"I Am Not Complaining": Listening to International Students' Requests and Complaints as Expressions of Diverse Learning Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the learning needs of international students at a Canadian private university. Through a qualitative content analysis of 580 students' emails, we identified and examined 819 requests and complaints The analysis highlighted trends about due dates, assignment resubmissions, regrading, and plagiarism issues, leading to the identification of five primary needs: improved internet access and digital literacy support, acknowledgment of cultural differences, assignment design without assumptions, accessible learning management systems, and inclusive learning environments. These findings underline the necessity of empathetic listening to develop strategies that facilitate international students' transition to Canadian higher education, enhancing their learning experiences. The research suggests innovative approaches for incorporating international students' perspectives into course and program design, advocating for active engagement with these students to create educational environments that are inclusive and responsive to their unique needs.

Keywords: Canada, higher education, international students, students' needs, content analysis

The global landscape of higher education has witnessed a remarkable surge in the mobility of international students, a phenomenon underpinned by the complex interplay of geopolitical, economic, and educational dynamics (Goodman & Martel, 2022; Hill et al., 2022). Over the past few decades, the number of international students pursuing higher education abroad has significantly increased (Zhang et al., 2021), reflecting broader globalization and educational

exchange trends. Specifically, the population of international students worldwide expanded from two million to more than 5.3 million between 2000 and 2017, with forecasts predicting that eight million students will study outside their home countries by 2025 (Glass & Gesing, 2022; Migration Data Portal, 2020).

This growth highlights the global demand for quality education and underscores the diverse and evolving needs of international students navigating the educational landscapes of their host countries. Currently, Canada stands out as a prime destination for international students, attributable to its immigration policies and high-quality academic offers (Liyanage & Gurney, 2018). With international students comprising approximately 17% of Canada's postsecondary student population, the country's educational institutions serve as a microcosm of global cultural and intellectual exchange (Statista, 2022). Students' experiences, however, tend to be marked by a spectrum of challenges—from academic adaptation and cultural integration to financial and social hurdles—underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of their unique situations and requirements.

Despite the extensive research that has focused on international students' academic and social integration, a gap exists in our understanding of how their expressed complaints and requests can serve to articulate their distinct learning needs within the academic context. This study utilizes an existing analytical framework (Torres Arends, 2023) to examine 580 emails international students sent to their instructors at a private university in Ontario, Canada. Through this qualitative content analysis, which focuses on student requests and complaints, we aimed to uncover and interpret these communications as manifestations of the student's learning needs. Our study seeks to enrich understanding of international students' perspectives and identify actionable strategies that academic institutions can employ to create more inclusive and responsive educational settings.

The following literature review provides an overview of the increasing presence of international students in Canada and their challenges, including adapting to a new society a new and academic culture and balancing life responsibilities. The literature review provides a context for exploring how these students navigate the educational landscape and highlights the need for tailored support to address international students' diverse needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Students in Canada

Canada's immigration regulations have played a central role in making the country an attractive destination, which has led to a significant increase in international student enrollments in Canadian tertiary academic institutions (Scott et al., 2015). International students represent approximately 17% of Canada's 2.17 million postsecondary students (Statista, 2022). In 2020–2021, 373,599 international students enrolled in Canadian postsecondary educational institutions (Statista, 2022). A significant increase occurred between 2014 and 2018, when "the number of international students in Canada increased by 68%" (Global Affairs Canada, 2019), and during the same period, their number

increased in Ontario by 96% (Parkin, 2019). On January 22, 2024, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship announced a new policy to cap the annual issuance of international student visas in Canada. This decision addresses the high admission rates observed in recent years. While the intention to set a cap is confirmed, the policy review and implementation timeline details remain uncertain and are pending further clarification (Government of Canada, 2024, March 13th).

Research demonstrates that international students significantly benefit the Canadian economy (Global Affairs Canada, 2019; Legusov & Jafar, 2022; Legusov et al., 2023; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). A "main reason behind the growth is that international students pay much higher tuition fees than domestic students and are thus seen as a way of offsetting stagnant government funding" (Usher, 2019, p. 21). International students are significant contributors to Canada's post-secondary system and are also highly regarded as prospective immigrants (Global Affairs Canada, 2019; Merli et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2015; Sharma, 2020; Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013).

Analyzing who international students are is a complex task given the regional structure of higher education in Canada, which includes both private and public universities and colleges. Research on international students attending Canadian private colleges and universities is limited, resulting in a relatively large but under-researched segment of the population. Typical classifications focus on international students' country of origin; however, assumptions that students from the same country are similar can result in misconceptions about students' unique identities, capabilities, and their specific needs and requirements for success. International students in Canada come mainly from two countries, India and China, which together account for more than 50% of the international student population in Canada (Global Affairs Canada, 2019). However, sharing a nationality does not mean a homogeneous population (Jones, 2017) and fails to address who the international students are (Anderson, 2020). To anticipate international students' learning needs, we need to collect information regarding, for example, their prior academic experiences, such as whether they received instruction in English, whether they are first-generation university students, their level of financial support, their prior experience using learning technologies, and whether they are working to cover their university expenses.

Legusov and Jafar (2022) identified six trends that characterize the international student population in Canada: 1) over 68% of international students study in Ontario, 2) they study in colleges in Ontario's largest cities, 3) some Ontario colleges have campuses dedicated to international students, 4) India is the country with the most international students in Canada, followed by China, 5) agents working overseas recruit 78% of international students, and 6) the shift to online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have impacted students' preference for online courses (p. 59–64).

In recent years, research on international students in Canada has proliferated, focusing on who they are and what their academic experience looks and feels like (Kim & Kwark, 2019; Marom, 2022; Torres-Arends, 2023; Varughese et al.,

2021). The findings of these studies demonstrate that international students' needs can and should be addressed by implementing research-informed strategies in academic settings (Bista, 2019; Marom, 2022; Torres-Arends, 2023). Recent trends show international students need intentional support to stay in Canada post-graduation; otherwise, they will likely leave (Akbar, 2022). Change in how education is designed for international students is needed; the cultural diversity they bring must be regarded as an asset versus a problem to be solved (Ryan, 2011). We need to understand who international students in Canada are, where they are located across the country, how they learn best (Eaves, 2011), what academic and psychological support they require (Skromanis et al., 2018), how they are positioned in society (Buckner et al. 2022; Caruana, 2014; Tavares, 2021), and what motivates them to settle in Canada (Brunner, 2023; Macleod, 2021). It is essential to recognize that international students who enter private and public educational institutions in Canada constitute a heterogeneous population with diverse needs that must be rigorously identified and addressed.

Emerging Learning Needs and Multiple Adaptation Processes

International students undergo multidimensional adaptation processes as they compare their prior educational experiences with those encountered in Canadian postsecondary education systems. This intense adaptation and communication process involves affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions (Rienties & Jindal-Snape, 2016; Zhou et al., 2008), and the emerging learning requirements may be new to some international students. Some critical processes commonly highlighted include a) processing the new pedagogical expectations, b) using technology for academic purposes, c) understanding the dynamics of academic environments, and d) balancing academic demands with life roles and responsibilities.

New Pedagogical Expectations

Experiencing new pedagogies in a Canadian post-secondary context is a transformative journey that can require time for international students to adapt and become confident. Experiential, inquiry-based, problem-based educational approaches that encourage students to make personal connections and express their opinions may differ significantly from their previous educational experiences. Contemporary pedagogies in Canadian universities and colleges emphasize knowledge-sharing and co-creation through collaboration and group work; students are expected to actively participate, engage in dialogue, and critically analyze content rather than passively absorbing information.

The challenges of adapting to new academic cultures should be considered. Research suggests that international students need help transitioning to active learning approaches (Li, 2004). Communication gaps between instructors and students regarding expected study skills can exacerbate the challenges. It is imperative to provide clear assignment instructions and avoid assumptions about students' pre-existing academic skills to ensure their successful adaptation to new pedagogies (Gu et al., 2010; Haverila et al., 2020). Efforts at clear communication align with the concept of "culture synergy" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997), which

emphasizes the mutual efforts of host teachers and international students to understand each other's culture and co-facilitate smooth transitions to new learning landscapes (Zhou et al., 2008).

Using Technology for Academic Purposes

Canadian academic institutions expect students, including international students, to engage with their academic coursework using a variety of learning management systems (LMS). However, not all international students arrive with prior experience navigating these digital platforms. Additionally, while international students frequently rely on electronic devices, such as smartphones, for communication with their families back home, the transition to using technology for academic purposes may be a new experience for some. Adapting to the use of digital technology in education can present challenges for some international students since proficiency in fundamental computer operations is essential. International students might also encounter difficulties using specific software applications that are crucial for their academic pursuits (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007).

Understanding the Dynamics of New Academic Environments

International students often encounter challenges stemming from expectations that they take individual responsibility for managing their time and academic duties. This transition can lead to a sense of "non-academic accountabilities" among international students. Canadian postsecondary educational systems expect students to be highly independent in decision-making and time management, which may differ significantly from international students' previous educational experiences and may be interpreted as a laissez-faire approach, as in "You don't really need to do this." As noted by Leask (2003, as cited in McGregor et al., 2022), international students often play an old game with new and unclear rules, unaware of the subtle differences in academic expectations, which creates a need for support and guidance to navigate this unfamiliar terrain.

Adapting to the Canadian academic landscape requires international students to develop essential skills, such as prioritizing assignments, understanding assessment criteria, and adopting effective study and time management strategies. Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007) highlight that international students often need help with semester-long planning and daily work organization as they grapple with the shift from holistic grading systems to more nuanced evaluation methods. Mesidor and Sly (2016) point out that adjusting to diverse evaluation methods can be challenging. To succeed in the Canadian environment, international students must become self-reliant learners, exemplified by the transformation of Peter in Guo and Guo's (2017) study, which documents a new international student's journey in learning to do academic work both independently and collaboratively. Adapting to a new academic dynamic must be seen as an ongoing

process in which students experience a learning curve shaped by independence, new rules, and new academic expectations.

Balancing Academic Demands with Life Roles and Responsibilities

International students in Canada often experience overwhelming challenges as they navigate the unfamiliar territory of the Canadian educational system along with the multiple new responsibilities that come with living independently and away from their families. New responsibilities include finding housing, paying rent, doing household chores, buying groceries, and preparing healthy meals. Transitioning to independent living for the first time is a significant source of stress among international students (Rienties et al., 2012), whose challenges include new food choices, unfamiliar living conditions, financial constraints, and the demanding task of balancing work and study schedules. These challenges encompass both academic responsibilities and various difficulties related to "…language, culture, and personal barriers" (Wu et al., 2015, p.2). Some international students, particularly those from less financially privileged backgrounds, struggle to balance a full-time university degree program while simultaneously working full-time to finance their education (Paton, 2007).

Our review of the literature indicates that international students face multiple challenges as they undertake post-secondary study in Canada. International students require a comprehensive institutional and instructional support system that assists them in adapting to new academic learning demands and contexts while also managing their new lives in Canada. Understanding how to listen to international students' voices as expressions of need is crucial. This research aims to answer the following questions: What do international students' requests/complaints regarding academic requirements reveal about their adaptation processes? How can the arguments that international students offer to support their requests/complaints help us to better identify their learning needs?

This study utilizes Torres-Arends' (2023) analytical framework to uncover the underlying learning needs expressed through international students' complaints and requests. Torres-Arends (2023) investigated the nuances of international students' adaptation to Canadian academic regulations through a qualitative content analysis of 3,438 student email messages by focusing on the complex and often informal negotiations students engage in with professors regarding their academic requests and complaints. Torres Arends' (2023) study uncovered that international students frequently navigate academic environment without clearly understanding that their requests should align with the university's formal rules. Instead, they draw upon a constellation of arguments shaped by their cultural backgrounds and personal circumstances, revealing a conflict between their perceptions and the actual institutional regulations of the academic environment. The misalignment that Torres Arends' (2023) identified suggests that international students perceive the academic context as governed more by informal understandings than institutional rules. Such an informal perspective can complicate international students' cultural transition process and highlights the need for academic institutions to facilitate their transition more intentionally.Torres-Arends (2023) advocates for progressive learning strategies that communicate academic regulations more effectively. By doing so,

institutions can help international students navigate from a diverse array of arguments supporting their requests/complaints to a more streamlined understanding governed by institutional regulations. This approach not only meets the needs of international students more effectively but also fosters their social integration by reducing misunderstandings and assumptions.

Torres-Arends's (2023) findings suggest that understanding the arguments used by international students to support their complaints/request can shed light on their awareness and understanding of academic regulations. This understanding is crucial for international students to decode the new context and make progress in their adaptation process in the new academic environment. Torres Arends' (2023) analytical framework and study findings suggest a path forward for academic institutions to successfully understand and support international students' unique needs. The current research builds and extends on Torres-Arends' (2023) analytical framework to evaluate international students' requests and complaints as a proxy for accessing and understanding international students' learning needs.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data in this research consists of historical emails sent by students to instructors during the summer and fall 2020 terms. Senders were undergraduate international students registered in courses in a business program at a private university in Ontario. All email data was anonymized before being shared with the researchers to protect instructors' and students' anonymity and to comply with the requirements of the Research Ethics Board. The requests/complaints that were included in this analysis were those related to a) assignment resubmission, b) due date exception, c) due date extension, d) grade review, and e) plagiarism assessment.

The research method and analytical framework was developed as a result of the constraints put on previous research (Torres-Arends, 2023) by the pandemic, leading to the implementation of a similar design based on analyzing students' historical communications (i.e., emails) instead of conducting face-to-face interviews. Students' email requests/complaints were analyzed based on the premise that "… ordinary talk means far more than it says and carries information about cultural beliefs and knowledge systems that transcend the grammatical and referential aspects of languages" (Longacrek, 1983 as cited in Shweder, 1991, p. 196).

Sample Description

The email data were collected from students who were registered in 14 different courses: six courses in general studies and eight beginner or advanced business courses.

Data Collection Process

Seven professors voluntarily participated in the research by providing historical emails from students registered in two of their courses, one during the summer term and one during the fall term. Each professor was responsible for downloading emails from their Outlook program sent by students who took the selected courses during the terms under study. The professors anonymized the students' emails by removing all identifying information before submitting this data to the research team for analysis. The professors who agreed to contribute data for the research study and the selected courses were also anonymized; the data sets were renamed and labelled "Advanced Business/General Studies course" or "Beginner Business/General Studies course." The consent form that professors were asked to sign requested that they delete their responses to students. This study specifically focuses on analyzing the nature of student requests/complaints and the arguments they used rather than how professors managed or responded to these requests/complaints.

Categorization Strategy

To categorize the data, we reviewed the 580 emails and identified 819 unique requests/complaints within the entire set. There were 205 emails that did not contain either a request or a complaint and 128 new request/complaint emails (emails that were not analyzed in prior research by Torres-Arends (2023). Each type of request/complaint was assigned a unique category code, which resulted in the following quantitative categorization of the data by frequency, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Category and Frequency of Requests/Complaints Submitted

Category of Request/Complaint	Frequency of Requests/Complaints
Assignment re-submission	163 (20%)
Due date exception	126 (15.4%)
Due date extension	76 (9.2%)
Grade review	321 (39.1%)
Plagiarism assessment	133 (16.2%)
Total requests/complaints	819 (100%)

Codification Strategy

Each email was considered a register in which five types of requests/complaints could be categorized and summarized by frequency (Table 1). The following codification by types of student arguments was designed based on prior research that generated an analytical framework for identifying the types of arguments made in support of each category of request/complaint (Torres-Arends, 2023).

Codes	Type of Argument
1	No arguments offered (due date as suggestion)
2	Special treatment/"Treat me as your family"/Act of kindness
3	Financial difficulties
4	Wrong submission
5	Improve grades (give me a passing mark)
6	Review my assignment/grade (focus on learning)
7	Technological issues (computer or Moodle)
8	Illness/health problems (student or family member)
9	No understanding/no clear instructions
10	Personal challenges
11	Time management challenges
12	New

The research team followed a two-step codification process. In the initial step, the team members worked independently to code the type of arguments made in the categorized emails. Categorized request/complaint emails could be assigned multiple argument codes. In the second step, the two researchers engaged in several discussions to consider and resolve any coding discrepancies and to establish inter-rater reliability (Jacobsen et al., 2021) and achieve consensus while coding the entire data set. Finally, based on the frequency of coded arguments within each of the five request/complaint categories (Table 1), the research team engaged in a qualitative interpretation of the type of arguments made to support each of the five types of requests/complaints and to connect these with trends in underlying learning needs.

RESULTS

The research team observed that in four out of the five types of requests/complaints under study, the argument international students used most frequently falls within the code of special treatment. In arguments of this type, the students ask to be treated like family or request/seek acts of kindness from their instructor, revealing a significant pattern and prompting us to view their behaviour less as requests/complaints and more as proxies for identifying their learning needs. In the following sections, we elaborate on the frequency and meaning of arguments students used in each of five categories of request/complaint and begin to connect these with diverse learning needs.

Category: Assignment Resubmission

The university does not regulate assignment resubmissions; thus, these interactions belong to the sphere of informal agreements between students and professors. In this category of request/complaint, the most common argument used by international students is "special treatment/treat me as your family"

(code: 2) (Figure 1). The reasons for this request varied, ranging from submitting the wrong assignment due to limited or unstable Internet access to assignment deadlines coinciding with the student's work schedule. Balancing their employment workload with academic activities appears to present a significant challenge for international students as do difficulties understanding assignment requirements.
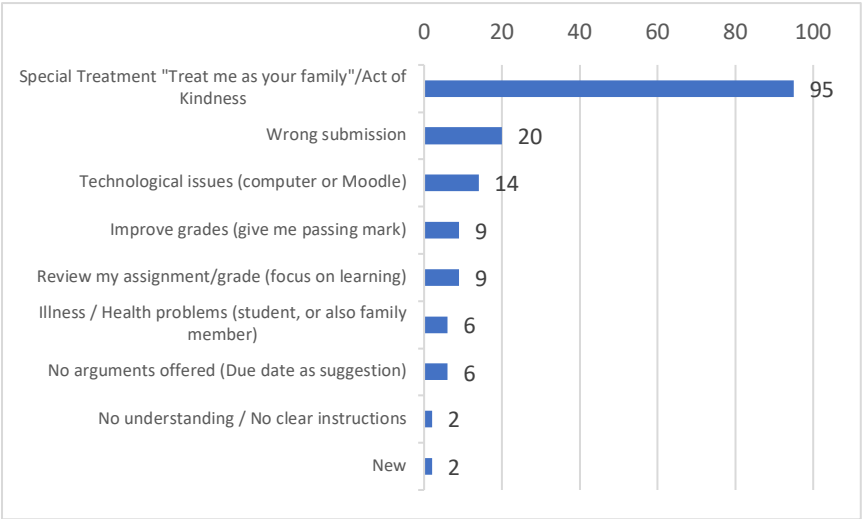
Figure 1: Arguments Used to Support Students' Requests for Assignment Resubmission (n = 163)

The following excerpts from the email data provide examples of the "special treatment" argument:

  1. "Please sir I don't want to fail. My parents took loan. Please sir give me one chance." (code: 2, 3 and 10)

  2. "Professor, U are like my father to me. Give me a chance. I will give 100% in all assignment." (code: 2)

  3. "Respected sir! I am sorry for my bad behavior. I know I made mistake and I do not deserve to pass but I had family stress. Too much workload. Please allow me one chance, if this happens again fail me in course but sir please one chance." (code: 2, 3, 10 and 11).

Misunderstandings about expectations, mistakes made under time pressure, and struggles with learning technologies are associated with emails from international students who urgently appeal for the opportunity to resubmit— as a second chance for success that reveals that diverse learning needs contribute to explaining students' requests for assignment resubmission.

Category: Grade Review

The university has well-established regulations regarding grade reviews. Grade appeals and academic assessments are aligned with the assignment rubric included in the course outline. Adhering to assignment requirements and deadlines can present significant challenges for international students. While the most common category of argument used (review my assignment, code: 6) does not fall under a request for "special treatment" (code: 2), it still ranks as the second most frequently used argument (see Figure 3).

The following email excerpts provide examples of students' arguments in support of their requests for a grade review:

> 1. "Hello mam. How are you? Mam, I request you to pass me in course. I got 41 grades overall. During my first four LA, I got zero grades because this is my first term and first time to study in Canada. Also, faced lot of trouble in my study due to online. I request you to adjust my grades and pass me. With regards." (code: 2, 5, and 10)
>
> 2. "Hi, can you please pass me. I tried but I don't know how to write case study. OK, I know my mistake but please at least give me just passing marks." (code: 2, 5, and 9).

We reflected on why international students appear to encounter difficulties with assignments with such frequency. One explanation, informed by our own teaching experiences with international students, is that the assignments themselves are not inherently difficult but rather that the instructions or requirements often presume a certain level of familiarity or prior knowledge that international students may not have. Consequently, international students may feel compelled to request a passing grade as their only option, perceiving that the assignment requirements are beyond their capabilities. The complexity of arguments students used allowed us to identify a range of learning needs, upon which we elaborate in the discussion.

Category: Due Date Extension

Due date extension is a formal procedure at the university. According to the regulations, submissions that are more than three days late will only be accepted if the student arranges an extension with the instructor. Students' most frequently used argument when they request a due date extension falls under the "special treatment" code (see Figure 3). Our analysis indicates that international students often feel compelled to communicate their financial constraints related to university fees, the challenges posed by the impact of COVID-19, and their difficulties in understanding assignment requirements in making a request for due date extension. Students often use these factors as part of their appeal for understanding, empathy, or kindness from instructors in navigating, and sometimes even circumventing, university regulations.

The following email excerpts provide examples of coded arguments in support of due date extension requests:

1. "Hi mam, i want to request you to submit my assignment 2. Please give me extension for that because my account is locked due to fees. As due to covid i am unable to manage my fees on time. So thats why i am unable to submit my assignment on time. Please try to understand my problem and please give me chance to submit that assignment. Thank you." (code: 2, 3, 7, 10, and 11)

2. "Hi professor, I am ... Once again extremely sorry for being late. And I hope I get good grades so that I can get through the course. If the assignments need any changes or there is a mistake please let me know I'll do my best to rectify it. Thanks a lot for your help and if there is anything that I can help you with please let me know. Thanking you, Regards " (code: 2, 5, 9, and 11)

Reconsidering students' requests for due date extensions as a call or argument for empathy and kindness, coded as "treat me as your family," broadens our comprehension of these appeals by providing insight into individual contexts and the need for specific learning supports and a sense of belonging.

Category: Due Date Exception

Under university regulations, an instructor can grant a due date exception in extenuating circumstances, such as a significant illness, a family death, or similar exceptional situations. A valid reason must be provided to request a due date exception, and documentation may be required.

One of the most frequently used arguments by international students when requesting a due date exception was coded as special treatment – "Treat me as your family/Act of kindness" (see Figure 3). This argument suggests that the concept of a due date may hold different meanings to international students, given their previous educational experiences. Utilizing an LMS can also represent significant challenges for international students, ranging from facing login issues to experiencing difficulties submitting assignments. Many students in this study expressed stress due to their inability to meet tuition payments, preventing them from accessing the system to submit assignments.

The following email excerpts illustrate students' arguments to support their requests for a due date exception:

1. "I misunderstand the deadline time due to my poor time management. I would not make mistake again. Could you please consider the mark of the work? I promise that I really take the work very seriously." (code: 2, 9, and 11)

2. "Hello sir, I really thank you so much you gave me extensions for some individual problems Could you please give me extension of individual problem 2-3 and please of individual case study because my account was block I didn't pay the fees, if you allow me to submit these, I can pass the course, otherwise I'll have to pay a lot of fees. I'm international student very hard. Please sir this is my humble request. Hope you'll help me in this situation. Thanks you so much Best Regards" (code: 2, 3, 5, and 10)

Recognizing that international students may hold different understandings about due dates, have uneven prior experience with learning technologies, and be

blocked from accessing the LMS for late tuition payments helps to expand interpretations of international students' requests as an expression of their learning needs.

Grade reviews, due date extensions, and due date exceptions share in common the fact that the student initiates the action. When submitting a request for a due date exception or a due date extension, international students most frequently invoke the "Treat me as your family" type of argument. It is worth noting that the request for a grade review stands out as it diverges in terms of the most common argument used (as illustrated in Figure 2).
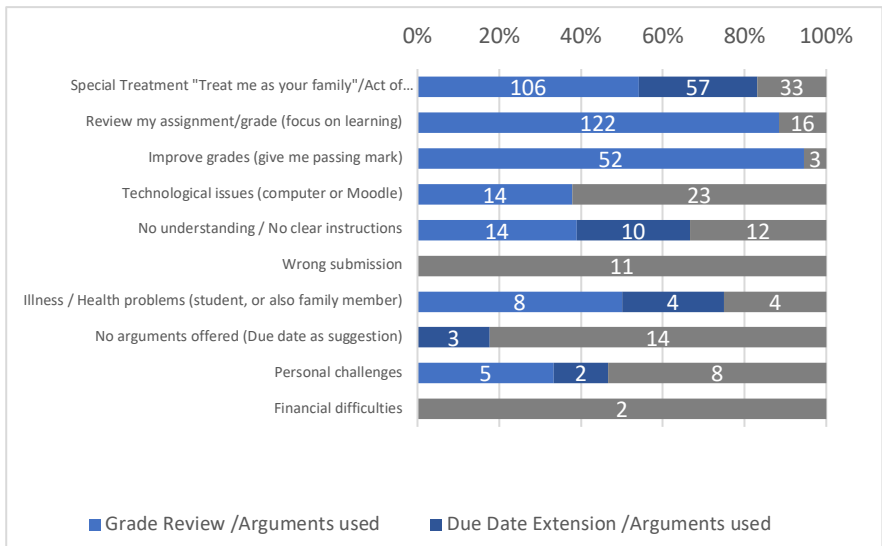
Figure 2: Arguments Used to Support Students' Requests for Grade Review, Due Date Extension, and Due Date Exception (n = 523)

Category: Plagiarism Assessment

According to the university's regulations, plagiarism constitutes a grave academic offence. Among international students, the predominant argument coded from emails on this request/complaint were arguments seeking "Special treatment" (Figure 3). In doing so, students provide explanations that underscore the significant distress they are experiencing. International students not only acknowledge plagiarism as serious misconduct, but they also appear to take full responsibility for their actions and often express shame and embarrassment in their emails to instructors.
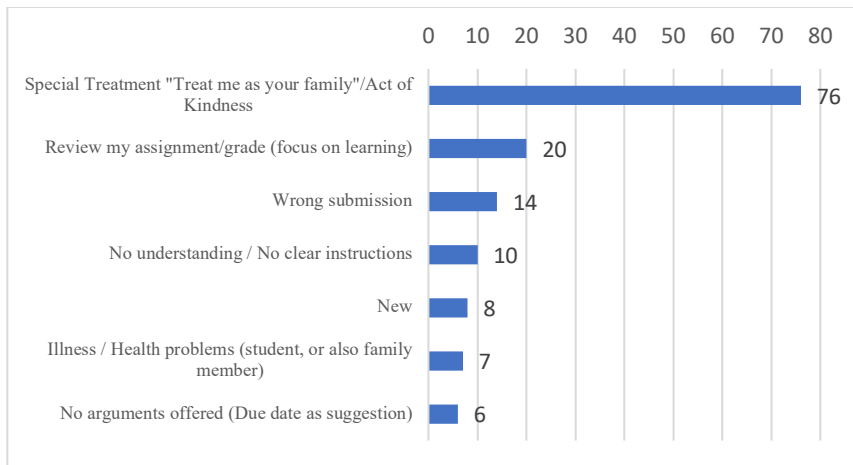
Figure 3: Arguments Used to Support Students' Requests for Plagiarism Assessment (n = 133)

The following excerpts from students' arguments in support of their requests for plagiarism review help to illustrate these phenomena:

      1. "Hi Prof. What can I say. I am ashame. Can you give me one chance. I will do it myself. I know I am responsible for my action. I do not want to fail please give me one chance. Please do not report." (code: 2 and 5)

      2. "Hi sir, accept my deepest apologies. I am ashame of this situation. I will like to submit work again. You can fail me but I want to pay my respect to you by this time writing by my own. Please allow me a chance. This will help in reducing my guilt. Please professor I don't want to fail. My parents took loan. Please sir give me one chance." (code: 2, 3, and 10)

      3. "Please I accept my mistake. Please sir. I asked **** to share file. I started paraphrasing but time was too short so I submit in hurry half work. Please give me chance, I promise I'll submit another case study" (code: 2 and 11)

These excerpts demonstrate how students apologize to their professors and express shame and regret for their actions. In emails, students acknowledge and take responsibility for their mistakes and express the desire to make amends by resubmitting the work and repairing the situation. Students plead for understanding based on their parents' investment in their education and the stress they are under to meet family obligations. Students express hope that the professor will treat this mistake as an educational opportunity rather than reporting their transgression, likely with a desire to avoid further academic or disciplinary consequences that would bring further shame and or financial penalties.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Examining international students' requests/complaints and interpreting the type of arguments made to instructors as a strategy for understanding their learning needs has provided us with an opportunity and method to improve how we listen to international students' voices in Canadian post-secondary. A comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by international students in Canada obligates us to consider the multiple adaptation processes students undergo and the learning needs that emerge, such as balancing academic responsibilities with full-time work in a new country, adapting to new academic and technological expectations and learning environments, and adjusting to independent living, and working in unfamiliar societal and cultural contexts away from their families. International students' repeated arguments for "special treatment: treat me as your family" surfaced as a significant trend and lens through which we can identify and better understand their learning needs, including the need to establish a sense of belonging.

Table 2: Categories of Requests/Complaints and Identification of Learning Needs

	Enhancing Internet access and supporting expanded digital literacies	Agreements and cultural differences	Assumption-free assignment design	Ensuring accessibility of the learning management system	Designing inclusive learning environments
Assignment re-submission	x	x	x	x	x
Grade review	x	x	x	x	x
Due date extension	x	x	x	x	x
Due date exception	x	x	x	x	x
Plagiarism assessment		x	x		x

The plea to "treat me like family" is a powerful metaphor employed by international students to express their need to make a meaningful connection with their professors, underpinned by empathy. This metaphor allows them to convey their challenges in meeting academic expectations and their fundamental need for academic, social, and emotional support. Similarly, the cornerstone of allyship is the idea of "Onua do—an Akan phrase that loosely translates to expressions of

love and care for others outside of familial bloodlines" (Asante, 2021, p. 147). The argument "treat me as your family," which is used extensively by international students in email requests/complaints, represents a complex set of values and beliefs, indicating a fundamental need for protection that—from the perspective of international students—can only be fulfilled by family members. In this sense, the creation of fictive kinship (Olitsky, 2011), where professors are seen as parental figures, allows us to identify international students' search for security, belonging, and social support during their multiple adaptation processes.

To elaborate on our findings that connect students' requests/complaints and the underlying learning needs we identified, we visualize these connections in Table 2.

The learning needs we identified from our quantitative categorization and coding and the qualitative interpretation of international students' requests/complaints and types of arguments include: 1) enhancing Internet access supporting expanded digital literacies, 2) establishing agreements and identifying cultural differences, 3) challenge assumptions in assignment design, 4) ensuring accessibility of learning management systems, and 5) designing inclusive learning environments. To elaborate on these learning needs, we identify institutional and instructional support systems and practices that can be implemented to address international students' diverse learning needs and assist them in better navigating and managing their new lives in Canada.

Enhancing Internet Access and Supporting Expanded Digital Literacies

It is essential to acknowledge that many international students may need more optimal mobile or laptop devices or Internet access due to their unique circumstances. Technological limitations can significantly impact international students' ability to fulfill academic obligations because, frequently, Internet connectivity is required to complete and submit assignments.

We recommend that academic institutions prioritize access to touchdown spaces with internet-connected workstations, particularly for the international student community. Additionally, workshops and orientations should be implemented for international students to expand their comfort and skill sets with learning systems and mobile technology.

During initial classes, instructors are encouraged to adopt flexible pedagogies regarding assignment submissions and provide alternatives for submitting assignments that anticipate uneven access to the Internet by international students who are new to the country and are engaged with multiple forms of transition.

Agreements and Cultural Differences

Addressing the underlying learning needs behind international students' requests requires open dialogue between students and professors. This dialogue may not always be entirely harmonious (Gutiérrez, 2008), but it is essential to recognize that working across cultures necessitates a dynamic cultural translation process on both sides (Bhabha, 1994). The goal here is not to achieve complete cultural alignment but to establish fundamental agreements that help international

students navigate the uncertainties of their new academic environment. During the ongoing adaptation process, it is essential for all parties, including academic institutions, instructors, and international students, to be fully aware that they are engaging in a dual translation process. International students often need to translate not only from multiple languages, but they also need to translate behaviours, thoughts, and emotions across different cultures. Therefore, misunderstandings can occur frequently and unintentionally. It is incumbent on those with more power, both the institution and the instructors, to lead in creating solutions, strategies, and practices that support and scaffold international students in making successful transitions. It is crucial to establish sustained professional development opportunities that integrate training in intercultural competencies and cross-cultural communication skills for all faculty and staff to promote awareness of cultural differences at the institutional and instructional levels.

Challenge Assumption in Assignment Design

Institutions and instructors need to consider the diverse backgrounds of international students when designing assignments, courses, and program structures (Anderson, 2020). The workload and expectations should intentionally and ethically respond to the reality that many international students must juggle multiple courses while working full-time to afford to live and pursue their education in Canada. Collaboration among instructors and across programs to design courses that consider the overall workload for the semester rather than focusing solely on workload and due dates in individual courses can help support international students' effective time management and decision-making to navigate multiple course expectations and obligations successfully.

Institutions are encouraged to lead in establishing communities of practice and curriculum development processes that intentionally target international students' learning needs and life situations. For example, institutions and instructors can be rewarded for leading widespread curriculum design practices such as developing layered assignments with clear objectives, providing detailed instructional guidance on steps to follow, and providing formative feedback to support successful completion (Brown et al., 2022). Instructional guidance should be presented in a logical progression, such as a checklist, to allow students to follow instructions. Finally, initial courses should incorporate an assignment resubmission policy where scores below a certain level have the possibility of being recovered or resubmitted, allowing instructors to turn an underperforming outcome into a scaffolded learning opportunity for student success.

Ensuring Accessibility of the Learning Management System

Developing digital literacy and competency in navigating learning management systems is crucial for international students' success in their academic journey. However, university policies, such as restricting students' access to LMSs due to tuition arrears, create a complex double bind that

disadvantages international students and their instructors, who are often in the dark. This double punishment, where international students are locked out of the system and instructors cannot grade their assignments, poses a significant challenge to student success.

While the university holds authority in regulating access to its educational platforms, implementing an inclusive access policy for the university portal would prove highly advantageous to international students and instructors. Ethical and empathetic policies and practices should be designed carefully considering the financial challenges encountered by many international students, thus extending the late submission policy to accommodate such circumstances. Finally, student status (active/suspended) should be available to instructors so that they are aware when students are encountering difficulties, can take appropriate steps, and can provide responsive support.

Designing Inclusive Learning Environments

The challenges international students face in Canada vary widely, considering the diversity of this population (Guo & Guo, 2017). It is essential to conduct research that allows for valid comparisons between different groups of international students. Moreover, recognizing whether international students are first-generation university attendees without prior academic training in English is vital. A significant number of international students fall into this category, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive academic support system that can effectively address students' unique needs. Additionally, identifying international students who must work full-time to finance their studies is imperative to address their specific academic challenges and needs.

Due to the significant increase in the mobility of international students over the past decade, both in terms of quantity and diversity, it has become imperative for post-secondary institutions to understand their student body. Knowing who the students are is crucial to creating academic environments responsive to this diverse student population's unique needs and characteristics. Establishing and maintaining a student database, updated by the students (e.g., every two terms) at the term registration, could allow institutions to gain insights into various characteristics of their student population, such as the number of students employed, their financial reliance on parental support, their housing arrangements, access to Internet facilities, possession of personal laptops, and commuting time to the university, among other pertinent details that could impact their learning process. Aggregate information about who the international students are should be gathered by programs and made accessible to instructors to help them design collaborative programs, curricula, and courses.

Conclusion

This paper contributes original insights to the dialogue on international students in Canada using an analytical framework to delve into their concerns and learning needs. After analyzing international students' requests/complaints, we propose five innovative approaches for educational institutions to cultivate learning environments that are attuned to and supportive of the diverse learning

needs of the international student community. We contend that to address the needs and challenges of international students in Canada, researchers and educational institutions need to adopt new methods for listening to students. This original contribution to the research showcases one research method for listening to students' complaints and requests and analyzing these as a proxy for their learning needs. We recognize our research reflects the requests/complaints and learning needs of international students from one private university in Ontario. Second, we recognize the limitation of this research in that not all international students will complain or make requests of their instructors. Unfortunately, too many international students suffer in shame and silence. A multifaceted approach is needed, one that includes open dialogue, intercultural understanding, thoughtful and collaborative program, course, and assignment design, and comprehensive institutional and instructional support systems responsive to international students' diverse backgrounds and caring about their circumstances. In learning to listen to international students' voices, institutions and instructors can better recognize and respect their diversity and unique learning needs and develop policies and practices for inclusive excellence that better serve this vital segment of the student population in higher education.

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