 weeks	1 month prior
June	6 weeks	2 weeks prior
July/August	1 month	none

\*NR = not reported

Table 2. Private Short-Term Programs Offered in Summer.

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
July 15	2 to 5 weeks	varies
July and August	2 to 6 weeks	NR

*Short-Term Programs Starting Every Monday or at Non-specified Times*

Five public institutions indicated start dates for other short-term programs in general terms. These programs ranged in length from two weeks to three months (Table 3).

Table 3. Public Short-Term Programs Offered every Monday and at Non-Specified Times

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
on Mondays	variable	anytime
vary	2/4/or 9 weeks	1 to 2 months prior or later if space available
various	3 weeks	6 weeks prior
year round	4 to 6 weeks	none
anytime	up to three months	flexible

In comparison, the private sector offered six short-term programs that started every Monday. These ranged in length from one week to two years (Table 4). One institution also offered a program that started every two weeks and went for an unspecified length of time. Private institutions had programs with general start dates. Lengths of programs were from one to two months or "variable".

Table 4. Private Short-Term Programs Offered Starting Every Monday or at Non-Specified Times.

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
every Monday	NR*	NR
every Monday	1 week to 52 weeks	2 wk. prior, or later if space available
every Monday except 4th	1 to 3 weeks	start date
weekly	2 to 50 weeks	flexible
every Monday	2 years	NR
any Monday	2 weeks minimum	NR
varies	varies	NR
any	1 month	NR
ongoing	variable	ongoing
	2 months	2 weeks prior or ASAP

\*NR = not reported

#### *Programs That Were Offered on a Monthly Basis*

Seven private institutions had programs that started monthly. These all ran for four weeks, except for one which could be taken for less than four weeks. One participant reported that their program was for a minimum of one month, and two mentioned that their programs could be taken for up to twelve weeks ( Table 5). No public institutions had monthly programs.

Table 5. Private Short-Term Programs Starting Monthly

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
first Monday of the month	1 to 12 weeks	2 weeks prior
every 4 weeks	4 weeks	NR
first of each month	4 weeks	30 days prior
every month	4 weeks	4 weeks prior
monthly	1 month minimum	NR
every 4 weeks	4 to 12 weeks	NR
every 4 weeks	12 weeks or less	4 weeks prior

*Programs That Were Offered on a Semester or Quarterly Basis*

Five public institutions offered short-term programs three to six times a year. They ranged in length from 3 weeks to 12 weeks (Table 6). There were five programs offered in the private sector with start dates other than in summer, weekly, or monthly.

Table 6. Public Short-Term Programs on a Semester or Quarterly Basis

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
January, May , September	3 - 12 weeks	none
January, August, November	12 weeks	4 weeks prior
	3 - 4 weeks	2 1/2 months prior
	10 weeks	1 month prior
6 times /year	7 weeks	1 month prior
6 times/year	2 months	1 month prior
January, April, September	12 weeks	1 month prior

#### Appendix IV Long-Term ESL Programs

All 16 public institutions offered ESL programs of more than three months for international students. Of the twenty-two private institutions from whom questionnaires were received, all offered long-term programs. The difference between long-term programs at public institutions and private institutions was that most of the private institutions considered that their "long-term" ESL programs to be continuations of their short term programs.

Deadlines ranged from four months prior to the start of classes to no deadline. In the public sector, with the exception of two programs, all were full-time. In the private sector, all programs were offered both full-time and part-time, with the exception of two institutions who offered full-time programs only.

The data reported on long-term programs can be described in terms of those programs offered one, two or three times a year, and those that accept new students on a continuous basis.

##### *Programs Offered One, Two, or Three Times a Year*

In the public sector, there were nine programs offered which had start dates in either January, April or May, and September. These ranged in length from 13 weeks to 8 months, and the application deadlines were from 3 months' prior to the start of classes to the first day of class. There were five programs which were offered two times a year, starting in either January and September or in April and September. These ranged in length from 4 months to a year, and the deadlines, though not reported by two institutions,



ranged from 3 months to 5 weeks prior to the start of class. There were two programs which started in January; they were four months long and had application deadlines that were 4 months prior to the start of class or "flexible" (Table 1). One public institution said it offered long-term programs that were multiples of its short-term programs, which is similar to what the private institutions offered.

Table 1. Public Long-Term Programs Offered One, Two or Three Times a Year

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
January, May, September	15 to 13 weeks	before the first day of class
January, April, September	14 weeks	6 - 7 weeks prior
January, May, September	14 weeks	3 months prior
January, May, September	3 months or 4 months	3 months prior
January, May, September	4 months	1 month prior
January, May, September	4 months	varies
January, May, September	4 months	3 months prior
January, April, September	20 weeks	NR*
January, May, September	8 months	NR
January, September	15 weeks	3 months prior
January, September	4 months	2 months prior, but flexible
January, September	4 months	NR
January and September	1 year	NR
April and September	16 weeks	5 to 6 weeks prior
January	4 months	flexible
January	13 months	4 months prior

\*NR = not reported

Five private institution participants indicated that their long-term programs were extensions of their short term ones. Three programs started any time or every Monday; four programs started every month; one was offered three times a year; two were offered quarterly; and two were offered once a year in January and September. These programs

ranged in length from three months to a year. Application deadlines, where noted, were one month to two weeks prior to the start of class (Table 2).

Table 2. Private Long-Term Programs

Start date	Length of program	Application deadline
any	NR*	1 month notice
every Monday	1 year	NR
first Monday of month or week	13 to 52 weeks	2 weeks prior
every 4 weeks	more than 12 weeks	4 weeks
monthly	3 months	NR
every month	up to 48 weeks	NR
monthly	up to 1 year	NR
3 times/year	15 weeks	varies
quarterly	24, 34 weeks	2 weeks prior
January	3 to 8 months	flexible
September	1 year, 2 years, 3 years	May 1st

\*NR = not reported