

## Internationally educated professionals weighing the benefits and the challenges of licensing and certification in Canada

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### What you need to know

Testing is an essential component of professional licensing and certification, which serves as a powerful decision-making tool to include or exclude internationally educated professionals (IEPs) from their respective professions in Canada. This study examines the role that testing plays in professional licensing and certification from the perspectives of internationally educated professionals in four professions: teachers, engineers, nurses, and medical doctors, and their respective license-granting and certification organizations. The study was conducted in Kingston and Windsor, Ontario, Canada with data collected through face-to-face interviews. The findings indicate both internal and external factors are associated with the testing process which impact whether internationally educated professionals can continue to practice and to contribute to Canada's long-term social and economic goals.

### What is this research about?

Canada has a large population of internationally educated immigrant professionals who use English as a second language. The main settlement issue for these internationally educated professionals is to be successfully certified in their relevant professions (personal goals) so that they can effectively integrate into the Canadian workforce and become contributing citizens (social goals). Non-recognition of international credentials and challenges in satisfying licensing and certification



Immigrant professionals with foreign education have found Canadian licensing and certification testing to be confusing and difficult to navigate through the process.

testing requirements have been identified as the largest barriers to successful integration into the workforce, costing the Canadian economy as much as \$5 billion per year (Bloom & Grant, 2001).

### What did the researchers do?

This study has explored the role that certification testing in English plays in professional licensing and certification from the perspectives of IEPs representing four professions (teachers, nurses, engineers and medical doctors) and their respective professional associations. Specifically, IEPs who recently immigrated and settled in Kingston and Windsor, Ontario as well as key informants from the respective professional associations were interviewed. The focus was on professional proficiency tests in English in order to understand the role that the English language plays in mediating professional knowledge. The study answered the following research questions:

1. How do IEPs understand and interpret the role that certification testing plays in their respective professional certification in Ontario?
2. How do the respective professional associations of those IEPs understand and interpret the role that certification testing plays for IEPs' professional certification in Ontario?

## What did the researchers find?

The primary findings from the IEPs suggest that both the costs and the benefits of certification are equal across the four professions. Two major themes demonstrate the complexity of factors, which impact the likelihood of successful certification for IEPs:

- 1) IEPs' perspectives of the testing and the application process
- 2) Their perspectives of barriers and facilitators to certification in Ontario

Participants described moving through a multi-stage process in a spiral fashion, meaning that the process of certification is not linear or straight-forward and that barriers and facilitators may fluctuate at each stage. Not every IEP will be able to successfully navigate *all* the stages to achieve professional certification.

Two major themes emerged from interviewing with key informants from respective professional organizations in Ontario.

This first theme includes four inter-related factors:

- a) licensing and certification requirements,
- b) rationale of certification requirements,
- c) policy and practice reshaping certification,
- d) satisfying/frustrating aspects in working with IEPs.

The second theme of perceived barriers and facilitators, which may affect the likelihood of IEPs' certification, includes

- a) IEPs' English and academic background
- b) costs and benefits
- c) mentoring and bridging programs
- d) impact of the job market

## How can you use this research?

Based on the findings of the study, we propose the following policy recommendations to support IEPs in professional licensing and certification:

- Strengthen cooperation and collaboration among certification test stakeholders via a continuous, systematic, and comprehensive approach which includes IEPs, settlement

agencies, bridging programs, and professional associations

- Increased transparency in the application process to make known the criteria by which IEPs are ranked and the areas in which they could improve to be eligible for the certification testing
- Reaching newcomers before or immediately upon arrival in Canada to provide a starting ground for learning about certification policies, procedures, and practices
- Recognizing and valuing international credentials and work experience as relevant in Canada (at the very least, these should not be a disadvantage)
- Community organizations should develop and implement profession-specific programming as per the requirements of professional certification associations. Such programming could encourage mentorship for IEPs in relevant professional fields

## About the research and the researcher

Project title: *The Role of Testing in Professional Certification for Newly Arrived Foreign-Trained Professionals to Canada*

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## Keywords

Internationally Educated Professionals, professional associations, testing, certification and licensure, Ontario